Patrick Sériot

STRUCTURE AND THE WHOLE

EAST, WEST AND NON-DARWINIAN BIOLOGY IN THE ORIGINS OF STRUCTURAL LINGUISTICS

Patrick Sériot
Structure and the Whole

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Editors
Paul Cobley
Kalevi Kull

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Structure and the Whole

East, West and Non-Darwinian Biology
in the Origins of Structural Linguistics

Translated from French by Amy Jacobs-Colas

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Foreword

At the creative diversity of borders, for understanding the structure and the whole

This is a special book on the history of ideas – and beyond. It unfolds the formation of structural linguistics in the 1920s and 1930s, featuring detailed research on the Prague linguistic circle and demonstrating the intertwining of ideas in linguistics, geography, and biology. But it also comprehends what 'history of ideas' may mean, how it may frame the world ...

As Juri Lotman has emphasised, creativity and meaning-making are concentrated at the borders.[1] For instance, in the borders between East and West – which is, in this case, Eastern Europe, or rather, the Intermediate Europe, *Zwischeneuropa*. Both Prague and Tartu belong to *Zwischeneuropa*. Prague is the place where the heroes of this story – semiotician and linguist Roman Jakobson, linguist and cultural theorist Nikolai Trubetzkoy, and geographer Petr Savitsky – met and, together with some other top scholars of the field, established the Prague School of linguistics. Tartu is the place where I am writing this and where I first met with Professor Patrick Sériot – at a Lotman-conference in 2002[2].

Each text can be read in many ways: "words do double duty or more"[3]. What really attracted me, when first reading the Russian edition of Patrick Sériot's book[4], was the discovery of the deep relationship between some theoretical ideas

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1 Lotman, Juri 1990. *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, p. 131ff.

2 Conference "Cultural semiotics: Cultural mechanisms, boundaries, identities" dedicated to the 80th anniversary of Juri Lotman, from February 26 to March 2, 2002, in Tartu and Tallinn. Sériot gave there a talk "The notion of "totality" in Ljubischev's work from the point of view of the Tartu Semiotic School".

3 Bach, Kent 1998. Ambiguity. In: Craig, Edward (ed.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 1. London: Routledge, 200.

4 The book was initially written and published in French (Sériot, Patrick 1999. *Structure et totalite: Les origines intellectuelles du structuralisme en Europe centrale et orientale*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France.) with a second edition in 2012 (Limoges: Lambert-Lucas). Its translations have appeared in Russian (Серио, Патрик 2001. *Структура и целостность: об интеллектуальных истоках структурализма в Центральной и Восточной Европе: 1920–30-е гг.* Москва: Языки славянской культуры.), in Czech (Sériot, Patrick 2002. *Struktura a celek: Intellektuální počátky strukturalismu ve střední a východní Evropě*. Praha: Academia.), in Serbian (Серио, Патрик 2009. *Структура и тоталитет: Интелектуално порекло структурализма у средњој и источној Европи*. Сремски Карловци: Издавачка књижарница Зорана Стојановића).

of both linguistics and biology in their route towards semiotics. While the set of concepts taken from biology is unusual – it included the ideas of convergence, polyphyly or the multiplicity of roots, teleology, nomogenesis, and the role of space. I first became acquainted and fascinated with this line of thought from the circle of Alexander Ljubischev in late 1970s, at the meetings on theoretical biology held by Russian colleagues. Despite the fact that it was already half a century after the scenes described by Sériot, these ideas were not only alive among some circles of thinkers, but were considered the most valuable ones to follow by a group of best-educated interdisciplinary scholars of the time in Russia. Culture's sphere, indeed, is spatial. Here we have several stories in one. However, briefly, the core story is here.

This is a book that focuses on the history of linguistics, on a period of the formation of structuralism, at least for linguistics. But I would like to turn attention to a broader note – its role for understanding semiotics. (It would be too much to say anything profound for linguistics, based on my limited knowledge.)

Patrick Sériot went to Paris to attend university in 1967. Structuralism was then the main intellectual attractor – to know, to follow, to criticize. In France, Saussure certainly remained its hero and originator. Sériot, as a student of slavistics however, soon discovered that the French school was not really aware of the trends that took place in the East of Europe, of the path that led to structuralism in the Prague school which grew from totally different roots and had another view on its mission. So he had to write about this for his French colleagues. But, before he could finish his work, the standard story of the history of structuralism had already been spread over the world. So he has to teach us again, in many places and languages.

Roman Jakobson was one of the central figures via whom the formation of the contemporary semiotics can be understood. Why? It is not only due to the fact that the major schools of semiotics got the initial inspiration from him: for example, Thomas A. Sebeok in North America said he was influenced by Jakobson. Juri Lotman and the whole Tartu-Moscow school learnt from him. Umberto Eco in Italy entered into semiotics partly via him. And French school in semiotics, also, felt a strong influence from Jakobson.[5] These major schools happen to cover most of semiotics from its wide-scale amplification in 1960s up to the end of the 20th century.

Thus we learn in the career of Jakobson, the pre-history of the Tartu–Moscow school as well as of much of contemporary semiotics as a whole. Where did Jako-

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[5] And this was not all. Jakobson, as he writes, also "was in close cooperation with Copenhagen Linguistic Circle", which he visited in 1939 (Jakobson, Roman; Pomorska, Krystyna 1983. *Dialogues*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 35).

bson prepare this platform? Most obviously, in Prague. Patrick Seriot's thorough-going research has made him one of the most learned scholars of the Prague school. And here comes one of his findings.

Jakobson, when going to Prague,[6] was searching for the basis of general linguistic theory. He found this at the sources which linguists would barely be inclined to consider – in the epigenetics of a Baltic-German biologist and anthropologist Karl Ernst von Baer, and in nomogenetics of a Russian geographer and evolutionist, Lev Berg. Baer was the pioneer of embryology, the one who discovered our egg cell; an anthropologist, geographer, evolutionist, a scholar of the utmost reputation in Europe and in Russia, the major opponent of Darwin in the 19th century.[7] Berg was a geographer and ichthyologist, who wrote one of the best non-Darwinian studies of evolution in early 1920s.[8] Incidentally, mainstream science forgot them both after the late 1930s. The Modern Synthesis in the biology during the 1930s made from a set of Darwinian ideas an extraordinarily strong dominant and it dug a trench between philology in the humanities and the study of other living and meaning-making creatures that was almost insurmountably wide. It temporarily killed the idea of intentionality in life sciences; it almost excluded the idea of convergence.

Baer, Berg and their followers developed a sound non-Darwinian approach to the explanation of the means and forms of evolution. According to this approach, development explains evolution, and not *vice versa*. Remarkably, the principles and means of this approach could be formulated in Jakobson's hands as *structuralism*. Jakobson introduced this term into linguistics.[9]

This is also a story of the history of semiotics. Thus I am reading Sériot as if he is showing that contemporary semiotics was born not only from the logic of C. S. Peirce and the linguistics of F. de Saussure (as several textbooks tend to claim), but also due to some ideas found in biology – ideas that have been very unpopu-

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6 Jakobson (1896–1982) studied in Moscow, went to Prague in 1920 (via a short stop in Estonia), and stayed in Prague until 1938. Then, after some time in Scandinavia, he took a ship (the same as Ernst Cassirer) to the USA in 1941. While in New York, he collaborated with Claude Lévi-Strauss, then from 1949 taught at Harvard University, and later maintained an office at the Massachussetts Institute of Technology.

7 Baer, Karl Ernst von 1864–1876. *Reden*. Bd. 1–3. St. Petersburg: H.Schmitzdorff.

8 Берг, Лев Семёнович 1922. *Номогенез, или эволюция на основе закономерностей*. Петербург: Государственное издательство. In English: Berg, Leo S. 1969. *Nomogenesis or Evolution Determined by Law*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

9 The first use of the term in linguistics could be in: Jakobson, Roman 1929b. Romantické všeslovanství – nová slavistika. [Romantic pan-Slavism – a new Slavistics.] *Čin* 1(1): 10–12 (p. 11). See also Percival, W. Keith 2011. Roman Jakobson and the birth of linguistic structuralism. *Sign Systems Studies* 29(1): 236–262 (p. 244).

lar in mainstream biology since the late 1930s and almost up to today. Interestingly enough, Jakobson's own account about the history of semiotics was very balanced already in the 1950s, so that it can be used by students of semiotics even now – hence he was depicted (being followed by Eco) between the campaigns of Peirce and Saussure in a picture by Litza Jansz in Paul Cobley's semiotics introduction picture book.[10]

In April 28, 1972, Patrick Seriot wrote to Juri Lotman: "I am a French student of Russian language. [...] Last year I defended diploma work in Paris university, on the theme 'Problems of application of linguistic model in the literary works of so-called Russian formalists of 1920s'. From formalists, I came to the contemporary semiotics. [...]"[11] Since 1987, Patrick Seriot has worked in the University of Lausanne, Switzerland, as the Professor of Slavic linguistics, where he has established a wonderful group of researchers, developing in-depth further studies on several problems discussed in this book. Much of this work has been discussed in their colloquiums and the seminars of CRECLECO (*Centre de recherches en histoire et épistémologie comparée de la linguistique d'Europe centrale et orientale*), in Lausanne and beautiful locations of the Swiss Alps (Crêt-Bérard, Leysin), and published in the journal *Cahiers de l'Institut de Linguistique et des Sciences du Langage* (*Cahiers de l'ILSL*) in the book series *Slavica Helvetica*, etc.[12] Sériot has also published a series of new works on related topics.[13]

In order to understand language, one should study more than language. Seriot's writing helps to grasp profound cultural processes on the relationships between language, life, and ideologies.[14] Foucault's demonstration of parallelisms between the sciences of linguistics, biology, and economics[15] obtains here additional dimensions as these fields together make up the sphere of meaning-making, which is the sphere of semiotics.

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10 Cobley, Paul; Jansz, Litza 1997. *Semiotics for Beginners*. Cambridge: Icon Books, p. 37.

11 Letter of P. Seriot to J. Lotman, Epistolary Archive of Juri Lotman and Zara Mintz in University of Tartu Library, F 135, s.Bs1307.

12 Sériot's group has also made freely available a valuable set of historical texts – see http://www2.unil.ch/slav/ling/textes/.

13 E.g., Sériot, Patrick 2010. *Les langues ne sont pas des choses: Discours sur la langue et souffrance identitaire en Europe centrale et orientale*. Paris: Petra. See his bibliography at http://www2.unil.ch/slav/ling/recherche/biblio/publi_seriot.html.

14 I tend to believe that his work helps to understand the depth of tensions between Europe and Russia.

15 Foucault, Michel 1966. *Les mots et les choses*. Paris: Gallimard. Its Russian translation (Фуко, Мишель 1977. *Слова и вещи. Археология гуманитарных наук*. Москва: Прогресс) had an impact to J. Lotman and us (see Kull, Kalevi 1999. Towards biosemiotics with Juri Lotman. *Semiotica* 127(1/4): 115–131; p. 121).

There is one more story that gains important light from reading Sériot's book. This is the importance of the concepts of organic form and morphology – their parallel use in linguistics and biology, and their role in structuralism. The concept of organic form was introduced by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and morphology by Goethe. These became important both in the linguistics (Wilhelm Humboldt) and biology (Richard Owen) of the 19th century, further used by structuralists (Vladimir Propp), and later, semioticians ...

Without structuralism semiotics today would be another thing entirely[16] – and to understand the strong non-Western roots of the former is indispensable.[17] In addition, for any semiotician not to understand the principles of phonology (i.e., the work of Trubetzkoy and his forerunners, like Baudouin de Courtenay) would mean not to understand much of the basics of meaning-making. Indeed the Peircean turn in semiotics that has taken place since the 1980s is on some occasions so strong that it has turned away from the knowledge of Saussurean type of linguistics altogether. The ideas coming from polyphylic structuralism are not only historically, but also theoretically, inevitable for semiotics to become the science of meaning-making *in toto* – that is what Sériot's work helps us to appreciate. Without using the term 'semiotics of culture' explicitly in this book, the material he provides is highly relevant for this field – both for understanding its roots and for making the field today.

Still, I must admit that Patrick Seriot's mind is above all and in the first place that of a linguist. This means that he shares, together with many philologists, a certain fear of organicism due to the danger of (potential) biologization. Paradoxically, I believe, the way of facts he is opening in front of us leads toward a basic shift in understanding the order of things – that the deepest watershed is not situated between culture and nature, but, if anywhere, it is more profound at the differences between living and not-related-to living, between the (linguistic plus non-linguistic) sign and the non-sign, which is the same as the border between the knowable and the knowledge-barren, or the lifeworlds and everything else. Sériot himself adds: "To study these origins of structuralism, I will be using non-binary, non-structuralist thinking. Between total identity and extreme difference there is room for what comes in between: gradations, *complexity*."

This book can also be read as a thriller[18]. It tells a story of hidden thoughts that the linguists had – their ideological motivation, and how linguistics itself works as a means to realise either the imperial or local cultural aims. The latter

has certainly been a part of linguistic activities quite widely, and particularly since the end of the 19th century when so many nations rapidly developed their self-identity. This is to understand the linguistic aspect in the contemporary world, in its ideologies. As Seriot mentions, there appear striking similarities between the Eurasianist positions of the 1930s and the much later political discourse in Russia.

The role of spatial factors, the relationship between language and territory, can be easily overlooked in the contemporary culture of global communication. However, they are not so easily overlooked by those who feel the border and are fed by its intellectual richness.

Good stories may last longer than scientific theories. Nevertheless, understanding is for now.

Kalevi Kull
Department of Semiotics
University of Tartu, Estonia

Introduction

"the clear space of science is not as clear as it seems"
(G. Gusdorf, *Le romantisme*, vol. 2, p. 365)

In the 1920s, after the trenches and the butchery of the First World War, at a moment when everyone seemed, as Guillaume Apollinaire phrased it, "weary of this old world" and in a post-war period marked by revolutions in art, science, and politics, Roman Jakobson and Nikolai Trubetzkoy proclaimed to anyone listening that a new era of science had arrived, a new way of organizing knowledge. Moreover, they specified, this *new* knowledge had a *local* origin: it was "*Russian* science." My purpose here is to examine that dual claim of novelty and Russianness.

1 Novelty and decentering

What might it mean for scientific thinking to be new? By what signs may novelty be recognized? Was what Jakobson and Trubetzkoy had to say *new*? Did the structuralism of the Prague Circle *break with* what had preceded it? If so, do we have tools for measuring the amplitude of that break? Did Jakobson's and Trubetzkoy's thinking represent a discontinuity in scientific discourse? Should the newness of their discourse be measured in terms of the spatial and cultural distance separating Russia and Western Europe? Yet another option: Should it be measured in terms of the specific role played by Prague as a meeting place of cultural influences at the heart of Europe?[1] The difficulty of drawing neat temporal dividing lines between paradigms in linguistics makes it hard to use the paradigm notion in that discipline, but what of the spatial boundaries of what might be termed *scientific cultures*? The question of the boundaries of constructed research objects will be central to our discussion here.

But if science can be divided into local epistemes, if it is strongly dependent on national cultures, is it still science? This type of question was not readily asked in the "West" at the close of the twentieth century. However, for the two aforenamed linguists, unanimously acclaimed as universal scholars for their contribution to *linguistic* science, the question of local epistemes not only appeared legitimate in the 1920s and 1930s but was indeed the pith of their preoccupations. We are therefore compelled to admit that the term "Western," if only in history of

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1 On interculturality as a particular component of the atmosphere in Prague during the interwar period, see Raynaud 1990.

sciences, must itself be defined; we cannot take it for granted but shall instead have to flush out assumptions of its existence by examining an alternative discourse, that of Russian identity and its proclamation of an opposition between East and West. This book, then, is also a reflection on Europe: I examine history of science to find the answer to a question that greatly exercises many Russian intellectuals: "Is Russia in Europe?"

There is nothing revolutionary in the thesis advanced here. The point is to see whether "organic" is synonymous with "structural" in Trubetzkoy's and Jakobson's writings, whether their incessant use of the word "organism" is metaphorical or reflects what was in fact biologistic thinking; to follow the genesis, the painful birth of one notion – *structure* – out of another – the Romantic notion of the *whole* – in connection with a third *organism* – in the thinking of the most illustrious Russian representatives of Prague structuralism. What we shall observe is a slow, gradual shift from one conceptual world to another – despite explicit declarations by many contemporary protagonists of structuralism that the break was, on the contrary, a clean one. In fact, scientific "modernity" is not attained through declarations; it is not necessarily reflected as such in the consciousness of contemporaries. Claiming that a break has taken place is not enough to make it occur. The structural revolution that took place in Prague between the two world wars was not as radical an epistemological break as was claimed at the time. In fact, the 1920s and '30s witnessed a series of convulsions by which the organicist metaphor was slowly, painfully transformed into structuralism. It is the tipping moment I study here, the conceptual apparatus in gestation, an instant of unstable equilibrium comparable to the moment a fairground rollercoaster, after its upward climb, heads downward again gathering speed.

The idea that the notion of structure derives from the notion of organism is not new; it was put forward some time ago by Cassirer[2] and Koerner.[3] Here I am particularly interested in the East European sources of that filiation.

The importance of the interwar moment for the human sciences together with the geographical location of interest here – central and Eastern Europe – cannot be overstressed. Those features are as important as our knowledge of them in the French-speaking world is poor. For François Dosse (1991), the "history of structuralism" is the history of Paris intellectuals in the 1950s to '70s, while for the *Encylopédie Philosophique Universelle* (1990), "the structuralist movement is an intellectual movement that reached its apogee in France in the 1960s."[4]

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2 Cassirer 1945.

3 Koerner 1976b, p. 701.

4 *Encyclopédie Philosophique Universelle*, *Philosophie occidentale*, vol. 2 (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1990), p. 2468.

Remarks such as these point up the necessity of decentering. Structuralism was not only Paris in the 1960s but also Prague and Vienna in the 1920s and 1930s, a maelstrom in which metaphors migrated from science to science, primarily from geography and biology to linguistics. It was a long reengaging with the long dispute between the Enlightenment and Romanticism, a game of discovery and misunderstanding in which German idealism and neo-Platonism were reinterpreted by Russian émigré scientists on a quest for identity in the face of what they perceived as destabilizing modernity – men who had brought with them in their minds what they called "Russian science." In this interwar intellectual world, the philosophical notion of the whole or totality entertained ambiguous, contradictory relations with the ideological notion of totalitarianism, and the question of a system's or a culture's or a science's closure or openness was closely related to the question of relations between individual and group. The notion of *structure* as linked to that of *the whole* elicited ontological probing of collective entities and reflection on philosophy of history and determinism at precisely a time when both humanist and scientific values were in crisis. What I propose here is a close reading of oft-cited yet seldom read texts particularly likely to shed new light not only on the period under consideration and the relationship between science and ideology, science and "scientific cultures," but also on the very object of linguistics: language understood as a "system" or "structure."

This book is an attempt to answer a question raised for me by protracted contact with the world of the human and social sciences in Russia. My insistence on *comparison* is due to a particular experience; namely, repeated collisions with Russian colleagues' claims of the relativism of scientific theories. "Our science is different," they say, "you cannot understand us." What accounts for this *leitmotiv* encountered in some Russian intellectual circles? The notion of *local or national epistemological specificity* (rather than tradition) is strongly rooted in the human sciences in Russia, particularly in linguistics. It seemed to me crucial to understand the disconcerting regularity with which Russians lay claim to their own *culturally localized episteme*.

2 Three scientific personalities

To probe these questions, I present a particular moment in relations between linguists and their scientific object; that is, the interwar period, so close and yet so far away, a period that witnessed the emergence of structural linguistics but also of Europe as shaped by the Versailles-Trianon treaties *and* the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, a key period for understanding today's Europe.

During this period the values of Western civilization – particularly democracy – were in crisis (see Spengler). This was likewise a time of searching for alternative solutions, other ways of organizing society (here we can cite the various versions of totalitarianism and the idea of "regeneration" and "the new man"). It was a key period in the history of sciences, marked by the collapse of positivism as a dominant model and by discoveries and inventions of prime importance, from relativity to the unconscious, from the concept of model to that of structure.

Are there connections between these apparently disparate series of events and discourses? As I see it, the place to begin looking for an answer to that question is the Prague Linguistic Circle, in the thinking of three figures as enigmatic as they are emblematic of the period; three Russian émigrés, three brilliant intellectuals of the same generation.[5]

The first is Nikolai Sergeevich Trubeckoj (Trubetzkoy)[6] (1890–1938), the "professor prince," known in the West primarily as a linguist though alongside his linguistic research he was extremely active in several areas whose names – historiosophy, culturology, personology – are likely to sound odd to Western ears, all of which were conceived of in connection with a political, cultural and philosophical doctrine claiming to be *total*: Eurasianism.

Trubetzkoy is on first view a highly paradoxical figure. A refugee in Vienna, he professed open hostility to the "Romano-Germanic" peoples. A structuralist, he spoke of cultures as "organic wholes." A victim of both the Bolsheviks and the Gestapo, he scorned democracy and placed high hopes in countries where a single party was understood to incarnate the living idea of the people and the nation – namely, fascist Italy and Soviet Russia. A fervent Russian patriot, he had nothing but praise for the "Tatar yoke." A relativist who favored respect for all cultures, he denied Ukrainians any claim to a language of culture.

The question of how Trubetzkoy's two main activities were related has often been raised,[7] though Trubetzkoy himself claimed there was no relation between them.[8] Studying this connection here will enable us to see whether there is indeed a specifically "Western" type of thought in the field of linguistics and whether "Russian thought," should *it* exist, is part of it; whether the different variants

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5 The Prague Russian Sergei Kartsevsky did not play an important role in the Prague Linguistic Circle (though he did contribute to the "Theses of 1929"). In his letters Trubetzkoy attributes no more than a modest role to Kartsevsky.

6 "Troubetzkoy" is the transcription he used in the articles he published in French; "Trubetzkoy" in those he published in German. The spelling here is the one commonly used in English versions of his works.

7 See Mounin 1972, p. 100; Viel 1984, p. 43; Kleiner 1985, p. 99; Gasparov 1987, p. 49.

8 Trubetzkoy, letter to Jakobson of February 1, 1921, *LN* 1985, p. 12.

of structuralism include both an "East European" component,[9] i.e., a version of structuralism understood to emphasize system closure and used in Russia, and another component restricted to abstract notions and used in "the West."

Roman Osipovich Jakobson (1896–1982) is surely the most written-about linguist of all. Unanimously considered a linguist only in Western Europe, and in the United States an American linguist, Jakobson is cited primarily for his studies of aphasia, his binary principle, his insistence on universals, his definition of the phoneme as a bundle of distinctive features, his "functions of language" model. Few "Westerners" have sought to reconstitute the specifically Russian aspect of his work. Fewer still have noted the astonishing combination of his rejection of modernity and fascination for the avant-garde, or his definition on linguistic grounds of a closed world, *Eurasia* – a naturalist study in the service of an anti-naturalist cause in which a geometric approach is applied to spatial relations between languages.

The last figure is Petr Nikolaevich Savitsky (1895–1968), a non-linguist whose important role in the genesis of structuralism has gone largely unknown. As a Russian pioneer of a type of geography he himself designated as "structural," Savitsky was the first to apply in Russia during and after the First World War a theory explicitly presented as geopolitical, a theory whose originality nonetheless consisted in noting systematic correspondences between isolines pertaining to unrelated phenomena (climate, soil type, languages), correspondences used to construct the autarkic ideal of a closed world presented as a *system*. Trubetzkoy and Savitsky were the uncontested leaders of the *Eurasianist movement*, and the influence of Savitsky's thinking on Jakobson's and Trubetzkoy's was considerable and should be given its due.

3 "Suggestions from the East"

Can there be a recognizably Russia-specific linguistics – that is, specific to that part of the world? There does seem to be a kind of bedrock of Russian cultural content, a "Russian ideological tradition" as Jakobson put it (expression reported by Holenstein,[10] who for his part preferred the term "*russische Geistesgeschichte*"). Nonetheless, if there is a Russia-specific linguistics we should restrict ourselves in speaking of it to the fundamental notion of *commensurability*, more exactly the *comparability* of national, or local, linguistic schools, without which notion

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9 Holenstein's opinion, 1974, p. 8.
10 Holenstein 1984, p. 22.

no scientific study would be possible. The danger here is an unfamiliar one, that of two antithetical but complementary sorts of *cultural solipsism*: explicit in Russia, with the claim that "our science is different"; implicit in the West, where the understanding is that Western science is the only science. This epistemological isolationism underlies *both* the statement "You've got to be Russian to understand Russia" and Europeano-centrist ignorance of the fact that linguistic science exists in Russia. I shall undertake to elaborate a method and means of *comparison* that steers clear of both these pitfalls, a "comparative linguistics" comparable to comparative literature, the program of which will be to use texts to shed light on each other; a transversal study rather than a monograph on an author or school. To be a linguist of Slavic languages in the West is to mediate between scientific worlds, to make a scientific virtue both of calling into question the notion of "absolute singularity" dear to present-day neo-Slavophile thinking in Russia (the "incommunicability" dear to cultural relativists) *and* pointing up either naive Western ignorance of Russian scientific references and scientificity criteria or the misguided Western tendency to lump the Russian intellectual world together with "Western culture."[11]

It is a sort of commonplace in the West to see structuralism as evolving linearly from Saussure to Lévi-Strauss and Barthes by way of various intermediary links in Prague and Copenhagen in the 1930s. In the *Encyclopédie Philosophique Universelle* of 1990, in the entry "Structuralism and linguistics" that figures in a chapter entitled "Western Philosophy," we find the following statement:

> The term structuralism appeared, together with the methodologies it designates …, the bases of which were established by Saussure between 1906 and 1911, in part in opposition to the positivism of historical grammar. In the 1930s, Trubetzkoy and Jakobson in Prague, Bloomfield and Sapir in the United States, identified the minimal distinctive units called phonemes; *the thinking of the first three is based on Saussure's*[12] (vol. 2, p. 2470).

Jakobson, then, is presented as a "founding father" of structuralism. The same holds for Trubetzkoy, of whom a Serbian linguist well known in the West maintained that he had merely extended Saussure's thinking:

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11 How a scientific theory gets disseminated in a foreign country is often a contingent matter. Baudouin de Courtenay was known in Japan well before he became known in Western Europe because his student Polivanov praised him to his Japanese colleague Jimbo, who later disseminated Baudouin de Courtenay's teachings (in a way all his own, it must be said) (see Trubetzkoy 1933 [1969, p. 146]). There is an anthology of Baudouin de Courtenay's texts in English, see Stankiewicz 1972.

12 My italics.

Trubetzkoy's ideas on phonology were fundamentally inspired by Saussure's brilliant formulations in the *Cours de linguistique générale*: language has a social function; it is a system; sound units function as linguistic units that are used to communicate (Ivić 1970, p. 135).

Martinet's introduction to a collective work entitled *Le langage* does offer some acknowledgment of an "Eastern" contribution:[13]

The point of view we have chosen as the frame for our discussion is situated on the axis of thought that developed out of Ferdinand de Saussure's teaching in Geneva, enriched by suggestions from the East of Europe (p. XI).

Seen from the other side, the picture changes entirely. In a letter to Jakobson,[14] Trubetzkoy says he finds "absolutely revolting" André Mazon's claim to have identified Saussure's ideas in Jakobson's *Remarques sur l'évolution phonologique du russe*.[15] After a trip to England, Trubetzkoy writes he was appalled to discover that English linguists identified him and Jakobson "purely and simply with the school of Saussure," adding: "This does us some wrong."[16]

One of Jakobson's firmest, most insistent claims in the 1930s was the importance of "the space factor," which determined as he saw it not only relations among languages but among scientific cultures: "Russian theoretical thought has always been characterized by certain specific tendencies" (Jakobson 1929b [1988, p. 54]).

4 On traditions

It is worth studying the reasons for such a marked, chronic misunderstanding. They go beyond the mere distortion caused by the existence of variants in any current of thought. Our understanding of structuralism altogether depends on clarifying this *malentendu*.

The difference between Russian and Western ways of handling how linguistic knowledge is produced is not made any clearer by obstinate use in both Russia and Western Europe of the term "tradition"[17] in historiography of linguistics. That

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13 Martinet, ed. 1968.
14 Trubetzkoy, letter to Jakobson of January 28, 1931; *LN* 1985, p. 189.
15 Jakobson 1929a.
16 Trubetzkoy, letter to Jakobson, May 1934, *LN* 1985, p. 299. On this point see Viel 1984, pp. 51ff.
17 This word seems to draw a dividing line between humanities and social sciences on one side, exact sciences on the other. Would anyone think of discussing "tradition" in nuclear physics or

obstination itself reveals that the positions are not as clear-cut as they might appear.

It is surprising that after Michel Foucault's systematic demolishing of the notion of tradition[18] its use should still be permitted in linguistics, at least when its meaning, instead of being theorized, is simply taken for granted. Surely when Foucault denounced the uncertain object of "the history of ideas," it did not even occur to him that the notion of *tradition* could be used to designate separate cultural groups or culturally determined approaches to the object of linguistic study.[19] Georges Mounin[20] referred to a "profound tradition in Russian thought" without defining it; likewise Jean-Claude Milner has referred to an opposition between "our tradition"[21] and that of Russian linguists.[22] What *are* these entities, constructed all the more hastily for being accepted without discussion? The same question holds for notions used without any discernment such as "Western linguistics" and "Russian linguistics."

There would be nothing shocking in a culturalist interpretation of ways of proceeding in linguistics were it not for the total absence of any definition of the notions being wielded and the fact that in place of definitions we find a discreet appeal to the self-evident, to intuition. Can we be so sure there is a "Western tradition" in linguistics, to which "Russian tradition" or "Russian thought" does or does not belong? What dividing lines, particularly on the Eastern side, allow for affirming that scientific thought ceases to be "Western thought" on the land mass stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the Sea of Japan, becoming instead, perhaps, Russian thought or Asian thought? Are these respective entities each so homogeneous that an opposition can be established between them? And how can we know if two "traditions," two types of "thought" are entities belonging to different worlds or rather variants of a single entity? Non-theorized use of

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molecular biology? On the other hand the connection between ideology, culture and science seems undeniable in the humanities and social sciences. The problematic notion of "Russian science" is useful in that it draws attention to this dividing line.

18 Foucault 1969, pp. 31–33.

19 The expression "French linguistics" refers simply to all research in linguistics conducted in France, in contrast to the term "French linguistic tradition," which is likely to suggest there is a French way of doing linguistics. Jean-Claude Chevalier (1975) set out to study "the situation of French linguistics" from 1969 to 1974, but J. Sumpf (1972) meant to study "the main features of the French linguistic tradition."

20 See Mounin 1972, p. 149.

21 This expression alone deserves a long commentary. Is "our" tradition French? Is it that of the French language? Is it Western European? Western? What is the referent of this first person plural?

22 Milner 1982, p. 334.

the term "tradition" in itself raises several questions: Are linguists *confined* and *constrained* by the framework of thought within which they express themselves as linguists? Can a linguist *innovate* – invent or discover something – *within* a tradition? And if so, how can we determine whether the invention fits with the tradition or breaks with it? Are there passages from one tradition to another, or only hermetically sealed boundaries? The risk of aporia looms large. I have therefore discarded the idea of "tradition" in linguistics, as it rigidifies in advance the object under study, namely, the connection between science and culture, science and ideology.

5 Complementarity

The "national traditions in linguistics" idea is not to be looked for in declarations but rather in scientific or scholarly work itself. An attentive reading of the relevant texts will enable us to steer clear of preconceived notions of schools, currents, paradigms, and to see, rather than fail to see, complexity and diversity. Likewise, taking these authors' writings seriously will enable us to steer clear of preconceived choices or distinctions between what pertains to a scientific discipline strictly speaking and what may be thought of as a scholar's fancy. Paradoxically, however, the "Prague Russians'" own claims to being different draw us directly into the work of comparing currents of thought – a much more fruitful undertaking than questing after traditions.[23]

It is under these conditions that we can engage in a critical dialogue with Russian culture. Rather than doing hagiography or indulging some exoticizing fascination for "the Russian soul," let us adopt a comparative perspective. If differences appear between Russia and "the West," they shall have to be demonstrable and measurable – we could call this perspective *comparative epistemology* if that expression makes any sense. What I see as the original undertaking of this book is to study scientific discourse with the aim of discovering a possible cultural difference between Russia and Western Europe. This requires us to adopt an uncomfortable position in which science in Russia is understood to be part of the general development of ideas, currents of thinking and debates in Western Europe while interpreting, shedding light on and wielding those ideas, currents and debates in its own way, just as Rome and Byzantium were two antithetical, fiercely opposed yet complementary versions of Christianity. The scientific com-

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23 The expression "Prague Russians" is used here exclusively to designate Russian members of the Prague Linguistic Circle, not Russian émigrés in Prague.

plementarity of Russia and Western Europe is composed of interferences, overlappings, reversals, misunderstandings and mutual enrichment and inspiration. To study these origins of structuralism, I will be using non-binary, non-structuralist thinking. Between total identity and extreme difference there is room for what comes in between: gradations, *complexity*.

If we stick to the thesis that nascent structuralism's break during the interwar period from the science that preceded it was much less clean than is generally claimed, we shall have to study closely the main authors, explore the epistemological world they worked out of, the network of metaphors they used, the books they cited, the models of thought they drew on. We shall have to bring to light the implicit value system, the hidden text that presided over the writing of the Prague Russians' explicit texts on structuralism. It will never be possible to know directly what Jakobson and Trubetzkoy's intellectual world was made of. But though we cannot reconstruct a faithful image of that world, we can at least try to construct a *model*, an explanatory schema of it. That model will be based here on close familiarity with the texts. Using them to shed light on each other should enable us to reconstitute the missing pieces of the puzzle, to disentangle the threads of this confusing skein. I shall therefore be making extensive use of quotation.

A problem such as the coexistence of incompatible paradigms cannot be resolved by running after an impossible ideal; i.e., seeking to find the unique viewpoint from which all will become clear and well ordered. But we can attempt, more modestly, to find some meaning in this immense labyrinth. It is the duty of Slavists to reintegrate the Russian scientific world into European culture by comparing the two, addressing an audience of epistemologists of linguistics but also geographers and biologists, showing them that the Slavic world is not only one of (hounded) painters and (accursed) poets, still less a "mentality,"[24] but rather a world of intense scientific activity.

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[24] For a critique of the notion of mentality, see Lloyd 1990.

First part: **Background**

Chapter 1
The question of boundaries

In the most recent, Bachelardian type of epistemology – what Balibar and Macherey call scientific epistemology, adding that it does not really exist yet – a much more minutely historical history of linguistics is needed to discover "the real laws of scientific production"

(Mounin 1972, p. 229).

1 Boundaries in time: Are there paradigm shifts in linguistics?

Can the birth of linguistic theories be dated? Can they be assigned an origin, a *terminus à quo*, after which nothing is as it was any longer? A discovery in physics may lead to a paradigm shift, but has anything ever really been *discovered* in linguistics, other than previously unknown languages?[1]

The inadequacy of Kuhn's "paradigm" concept for the history of linguistics has been illustrated so often that there is no need to undertake a new demonstration here.[2] I shall simply review the main points of the argument.[3]

According to Kuhn,[4] a "paradigm," that is, a theoretical and methodological framework of "normal science," results from a remarkable discovery made by an individual researcher that renders the previous paradigm impossible and unthinkable. The new belief system enjoys perfect consensus in the scientific community until the next paradigm shift, caused by an avalanche of new discoveries, makes it, in turn, obsolete.

As Kuhn saw it, paradigms are mutually impenetrable sets, incommensurable entities, utterly incompatible "worldviews" separated from each other by clean breaks, including with regard to the mode of expression.

Percival's critique of Kuhn's thinking bears mainly on this last point. In the history of linguistic ideas, he explains, it is practically impossible to discern absolute breaks because innovators always make use of preexisting theories in one way or another, integrating and enlarging them. Since there is no real dis-

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1 Europeans' "discovery of Sanskrit" following William Jones' "Calcutta speech" of 1786 was not actually a discovery at all but a new, comparative perspective on material that had been known for several centuries.

2 Nonetheless, some historians of linguistics have tried to apply Kuhn's paradigm; see Radwanska-Williams 1993, p. 5ff.

3 Cf. Hymes 1974, Percival 1969, Bahner 1984, Brincat 1986.

4 Kuhn 1970.

continuity between linguistic schools or currents of thought, it is impossible to distinguish a new paradigm from a *new variant* of an old paradigm. For example, regardless of how long we debate the question of whether or not the School of Kazan (Baudouin de Courtenay) belonged to the same paradigm as the Neogrammarians, we can never reach a definitive answer.

Bahner argued along the same lines, while criticizing partisans of the paradigm theory for reducing "social factors" to the socio-psychological character of scholars' behavior, thereby failing to take into account the needs of social practice implicated in the history of science.

Lastly, the scientific *revolution* theme, i.e., paradigm *overturning*, has also been criticized in various ways. In this connection we may cite Kuhn himself: "Science destroys its past," a formula exemplified by Einstein's work, which annulled Newton's and Galileo's as non-relevant, whereas Picasso's art in no way rendered Rembrandt's paintings obsolete. However, there are many authors who claim that the history of linguistics contradicts Kuhn's formula: no linguistic theory has ever annulled the work of preceding centuries; instead, new linguistic theories shift the focus or problematic.

As I see it, these criticisms, however well-founded, fail to take into account two important points. First, they do not give adequate weight to a fundamental contribution of Kuhn's theory; i.e., discontinuities in the history of science, a point on which Kuhn's thinking ran directly counter to the purely internal, cumulative, continuist history advocated by Popperian "analytic theory" with its radical separation between scientific theory and history of science. Second, Kuhn never claimed that the paradigm notion was applicable to the history of linguistics; on the contrary, like the humanities and social sciences, linguistics was in a pre-paradigmatic state; it had not yet attained "scientific maturity."

But while the cumulative, continuist position renders its proponents blind to epistemological breaks, the opposite approach, by overemphasizing irreversible breaks between incompatible epistemes, precludes its proponents from seeing how the strong points of an older paradigm are in fact present beneath a new one – insistent if veiled echoes of which the authors whose thinking generates them are often themselves unconscious.[5] Koerner allowed for the existence of

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5 The paradigm notion was often used in the history of linguistic thought in Soviet Russia in the sense of a closed, coherent set, though the same analysts also underlined *ties* between linguistics, philosophy and other branches of activity such as art; cf. Stepanov 1985, p. 4: "By 'paradigm' we mean a dominant way of conceiving of language during a given period, linked to a particular philosophic approach and a particular tendency in art, the outcome being that philosophic positions are used to explain the laws of language and linguistic data are used to resolve certain philosophical problems. The same holds for *art*: a given artistic tendency, particularly in verbal art, creates ways of using the language that in turn leave their mark on art."

"underground streams" within the main stream. But we must go further still. We must recognize that phenomena such as overlap, interpenetration, reinterpretation, non-alignment, reworking, misunderstanding and confusion are not failures due to the "softness" of the human and social sciences, eternally inferior to the idealized "hard" ones, but rather that they manifest specific tensions in the histories of these sciences between continuous and discontinuous evolution, and that this is what enables us to account for both slow gestation and sudden overturns, with the understanding that the latter seldom efface the mainstream content of the preceding period. I shall therefore be questioning whether the different transformation *thresholds* Michel Foucault distinguished in the archeology of knowledge – positive, epistemologization and scientificity thresholds – are actually applicable to the field, place and period under study here.[6] "Prague Russian" structuralism did not pop out of Roman Jakobson's head in finished form, complete with helmet and shield.

But after the rips and tears of time and the cracks in disciplinary dividing walls, we must examine the question of spatial boundaries. Our picture of the human sciences in Europe can be neither complete nor comprehensible until we take into account what was going on in its central and eastern parts.

2 Boundaries in space: Russian science and European science, same or other?

That structuralism did not appear suddenly like a thunderbolt across a blue sky, that it had a prehistory, despite the declarations made by the movement's protagonists that their thinking represented a total break from the preceding period, has been clear since the writings of Cassirer (1945), Percival (1969) and Koerner (1975), the last of whom studied structuralism's long "incubation period,"[7] beginning in the late eighteenth century.

However, to my knowledge, with the exception of works by Toman (1981, 1992), Holenstein (1984, 1987), Gasparov (1987) and Viel (1984), attention has never really been drawn to the fact that in the 1920s and 1930s an *Eastern* variant of structuralism was taking shape, primarily in the writings of the "Prague Russians," and that this variant, was declaring its independence, scientific speci-

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6 Foucault later adopted a more flexible position, allowing for an increasing number of "interstices" between epistemes previously assumed impenetrable to each other.
7 Koerner 1975, p. 725.

ficity and fundamental difference from the other self-proclaimed structuralism schools, mainly the Geneva School.

In connection with the renowned statement "Language is a system in which everything holds together,"[8] Cassirer[9] quoted Brøndal, who held that "in a given state of a given language, everything is systematic; any language is made up of sets where everything holds together. … A system is a coherent set: if everything holds together, each term must depend on another."[10] But Cassirer then extended this example unanimistically to all structuralist thinking:

> The same conviction appears in Saussure's *Cours de linguistique générale* and in the works of Trubetzkoy, Jakobson and the other members of the Prague Linguistic Circle (Cassirer 1945, p. 104).

Some of Jakobson's declarations may seem to corroborate this unanimistic view:

> When a few linguists connected with the Prague Circle came, in 1918, to The Hague International Congress, with the drafts of their replies to the fundamental questions proposed by the Congress committee, all of them felt that their deviations from traditional dogma would remain isolated and perhaps severely opposed. Meantime both in the formal and even more in the private discussions at the First Congress of Linguists, there proved to be partisans of similar views and paths among the younger scholars from different countries. Students, pioneering solitarily and at their own risk, discovered to their great surprise that they were fighters for a common cause (Jakobson 1971b, p. 522).

Moreover, *Principles of Phonology*, the only one of Trubetzkoy's works actually read in the West, explicitly refers to Saussure's opposition between *langue* and *parole* to provide grounds for the distinction between phonology and phonetics.[11]

Since World War II the *unanimist* thesis has generally been argued in the following terms:

> His [Saussure's] work was one of the most important sources of inspiration for the Prague Linguistic Circle, and the most influential of his ideas was the concept of language (*langue*) (Steiner 1978, p. 357).

Even when the unanimist thesis is viewed critically, Saussure remains the inalterable reference:

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8 Whom this assertion is to be attributed to is itself a matter of some controversy; cf. Toman 1987; Hewson 1990; Peeters 1990.
9 Cassirer 1945, p. 104.
10 Brøndal 1935, p. 110.
11 Trubetzkoy 1985, *LN*, p. 241.

> Hardly a homogeneous movement, structuralism took a variety of forms: Trubetzkoy's phonology, Hjelmslev's glossematics, Kuryłowicz's ideas, Chomsky's general grammar.... The only thing that unites structuralists is that to a greater or lesser extent they all claimed Saussure as their master or at least as their precursor (Mańczak 1970, p. 170; quoted in Koerner 1975, p. 808)

Nonetheless, these declarations of unanimity are puzzling. Was the Prague Linguistic Circle Saussurian without knowing it?

There was another side to the Prague Russians' structuralism. Texts they wrote in "Western" languages did of course suggest they were working for the "common cause" with their Western colleagues. Jakobson's tribute to Meillet, for example, was particularly laudatory.[12] However, lesser-known texts written in Russian or Czech in the 1920s and '30s reveal the hidden underside of their scientific activity. In a letter of May 17, 1932, for example, Trubetzkoy wrote to Jakobson that in rereading Saussure's *Cours* he found nothing in it but "a bunch of stale ideas."[13]

If different interwar schools took the *same name*, laying claim to the same principles while being perfectly conscious of their differences, then what did they have in common that enabled them to share that name? Did the name refer to a real community of understanding or was it only a convenient rallying sign? What *was* this nominal entity?

It seems to me that the tormented history of European or "continental" structuralism (as Jakobson put it in 1963) harbors a misunderstanding that is due to the fact that the key notion of structure can be grasped in two ways: as an ontological whole or a system of relations, as a real object or an object defined for study purposes. The Prague Russians' contribution is particularly instructive as it reveals the coexistence of the two conceptions and the misunderstandings caused by it.

When Louis-Jean Calvet wrote "Each society's linguistics corresponds to its relations of production"[14] he was explicitly paraphrasing Meillet's "Each century's grammar corresponds to its philosophy."[15] Perhaps without knowing it, Meillet himself was paraphrasing Kant's affirmation that "a given period's metaphysics bears the mark of its physics."[16]

Let us accept the approximative notion of an "air du temps" that lends contemporaneous currents of thought a "family ressemblance" which transcends

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12 Jakobson, 1937 [*SW-II 1971*, pp. 497ff].

13 Trubetzkoy 1985, *LN*, p. 241.

14 Calvet 1974, p. 39.

15 Meillet 1926a, v. 1, p. viii.

16 Quoted in Gusdorf 1993, v. 2, p. 376.

disciplinary boundaries – what Goethe called the *Zeitgeist* and Koerner[17], following Whitehead[18] and Becker,[19] "the climate of opinion." I prefer to call it the *doxa*, *common opinion* in Aristotle's sense, particularly constraining in that it is never explained, presented, explictly laid claim to. The *doxa* is not to be taken here in the negative sense of a "wrong opinion," but rather of opinion as a set of representations and presuppositions so widely shared and felt to be so self-evident that we may well forget they have a history and are the product of earlier elaboration. Here I will be working to bring this buried past to the surface, this sediment of knowledge and ignorance, these fundamental references, this fabric of metaphors that a developing scientific activity was founded upon, this hard core of certain knowledge and dogma that enabled researchers to feel they were advancing on solid ground while concealing other possible avenues of exploration from them. I will be using the old-fashioned term "air du temps" to designate this combination of the known and unknown, the imagined and discarded, that won over by way of certain metaphors an entire scientific community, however heterogeneous it may seem to have been.

But in the great synchronic swath covered by a given "air du temps" there are also *local variants*, restrictive institutional and intellectual conditions of possibility of the sort that render a scientific discourse *licit* in a given national scientific community. Is there likewise an "air du *lieu*" (place) that lends a family resemblance to the intellectual productions of a given country within a single culture, despite the passing of time? Retrospective illusion (i.e., using the criteria of a current theory to understand an earlier one) is generally considered a serious methodological error. But what of the illusion that might be called "chorological"[20] and blinds to the local specifications of a given episteme? What can an expression like "Russian science" mean? We begin to get a sense of the profoundly provocative nature of a sentence like Bonald's in his 1806 essay, "Du style et de la littérature": "Literature is the expression of a society" – not, or no longer, a period.

While the historical situatedness of scientific practices no longer elicits much controversy in the West, the idea that the spatial and cultural dimension of those

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17 Koerner 1975, p. 719.

18 Whitehead 1925 [1967, p. 3].

19 Becker 1932, p. 5.

20 From Greek *khora*: region, land. The ancient term chorology was reintroduced into biology by Haeckel (1834–1919) in *Generelle Morphologie* (1866, II, p. 286) to designate the discipline that studies the geographic distribution of living organisms across the earth's surface. It was then discarded in favor of bio-geography (cf. Tort 1995, p. 579). In linguistics, however, it was used by Graziado Ascoli (1829–1907) in his *Sprachwissenschaftliche Briefe* (Leipzig, 1887, p. 17); Ascoli called territorial "correspondences" "chorographic."

practices may be a relevant variable has not had much resonance. Though the problem was taken up by neither Kuhn nor Foucault, even less so by Popper, the term "Chinese science," for example, is generally accepted as applying to an autonomous scientific practice (primarily with reference to medicine; see studies by Needham and Sivin). But though there can be little doubt that Hindu linguistics (Panini) and Arabic linguistics (Sibawayhi) are autonomous bodies of knowledge, epistemologically and historically separate from "Western linguistics," the question of whether Russian (and Soviet) linguistics amounts to a particular science different from Western linguistics may seem idle to a Western reader. In Russia itself, on the other hand, that question is constantly, energetically debated, and one of the most serious questions of identity is whether or not Russia is part of Europe. Harris and Taylor's *Landmarks in Linguistic Thought* (1989) is subtitled *The Western Tradition from Socrates to Saussure*; in the preface this becomes "the long, multilingual, European tradition."[21] But neither the "Western tradition" nor the "European tradition" is defined, other than to say it goes back to Greco-Roman Antiquity. Does the Russian reading of Byzantine tradition present that tradition as part of European linguistics? Likewise, the aforecited *Encyclopédie Philosophique Universelle* establishes oppositions between Western philosophy, Asian thought (Indian, Chinese, Japanese) and notions found in traditional societies without raising the question of the exact location of borders and boundaries between those bodies of thought. The answer to the question of boundaries, particularly *the eastern border of Western thought*, seems totally natural. No particular place is granted to Russian thought, which gets ranked "by default," as it were, with "Western philosophy" though no arguments are ever put forward to explain this categorization. Trubetzkoy and Dostoyevsky thus get classified as "Western" thinkers – an interpretation that would simply not be acceptable in Russia today or in Soviet times or to Russian émigrés such as Trubetzkoy himself.

Against the extreme cultural relativism characteristic of today's Russia, wherein Russian culture is understood to reflect an *essence* fundamentally different from all others, I will be demonstrating a thesis so moderate as to seem quite banal from a Western viewpoint: Linguistics in Russia does not differ in *nature* from "Western" linguistics; it arose out of the same source, namely, the metaphysics of Plato and Aristotle; it is not a "closed historical-cultural type."[22] I shall not be referring to the "Russian soul" or any notion of ethnic determinism to explain anything about Trubetzkoy – obviously if one wants to study a relativist philosophy it is crucial not to be a relativist oneself. The point is to account for Russian discourse on the epistemological specificity of Russian science. We will be able to

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21 Harris and Taylor 1989, p. vii.

22 On this term see the claims of N. Danilevsky, ch. 2.

determine whether Russian science belongs with "Western thought" only after a long detour in which I study the main *themes* (in Holton's sense [1973]) of scientific work in Russia as it compares to scientific work in "the West."

Human science ideas move from one country to another in a way that is not perfectly synchronous. There are *intervals* or *lags* in reception of scientific works, and these often have an ideological rather than technical cause (for books do circulate and get translated). For this reason it is crucial to reconstruct an entire background of polemical debates that today we can hear only muted echoes of. And yet those echoes, like the "sound of stars" captured in space by radio telescopes, are the indistinct background noise of our own discussions;[23] they are the "noise" in the midst of which our own concepts are born. It is this background that I will be working to bring back to life here, by examining the primary sources, texts written by direct witnesses as well as the protagonists themselves, in the hope of making intelligible all the allusions likely to be negligently skipped over today because they *no longer make sense* to the contemporary reader (see Mounin's and Martinet's sceptical comments on teleology in Jakobson's thought and their misunderstanding of the importance of this term).[24] This way of proceeding not only works to fill in a missing part of the picture of science in Europe but is justified by the intuition that an entire intellectual world has remained in darkness: the underside of Prague structuralism, what Nikolaj Savický called "the lesser-known sources of the Prague Linguistic Circle."[25]

Reading texts by Jakobson and Trubetzkoy is like deciphering a palimpsest. Holenstein looked long and hard in them for a phenomenological world.[26] Mounin rightly sensed in them "a whole ideological backdrop strongly influenced by Hegelian thought."[27]

Many points remain shrouded in mystery, and their presence immediately strikes the eye upon reading the index of proper names in Jakobson's *Selected Writings*. Why, for example, is Joseph de Maistre among them? Why did Jakobson so frequently turn to this most illustrious representative of Counter-Revolutionary, Counter-Enlightenment Catholic thought, from his 1930s' writings to the

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23 Thinking on discourse analysis in France in the 1970s has bequeathed us a principle of inestimable value: *Things have already been said before and elsewhere; there is always what has already been said.* My purpose here is to reconstitute this pre-text for "the other Europe."
24 Cf. Martinet 1955, pp. 17–19, 44–45, 97–99; Mounin 1972, pp. 107–108. On *teleology* see Ch. 7.
25 Cf. Savický 1991. Nikolaj Petrovich Savický is a linguist in Prague and the son of Petr Nikolaevich Savitsky. (The different spelling is due to the Czech transliteration of the Cyrillic alphabet.)
26 Holenstein 1974, 1976.
27 Mounin 1972, p. 100.

Jakobson-Pomorska Dialogues?[28] It was hardly "by chance," to use one of his own favorite expressions.

These realities would all remain quite enigmatic if we did not seek to grasp the entire set of their underlying assumptions, the presuppositions of their epistemological and artistic world – their "ideological" world in the broad sense of that term; to set aside all that has occurred and been written after them so as to get a clear picture of what a Russian émigré in Prague between the two world wars knew, thought and was looking for. It would be useful, for example, to know what books were in Jakobson's and Trubetzkoy's libraries. Trubetzkoy said little about what he read; Jakobson had much more to say of his own readings. But we can try to reconstitute their intellectual universe, their *ideal library*, and thus correct to some degree the Western world's current standard image of structuralism.

3 The boundaries between science and ideology: What is at stake in comparative epistemology

The aim of this work is to relate a linguistic theory to the historical conditions in which it was produced, to assess the interactions between it and "neighboring" theories or between it and contemporaneous discursive fields, to restore the *air du temps* and the *air du lieu* to which this body and world of thought belonged. It is not my purpose to develop an external view on the theoretical work, but rather to identify the consistency (and contradictions) of the undertaking behind the theory's resources and intentions. I propose to apprehend the emergence of Prague Russian structuralism within a broad context – scientific culture in Russia and Central Europe – and a narrow one: the ideological doctrine of Eurasianism (see Chapter 2). In direct contrast to Althusser's scientistic position (his belief that it was possible to establish a radical separation between science and ideology), I will be emphasizing here the inextricable intertwining of science and ideology, at least in the field under study.

Many French human science researchers of my generation were traumatized by Michel Foucault's condemnation of "the history of ideas,"[29] an analytic undertaking that pursues the hunt for precursors, continuities, "traditions" ever further back in time – an ad infinitum, *ad nauseam* search for sources, origins, influences. The impact of that condemnation was surely salutary. However, we must not become obsessed either with epistemological breaks, splits, leaps, dispersed

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28 Jakobson 1983, p. 88.
29 Cf. Foucault 1969, pp. 31–33; 1971, p. 61.

utterances and statements. It is crucial to return to slow maturation processes, gradual separations, in this field of human sciences where knowledge is much more likely to evolve through modes of thinking, the integration – as metaphor – of models and notions imported from other disciplines and even other areas of work and thought (art, politics, etc.), than through discoveries internal to the discipline. Different, opposed, contradictory notions cohabit and coexist, and they do so that much more readily and surreptitiously when they are not really stable, when they use the same words with different meanings. I shall be using the categories of historical epistemology as understood in the French-speaking world – that is, the thinking of Bachelard, Canguilhem and Foucault – while showing that the shift from ideology to science need not be as sudden or brutal, episteme boundaries as strictly drawn, or discursive formations as homogeneous as may have been thought when French researchers were working on almost entirely French material in the half-century following the Second World War.

Going back to the sources this way – an undertaking not as fantasmagorical as Foucault would have it – will at least enable us to better understand the diversity of frames into which the "innovative" ideas of the interwar Prague structuralists fit.

4 The double helix

I will not be trying to *get beyond* the opposition between internalist and externalist linguistic history, but rather to get those two types of history to work together. I will constantly be using one in reference to the other. Likewise, if we accept Bloor's analogy between Popper's epistemology and Enlightenment philosophy on one hand, Kuhn's epistemology and Romanticism on the other[30] – that is, between an open-ended model and a closed one – we can use both approaches not in static opposition but rather by supporting one with the other, thereby moving up a double spiral that looks more like the two revolving chains of the DNA structure than the two uprights of a ladder. This will enable me to argue a twofold thesis:

1. Prague Russian structuralism can only be explained and assume its full meaning in light of the ideological debates of the time; moreover, it belongs to a cultural history that extends far beyond the framework of those debates;
2. The opposition between the two antithetical ideologies known as the Enlightenment and Romanticism is generally understood to refer to two extreme,

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30 Bloor 1991.

bipolar theoretical positions. In reality, there was constant "movement" back and forth between the two poles: borrowings, reinterpretations, reversals, misunderstandings, even dissembling. The same researcher might build some of his theses around one pole – the dominant one – while maintaining features of the other as subdominants.

One consequence of this twofold thesis is that there are no "national sciences," culturally determined once and for all as closed totalities, but rather *major options*, choices between different ways of constructing an object of knowledge (synthetic and analytic, for example). Moreover, these major options are not rigid or eternally fixed but evolve continuously, making use of each other to do so;[31] the dominant features of one or the other appear in a given period, scientific milieu, country. Russian science does not come from outer space.

Regarding the *newness* of Prague structuralism, we have to accept a tense position between two antithetic options. Between the claim of radical novelty (for Maurice Halle, what appeared in Prague was "a totally new way of doing historical phonology"[32] and for Vilém Mathesius, the crisis of the neogrammarian model was already over in 1931 and with functionalist structuralism we entered a "new period" altogether[33]) and Savický's provocative article asserting that the Prague Russians invented nothing and certainly nothing the Neogrammarians had not already invented,[34] there is room for a study of halftones and ongoing relations between apparently irreconcilable theoretical options.

Whereas linguists have two ways of constructing an object of study or knowledge, this book has one way of producing a discourse about them – that too explains the spiral-shaped composition I have chosen. I return several times to the same theme – a whole and its boundaries, the shift from the notion of the whole to that of structure – approaching it from different angles, each time exposing more fully the models underlying its history and cultural embeddedness.

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31 This way of writing the history of concepts draws on the "epistemological neutrality" principle advocated by Sylvain Auroux (1989, p. 16). The point is to abstain from deciding whether or not Eurasianist speculations on the world are more or less "scientific" than contemporaneous work by their Western European linguist or geographer colleagues. However, though I accept Auroux's "moderate historicism," it is important to handle with caution the *philosophy of history* latent in the texts studied here.

32 Halle 1987, p. 104.

33 Mathesius 1931.

34 Savický 1987.

Chapter 2
The Eurasianist movement

The notion of structure discernible in the interwar work of the Prague Russians acquires new intelligibility if we consider it in relation to the ideas driving the *Eurasianist movement*. That movement and its emphasis on the notions of system and organic whole constitute the immediate ideological framework for their understanding of the notion.

The end of the civil war in Russia (1920) and the defeat of the White armies sent many Russians into exile, primarily to Europe. By 1921, approximately one million Russians were living outside Russia.[1] One specificity of Russian émigrés is that they all belonged to the sociocultural and academic elites or the liberal professions.

This émigré population encompassed the entire spectrum of political opposition to the Bolsheviks, ranging from liberal republicans to monarchists calling for pure and simple restoration of the old regime. One émigré project and program, that of the highly original movement called *Eurasianism,* will be central here because of its special interest in the notion of totality or the whole.

The linguist Nikolai Trubetzkoy,[2] arriving in Sofia in 1920 after being shunted from city to city during the civil war, became the main instigator of this current of thought, which brought together some of the most brilliant Russian émigrés of the interwar period.

Eurasianists were in no way a fanatic sect. In contrast to most other émigré movements, Eurasianist theory was developed by full-fledged scientists – ethnographers, linguists, historians, geographers, philosophers, theologians and jurists, all recognized intellectuals and acknowledged experts in their disciplines, all of affluent, urban background. Some may have been cranks but none was a quack. As cultured men they had direct knowledge of Western scientific and philosophic literature. They were not fundamentalists, showed no temptation to confine themselves to dogmatic sources – on the contrary, they greatly valued research and scientific discovery.[3] And despite their idealization of pre-Petrovian Russia, they had no impulse to withdraw into passéist values: their eyes were trained on the future. However, they did adamantly reject what they

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1 See Raeff 1996, p. 217.

2 On Trubetzkoy's biography see Ivanov 1991; Liberman 1991a; Sériot 1996a. Since the 1990 centenary conference at Moscow University, Trubetzkoy's philosophical, political and essayist activities are gradually being rediscovered in Russia.

3 As always with Eurasianists, qualifications are in order: Florovsky's 1921 article "Xitrost' razuma" [The ruse of reason] is a virulent diatribe against rationalism.

called "Romano-Germanic culture," which they saw as an extreme manifestation of an abhorrent version of *modernity*.[4] I will return to the *modernity* theme. Here we can specify that Eurasianists swung back and forth between highly optimistic scientism with regard to their own scientific activities and vehement rejection of the notion of scientific omnipotence:

> The "age of faith" has come again to replace the "age of science" – not in the sense of annihilating science; our claim is rather that all attempts to resolve the fundamental problems of existence by scientific means are vain and blasphemous (unsigned editorial quoted in Florovsky et al. 1921, pp. VI–VII).

Eurasianism was first publicly expounded on June 3, 1921, at a session of the Religious Philosophy Circle of Sofia. Two papers were given on that occasion, one by the theologian and cultural historian G. V. Florovsky (1893–1979), the other by N. S. Trubetzkoy.[5] In that same year, four young Russian intellectuals – P. P. Suvchinsky (musicologist, 1892–1985), P. N. Savitsky (economist and geographer, 1895–1968), G. V. Florovsky and the ethnologist and linguist N. S. Trubetzkoy – all born in the 1890s, all temporarily settled in Sofia, published a collection of articles with the following, enigmatic title: *Exodus to the East*: *Presentiments and Fulfillments. The Eurasianists' Affirmation*.[6] Composed of an introduction and ten articles, this collection may be considered the movement's manifesto.

In 1923, Savitsky gave the following definition of the Eurasianist movement, marked by the idea of a *worldview* that *radically broke* from all that had previously existed:

> The Eurasianists – essayists, representatives of a philosophical movement – are a group of young writers and scientists who came together around a shared worldview immediately following the major wave of emigration by the Russian intelligentsia in 1919 and 1920. Eurasianists are representatives of a new principle of thinking and living, a group of persons working to apply a new approach to life's fundamental, decisive questions, an approach that derives from all that was experienced in the last decade, for the purpose of radically transforming the worldview and way of life that have dominated up to the present time. The Eurasianists have also put forward a new geographical and historical definition of Russia and of the world they call "Eurasian," ... "the middle continent" (Savitsky 1923 [1992, p. 164]).

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4 It is worthwhile noting here one of the Eurasianists' many paradoxes: *all* of them took refuge in the West, among the very "Romano-Germans" they so abominated. There were no Eurasianists in the major Asian centers of Russian emigration, such as Kharbin in Manchuria.

5 Sobolev 1991, p. 124.

6 A paraphrase of an expression used by Dostoyevsky.

Like all Eurasianists, Savitsky was literally magnetized by the leitmotiv of radical novelty, an absolute break from the existing scientific and ideological world. In reality, as we shall see, the Eurasianist movement belonged to a line of thought whose roots were quite old and deep; it also had close ties to the European, and particularly the German, thought of its time.

1 A brief institutional and political history of the movement

The Eurasianists were scattered throughout the main European centers of Russian emigration, primarily Prague, Berlin and Paris.

Eurasianism started out as an apolitical philosophical and scientific movement but soon developed into a structured, ramified organization with relays in most European capitals and substantial means at its disposal, including a publishing house to ensure publication and diffusion of a number of Eurasianist periodicals. This orthodox scientific utopia was gradually transformed into a "particular type" of political party whose goal was nothing less than to seize power from the Bolsheviks in the USSR. A metamorphosis such as this was surely inevitable given the political passions exercising the mass of Russian émigrés; all intellectual movements of the time became politicized.

The various Eurasianist centers enjoyed a high degree of independence. As "leftist Eurasianists," the "Clamart group" on the outskirts of Paris (among them S. Ja. Efron and D. P. Sviatopolk-Mirsky) manifested sharply pro-Soviet sympathies.[7] It was this group that published the daily newspaper *Evraziya*. Its known ties to the OGPU (the Soviet secret service of the time[8]), its pro-Soviet propaganda and persistent urging of émigrés to return to Russia brought about a split in the

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7 Several events involving Russian émigrés took place in Clamart during the interwar period. Nikolai Berdiaev lived there (at 14 rue de Saint-Cloud), and it was in his house that "Clamart Sundays" were held, in collaboration with the personalist philosopher Jacques Maritain. These gatherings of French and Russian émigré intellectuals led to the publication of several special issues of the *Cahiers de la Quinzaine* (cf. Raeff 1996, p. 273). It was in Clamart – at 4 rue Brissard – that the Editions Eurasistes publishing house was headquartered. And on all his 1930s' trips to Paris, Trubetzkoy stayed in Clamart at the home of Count A. Chtrebtowitch-Bouteneff, 52 rue Saint-Cloud (letter of March 13, 1934, *LN,* 1985, p. 298).

8 OGPU: *Ob"edinennoe gosudarstvennoe politicheskoe upravlenie* (Unified State Political Directorate), the Soviet state intelligence service, ancestor of the KGB. Efron, a "leftist Eurasianist" and husband of the poetess Marina Tsvetaieva, became an OGPU agent in Paris and in 1937 he took part in political assassinations decreed and organized by Moscow. After the assassination in

movement in the early 1930s.[9] After Florovsky and others, Trubetzkoy too broke off relations with Eurasianism, though he continued to collaborate sporadically with the publishing house.[10]

The largest Eurasianist group was in Prague. Like all Russian émigré intellectuals, its members benefited from the "Russian Action" policy of T. G. Masaryk's government, the aim being to develop a generation of democratic Russian émigré intellectuals and academics to replace the Bolshevik cadres in the Soviet Union after the inevitable collapse of the communist regime. The strengthening of that regime in the late 1920s, together with the severe, widespread economic crisis of the time, put a virtual halt to this policy in the 1930s.

Though émigré "Russian science" was deprived of normal means of disseminating its results and reproducing its elites, the enormous scientific resources of the "Prague Russians" must be stressed: they had at their disposal a complete Russian-language teaching and research system, including a law school, the "Russian People's University," a high school[11] and numerous research institutes.[12]

Though many Eurasianists had been White Army officers, they were first and foremost intellectuals: researchers and teachers. Their ideas were as maximalist as those of the fascists and Bolsheviks, with whom they also shared intense contempt for parliamentary democracy. There was one major difference, however: the Eurasianists knew nothing about how to seize power.[13] Despite declarations of

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Lausanne of Ignace Reiss, a Soviet agent who had defected to the West, Efron fled back to Russia, where he was arrested and executed. See Raeff 1990, p. 85; Struve 1996, p. 57.

9 On the history of the different "leftist" scissions within the movement, see Shlapentok 1997.

10 See Trubetzkoy 1933a, 1935a, 1935b, 1937. On what moved Trubetzkoy to abandon Eurasianism, see Kaznina 1995.

11 The linguist S. Kartsevsky taught at the Russian high school in Prague from 1922 to 1926; also at the Russian Pedagogical Institute. The principal of the Russian high school was Petr Savitsky, who was also *privatdozent* at the Russian law school and lecturer in the Slavic studies department of Prague's German-language university.

12 See Postnikov 1928.

13 Nor do they seem to have had any ties with the Russian fascist movement (on Russian fascists of the interwar period see Stephan 1978). However, the difference does not seem to have been very clear for their contemporaries. Antonio Gramsci likened them purely and simply to fascists: "*The Eurasian movement*. The movement is centered around the journal *Nakanune*, which leans toward a revision of the posture adopted by émigré intellectuals; it started in 1921. The first thesis of Eurasianism is that Russia is more Asiatic than Western. Russia must place itself at the head of Asia in the struggle against European ascendancy. The second thesis is that Bolshevism has been a decisive event in Russian history: it has "stirred up" the Russian people and enhanced the international authority and influence of Russia by means of the new ideology it has disseminated. The Eurasians are not Bolsheviks but they are enemies of Western democracy and parliamentarism. They often pose as Russian fascists, as friends of a strong state in which discipline, authority, hierarchy should reign over the masses. They support dictatorship and they welcome

principle (Savitsky, for example, wrote that the aim of Eurasianism was to "create a new Russian ideology capable of grasping the meaning of the events that have just occurred in Russia and indicating aims and methods for action to the young generation"),[14] Eurasianism was a theory of knowledge rather than action.

Eurasianists also differed from fascists in showing no taste for combat as an end in itself nor for action or will as the supreme value; they did not at all esthetisize force or violence and were quite incapable of discipline. Consistent with this, they attached no value to obedience or devotion to a ruler or headman; nor did they set out to guide the youth or develop a youth movement. Eurasianism was a scientific and religious utopia in which "self-knowledge" was to be used to realize the true *essence* of a community, a community conceived as a collective person (see Chapter 9).

With the exception of Trubetzkoy's discreet anti-Semitism, a reflection of the general atmosphere of the time,[15] the Eurasianists explicitly rejected all biological and racial determinism.[16] Their recurrent theme was *culture*, which they systematically opposed to *civilization*, as we shall see. This did not prevent some of them from linking Western values – rationalism, pragmatism, materialism, a lack of spirituality – to the "decadence" they claimed to have been brought about by Old Testament "Judaic morality"[17] or the ideas of Jewish philosophers living in the West.[18]

Their thinking did have one point in common with the major totalitarian, anti-democratic ideologies of the 1920s and '30s: a profound distaste for hedonism and materialism, for exclusive concern with well-being, comfort, material security, utilitarianism and individualism – the set of values that Louis Dumont has identified with "modern" societies[19] and that in Bolshevik and Italian fascist

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the current state system in Soviet Russia, however much they yearn to replace the proletarian ideology with a national ideology. Orthodoxy for them is the typical expression of the Russian popular character; it is the Christianity of the Eurasian soul" (Gramsci 1992, pp. 272–273).

14 P. Savitsky, quoted by Lavrov without source reference (1993, p. 9).

15 See Trubetzkoy 1935a: "O rasizme" ["On racism," 1991, pp. 277–288]).

16 It is important nonetheless to note an article published in the *Evraziiskaia khronika* claiming that the distribution of blood types over Eurasian territory proved the proximity or *affinity* between the Eurasian peoples: by virtue of the statistical distribution of blood types among Russians, "Russia is situated between the European and Asian groups; it falls almost entirely in with the Asian group and has very little in common with the European one" (V. T. 1927, p. 26). Jakobson referred to this article in citing "racial blood coefficients" as proof of the fundamental anthropological difference between the peoples of Eurasia on one hand, Europeans and Asians on the other (1931a [*SW-I*, 1971, p. 147]).

17 Cf. Kartashev 1922, p. 63, pp. 75–76.

18 See Florovsky 1922, pp. 30–36.

19 See Dumont 1983.

terminology were called "the bourgeois spirit." For Eurasianists those values were the quintessence of the Western, Romano-Germanic world.

So it was that they threw themselves into an activity they had no training for, shifting from theoretical elaboration of their doctrine by way of seminars,[20] lectures and informative pamphlets to a kind of shadow warfare aimed at getting their propaganda into the USSR and even "re-educating" the communist rulers. They soon fell into the clutches of the OGPU, masters in the arts of disinformation and infiltration. During Savitsky's "clandestine" journey to the Soviet Union in the summer of 1926, the OGPU rigged up an entire secret Eurasianist organization. Savitsky was shown fake Eurasianist meetings and attended fake masses in fake churches said by fake priests, members of the Soviet secret service.[21]

In the 1930s, the Paris group gradually became openly pro-Soviet while the Prague group subsisted thanks to Savitsky's strong personality. The latter ceased its activities when the Germans occupied Prague in March 1939 and banned Eurasian publications. In 1941, the Nazis ejected Savitsky from his post in the German-language university after he publicly declared "Russia is invincible." In 1945 he was arrested by the Soviets, despite his having welcomed them with patriotic fervor, and sentenced to ten years in a forced labor camp in Mordovia. In 1956, following de-Stalinization, he was released and sent back to Prague, where he was arrested by the Czechoslovakian police for an anthology of poems he had published in Paris. But he was amnestied shortly thereafter, when the Czechoslovakian Interior Minister fell into disfavor; also thanks to intervention by Bertrand Russell. Savitsky's last years were hard as he was forbidden to teach, but he continued to work until the end of his life on his reinterpretation of Russian history and geography while keeping up a steady correspondence with Jakobson.[22]

2 The main features of Eurasianist doctrine

Despite or because of its proclamations of radical newness, Eurasianism had many features in common with contemporaneous ideological and intellectual movements in Europe. These cannot be understood as direct borrowings; rather, they all belonged to the same *air du temps,* the same intellectual atmosphere.

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20 In 1926, for example, the Paris "Eurasian seminar" organized a series of lectures run by L. P. Karsavin on the relationship of Russia to Europe; approximately 150 people attended each of these sessions, held at 11 bis rue de Magdebourg (cf. "Evraziiskii seminar v Parizhe," *Evraziiskaia khronika* 7 [1927], pp. 42–45).

21 See Stepanov 1995, p. 439.

22 Savitsky's letters to Jakobson are in the Jakobson archives at M.I.T.

2.1 Singularity, not universalism

Eurasianist theory was based on two types of reasoning that were constantly trying to connect with each other. One turned on geopolitical considerations (Savitsky) while the other was historical-cultural (Trubetzkoy) and linguistic (Jakobson).

Eurasianist movement members all agreed that Russia belonged to neither Europe nor Asia but constituted instead a *third continent* named Eurasia, a "world apart" located east of Europe and north of Asia, a world whose own particular culture had been negated in Russia by two hundred years of Occidentophile monarchic rule. Eurasianists saw the Bolshevik revolution not as a revolt of poor against rich but rather (aside from atheist communism, which they understood to have been imported from the West) a revolt of the Russian masses against domination by a Europeanized class that had propagated a foreign culture incomprehensible to the Russian people – forced Europeanization.

For them, the *singularity* (*samobytnost', svoeobrazie)* of the Eurasian culture and state system (*gosudarstvennost'*) was the product of ancient, creative collaboration between Eastern Slavs and the Finno-Ugric and Turkic peoples of Eurasian lands.[23] The spiritual essence of Russian self-awareness (*samosoznanie*)[24] lay in Orthodoxy, and the two centuries of domination by Western principles – principles forced on Russia by Peter the Great – had culturally split a people that was once an *organic whole.*

Eurasianists were not at all in favor of restoring the monarchy or the pre-1917 order, but called instead for moving beyond Bolshevism by returning to the Russian Orthodox ideals of love and "uni-totality" (*vseedinstvo*).[25] These, they argued, had been eradicated from the official Orthodox church but were still very much alive in popular consciousness.

In contrast to Slavophiles and pan-Slavists, Eurasianists recognized no tie between Russians and western Slavs, as the latter were Westernized and Catholic. The Eurasianists' combined social, political and scientific thinking stressed geographic, historical, cultural and psychological *affinities* between the regions and peoples of Russia and those of the territories immediately to the east, Russia's close eastern neighbors, understood to form a *natural unit,* a world that owed more to the East than to the West. The crucial task of the Eurasianist movement was to maintain at all costs the entire state entity of the erstwhile Russian empire,

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23 In contradistinction to Turks, i.e., inhabitants of Turkey, Turkic peoples are all those speaking Turkic languages: Azerbaijani, Turkmen, Uzbek, Kazakh, Kirghiz, Tatar and of course Turkish.
24 *Samosoznanie* is directly modeled on the German *Selbstbewusstsein.*
25 On the relationship between unity and the totality or whole, see Ch. 9.

now called the USSR and which they proposed to name Eurasia. Their scientific work purported to demonstrate the *anti-natural, artificial* character of any and all ways of carving up this *living whole*. This intense activity, aiming to offer *ontological proof* of the existence of the Eurasia entity, produced the following definition, formulated by Trubetzkoy in 1927:

> ...the national substratum of the state formerly known as the Russian Empire and now known as the USSR can only be the totality of peoples inhabiting that state, taken as a nation (*mnogonarodnaia natsiia*) and as such possessed of its own nationalism. We call this nation *Eurasian*, its territory *Eurasia*, and its nationalism *Eurasianism* (Trubetzkoy 1927a, p. 28 [1991, p. 239]).

In "Europe and Mankind" (1920 [1991, pp. 1–64]), Trubetzkoy called for reversing perspectives: what was currently called "universal civilization," the central value of which was "progress," was actually nothing more than European chauvinism, extremely dangerous among other things because of the strong attraction it exerted on non-European intellectuals, subject to its "hypnosis by words."

For Eurasianists, the effects of other countries' borrowings from European culture could only be negative because the receiving cultures could not "organically assimilate" the borrowed material. Non-European psychology was different, so non-Europeans could never be an integral part of European civilization; nor could they succeed in developing their own values within the framework of that civilization because they could only participate in it at a kind of secondary level. And their own culture was in no way inferior to Europe's; it was simply different.[26]

Trubetzkoy exhorted intellectuals of non-European countries "blinded" by Europe (including and surely above all intellectuals in Russia) to recover their sight and thus to perceive the false, pernicious nature of European claims of universality. Only then could they lead their people to cultural independence; that is, "to being oneself."

Taking off from the principle that a universal culture was an impossibility – and a barren proposition into the bargain – Trubetzkoy asserted that cultures had to be "nationally delimited."[27] Separate cultures were organic entities or "wholes," what he and Savitsky called "systems." Trubetzkoy insisted on intersystemic foreign-ness, manifest in the necessary uniqueness of each system's structure and historical path (with its necessarily harmonious *intra*-systemic organization) and maintained that any exact "translation" from one system to another was impossible. *In what way, then, did Eurasia constitute a system?* Above

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26 Trubetzkoy 1920, p. 42 (1991, pp. 34–35).
27 Trubetzkoy 1923a (1996, p. 118).

and beyond the weight of the organism metaphor, this question should enable us to approach the complex, subtle relations obtaining between the terms *system, structure and whole* in the thinking of the Prague structuralist linguists.

2.2 A quest for identity: impossible ecumenism

In fact, the Eurasianists rendered the two "worlds" of Russia and Europe incompatible by overestimating the religious opposition between Orthodoxy and Catholicism. This was surely the real borderline, a symbolic one at the level of discourse, a borderline further exacerbated by Russia's territorial losses in the First World War, a borderline that explains the particularities of the Eurasianist discourse on territory. For example, for Eurasianists the independence of the Baltic states and Finland was self-evident: those nations were either Catholic or Protestant and therefore "Latin" in the sense of "non-Orthodox."[28]

Directly attacking the idea of Christian universalism (which the Eurasianists identified with the Roman Catholic Church) and in dropping all relativist indulgence, Trubetzkoy incessantly asserted absolute incompatibility between the Orthodox and Catholic worlds, emphasizing above all the fundamental superiority of the former over the latter, repeatedly trotting out an *idée fixe* that the Eurasianists shared with Slavophiles and that can be expressed as follows: Despite the fact that Russia, due to particular historical circumstances, came in contact with European culture, it always belonged and would always belong, in its deepest inner being, to a *totally different* cultural world, a world separated from European culture by a genuine abyss and infinitely superior – thanks to its ethical, esthetic and spiritual values – to anything Europe had ever produced.

In this vein Trubetzkoy explained that the Cyrillic alphabet was intrinsically superior to the Latin one.[29] But what may not be known is that Jakobson adopted the same line. In his fundamental text on the alliance between Eurasian languages,[30] he vehemently criticized the policy of Latinizing the alphabets of Soviet Union languages, arguing that the Latin alphabet was technically

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28 Byzantine terminology equated the Catholic world with the "Latin" one, the Byzantine understanding being that religious membership was of greater significance than ethnic membership. The fact that Romanians, who speak a Latin language, were Orthodox did not contradict this terminology. The fundamental, irreducible differences between the Orthodox world and the Catholic-Protestant one are best presented in the collective anthology entitled *Rossiia i latinstvo* [Russia and Latinity], 1923. For a detailed commentary on this opposition, see, among others, Mirsky 1927.

29 Trubetzkoy 1927b, pp. 88–93

30 Jakobson 1931a [*SW-I*, 1971, pp. 192–194]; see below and Ch. 3.

ill-adapted to the specificity of Eurasian languages. In the same period (the late 1920s), the Soviet linguist E. D. Polivanov (1891–1938) was touting that policy as major progress toward internationalization.[31]

Eurasianist thought was quite consistent on the notion of holism: harmony within the whole, symmetric peripheries around a single center. However, these thinkers were at much fewer pains to construct the eastern border of Russia than the western one. In *The Legacy of Genghis Khan*, the grimmest book Trubetzkoy ever wrote (published in 1925 under the pseudonym I. R.[32]), the real problem is Russia's western border – i.e., the line of resistance against Russian expansion – not the eastern one, which had been continuously receding eastward – all the way to Alaska – since the capture of Kazan in 1552 under Ivan the Terrible. In fact, Eurasianist calls for solidarity with countries that might now be designated "Third World"[33] were only a front for these Russian intellectuals' quest for identity as they confronted their other self: Western Europe.

In this connection it is significant that there were virtually no non-Russian Eurasianists, not even a Ukrainian.[34] The "Turanian" aspect of "Eurasian culture" was highly abstract: Eurasianists never cited a single non-Russian Eurasian writer, thinker or scholar. They did not write a single word on Avicenna, for example. Their sole hero was Genghis Khan.

Scandalized by the internationalist politics of the early Bolshevik government, the Eurasianists were therefore pleased to see the changes brought in by 1930s Soviet cultural policy, which began emphasizing the Soviet whole and its "solidarity" around Russia, abandoning any signs of internationalism (see, for example, the shift to the Cyrillic alphabet for non-Russian languages).

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31 See Polivanov 1931 [1968, p. 197].

32 *I. R.* probably stands for nIkolaj tRubeckoj, but another possibility is "Iz Rossii" ("from Russia"). The bibliographical reference here is Trubetzkoy1925a.

33 See Trubetzkoy's call for revolt: "How is the inevitability of universal Europeanization to be resisted? At first glance it appears that the only possibility is a general uprizing against the Romano-Germans. If mankind – not the 'mankind' the Romano-Germans like to discuss, but genuine mankind, the majority of which consists of Slavs, Chinese, Indians, Arabs, Negroes, and other peoples, all of whom, regardless of color, are groaning under the heavy Romano-Germanic yoke and squandering their national energies on the production of raw materials for European factories – if this mankind could unite in a common struggle against the oppressors, it would probably succeed sooner or later in overthrowing the hateful yoke and sweeping these predators and their culture from the face of the earth" (Trubetzkoy 1920, [1991, p. 59]).

34 It is interesting to note that A. Ja. Bromberg, a Jew, called upon the Jews to contribute their Messianic energy to that of Russia-Eurasia, thereby creating a "New Israel" (Bromberg 1931, pp. 113–117, 139–140).

2.3 "Cultures" in the plural, not "civilization"

Eurasianists conceived of Russian culture not as a reflection or part of Western culture but as a culture "apart," specific to a set of Eastern European and Asian peoples with "affinities of the soul" to Russia. It was this affinity, explained the authors of *Exodus to the East*, that made Russian culture "accessible and close to these peoples and conversely rendered fruitful their participation in the Russian cause."[35]

The French-speaking world is not at all familiar with Trubetzkoy's "cultur-ological" works, though they are crucial to grasping certain particularities of his structuralism, namely the "old Hegelian backdrop" that Mounin spoke of[36] while acknowledging his bewilderment at some of Jakobson's comments on Trubetz-koy. Clearly Mounin only had access to the few biographical details published at the beginning of *Principles of Phonology*" (English edition, 1969); Trubetzkoy's correspondance was not published until 1975 in the United States, and then only in the Russian original; the French translation dates from 2006.[37]

Like all Eurasianists,[38] Trubetzkoy, even while calling for a "revolution in consciousness," drew upon ideas of a retrospective utopia; not the imperial Russia produced by the reforms of Peter the Great, but Muscovite, pre- Petrovian, "authentic" Russia, which he believed had developed out of the Tatar-Mongol system of government. His fascination with the Mongol Empire fuels the above-mentioned *Legacy of Genghis Khan* (1925).

Calling for a reassessment of Tatar-Mongol rule, traditionally viewed nega-tively, Trubetzkoy asserted that the real source of the Russian state was not Kievan Rus' but the Mongol Empire. Indeed, Kievan Rus', a fragmented set of provinces

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35 Florovsky et al. 1921, p. VII.

36 Mounin 1972, p. 101.

37 Nonetheless, Böss's illuminating monograph on the Eurasianist movement (1961) was already available when Mounin was writing. Most publications in French on the subject date from the 1930s (and are to be found primarily in *Le Monde slave*, the journal of the Ecole des Langues Ori-entales, never in the *Revue des Etudes Slaves*, published by the Institut d'Etudes Slaves). There were none after that date. Only in fairly recent times have French language researchers begun mentioning Eurasianism again, almost exclusively in connection with Trubetzkoy (Nivat 1966; Viel 1984; Adamski 1992). After the war, a few isolated studies were done in other languages, namely Riasanovsky 1967 and first and foremost the above-cited Böss 1961. All of Trubetzkoy's non-linguistic works were republished in Moscow in 1995, and many have been translated into English (cf. Liberman 1991a) and French (cf. Sériot 1996b). On neo-Eurasianism in post-commu-nist Russia, see Désert-Paillard 1994.

38 Following the translator of S. Lubinsky's article (1931, p. 388), I use the word *Eurasianist* to designate partisans of the doctrine and *Eurasian* to designate inhabitants of Eurasia. S. Lubinskij was one of Petr Savitsky's many pseudonyms (see Riasanovsky 1967, p. 47).

representing barely one-twentieth of Russia's current territory, was historically "non-viable":[39] it was not an "organic whole." With its sedentary inhabitants, it could not resist the nomads from the steppe. The Tatars' *Golden Horde,* on the other hand, corresponded fairly closely to that territory. It was Genghis Khan who first had the *idea* of Eurasia as a sovereign, unified unit. What had been called until then the "Tatar yoke" had in truth protected Russia from something much worse: the "Romano-Germanic yoke," a mortal threat to Eurasia.

Eurasianists were divided on several points, but they did share one conviction: only by adopting a particular "worldview" – Eurasianism – could the uniqueness, the singularity of Russian culture, founded as it was on the Greco-Byzantine heritage *and* the Mongol conquest, be preserved. Russia-Eurasia (in principle these terms designated the part and the whole but they were often used as synonyms, two names for the same whole) was thought of not as a colonizing country (that is, not as having colonized Central Asia and the Caucasus) but rather as a country that had itself been colonized – by the "Romano-Germans." Furthermore, Russian expansion into Central Asia and the Caucasus was seen as a natural, continuous process of *organic development,* a sort of ecological process without political motivation or causal relations.[40] Eurasia was for Eurasianists a natural geopolitical *unit* whose geographical (geophysical), cultural, historical, ethnic and anthropological characteristics *coincided*: a *harmonious organic whole.*

Though Trubetzkoy never cited his sources (the only exception being Gabriel Tarde), he consciously or unconsciously left clues to what he had read. His "Europe and Mankind*"* (1920) is an obvious allusion to *Russia and Europe*, an 1869 work by the theorist of pan-Slavism N. Ja. Danilevsky (1822–1885) that anticipated the thinking of Spengler and Toynbee (an incomplete German translation of Danilevsky's work came out just after the 1920 publication of Spengler's *Decline of the West*). Its theme is extremely similar to Trubetzkoy's: an organicist theory of self-enclosed "historical-cultural types" that represent the ultimate divisions of humanity and cannot be connected to each other.[41] Both Danilevsky and Trubetzkoy used the term "Romano-Germans."[42] Likewise the subtitle of *The Legacy of Genghis Khan* – "A view of Russian history not from the West but from the East" –

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39 Trubetzkoy 1925a, p. 4.

40 On Jakobson's rejection of causal explanations, see Ch. 7.

41 Jakobson ranked Danilevsky among the "wonderful fruits" of Russian philosophy due to his anti-positivism (Jakobson 1929b [1988, p. 55]).

42 Danilevsky's term "Romano-Germans" was taken up in the USSR at the end of World War II and applied from a neo-pan-Slavist perspective, notably by the renowned linguist V. V. Vinogradov in *Velikii russkii iazyk* [the Great Russian language] (Moscow 1945); see Sériot 1984. On Danilevsky, see McMaster 1967.

hammers home the same leitmotiv of *vision* as Danilevsky's subtitle: "A view of the cultural and political relations of the Slavic world to the Romano-German world." The Eurasianists needed the theory of isolated historical-cultural types to be able to claim that the geographic, ethnographic and political ties between Russia and Asia excluded the possibility of Russia being part of Europe. Trubetzkoy and Savitsky's own highly significant contribution was to replace "type" by "system"; I return to this in connection with the notion of "archetype."

Though Trubetzkoy had substantial, specific differences with Danilevsky, his reading of the latter's work left discernible marks on his thinking, so many clues to be followed out. The main point of convergence between them is extreme cultural relativism: a universal civilization is impossible and unthinkable; "culture" can only exist in the plural. This corresponds perfectly to the recurrent Romantic opposition between *culture* and *civilization*,[43] updated by Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), though in the Russians' thinking the issue of the relation between plural and singular (or "universal") supplemented the opposed values "Apollonian" civilization/"Dionysian" culture. More or less latently, the idea appeared in both authors' writings that Russian culture was intrinsically superior to the others. In any case, it was specific, and fundamentally different from "Romano-Germanic" culture.

In contrast to the last of the pan-Slavists, Trubetzkoy and the Eurasianists did not call for retaking Constantinople. Instead, everyone should stay at home and learn to know himself. Likewise – and this must be the ultimate paradox – Trubetzkoy accused classic Slavophiles of being "Westernized"[44] in that the Slavic world now wished to imitate the great Western powers.

The Eurasianists' profound distaste for and rejection of Western European culture manifested itself in a sharply hostile attitude toward its main founding

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43 This opposition was explicitly applied by a contemporary of the Eurasianists, Thomas Mann (1875–1955): "The nation, not "humanity," a sum of the individuals, is the bearer of the general, of the human quality; and the value of the spiritual-artistic-religious product that one calls national culture, that cannot be grasped by scientific methods, that develops out of the organic depths of national life and is called national culture – the value, dignity and charm of all national culture, therefore, definitely lies in what distinguishes it from all others, for only this distinctive element is culture, in contrast to what all nations have in common, which is only civilization" Mann, 1918, p. 213; Eng trans. 1983, p. 179. Mann rejected this opposition after the war. In fact, the thinker closest to the Eurasianists was Spengler. His "historical morphology" purported to study the successive phases every culture goes through: an initial phase of youth and dynamism and a phase of inevitable decay to which the term "civilization" applied (Spengler 1918). Berdiaev, meanwhile, in *The Meaning of History* (1920), established an opposition between what Russia lacked – civilization – and what it had in abundance: culture. The literature on the culture/civilization opposition is vast.

44 Trubetzkoy 1921a, p. 84 (1991, pp. 78–79).

principles, namely the notion of democracy and the value attaching to the notion of the individual person. They set out to prove that Russia-Eurasia, though forced by historical circumstances into contact with the Western world, had always belonged and always would belong, by the very essence of its "vital principles," to a cultural world totally different from Europe.

Eurasianist accusations against "the West" pertained primarily to psychological traits that would now be collectively termed a "mentality": namely egoism and Western man's individualistic tendency to defend what he conceived of as his own personal rights. The historian and jurist N. N. Alekseev, a Prague Eurasianist, deemed European history rife with struggles to establish the sovereign rights of the individual.[45] As he saw it, this egoistic principle had spread to entire nations since the nineteenth century, turning them into something like giant individuals fighting for their interests and prerogatives. Eurasianists contrasted this Western world, torn apart by internecine battles, with the harmonious image of ancient Russia spinning out its life in the sheltering shade of Orthodoxy. As they saw it, the basis of the Orthodox understanding of the world was not the individual's struggle for rights but brotherly love and solidarity among members of the *community* – not the *society,* which Eurasianists viewed as an abstraction.[46] This idealized view of early Russia corresponds nearly word for word to Slavophile dogma and in any case lines up fairly well with ancient political doctrine. From the outset, the ideologists of Muscovite Russia were resolutely opposed to the Western Renaissance's extravagantly laudatory discourse on the individual person, which to them expressed human "arrogance." The demands that the individual addressed to society for more rights had been perceived in Muscovy as fundamentally immoral.

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45 See Alekseev 1934a and 1934b.

46 Here we recognize the Romantic and Hegelian opposition between *Gesellschaft*, "society," an artificial entity deriving from Enlightenment contractualist theories (an association of individuals with a particular shared goal; that is, for whom the group is not its own end) and *Gemeinschaft*, "community," an organic notion, a natural entity (of primary importance is the unity of the individuals comprising the community). This antinomy is at the basis of the thinking of the German sociologist and philosopher Ferdinand Tönnies (1855–1936), who developed it in his major work *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (1887) and applied it in his linguistic research (on this point see Nerlich 1988, pp. 215–217). Mounin's intuition about Trubetzkoy's Hegelianism thus proves correct: just as for Trubetzkoy "any person is capable of fully assimilating only the products of the culture to which he belongs himself or of the cultures nearest to his own (1923a, p. 112 [1991, p. 151]), so for Hegel the individual could only fully realize himself by partaking in what simultaneously expressed and exceeded him: his culture and his people.

The Eurasianists thought of the culture of Russia-Eurasia as fundamentally religious: Orthodox.[47] Orthodox culture, founded on "conciliarity" (*sobornost'*),[48] stood opposed to law-based, rationalist, individualist Roman Catholic Europe (Genevan Protestantism being merely the emanation of a sort of anti-Rome). For Eurasianists, Western man was incapable of conceiving the category of "totality" or the whole; he could see nothing but logical abstractions; his ethics could only degenerate into casuistry and his science into purely destructive *analysis*. The legal constructions of Roman law, Thomas Aquinas' logical constructions, and modern analytical science were all fueled by the same rationalist spirit. Greek theology had never been anthropocentric in the Latin way. Based on the Platonic tradition, it conceived of God as a Logos that informed and transfigured the Cosmos, and man as a *part* of that Cosmos, *partaking of* the Logos. The notion of the universe played a fundamental role in Orthodox understanding, and no part of Creation stood outside religious life. This made a purely human, anthropocentric attitude toward religion impossible and precluded religion's being absorbed into ethics. It also precluded any kind of individualism, as neither God nor man could be thought of as *separate* from each other or from the world. The neo-Platonic component of this understanding, based on the doctrine of non-separation, an echo of the violent dispute dividing the Platonist Greek Fathers and the Aristotelian Roman Fathers, is of great importance But here again, that *knowledge* implied a *duty*: Trubetzkoy called for undertaking "efforts to re-educate national self-awareness with a view toward establishing the symphonic (choral) unity of the multiethnic nation of Eurasia."[49]

For Eurasianists, however, there was nothing universal about the Cosmos. It was fragmented into several "worlds" that by law, as it were, differed from each other. For Trubetzkoy – and in direct contrast to Mallarmé's famed assertion in *Crise de vers*: "Languages, which are imperfect in so far as they are many" – languages and cultures were *perfect* for that very reason.

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47 Thanks to their "Turanian" mentality, Muslims in the Russian Empire were thought of as "potential Orthodox" believers. For Trubetzkoy, "It is therefore extremely important that Emelyan Pugachev stood under the banner of the Old Belief and rejected the 'pagan Latins and Lutherans'; but he did not consider it reprehensible to unite with the Bashkirs and other adherents of not only non-Orthodox Eastern Christianity but of the non-Christian faiths of the East" (1921a [1991, p. 98]).

48 In the Orthodox Church *conciliarity* or *catholicity* is understood to manifest church consciousness and the plurality of theological opinions that come together in expressing unanimity. It implies the notion of *communion (soborovanie)* and directly contrasts with the Catholic notion of accepting and submitting to a hierarchically ordered "ex-cathedra" authority.

49 Trubetzkoy 1927a, p. 130 (1991, p. 243).

In 1923 in the movement's journal *Evraziiskii vremennik,* Trubetzkoy published an article on the plurality of languages entitled "The Tower of Babel and the Confusion of Tongues" in which he proposed a new interpretation of the Babel myth. While work was a punishment that God had inflicted on man, no suffering was associated with the plurality of languages; the *law* of language splitting and fragmentation–was eternal and guaranteed the blossoming of cultures.[50] Using English terminology, we could say that for Trubetzkoy, God had not confused human language but rather multiplied languages.

The uniform, universal culture of the men who set out to construct the Tower of Babel was "unilateral," devoid of national differentiation. It had potential for remarkable scientific and technological development but was characterized by "spiritual emptiness and moral decay."[51] A universal culture must necessarily bring together "the psychological elements common to all people," and those features could only pertain to logic and material needs.[52] Therefore, "in a homogeneous culture, logic, rationalistic science, and technology will always predominate over religion, ethics and aesthetics."[53] In fact, without spiritual leavening, logic and material technology precluded self-awareness. Only a "nationally delimited" culture could enable "everything related to people's moral and spiritual life" to develop.[54]

The refusal to accept the idea of universal culture and the quest for separate cultures or "self-enclosed historical-cultural types" – the only entities capable of ensuring harmonious individual development – were consistent features of Trubetzkoy's culturological texts. In his first text on nationalism he was already stressing that "the cultures of all nations should be different" (Trubetzkoy 1921a, p. 78 [1991, p. 72).

In asserting that cultural self-containment was a vital necessity, Trubetzkoy was advocating extreme relativism and thus rejecting the hierarchical classifications of linear evolutionism:[55]

> The element of evaluation should be banished once and for all from ethnology, the history of culture, and from all the evolutionary sciences, because evaluation is inevitably based on egocentricity (Trubetzkoy 1920, p. 42 [1991, pp. 34–35]).

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50 Trubetzkoy 1923a, p. 108 (1991, p. 148).

51 *Ibid.*, p. 109 (1991, p. 149).

52 *Ibid.,* p. 150.

53 *Ibid.*

54 *Ibid.*

55 In this respect, Trubetzkoy's relativism and anti-universalism stand in stark contrast to the religious ecumenism of Vladimir Soloviev (1853–1900), who called for founding a universal, supra-denominational church.

This understanding is based on a fundamental metaphor that goes back to German Romanticism: *nations are like persons*. Parallelism between "nation" and "individual" was what allowed for rejecting all notions of universal culture.

Consequently, the Eurasianists were perfectly consistent in asserting that there could be no transplanting of spiritual and cultural values. Trubetzkoy had no intention of preaching Orthodoxy to Catholics; he was only asserting the natural (historical) nature of the opposition between those two versions of Christianity and the definitive nature of that opposition (at least until the Last Judgment).[56]

2.4 A conception of culture in areal terms

In the Western world we are accustomed to anti-colonial discourse where the relevant opposition is North/South and the line of argument is "leftist." We are much less familiar with Russian "rightist" anti-Western, anti-colonial discourse, where the relevant opposition is East/West. The point of that discourse is not to emancipate a people but rather to defend national tradition. Being aware of this shift in perspective is essential to understanding the events that followed on the collapse of communism in Russia; they only make sense if we know their historical antecedents, which refer back to Slavophile thinking but also to the Byzantine view of the "Latin" West. In any case, advocating that Russia be "re-Asianized" to save it from the "nightmare of Europeanization" was also a means of justifying the Russian Empire's colonial policy and the Soviet state's iron resistance to any and all separatist inclinations on the part of its Republics, and this view went hand in hand with the conviction that Western influence amounted to a "Romano-Germanic" yoke.

Nonetheless, the Eurasianist areal conception of culture is rife with difficulties. Trubetzkoy's conception of collective entities such as peoples and cultures is characterized by constant tension between the categories "continuous" and "discontinuous." On the one hand, those entities were embedded in a complex, open hierarchical structure:

> There are no (or virtually no) entirely unique, isolated peoples: every people belongs to some group of peoples with which it is linked by certain general traits. Moreover, one and the same people will often belong to one group by one set of criteria and to a different group by other criteria. (Trubetzkoy 1927a, p. 28 [1991, p. 240]).

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56 Cf. Trubetzkoy 1923a.

On the other hand, Trubetzkoy indicated an upper limit to that continuum, the boundary that formed closed wholes: "only large ethnic entities (for example, a group of peoples) approach total uniqueness" (*ibid*.). Obviously, then, the USSR-Eurasia had attained that total uniqueness.

We are confronted here with a double standard. On the one hand, Trubetzkoy thought in terms of contacts, adjacency, gradations, declaring them a universal rule, but the examples he cited pertained exclusively to Eurasian peoples. On the other, when it came to comparing Russian-Eurasian culture to Romano-Germanic culture, cultures were understood to be hermetically sealed monads. In "Europe and Mankind," for example, he formulated the dilemma of adopting or rejecting Romano-Germanic culture as if it were necessarily an "all or nothing" choice.

Trubetzkoy always saw the Romano-Germanic world as a non-differenti-ated – and hostile – whole: "the Romano-Germans – our worst enemies," he wrote in "The Russian problem" (1922, p. 314). Their culture had an incorrigi-ble, "fatal defect": egocentrism (see *Europe and Mankind*). French culture and German culture were thus understood to form a homogeneous whole – a particu-larly curious judgment given that Trubetzkoy's diatribes against Romano-Ger-manic culture recall in many ways those of the German Romantics against French Enlightenment culture. He merely shifted the comparison eastward.

At times he presented cultures as territorially continuous; at others as count-able objects that could come together into a single unit. Trubetzkoy's ideal was the purity of Russian cultural tradition in contrast to Romano-Germanic culture (he stressed the hereditary difference between the two), yet he favored organic fusion of the cultures of the steppe (Turanian culture)[57] and the forest (Russian and Finno-Ugric cultures) – in that particular case convergence had occurred *without* common heredity. The "worlds" of Europe and Eurasia were assumed to

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57 In his *Catalogue of the languages of the known nations* (1800–1805), the Spanish Jesuit phi-lologist Lorenzo Hervás named "Turanian" the family of languages known today as Ural-Altaic. The name is said to derive from Iranian mythology: *Tur*, a son of Fereydun, was given *Turan* or Turkestan for his domain. The term Turanian is no longer used in linguistics, but Henri Vallois (1976, p. 41) identified the Turanian "race" as an Asian one. The imagined solidarity between Turanian peoples (Bulgarians and Turks for the Turkic-Mongol group, Magyars and Finns for the Finnish group) fueled nationalist movements in Hungary and Turkey from 1900 to 1930, lead-ing to the development of *pan-Turanianism,* the main goal of which was to bring together the Turkic peoples of Turkey, Iran and the Soviet Union under one state. The idea that the Japanese were originally Turanian had some success in Japan in the same period (cf. Yuki 1984, p. 158). Trubetzkoy's contemporary Father W. Schmidt, founder of the "Vienna School" of anthropology and a major figure of diffusionism, also spoke of a "Mongol-Turanian cultural circle," opposing it to the "Indo-Germans."

be different *in essence* whereas the steppe/forest opposition could be resolved into organic complementarity.

The theme of autarky and self-sufficiency raises an even more acute problem: what were the boundaries of identity, the whole? Trubetzkoy never gave any criteria for distinguishing the whole from its parts. Ukrainians were in an inclusive, part-to-whole relation with Russians whereas Eurasians and Europeans were mutually exclusive, constituting two separate wholes.[58]

The inconsistencies and vagueness of the Eurasianists' conception of their object of discourse provoked caustic criticism from Nikolai Berdiaev, who accused them of nominalism. The charge may seem surprising coming from a philosopher who utterly failed to grasp the Platonic essentialism on which Eurasianist theory was based, but it serves the very useful purpose of drawing our attention to the arbitrary nature of the boundaries laid down to distinguish wholes from one another:

> The Eurasianists subscribe to Danilevsky's historiographical theory and have adopted his naturalism and nominalism. Danilevsky and the Eurasianists' historiosophical ideas are a naive, philosophically indefensible form of nominalism: nominalist negation of human reality. Their conception of nationality is realist but their conception of humanity is nominalist. The nominalist process of breaking down real entities cannot be arbitrarily halted. Nominalism cannot recognize the reality of nationality any more than it can recognize the reality of the human individual: the process of breaking down real entities is endless. If humanity or the cosmos are not realities, then the other levels are not real either (Berdyaev 1925, p. 109).

2.5 Ideocracy, not democracy

Like the other Eurasianists, Trubetzkoy abhorred and adamantly rejected parliamentary democracy for being an abstract, non-"organic" principle. As the ultimate form of amorphous individualism, it left man alone confronting an abstract state, delivered up to the arbitrary arithmetic of elections. The state he favored was an "ideocratic" one to be headed by a single party composed of morally superior beings who would represent "the Idea" – society's subjection to an Idea was one of Eurasianism's fundamental doctrines.[59] This single Eurasianist party was destined to replace the Bolshevik party. The government had to be "demotic" – that is, to receive absolute support from the "symphonic personality" of the

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[58] Trubetzkoy 1927c.
[59] See Savitsky 1923b: "Peoples have to be ruled by ideas, not institutions. Communism can only be vanquished by means of a higher, more encompassing idea."

people and to act in its interests – rather than democratic, for democracy was nothing but the barely masked anarchy of ever-changing individual wills. Specifically, "uncontrollable" factors such as freedom of the press or private capital should be banned entirely; liberalism and democracy were "ideocracy's worst enemies." For Eurasianists, communism and fascism were coarse approximations of the perfect ideocratic state. Fascism was inadequate because its governing Idea was a contentless platitude: society has to be organized. The inadequacy of communism lay in the contradiction between its ideocratic practical program and a materialist philosophy that denied the reality of ideas and reduced history to a process of responding to necessity. But though Trubetzkoy judged the "ideocratic states" of his time quite harshly – the USSR for professing atheism, fascist Italy for remaining colonialist – he did credit them with paving the way for the inevitable advent of "true ideocracy."

Another contemporary current of thought, the so-called German Conservative Revolutionary Movement of the 1920s, exhibited strong similarities to Eurasianism. Its adherents included such important figures as Ernst Jünger and Oswald Spengler.[60] German Conservative Revolutionaries favored neither liberal capitalism nor communism but a "third way." Eurasianism reinforced the third-way notion by assigning Eurasia the identity of a "third world."

The two movements shared the same goal, or illusion: infiltrating a totalitarian party to get it to realize their own objectives. The two doctrines also had in common an elitist nature and unswerving faith in the omnipotence of the idea. They were not restoration thinkers, nostalgic for the past; rather they saw the catastrophic events that had just occurred (the 1917 Russian Revolution, the defeat of Germany in 1918) as means of radically renewing society. But in both cases we find the same untenable tension between geo-historical determinism and the activism required for a "revolution in consciousness."

If the Eurasianist doctrine may be called totalitarian, what made it so was the fact that it subjected the individual to the powers-that-be, included him in a system that transcended him – a *whole*. Totalitarianism claimed to control man utterly in his physical, psychological and intellectual hypostases: a closed, self-sufficient, autarky-based system that accounted for all aspects of life.

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60 We know that Trubetzkoy hoped Spengler would write a foreward to the German translation of his *Europe and Mankind*; see Pomorska 1977. Trubetzkoy's text was translated into German by Sergei O. Jakobson, Roman Jakobson's brother (*Europa und die Menschheit*, trans. S. O. Jakobson and F. Schlömer, foreword by Otto Hoetzsch [Drei Masken Verlag, 1922]). On the German Conservative Revolutionary Movement, see Breuer 1996.

2.6 A philosophy of history

All current definitions of structuralism stress the importance of the *synchronicity* of facts rather than their development over time. The point, for example, is to show how structuralism in linguistics moved beyond the historicist approach of the Neogrammarians. But for Trubetzkoy (as for Jakobson prior to 1939) not only did the synchrony/diachrony dichotomy have to be superseded, it was in itself inadmissible.

In "Two worlds,"[61] Savitsky worked to demonstrate that Russia was in the process of disentangling itself from European culture and that Eurasianist theory was an attempt to interpret this break from the perspective of a philosophy of history in which cultures were understood to be living organic beings that were born, grew, went through mature adulthood and senescence, and died. He was therefore a fierce opponent of linear evolutionism,[62] discarding it in favor of a notion of geo-historical cultural monads: self-contained, self-sufficient, mutually incomprehensible and mutually impenetrable worlds.

In contrast to our dominant vision of structuralism as simply not concerned with history, Trubetzkoy's writings were fueled by a highly particular philosophy of history, a teleology informed by rejection of the idea of progress. In a period when that idea was in crisis,[63] Trubetzkoy, like his contemporary Georges Sorel, rejected not only the idea of linear progress but also the Romantic idea of a past golden age, and he did so in the name of a "logic of evolution" based on the notion of *system* historicity. For Trubetzkoy, the simplistic idea that language-family history was a unidirectional process (the branchings of a genealogical tree) quite logically followed from the Western European notion of "progress."

Several scholars have stressed the massive presence of Hegelian ideas in Jakobson's and Trubetzkoy's writings.[64] Surely the Hegelianism in their thinking lay in their philosophy of history, which contrasted sharply with post-World War II structuralism. For Trubetzkoy, becoming (*das Werden*) was never a matter of chance; it always had *meaning*, and that meaning had to be deciphered. However, Trubetzkoy's philosophy of history cannot be reduced to pure reiteration of the great Hegelian themes. In certain respects his conception of time was typical of

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61 Savitsky 1922.
62 "Linear evolutionism" here is an allusion to the theories of Morgan and Engels; Marr took it to an extreme in his "stages" theory; see Ch. 7.
63 It should be recalled that the Eurasianists were in no way marginal individuals. They were deeply cultured, and in contrast to landowners, their pre-Revolution social situation was stable and in no way threatened by scientific and technical progress. The reasons behind their stubborn rejection of the notion of progress were ideological, not economic.
64 Mounin 1972, p. 100; Holenstein 1984.

the nineteenth century: time was irreversible. Yet he added an important quali-
fier: time was not universal, but ran instead within self-enclosed wholes. Nations
did not come one by one to partake in some great universal process that was grad-
ually realizing absolute Mind.

For Trubetzkoy, philosophy of history was not a particular, isolated discipline
but the field in which he could apply or put into practice the general principles
of the Eurasianist philosophy of culture. History was culture as it developed dia-
chronically, and the motor and *subject* of the historical process were "collective
persons." According to this doctrine Europeans stood opposed to the rest of the
world. They seem the only "fated" people, and their true, inalterable nature was
violence and expansionism. No other people was in such a desperate way. In the
genuine process of self-awareness, each collective person would become aware of
its relativity and acknowledge every other collective person as its rightful equal.
Europeanization was the fundamental evil and threat to this historical process,
for it blocked the *natural* evolution of each organic whole.

The importance of divine providence in Trubetzkoy's philosophy of history
may seem to undermine the fixed framework of his natural evolutionary program.
"God," he wrote, "intervenes directly in the historical process."[65] However, given
his terminology, this idea does seem a kind of equivalent to historical *necessity*:
his writings are full of expressions like "it was inevitable that" and "the merciless
logic of history." Moreover, every group, be it social, ethnic, or some other sort,
had a *task* to accomplish – Ukrainians, for example:

> A properly developed national self-awareness will show the future creators of this culture
> its natural boundaries, as well as its true essence and most basic task: to become *a special,
> individualized, Ukrainian variant of all-Russian culture.* (Trubetzkoy 1927c, p. 184 [1991,
> p. 267]).

Since time and space could not be dissociated, historical units were also geo-
graphical units. Not only did every anthropological entity have a task, a destiny
to accomplish, but so did every geographical entity, for these were *goal-oriented
wholes*. This idea returns like a leitmotiv in *The Legacy of Genghis Khan*:

> From the beginning the political unification of Eurasia was a historical inevitability, and
> the geography of Eurasia indicated the means to achieve it (Trubetzkoy 1925a, p. 6 [1991,
> p. 165]).

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65 Trubetzkoy 1923a, p. 120 (1996, p. 124).

Likewise, while Bolshevism and Marxism were seen as particularly dreadful consequences of Western – more exactly "Romano-Germanic" – culture, this was not true of the Russian Revolution, conceived as an immense, *necessary* cataclysm that had simultaneously stirred the Russian masses and the Oriental peoples of the Russian Empire. For the Eurasianists, the October 1917 Revolution represented purification, renewal and resurrection of the true spirit of the steppe specific to Russian culture; it was the starting point of a process that would bolster the power of Eurasia.

Lastly, Eurasianism was marked by constant tension between a Hegelian philosophy of history as continuous development wherein every nation has its turn to dominate historical processes, and a cyclical vision of time where cultures are incommensurable, mutually impenetrable monads. This conflict between two visions of history and time became a point of much interwar discussion and debate in connection with structuralism.

3 Missing borders, imagined borders

3.1 A "geographist" ideology

Eurasianists seemed to know nothing of works on the geographical nature of Russia by their contemporaries or immediate predecessors, specifically the anthropological-geographical theories on the Russian Empire of Friedrich Ratzel (1844–1904) and John Mackinder (1861–1904).[66] At any rate, they never cited their sources. Nonetheless, the "air du temps" is undeniable. As contemporaries of Oswald Spengler, the Eurasianists and their ideas fit very well into the intellectual life of post-World War I, post-Versailles Treaty Europe.

Their common aim was to prove the natural, *organic* existence of Eurasia-USSR by demonstrating points of similarity among the peoples and languages of Eurasia, a similarity much stronger than any ties that might exist between those peoples and languages and their counterparts outside Eurasian territory. The following text by Trubetzkoy offers a striking example of this type of reasoning:

> Any individual people of Eurasia can of course be included in some other, not exclusively Eurasian group according to certain criteria. For instance, by linguistic criteria Russians belong together with the Slavic peoples, Tatars, Chuvash, Cheremiss, and others belong to

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66 See Hauner 1992.

the so-called Turanian peoples; by religious criteria Tatars, Bashkirs, Sarts,[67] and others belong to the Moslem peoples. But these links should be less strong for them than links uniting them as the Eurasian family : Eurasianism, rather than Pan-Slavism for Russians, Pan-Turanianism for Eurasian Turanians, or Pan-Islamism for Eurasian Moslems, should become predominant. These 'pan-isms,' by intensifying the centrifugal energies of particular ethnic nationalisms, emphasize the one-sided link between the given peoples by only a single set of criteria; they are incapable of creating any real, living and individual multiethnic nation. But in the Eurasian brotherhood, peoples are linked not by some one-sided set of criteria, but by their common historical destiny. Eurasia constitutes a geographical, economic, and historical whole. The destinies of the Eurasian peoples have become interwoven with one another, tied in a massive tangle that can no longer be unraveled; the severance of any one people can be accomplished only by an act of violence against nature, which will bring pain. The same holds for the ethnic groups forming the basis of Pan-Slavism, Pan-Turanianism and Pan-Islamism. Not one of them is united to such a degree by a common historical destiny (Trubetzkoy 1927a, pp. 29–30 [1991, pp. 241–242]).

During the same period Jakobson too was interested in Eurasia, which he defined as a *whole* exhibiting "structural" correlation of components belonging to different phenomenal orders:

Is the human community of the Eurasian geographical world different from the communities of neighboring worlds, above all Europe and Asia, and if so, in what way? Economic geography correlated with the givens of physical geography allows for observing that the Eurasian world is on the order of a whole. The historical destiny of Eurasia confirms its indissoluble unity. Study of the racial blood coefficient[68] brings to light the essential anthropological difference between the peoples of Eurasia and Europeans and Asians. Lastly, ethnology, freed from its long-standing dependence on the genealogical table of languages, is now establishing the specific characteristics of the Eurasian cultural circle (Jakobson 1931a [*SW-I*, 1971, p. 147]).

Clearly, then, *boundaries* were the key issue from the outset. Eurasianism undertook first and foremost to *reconfigure borders,* to destroy entities it considered false or merely apparent (e.g., "Slavs") and establish others, understood to be more real because "organic" (e.g., "Eurasians").

The move of calling borders – linguistic, cultural or territorial ones – into question was an ordinary and even common one in post-Versailles Treaty Europe, but the Eurasianists reinterpreted it in connection with another question they considered crucial: Where did the border lie between Russia and its Other (Western Europe) and what did the difference between them consist in? Eurasianists detached Russia from the Slavic world and in contradistinction to

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67 The Sarts are an Uzbek group sedentarized earlier than other Uzbeks.

68 Sic: *rasovyi koefficient krovi.*

pan-Slavists they shifted the borderline eastward. In doing so they were applying a fundamental axiom of Eurasianist theory: the cause of all trouble was non-recognition of real system borders.

> To a large extent, the historical contradictions we are experiencing at the present time accumulated in Russian reality because of the Russian attitude toward Western European culture, the culture that until very recently reigned throughout the world and which is only now beginning, it would seem, to elicit attempts in all parts to submit this question to fundamental reconsideration ("Evraziistvo" ["Eurasianism," unsigned editorial], *Evraziiskaia khronika* 1 (1925), p. 1; published in Prague).

Trubetzkoy contributed greatly to this enterprise of rearranging entities, shifting apparent borders, dividing entities whose unity had been taken for granted until then, the purpose being to bring to light more authentic, organic, *natural* borders. Any supposed Slavic unity or solidarity vanished:

> From an ethnographic point of view, the culture (meaning the stock of cultural assets that meets the physical and spiritual requirements of a particular milieu) of the Russian people is an absolutely singular entity that cannot be accurately identified with any broader cultural zone or grouping of cultures. Generally speaking, this culture comprises its own special zone and includes, besides the Russians, the Ugro-Finnic peoples and the Turkic peoples of the Volga Basin. Moving to the east and southeast, this culture merges almost imperceptibly with the Turko-Mongolian culture of the steppes, which links it in turn with the cultures of Asia. In the west there is also a gradual transition (via the Belorussians and Ukrainians) to the culture of the West Slavs, which borders on the Romano-Germanic and 'Balkan' cultures. But these links with other Slavic cultures are not very strong, and they are counterbalanced by strong connections with the East. Russian national culture is closely associated with the East in a whole set of issues, so that at times the boundary between East and West passes exactly between the Russians and other Slavs. On certain issues the South Slavs and Russians are closely related, not because both groups are Slavs but because both have experienced strong Turkic influences. (Trubetzkoy 1921b, pp. 96–97 [1991, pp. 92–93]).

> The Russian national character is quite distinct from that of the Ugro-Finns and the Turks but at the same time it does not in the least resemble the national characters of the other Slavs (*ibid*, p. 96).

The central issue of redrawing borders goes back further than is usually thought in both Russian culture and the work of Western European geographers. The term Eurasia was forged and brought into use by the Austrian geologist Eduard Suess (1831–1914) in 1885, in *Das Antlitz der Erde*.[69] His point was to demonstrate that there was no separation between the continents of Europe and Asia; he claimed

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[69] On the history of Russian notions about the relation between Europe and Asia, see Bassin 1991.

that the boundary between them was purely conventional and that the continental mass formed by fitting them together should be thought of as a whole, a single geological *and* ethnic entity. Suess's "Eurasia" was an *inclusive* term that brought the two continents together, and it is as such that the term continues to be used in French today.[70]

Eurasianists, on the other hand, used the same term with an *exclusionary* meaning: Eurasia was *neither* Europe *nor* Asia but rather, as explained, a "world apart." In this they were following the view of the Slavophile linguist, ethnologist and geographer V. I. Lamansky (1883–1914), the first to have put forward the notion – citing geographic and linguistic phenomena in support – that the Ancient World was divided into not two but three continental entities – Europe, Asia, and Russia – the last being "a middle world" located east of Europe and north of Asia.[71]

As early as 1892, in *The three worlds of the Asiatic-European continent,* Lamansky claimed that the Russian Empire was an autonomous geographic entity, clearly distinguishable from the other two by its natural characteristics, namely near-total absence of internal division and peripheral mountain ranges encircling a vast central plain. Like his predecessor Danilevsky, Lamansky attributed both a *cultural* and *natural* dimension to the notion of the Russian Empire's physical unity: the Russians had not colonized Siberia; their settlement of it was in truth a "natural and organic" process in that the parts of the Empire east and west of the Urals formed an "indivisible whole," a political and cultural unit unified by Russian culture: "the same faith, the same language, the same nationality."[72]

It is with reference to this ideological context – how to redefine the borders of collective Russian identity – that the Eurasianist movement should be understood. Fundamentally, that movement was defined by the fact that it called into question two types of what its proponents considered deceptive ideas. The first was the idea of a "universal culture." For Trubetzkoy, there could only be separate, unique cultures; there was nothing universal about Romano-Germanic culture; it was merely one culture among others. The second was the idea that Russia was part of Europe. But this created an extreme tension, for Eurasianist doctrine was constantly oscillating between two answers to the question of how East and West should be related: merge or clash? On the one hand, Russian-Eurasian culture brought together and reconciled the European and Asian essences; on the other,

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70 See the *Encyclopedia Universalis*, entry "Eurasie. Bio-géographie: "Eurasia: the block formed by the Asian and European continents; represents a third of the land surface of the earth's crust, an unbroken stretch of land measuring over 54 million sq. km.**"**

71 See Sériot 1998.

72 Danilevsky 1869.

Eurasia was the arena in which those same essences fought it out – with Asia victorious for two reasons: one, the authentically Russian soul was Asian, not European, and Russian Europeanism was merely superficial, having been artificially imposed by Peter the Great; two, Asian or "Oriental" culture was *superior,* more profound, than European or "Western" culture.

While Trubetzkoy was interested above all in *culture,* the geographer Savitsky emphasized *nature.* Jakobson, meanwhile, would try to devise a properly linguistic definition of Eurasia (see Chapter 3). But all shared the desire to find a scientific definition of Eurasia within their particular area of expertise. According to Savitsky, for example, the traditional division of the Ancient World into Europe and Asia held up no better than the division of Russia into "European" and "Asian" parts. The boundary formed by the Urals and generally recognized as the border between Europe and Asia was artificial. A more real, more "natural" boundary than any break between Europe and Asia was the line connecting the closest points of the "isthmus" formed by the band of land between the Baltic and Black Seas,[73] with its many, superimposed climatic, botanical, pedological,[74] linguistic and cultural borders. In a letter to Jakobson dated August 7, 1930,[75] Savitsky recalled that he was the first to have used the word "Eurasia" and that he had done so to designate Russia (the Russian Empire) as a "particular geographic whole." He also related that the idea had come to him in the fall of 1919, as he was recovering from typhus in the Ukrainian city of Poltava.

The only border that seems to have counted for the Eurasianists was the one separating Russia from Europe, and the "zonal" notion of closed historical-cultural types seems to have been used above all to seal Russia off from Europe both culturally and economically. In this vision East and West are *not a relationship but rather objects in the ontological sense*: from the start, the soul of the Slavs was attracted to the East, their body to the West.[76] This conception of culture is more substantialist than structuralist: culture can be "reshaped" or "borrowed" as if it were a thing.

The essential difference between Lamansky and Danilevsky on the one hand, the Eurasianists on the other, is that the former had the Slavic world encompass Russia while ignoring or scorning Asia, whereas the latter excluded the Western Slavs from Eurasia while including Russian Empire Asians.

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73 Savitsky 1934, p. 17.

74 From the Greek *pedon* (earth, soil). It is of course this meaning, "soil science," rather than the one pertaining to pediatrics (from *pais, paidos*: child), that the term has here.

75 Jakobson Archives, MIT.

76 See Trubetzkoy 1921b, p. 93 (1991, pp. 87–88).

We can now compare these distinct representations of the borderline understood to separate clean from unclean, same from other, *svoe* (that which belongs to self) and *chuzhoe* (that which is foreign) – the borderline that is the basis for identity discourse in Russia. Lamansky's and the Eurasianists' respective geographical indications are precise enough to allow us to trace the two dividing lines on a map.

Line *A* is the pan-Slavist border (Dantzig-Trieste) and corresponds to Lamansky's text;[77] line B is the Eurasianist border (Murmansk-Brest-Galatsi) as indicated in texts by Jakobson, Trubetzkoy and Savitsky.

The difference between the pan-Slavist and Eurasianist borders is quite clear. The first includes the entirety of the Slavic world (including Catholic Western Slavs) in its "Middle World" whereas the second, coming close to the Curzon line in the area of Brest-Litovsk,[78] excludes not only Western but also Southern Slavs from Eurasia. Over a period of approximately thirty years, the location of Russia in Russian identity discourse had gradually shifted eastward, first detaching itself from Western Europe, then from Europe's Slavic zone.[79]
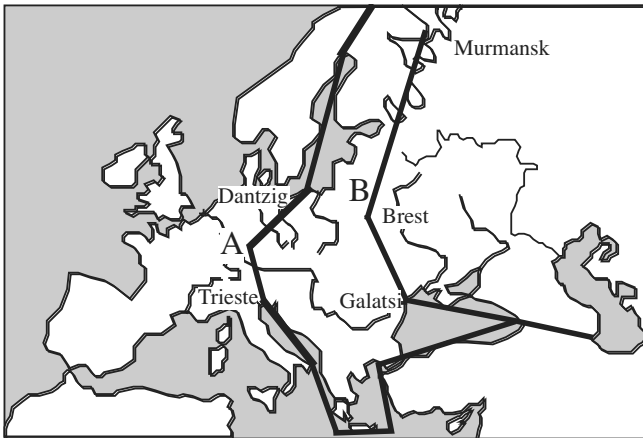
Fig. 1: *Two western borders: Europe and Eurasia (the Middle World)*

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77 Lamansky 1892.

78 On the history of discussions of the "Curzon line," see Hauner 1992 and Yakemtchouk 1957.

79 This exploration could be further refined by a study of the post-World War II return to pan-Slavism in the USSR, a study that would make use of Vinogradov's *The Great-Russian language* (1945), for example, a return to Lamansky's ideas updated to respond to the needs of the period.

There were so many characteristics qualifying Eurasia as a unified whole that it could actually be defined in several ways, and the borders thus identified necessarily varied somewhat as a function of the chosen distinguishing feature. Climate and physical geography were the most characteristic, and they justified thinking of the 1920s' borders of the USSR as "natural."[80] The border between Europe and Eurasia was likewise understood to correspond to thresholds in temperature, climate, soil type, flora and fauna, and so to follow a line running (approximately) from Murmansk to Galatsi by way of Brest-Litovsk. Savitsky defined Eurasia as that surface of the continental block of the Ancient World where the north-south shift in climatic and botanical zones[81] was least disrupted by non-latitudinal factors (seas and mountains) and where all rivers flowed parallel to longitudinal lines. The *law-abiding regularity* (*zakonomernost'*)[82] of this series of zones (the only other place such a phenomenon could be found was in sub-Saharan Africa) stood in stark contrast to the heterogeneous, fragmentary, regionalized structure of Europe. For Savitsky, Eurasia was organized as a structure of continuous latitudinal north-to-south "flag stripes": tundra, forest (taiga), steppe, desert and mountains. Each of these zones was divided just as regularly into subzones; for example, the steppe was divided into prairie steppe, grassland steppe, and wormwood steppe. Each zone and subzone had its own complex of plants and soil types. Each stretched east-west in a straight and unbroken line.[83]

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80 The Eurasianists all agreed that Eurasia did not include the Baltic countries but they had reservations about the border resulting from the separate Brest-Litovsk peace treaty of March 1918. Once again, Eurasianist proposals came closer to the Curzon Line than the Soviet-Polish border defined in August 1920 by the Treaty of Riga. The western border of the USSR established at the end of the Second World War – that is, further west – corresponded much more closely to the one advocated by the Eurasianists.

81 The idea of climate or temperature "zones" was first put forward by Greek geographers, namely Ptolemy in the second century A.D.

82 Most of the specific terms used by Eurasianist thinkers were modeled on German philosophical vocabulary. *Zakonomernost'* was modeled on *Gesetzmässigkeit* while *celeustremlennost'*, a term we will later consider in connection with *teleology,* is modeled on *Zielstrebigkeit*. All pertain to an organicist philosophy of history.

83 The *zone theory*, which will often come up here, was developed in detail by the Russian School of Genetic Pedology, founded by V. V. Dokuchaev (1846–1903). In his classic work *Russian Black Soil* (1883), he used a *globalist* approach wherein each soil type was considered an "autonomous historical-natural body," *a living environment* formed by the interaction of various local factors: the parent rock, climate, flora and fauna, landscape contours, geological age of the region plus the human activity in it. With the notion of "natural territorial complex," the land became the locus of complex interactions between inert and living, natural and social factors. Dokuchaev was thus the founder of Russian landscape science – *landshaftovedenie* in Russian, modeled on the German *Landschaftkunde*. On the basis of the independent genetic characteristics of each soil type, Dokuchaev established a map of Russian and world pedological zones, distinguish-

Geopolitically too, Eurasia was the "true Middle Empire," the "central world of the Ancient Continent," the "middle world," the "center of the Ancient World."[84] Savitsky described this natural whole as a "periodic, symmetrical zonal system."[85] It is in this respect that Eurasianism can be termed a "geographicist" ideology: geography was the key; it *made visible* what had been hidden and incomprehensible.

In 1925 Trubetzkoy put forward his own geographical definition of Eurasia, in which he specified his notion of "system." The following excerpt shows how close his thinking was to that of Savitsky and Jakobson:

> Geographically, the territory of Russia, understood as the nucleus of the Mongolian empire, can be defined in the following manner. A long, more or less uninterruped zone of unforested plains and plateaus stretches almost from the Pacific Ocean to the mouth of the Danube. This belt can be called the "steppe system." It is bordered on the north by a broad zone of forests, beyond which lies the tundra. In the south, the steppe system is bordered by mountain ranges. Thus there are four parallel zones stretching from west to east: the tundra, the forests, the steppes, and the mountains. In the meridional direction (i.e. from north to south or south to north) this system of four zones is intersected by a system of great rivers. This then is the essence of the geographical configuration of the land mass under discussion. It lacks both access to the open sea and the ragged coastline so characteristic of Western and Central Europe and East and South Asia. With regard to climate, this land mass is distinguished from both Europe and Asia proper by a set of characteristics associated with the term "continental climate": extreme variations between summer and winter temperatures, a distinct isotherm and wind direction, and so on. This land mass differs from both Europe and Asia proper and constitutes a separate continent, a separate part of the earth, which in contrast to Europe and Asia can be called *Eurasia* (Trubetzkoy 1925a, pp. 5–6 [1991, p. 164]).

In a distant echo of Fichte's *Closed Commercial State* (1800), the theme of *autarky* finds an echo in that of closed or self-contained spaces, the notion of closed systems. The *continentality* concept is fundamental here. Savitsky pointed out[86] that the most "continental" points of Africa, South America and North America lay no more than 1700 km from their coasts; only in Eurasia were there places located

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ing seven "world zones": boreal, northern forest, forest-steppe, steppe, dry steppe, desert and sub-tropical. He sought to promote a "synthetic natural science," a single approach for studying both inert and living nature. Lastly, this "historical-naturalistic" conception of soil types went explicitly against a purely "utilitarian" notion that Dokuchaev thought of as "Western" in which land was considered only in terms of whether or not it was arable. On Dokuchaev, see Deléage 1992, pp. 199–202, and Semenova and Gacheva 1993, pp. 284–285.

84 Savitsky 1934, pp. 13–14.

85 "Die eurasische Welt ist das Reich eines periodischen und zugleich symmetrischen Zonensystems," Savitsky 1934, p. 17. On the notion of periodic system, see Ch. 8.

86 Savitsky 1927b, pp. 6–9.

further than 2400 km from the coast. Moreover, the Eurasian coasts were of self-enclosed seas, frozen solid most of the year or readily subjected to military or trade blockades. This situation was a disadvantage if Eurasia wanted to be competitive on the world market since land transport was much more costly than sea transport. The solution was for Eurasia – a virtually self-sufficient whole given the country's immensity and natural resources, which made it a kind of "ocean continent" – to be economically self-sufficient.[87] Moreover, knowledge of the *nature* of this "world" made it clear that the Russian-Eurasian economy had to be self-sustaining:

> Russia's economic future cannot consist in aping the "oceanic" policy of the others, a policy in many ways inapplicable to Russia, but rather in understanding its own "continental nature" and adapting to it (Savitsky 1921a, p. 125).

Trubetzkoy's arguments on Eurasia as a self-sustaining whole were based on both nature and necessity:

> Eurasia represents an integral whole, both geographically and anthropologically. The presence within it of geographically and economically diverse features, such as forests, steppes, and mountains, and of natural geographical connections between them makes it possible to view Eurasia as a region that is more or less self-sufficient economically. By its very nature, Eurasia is historically destined to comprise a single state entity. (Trubetzkoy 1925a, p. 6 [1991, p. 165]).

And in a 1933 article bearing the highly suggestive title "Thoughts on autarky," Trubetzkoy went even further. Whereas for Savitsky the autarky solution was appropriate only for Eurasia and for reasons of economic profitability, for Trubetzkoy it represented a universal ideal for humanity, itself divided into "separate" or "singular" worlds (*osobye miry*):

> Autarky is economically and politically more advantageous and offers more guarantees of human happiness than the "world economy in one common melting pot" system.... Up until now we have tried to prove that what was needed was a self-sufficient economy for a particular state. I think that on the contrary we should be more interested in the advantages of a *system of self-sufficient worlds as a particular way of organizing the world economy* (Trubetzkoy 1933a [1995, p. 436]).

Trubetzkoy then set out to show that self-sufficiency was impossible in a state that did not form an authentic "world apart" (examples of "inauthentic" worlds were Großdeutschland, pre-WWI Hungary and the colonial empires of the time with their overseas colonies). He called for collectively combating such "perversions":

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87 Savitsky 1921a.
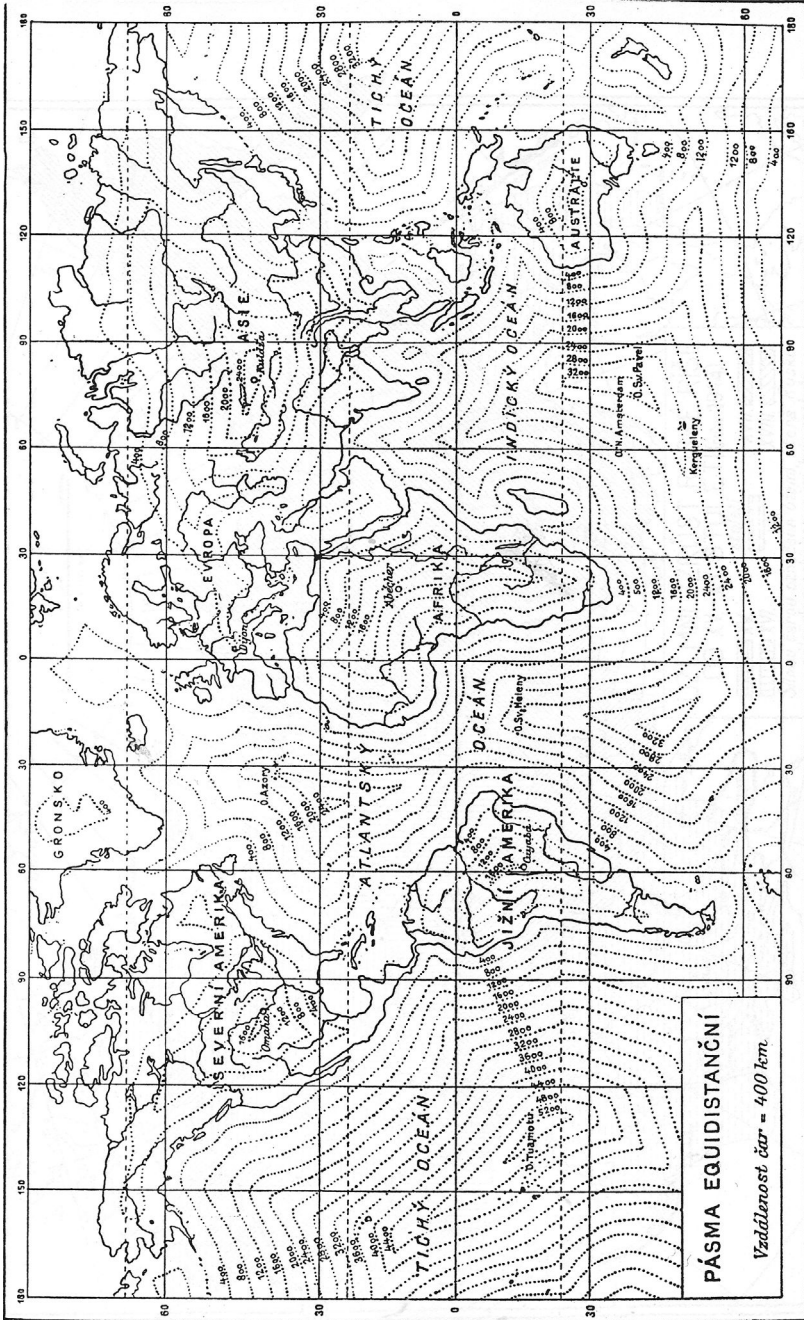
Fig. 2: Map of equidistant zones (Savitsky 1933)

> It must be proved that the fundamental advantage of autarky, i.e., its stability, which guarantees peaceful coexistence both internally and externally, is only possible if the regions that come together in a world apart are tightly knit not only economically but also historically; that they have a common destiny, civilization, common national particularities and national balance (that there are no white masters and black slaves). One property of a "world apart" is that it cannot be carved up differently without damaging either the removed part or most of the other parts (*ibid.*).

Lastly, he suggested "radically raising the question of the way of life and type of civilization implied by economic autarky":

> Clearly a geographical region either can or cannot attain autarky only as a function of a given way of life[88] and type of civilization. The current way of organizing the world economy presupposes a single type of civilization combined with extremely different living standards (social inequality). The autarkic world system will be just the opposite, varying by civilization but with no more than a single level within the bounds of each autarkic world (*ibid.*, p. 437).

Though not a founding member, the linguist Roman Jakobson was sympathetic to Eurasianist movement ideas, kept abreast of them and contributed to Eurasianist publications.[89] He drew on linguistic arguments – also studies by his close friend and collaborator Savitsky – to confirm the existence of the "world apart" called Eurasia:[90]

> Eurasia is characterized by a set of specific features that pertain to soil, vegetation and climate; it is a typically "multi-characteristic" territory, an original geographical world apart that forms a whole. These are the conclusions to which Russian geographical science

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88 Trubetzkoy's use of the expression "way of life" (*zhiznennyi standart*) echoed that of the late nineteenth-century terms *Lebensform*, forged by Fr. Ratzel in Germany, and *genre de vie*, forged by Paul Vidal de la Blache in France. The expression designates an organized complex of collective practices and production techniques consolidated by tradition and adapted to a given geographic milieu. Both Trubetzkoy and Savitsky seem closer to Ratzel's theses – that is, a determinist approach to the notion – than to Vidal de la Blache's more flexible, "possibilist" approach.
89 Jakobson's 1931 booklet, *K kharakteristike evraziiskogo iazykovogo soiuza* ["For a characterization of the Eurasian union of languages"] was published in Paris by the Editions Eurasistes.
90 Savitsky became Jakobson's godfather when he had himself baptized in the Orthodox Church in Prague in 1936. Jakobson often cited Savitsky's works in the early 1930s (see Ch. 8). In his tribute to Trubetzkoy, he described Savitsky as "the great geographer and historian of civilizations" (1939 [1973, p. 300]). In his *Dialogues* (1980), he spoke of him as his "friend," a "true pioneer of structural geography" (p. 35), the "perspicacious visionary of structural geography" (p. 88). In the 1930s the correspondence between Savitsky, living in Prague, and Jakobson, in Brno, was intense; they resumed it in 1955 when Savitsky returned to Prague after his imprisonment in the Soviet Union. An important letter for the history of structural linguistics, dated August 9, 1930, may be found in Toman 1994, pp. 121–138.

has come in the last decades, synthesized with great insight in the works of P. N. Savitsky (Jakobson 1931a [*SW-I*, 1971, p. 146]).

3.2 A fascination for Mongols, or the identity paradox

The Eurasianist doctrine or "worldview" was a sign of the distress, confusion and profound insecurity about identity affecting the Russian émigré intelligentsia, constantly confronted with the pressing problem of Russia's relation to Europe: a part or another whole, backward or just fundamentally different? Asserting the radical heterogeneity of Russian and European cultures and turning instead toward Asia made this discomfort around identity easier to bear while protecting the émigrés from the danger of assimilation and acculturation in their countries of exile.

Nonetheless, the "radical heterogeneity" theme already had a long history in Russian culture. The "late Slavophiles" of the 1860s to 1880s (Danilevsky and N. N. Strakhov, 1828–1896) had moved from the Romantic idea of "Russia's special path" prominent in the thinking of the previous generation (K. S. Aksakov, 1823–1886, A. S. Khomiakov, 1804–1860) to the idea of a historical-cultural "morphology"[91] in the framework of which the Slavic and Romano-Germanic worlds were perceived as different, incompatible cultural types.[92]

But Strakhov and Danilevsky had to reconcile this view of Russia as a self-enclosed whole with their pan-Slavist understanding, which held that Russia was also the center of a Slavic world encompassing Bohemia and Serbia; i.e., territories the Eurasianists would later clearly situate inside Europe. It can be said that up to the turn of the nineteenth century, Russian intellectuals sought to define their country in relation to Western Europe. Whether they were Westernists, for whom Russia was underdeveloped compared to the West, or Slavophiles, for whom Russia was a fundamentally different entity from the West, the point of reference was always Western Europe (which they called simply "Europe").

Russia's disastrous 1904 war with Japan proved the occasion for a reversal of perspectives on relations between Russia and the "Orient" in the thinking of one segment of the Russian intelligentsia. The virtually empty spaces of eastern Siberia lying along settled Chinese territory provoked fear of a "Yellow Peril," ubiquitous in the literature of the time. The literary and philosophical movement known as "pan-Mongolism" viewed Asian expansion as a mortal threat for the

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91 On the notion of "morphology," see Ch. 7.
92 See Gasparov 1987, p. 53.

Christian world, of which Russia was undeniably part. For the philosopher Vladimir Soloviev, salvation lay in reuniting the Catholic and Orthodox worlds.

Russian culture's view of Asia at the turn of the century was marked by the image of the *anthill,* an *undifferentiated multitude* that would slowly take over the entire earth. After the Russo-Japanese war, the writer D. S. Merezhkovsky (1866–1941) denounced the internal danger of Russia's "Chinification" (*kitaizaciia*), inventing an imposter who would seize the world throne thanks to the mediocrity of Europe, imagined as entirely *leveled out,* reduced to nothing but a *bourgeois* middle class that would now become a second "Middle Empire," that is, an empire of *mediocrity.* As Merezhkovsky saw it, the danger was a world government that would repudiate freedom and bring about Chinese-like social regimentation.[93]

Surprisingly, then, the image of an anthill associated with Asian world domination was *simultaneously* that of a bourgeois European world, a "positivist, leveled-out" world concerned exclusively with satisfying its material needs. Here Europe and Asia came together in the Russian intelligentsia's imagination as *otherness* linked to domination by the "bourgeois world" (*meshchanstvo*).

But soon this feeling of repulsion toward Asia was giving way to fascination with the East, in the form of a literary movement known as the "Scythians" led by such writers as Andrei Belyi (1880–1934) and R. V. Ivanov-Razumnik (1878–1946). In the 1910s this movement began replacing the idea of East-West union with catastrophic prophesies wherein waiting for the "Huns" was increasingly perceived with a kind of self-destructive ecstasy. In Alexandr Blok's "The Scythians," self actually becomes one with the primal destructive forces:

> Yes, we are Scythians – leaves of the Asian tree,
> Our slanted eyes are bright aglow with greed.[94]

At nearly the same time, the 1917 Revolution marked the awakening of the Russian nation, a nation closer to Asia than to Europe. The Russian Revolution was the

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93 On the "Mongol obsession" in turn-of-the-century Russian literature see Nivat 1966.

94 This famous poem was published in February 1918 in the daily newspaper *Znamya Truda,* the official paper of the leftist Social Revolutionaries (SR), which published all "Scythian" writings. The Bolsheviks banned the paper in July 1918, after accusingthe SR of planning a coup d'Etat. It should be recalled that as early as 1908 Blok was also indicting *civilization* for its Apollonianism, opposing it to Dionysian *culture.* In his article "Elemental force and culture" (part of the *Russia and the intelligentsia* cycle), Blok wrote that civilization ruined culture through its trust in sovereign reason, founded on a combination of material goods and mechanical phenomena in which man's original sense of unity was lost, a situation that fragmented and dissociated man and turned him into "an impotent diversity of techniques."

wake-up call for ancient Scythian Russia, and it sounded the defeat of the universal, mediocre bourgeoisie.

3.3 Figures of otherness: European or Asian, bourgeois or modern?

Scythianism obviously fit well into Russian turn-of-the-century spiritual and ideological renewal, with its rejection of both materialist conformism and the preceding generation's populist enthusiasm. Rather than a paradigm shift, this was a change in the Russian intelligentsia's value system: the "old" positivist, materialist worldview now coexisted with a "new" view, limited to a small group of artists and thinkers proclaiming that the time had come to throw off the old positivist, materialist fetters and return to idealism, rediscover the spiritual.

But this real split between two irreconcilable ideological positions should not mask the astounding degree of shared if tacit understanding between them – a Russian specificity of the pre-Revolution decades. The Russian intelligentsia agreed to a man that the common enemy was the "bourgeois," increasingly likely to be thought of simply as the foreigner – that is, the European. Rejection of "bourgeois" values was widely shared in Russia in the last third of the nineteenth century, not only by "leftist," populist, nihilist or revolutionary segments of the intelligentsia (D. Pisarev, N. Chernyshevsky) but also by the most reactionary "rightist" segment (K. Leontiev, N. Strakhov, N. Danilevsky) and the Slavophiles.[95] The image of the *meshchanin* (Philistine "petty bourgeois") elicited the same distaste on all sides. Dostoyevsky's work is steeped in execration of the Western "petty bourgeois." Philosophers of all stripes, writers, scientists and artists shared this special hatred for the social *and* cultural consequences of capitalist industry, including the astounding political manifestation known as parliamentary democracy. But an analysis in terms of class can only cause confusion by suggesting that the splits were sharper than they actually were. The general atmosphere in turn-of-the-century Europe itself was one of intellectual resistance to capitalism and the bourgeoisie, and resistance to *modernity* could just as readily

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95 This point should be qualified. The engineers who constructed the bold bridges that enabled the trans-Siberian train to cross broad rivers, who read Jules Verne or Camille Flammarion, together with the economists who drafted the agrarian reform policy felt very close to the idea of progress and were working to bring about the advent of modernity in Russia. Meanwhile the few Soviet commentaries on the Eurasianists identified them as partisans of the "bourgeois order" (*Bol'shaia sovetskaia enciklopediia,* 1st edition, 1931, entry "evraziistvo").

be found in the traditional bourgeoisie of Germany.[96] That resistance was sharpened by the spiritual distress that had spread through post-1918 Europe, leading some to reject the very notion of technical progress, which, due to its fundamental nihilism (rooted in the fact that it ensured man ever-more-complete control over his environment), thrust man out of his ecological niche, disconnected him from his fellows and so radically denaturalized or alienated him as to force him – against his will – to feel a sort of combined wonder and anxiety.

It was at this point that the Eurasianists' reversal of perspective came into play: the enemy was indeed the bourgeois, mired in his comforts and materialism, but he was now to be found exclusively in Europe. The image of Asia was no longer one of depersonalized and depersonalizing Chinese masses, but the improving image of Mongol, nomadic Asia:

> Genghis Khan was guided by the conviction that people possessing the psychological traits valued by him were to be found primarily among nomads, while settled societies generally consisted of people with the psychology of slaves. And indeed, the nomad is far less attached to material possessions than the townsman or peasant. Being by nature averse to sustained physical labor, the nomad places little value on physical comfort and is accustomed to limiting his needs without considering this limitation an especially onerous deprivation (Trubetzkoy 1925a, p. 12 [1991, p. 171]).

We must accept the following tension: some features of Eurasianism can only be explained with reference to the particularities of Russian intellectual history; others fit perfectly into the general European debates subsequent to World War I. Explanations in terms of borrowings are just as inadequate as explanations in terms of spontaneous generation. Russia did not come from, or amount to, another planet; it partook of the *air du temps*, the intellectual climate of the time.

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96 On this subject see Mosse's extremely illuminating work (1981).

Second part: **Closure**

Chapter 3
The space factor

> One fact decisively dominates our march across the centuries, runs through our entire history, encompasses, in a way, its entire philosophy, occurs in all periods of our social life and determines their character, is both the fundamental feature of our political greatness and the true cause of our intellectual impotence – geography.
> Petr Chaadayev, "Apologie d'un fou" [Apology of a madman] (1837), in Chaadayev, 1991, p. 304.

Did the Eurasianist movement express resistance to modernity or were its thinkers avant-garde? *Enfant terrible* of the post-Revolution Russian émigré world, causing irritation and perplexity in its time due to its taste for paradox, the movement is of interest to us here first and foremost because of the intense study of language it stimulated within itself. "Eurasianist linguistics" is a missing link in the history of structuralism.[1] Indeed, many of the Eurasianist linguists' central themes lived on in later linguistic studies by Russians and "Westerners" themselves often unaware they were addressing the same concerns.

At the turn of the 1920s and the peak of the economic crisis, Jakobson began to plan a far-ranging project that occupied him almost exclusively for nearly three years: to use phonology to prove that Eurasia – that is, the USSR – existed ontologically as an organic, natural territorial unit "that forms a Whole."[2] Taking off from the "language union" notion (*iazykovoi soiuz*, *Sprachbund*) formulated by Trubetzkoy as early as 1923, Jakobson developed his theory of "phonological language unions."[3]

The *Sprachbund* notion runs counter to the "language family" idea, and for Trubetzkoy it was a fundamental component of Eurasianist reasoning. Several linguists in the 1930s explicitly discussed the question of a Eurasian *Sprach-*

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[1] In a brief book written in Russian in 1931, "A characterization of the Eurasian language union," Jakobson alluded to the "tasks of Eurasianist linguistics" (1931a [*SW-I*, 1971, p. 194]). In *Eurasia in light of linguistics* (Prague, 1931), a Eurasianist Editions special publication on Jakobson's "discovery" of the phonological union of Eurasian languages, Savitsky was prompted to write: "Linguistics is becoming Eurasianized" (1931a, p. 5).

[2] Oddly, Trubetzkoy never focused his properly linguistic research on Eurasia (except for an extremely marginal note on the geography of declension, published in the appendix of Jakobson 1931a; see below), whereas Jakobson spent nearly all of 1931 disseminating the idea that Eurasia existed at the linguistic level, an idea he came back to at the end of his life in a chapter on "the space factor" in *The Jakobson-Pomorska Dialogues* (Jakobson 1983, Ch. 8).

[3] It was on September 15, 1930, during a lecture to the Prague Linguistic Circle that Jakobson first publicly conjoined the word "phonological" with the term "language union": "K fonologické charakteristice eurazijského svazu" [A phonological characterization of the Eurasian union].

bund.[4] But it was Jakobson who drew the greatest number of conclusions, and they are of considerable importance for understanding the degree to which the history of phonology is tied to issues and debates that exceed it. The *Sprachbund* notion, which echoes concerns of the "dissidents of Indo-Europeanism" (Hugo Schuchardt, the Italian neolinguists, Father Wilhelm Schmidt and others) and the development of geolinguistics, actually had different foundations and reflected different interests. It only *seems* to evoke the notion of hybridization or language mix. In fact, the point was to disqualify the notions of genetic closure and language families. This was a vast project for blurring or transcending established genetic borders so as to generate new, even more impenetrable dividing lines. In fact, the great conceptual revolution that Eurasianist linguists claimed to have brought about concerned the notion of *affinity through convergence.* In this chapter I present the epistemological foundations of the notion and the reasoning and arguments used to defend it; in the following chapters I examine the metaphors underlying it, without which we could not attain the notion of *totality* or *the whole.* This inquiry into "foundations" should enable us to answer the following questions:

– Why did Jakobson, as a Russian émigré,[5] write what he wrote in 1929–1931 in Central Europe, and who was he writing against?
– Did his theory arise out of nowhere or did it too have a (pre)history?
– How did he construct his objects of study?
– To what degree is the information provided by the theory genuinely meaningful for the object of study?
– Is Jakobson's phonological union theory structuralist?

My aim here is to do an "archeological" study of Jakobson's work on phonological unions while situating it in the context of the intellectual climate of the 1920s and '30s.

1 A brief overview of the question

The language union notion is seldom studied in linguistics in France. It is not found in Mounin's *Dictionnaire de la linguistique* (1974), Marouzeau's *Lexique*

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4 See Isachenko 1934, Skalička 1934.

5 A very recent émigré, for up to 1929 Jakobson was not an émigré at all but employed as a civil servant of the Soviet diplomatic mission in Czechoslovakia, a situation that earned him the distrust of numerous Russian émigrés and some influential members of the Czechoslovak government.

de la terminologie linguistique (1951) or Dubois' *Dictionnaire de la linguistique* (1973) under any of the relevant names (*Sprachbund, union de langues, alliance de langues, association de langues*). In the "geolinguistics" entry of Ducrot and Schaeffer's *Nouveau dictionnaire encyclopédique des sciences du langage* (1995), under the subheading "*mélange de langues*" (language mix) (pp. 118–119) we do find a few lines on the notion of "linguistic association," and the reader is referred to Appendices III and IV of the French version of Trubetzkoy's *Principles of Phonology*. However, there is no mention that in these two texts the notion is directly opposed to any idea of mix or hybridization.

In Britain, David Crystal's *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Language and Languages* (1992) presents the notion of "linguistic area" at the entry "areal linguistics," citing the example of Western European languages with front rounded vowels (French *sœur*, German *müde)*. The only commentary on the map presented in this entry comes to one line: "This feature cannot be explained on historical grounds." Interestingly, it is not specified whether this particular feature of vowels is phonetic or phonological.

In Italy, on the other hand, the country of *neolinguistics*,[6] G. R. Cardona's *Dizionario di linguistica* (1988) presents the problem of language unions in several entries ("lega linguistica," "linguistica areale," "area linguistica") and briefly recalls its history, though, like many others, it gives 1928 rather than 1923 for the first occurrence of the term in Trubetzkoy's writings.

There is extensive Western literature on language contact, but contact is seldom understood to take the form of language unions and almost never *phonological* language unions.

In the USSR in the 1950s, the attitude toward the notion of language unions was extremely negative. This seems odd given that it fit perfectly with Stalin's linguistic policy of "drawing together" all languages of the Soviet Union. And it brings to light the extreme tension in Soviet linguistics after the "1950 discussion" on Marrism. It was urgent to drive out this "doctrine," which refused to admit of

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6 *Neolinguistics,* also called areal or spatial linguistics, was developed in Italy from the 1920s to 1940s. Its most eminent representatives were Matteo Bartoli (1873–1946), Giulio Bertoni (1878–1942) and Vittore Pisani (1899–1975). The neolinguists, who had studied with Graziadio Ascoli, developed a geolinguistic theory close to that of Jules Gillérion but with idealistic connotations due to the influence of Benedetto Croce. In practice, they showed it was impossible to find two perfectly overlapping isoglosses; there was therefore no strict discontinuity between dialects. For them a language was a "system of isoglosses." They viewed linguistic geography as study of the diffusion of linguistic phenomena from a center toward a periphery by way of "radiation," with the understanding that any place could be a center. In the 1930s and '40s the neolinguists took an interest in the language union phenomena (*lega linguistica*), which they explained in terms of the *substrate* theory – in direct contrast to Jakobson (see Ch. 4).

system closure (see Chapter 5). In fact the language union notion was critiqued in the USSR in the 1950s as a means of resisting against structuralism. The Czech linguist Oldřich Leška, invited to publish an article in the Soviet journal *Voprosy iazykoznaniia*, wrote that the notion of language union "facilitated Marrist influence on structuralism."[7]

The language union theme came up again in linguistic research in the Soviet Union in the 1960s. But Jakobson's work was either unknown there or dismissed because he was assumed to be interested in a "union based on a single language feature" (*odnopriznakovyi*) or an "extensive union," insufficient to prove the existence of a true language union, which had to be "intensive," i.e., to pertain to several characters belonging to different levels of analysis.[8]

In post-Perestroika Russia, Jakobson's theory enjoyed great popularity, as it was associated with Trubetzkoy's name and reconsidered in light of the great ideological renewal; the quest for identity implied rehabilitating all aspects of Eurasianist theory. But this new appreciation came more from a culturalist than an exclusively linguistic perspective.

Meillet was virtually the only one of Jakobson's contemporaries to react to his work, and then only evasively. In his review of Volume 4 of the *Travaux du Circle Linguistique de Prague*,[9] he restricted himself to saying that he found Jakobson's article title "Über die phonologischen Sprachbünde" "somewhat enigmatic." He related Jakobson's theory to the notion of substrate, a word that Jakobson himself only used critically.[10] Jakobson and Meillet were wary of each other, and

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7 Leška 1953, p. 103.

8 The "intensive/extensive" opposition is found in Neroznak 1978, 1990, and Edel'man, 1978, p. 112. Meillet (1931a) likewise objected that a single criterion was not enough, and in his review of Jakobson's text regretted that he had not been attentive to the problem of *morphological* affinities among the languages studied. In a brief article, V. Skalička (1934) undertook to find other characteristic features of the phonological union of Eurasian languages but his inventory is neither systematic nor convincing. More recently H. Schaller (1997) has taken up the intensive/ extensive union opposition.

9 Meillet 1931b, p. 13.

10 Trubetzkoy too was critical of the substrate theory: "The occurrence of common phonological characteristics in a group of neighboring but unrelated languages or dialects has often been noticed, but scholars have been too hasty in invoking substrate theory or the assumption of a 'dominant' language to explain this fact. Such interpretations are worthless as long as they address only individual cases. It would be better to abstain from interpretation until all the relevant material has been has been collected" (Trubetzkoy 1931 [2001, p. 43]). Trubetzkoy's allusions to Sanfeld and the Italian neolinguists were transparent here. What Jakobson and Trubetzkoy could not abide in their competitors was how *unsystematic* their worldview was.

this did not change.[11] Tesnière wrote an astonishing article in 1935 for the journal *L'Anthropologie* ("La géolinguistique et le règne végétal") in which he expressed his doubts about whether there were any relations at all between linguistics and geography. His radical thesis was that geolinguistics made no more sense in connection with nomadic populations than in connection with industrial society, the latter being an incentive to rural exodus. It had meaning only when applied to settled populations because of their particular mode of subsistence: farming. Paradoxically, Tesnière explained, it was precisely at the moment that geolinguistics had acquired a scientific method that its true object began to disappear. Tesnière was in regular contact with the Prague Circle linguists; it is hard not to see his analysis as alluding to the language union idea. Above and beyond the provocative nature of this text, we note the refusal to take Jakobson's geographic reflections into account, despite the emphasis in Eurasianist doctrine on nomadic culture in Eurasia (cf. the "world of the steppe" leitmotiv).

The Dutch linguist C. C. Uhlenbeck (1935) departed from a strictly genetic view of language evolution with his suggestion that Indo-European might be linked to Finno-Ugric on one side, Eskimo on the other. For him, language families were the result of prolonged assimilation between languages in contact. He applied the language family concept to the anthropological concept of acculturation; that is, the adapting of cultural features borrowed from another culture.

With his notion of "language circle" (*Sprachenkreis*), Father Schmidt (1926) took into account the problem of language mix while remaining within the genetic interpretive framework. His "circles" are wider than families and are to be understood in relation to his anthropological concept of "cultural circles" (*Kulturkreise*). Jakobson criticized him for formulating value judgments of language differences despite his declared anti-evolutionism.[12]

The linguistic question of the Balkans had long preoccupied linguists, and in 1925 the Danish specialist of Romance languages Kristian Sanfeld published a book on it in which he proposed the term "linguistic unity." But this book, originally published in Danish, only found a wider readership upon publication of the French translation in 1930. On many points the book came close to Trubetzkoy's theory; there has even been talk of a "Sanfeld-Trubetzkoy theory." However, Trubetzkoy's theories as I see it are like no other, precisely because of his preoccupation with the borders of Eurasia, or what amounts to same: the Soviet Union.

For Sanfeld, the Balkan "language union" was founded on the idea of a Greek substrate, the prestige of Greek having imposed that language on the other Balkan

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11 On differences in how Jakobson and Trubetzkoy were received in France in the interwar period, see Chevalier 1997.

12 Jakobson 1931a, p. 155.

languages. Sanfeld presented the many cases of "similarity," "connectedness" and "conformity" among Balkan languages, citing borrowings and calques from Greek to explain the fact that Balkan languages "are interlinked in a thousand ways."[13]

2 Jakobson's phonological language union

In 1923, just after settling in Vienna, Trubetzkoy wrote an article in which he took up the question of language boundaries in theological terms: diversity in language and culture is not a punishment inflicted by God on men for having constructed the Tower of Babel but rather a necessary condition for the blossoming of languages and cultures. After explaining that a universal culture was impossible and that it was only in a "nationally limited" culture that "a people's moral and spiritual qualities" could blossom,[14] he added a specification that seriously complicates the problem of where the boundaries of a people, culture, language or dialect lie:

> While acknowledging the positive aspects of national culture, we should, however, reject the idea of national division in excess of a certain organic limit. National division is in no way equivalent to the anarchic fragmentation of national and cultural energies, to reducing the whole to ever smaller units. (Trubetzkoy 1923a, p. 112 [1991, p. 150]).

The whole idea of language union in Trubetzkoy's thinking derives from his concern about to how to define and delimit "organic" boundaries: boundaries that encompassed too great a surface were "mechanical" formations while excessively small surfaces amounted to non-organic parcelling. Only after pointing up the inadequacies of the genetic classification of languages did he propose using the term *language union (iazykovoi soiuz)*:

> [I]n addition to genetic grouping, we can observe grouping of neighboring languages not derived from the same source. Several languages belonging to a single geographical and cultural-historical region often exhibit similar features and this resemblance is conditioned by prolonged proximity and parallel development, rather than by common derivation. For groups formed on a non-genetic basis we propose the term language unions. Not only separate languages but even families can form language unions; in such cases several genetically unrelated families belonging to a single geographic and cultural-historical zone are united by common features and form a union of language families. (Trubetzkoy 1923, p. 116 [1991, p. 153–154].

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13 Sanfeld 1930, p. 34.
14 Trubetzkoy 1923, p. 111.

In his "Proposition 16," presented to the first International Congress of Linguists in The Hague in 1928, Trubetzkoy used the German term *Sprachbund*, a term whose definition he knew would be familiar to an audience of Western linguists. The term was readily accepted by congress members and widely disseminated, primarily among Prague Circle linguists.[15] The key words here were *similarity* and *resemblance*. As there was no mention of mix or hybridization, phonology, or geographical contiguity, the text was taken to be the manifesto of a typology program, when in fact the issue lay elsewhere:

> We shall call *language group* any set (*Gesamheit*) of languages linked to each other by a considerable number of systematic correspondences. Two types of language groups should be distinguished:

> We shall call *language union* (*Sprachbund*) all language groups that manifest strongly similar syntactic relations and a resemblance in morphological construction principles, and that have a considerable amount of cultural terms in common; also, in some cases, apparently similar phonic systems even without any systematic phonetic correspondences, correspondences in the phonetic envelope of their morphological components or common basic words.

> We shall call *language families* all language groups that have a considerable number of basic words in common and that exhibit concordances (*Übereinstimmungen)* in the phonic expression of morphological categories and, above all, constant phonic correspondences (*Lautensprechungen).*

> For example, Bulgarian belongs on one hand to the Slavic language family (together with Serbo-Croatian, Polish, Russian, etc.) and on the other to the Balkan language union (together with modern Greek, Albanian and Romanian).

> These names or concepts must be carefully distinguished from each other. When the linguist is establishing whether a language belongs to a certain language group, he must scrupulously indicate whether he understands the group in question to be a family or a union. This will save us many hasty, unconsidered declarations (Trubetzkoy 1928, p. 18).

In Jakobson's definition of language union, the "space factor" predominates:

> What we call linguistic unions are sets of languages belonging to contiguous geographical zones and whose structures exhibit acquired resemblances (Jakobson 1931d, p. 371).[16]

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15 See Jakobson but also Havránek 1933, Skalička 1934 and 1935.

16 The whole problem here is what is meant by the notion of "acquisition": contagion by contact, imitation, or a harmonious, necessary order to be revealed by geometric speculations? See Ch. 8.

From 1931, Jakobson's and Trubetzkoy's thinking came together; their voices merged:

> [There are] phonological features that tend to overflow the boundaries of a language and spread over vast contiguous areas (Jakobson 1938 [*SW-I*, 1971, p. 242]).

> The important thing is that the boundaries of phonological phenomena do not necessarily coincide with language boundaries; since they often cut across language areas, they can be identified only through phonological-dialectological research (Trubetzkoy 1931 [2001, p. 43]).

Jakobson discussed Eurasia as a phonological union in the following works, for a total of approximately two hundred pages[17]:
– "Remarques sur l'évolution phonologique du russe comparée à celle des autres langues slaves", *TCLP-II* (1929);
– *K kharakteristike evraziiskogo iazykovogo soiuza* (1931) [A characterization of the Eurasian language union];
– "Über die phonologischen Sprachbünde", *TCLP-IV* (1931);
– "Principes de phonologie historique", *TCLP-IV* (1931);
– "Les unions phonologiques de langues" *Le Monde Slave* 1 (1931);
– "O fonologicheskikh iazykovykh soiuzakh", in *Evraziia v svete iazykoznaniia*, Prague, 1931 [On phonological language unions];

and a later text :
– "Sur la théorie des affinités phonologiques entre les langues", *Actes du 4ème Congrès international de linguistes* (Copenhagen, 1936, published in 1938).[18]

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17 In his articles in Russian, Jakobson used the term coined by Trubetzkoy in 1923, *iazykovoi* (or *iazykovyi*) *soiuz;* in 1931d, published in French, he used the term "union de langues" and in 1938 (in "Sur la théorie des affinités phonologiques entre les langues") he used the term "association de langues." In German he unvaryingly used *Sprachbund,* as did Trubetzkoy at the 1928 congress in The Hague. This last term is the best known in linguistics. The French translation from Russian or German should be "union langagière" as the German term is not *Sprachenbund* – that is, these are not languages that belong as such to associations but rather parts of languages defined by distinctive phonological features, parts that can be detached from the whole and so become integrated into a new group made up of other parts of other languages. Weinreich found the term *Sprachbund* "unsatisfactory" in that it implied unity, "as if a given language were or were not a member of a given Sprachbund" (Weinreich 1958, p. 379), but he failed to grasp that language unions united not languages but *isophones*; see below.

18 All of these texts by Jakobson should be thought of as related to his project for a general world phonological atlas, a project he shared with Trubetzkoy at the time. That project could not be realized because of the financial difficulties caused by the 1929 economic crisis, but it was not

The fundamental work is *K kharakteristike evrasiiskogo iazykovogo soiuza*, a 59-page text published in Russian by the Editions Eurasiennes at Clamart. Jakobson never drew a map of the territory he was phonologically defining; he does not even seem to have attempted to do so. Here my methodological rule has been to *take seriously* all allusions and names in this text and to work step by step to lay out a graphic representation, proceeding "philologically" and not trying at this stage to establish any "truth" external to the text. The aim is to list and map each geolinguistic indication in the text; that is, each place-related linguistic phenomenon.

First, it is crucial to understand that Jakobson focused explicitly on the phonemic, not the phonetic, level.

Phonetics is an empirical science, an observation-based discipline. Its focus is language *sounds*, which are observed, described and classified. Acoustical phonetic study uses the same methods as acoustical physics; articulatory phonetic study, the same methods as physiology. Sounds would exist without phoneticians; they preexist all investigation. All language sounds, in their infinite variety, are of equal interest in phonetics. Phonetic transcriptions are placed in straight brackets; the name *Jakobson,* for example, is pronounced in Russian [jĭkʌpsón].

Phonology, on the other hand, *describes* nothing; phonologists *construct models*. The focus of phonology is *phonemes*. A phoneme can be neither observed nor measured because it is not a thing. It exists only as an abstract entity, theoretically *posited* within the *system* of a particular language. Phonemes are discrete (discontinuous) entities defined by their *function* of distinguishing meanings from each other. For Trubetzkoy, the phoneme is the smallest sound unit capable of distinguishing meanings within a given language. For Jakobson (from 1938 on), it is a bundle of distinctive features defined within each language in connection to a relevance criterion. The phoneme is not a sound; rather, it is *realized* through sounds. Phonological transcriptions are noted between slanted bars; the name *Jakobson* is noted /jakobsón/ in the Russian phonological system.

It is important to specify the systemic principle of phonology. Despite possible similarities between phonetic realizations, two phonemes belonging to two different languages can never be identical because each is defined *only by opposition to* the other phonemes of the language it belongs to. One relevant feature of the phoneme /s/ in English is that it is unvoiced; this determines its opposition to /z/ (*seal* /*zeal*: /siːl/ ~ /ziːl/). But in Spanish, the fact that /s/ is "unvoiced" is not

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accomplished in the 1930s either, probably because there was no consensus among linguists of the time about relations between phonology and space.

relevant since there is no /z/ in Spanish; the /s/ phoneme is simply realized [s] in some cases and in others voiced [z], depending on context.[19]

To bring to light or prove the existence of the "Eurasian language union," Jakobson selected three fundamental features: correlation of palatalization, polytony,[20] and territorial continuity.

The first of these requires some clarification. "Consonant palatalization" can be observed in some types of French pronunciation. For example, the initial consonant in *tire* [he/she/it pulls] differs from the one in *tare* [defect] in that the dental occlusion is accompanied by a raising of the tongue to the front palate (called "palatalization") in anticipation of the front vowel [i]. This is what André Martinet called "the law of least effort." The two [t]s are complementarily distributed here; they are *contextual variants* of the same phoneme /t/, one before a front vowel, where the tongue is raised (the "soft" variant) and one before a back vowel, where the tongue is not raised (the "hard" variant). In Russian, however, these same two [t]s can be found before any vowel, front or back; their opposition is thus phonologically *relevant:* the phonemes /t/ ("hard") and /t'/ ("soft") are correlated by palatalization; for example, /tok/ (*current*) ~ /t'ok/ (*it flowed*). Correlation of palatalization can also be found in word-terminal position: /dal/ (*he gave)* ~ /dal'/ (*distance).*

For Jakobson this type of phonological correlation – which he integrated into the more general opposition between "timbres"; i.e., the acoustic opposition between high and low pitch, pertaining to both consonants and vowels – was "the characteristic mark of Eurasian languages, in contrast to the non-polytonic languages of neighboring development locales."[21] He gave the example in Russian of a poem by Khlebnikov based on correlation of palatalization for the voiced labiodental fricative /v/ ~ /v'/, as follows:[22]

/v'i/	/vi/
/v'o/	/vo/

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19 Dubois et al. 1973, entry "phonème."
20 Jakobson defined polytony as follows: "If vocal tone pitch moves in different directions in a given language and if the opposition between these directions can differentiate between different word meanings then, following Durnovo, that language is called polytonic" (Jakobson 1931a [*SW-I*, 1971, p. 156]). According to Jakobson, Swedish and Serbo-Croatian to the west and Chinese and Vietnamese to the east were examples of polytonic languages.
21 Jakobson 1931a (*SW-I*, p. 159). On the notion of *development locale* see Ch. 8.
22 *Ibid.*, p. 160.

Phonological transcription	Transliteration of Cyrillic	Translation
/ja v'id'el	*Ja videl*	(I saw
vid'el	*Vydel*	the transformation
v'os'en	*Vësen*	of springs [the season]
vos'en'/	*V osen'*	into autumn)

Jakobson's crucial move was to ask whether palatalization could be *abstracted* from the consonant affected by it. In 1931, then, he was already exploring how phonemes might be broken down into distinctive features.[23] But it is important to grasp his purpose in doing so, which was to show that some features were *both* phonological (that is, intra-systemic) *and* common to different languages and therefore inter-systemic.

> If to the articulation of a prepalatal, apical or labial consonant is added the extra work of raising the body of the tongue to the hard palate, producing an acoustic impression of softening, this extra work is called palatalization. Palatalized consonants differ from non-palatalized consonants shaped in the same place of articulation only by this extra articulatory work (and from an acoustic perspective, only by the higher-pitched timbre). Naturally, if a language is characterized by an opposition between palatalized and non-palatalized consonants, the differential property – that is, the extra work or its absence (and from an acoustic perspective, the difference in timbre) – is abstracted from the isolated pairs and, in turn, the common base of each pair is abstracted from the differential property (for example, *s* may be abstracted from the feature of being hard or soft). In other words, we are dealing here with correlation of consonant palatalization. This correlation is especially clear if consonants belonging to several places of articulation are characterized by timbre oppositions. In Great Russian,[24] there are prepalatal, apical and labial palatalized consonants, and in most Ukrainian dialects there are palatalized consonants of the first two of these series (Jakobson 1931a [1971a, p. 163]).

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23 It is particularly interesting to read this embryonic version of the definition of distinctive features since Jakobson's definition in other parts of the same text is still quite atomistic, very close to phonetics: "We call members of phonological oppositions that cannot be divided into smaller (*drobnye*) phonological oppositions phonemes. A simplified definition of the phoneme: a sound capable of differentiating verbal meanings in a given language" (Jakobson 1931a [*SW-I*, 1971, p. 150]).

24 "Great Russian" (*velikorusskii iazyk)* designates Russian proper, by opposition to "Little Russian" (or Ukrainian) and Belorussian. The question of whether this set of eastern Slavic languages amounted to three dialectal subdivisions of the same "Russian language" or instead to distinct languages was hotly debated for centuries. On this subject see the polemic between Trubetzkoy (1927a) and the Ukrainian Doroshenko (1928), both of them émigrés.

Jakobson then explained how to determine whether an articulatory feature was *relevant* or not (at that time he was still using the word *phonological* or *differential*):

> However, for dorsal, or palatal, consonants, raising the tongue body to the hard palate is not extra work but the primary work. Of course in this case too that work produces the acoustic impression of high-pitched timbre; but dorsal and hard consonants, identically articulated while belonging to distinct series, are mutually opposed not only in terms of timbre but also by the characteristic sound they produce (and from the articulatory perspective, by the difference in where the main work is done). Which of the two acoustic-motor differences is the differential phonological property of this opposition?

> If in a given language there is an opposition between palatalized consonants and non-palatalized consonants of the same series, and if, in addition, there is an opposition between the dorsal consonants and non-palatalized consonants of a nearby series, this second opposition should be thought of as one of timbre and is part of the palatalization opposition. Examples: 1) Polish dialects in which palatalized labials are opposed to hard labials and dorsal consonants to hard posterolinguals, hard anterolinguals and the hard apical *n*, and 2) Ukrainian dialects where palatalized anterolinguals are opposed to hard anterolinguals and prepalatals to hard apicals. This type includes Hutsul dialects and dialects of Bucovina and Bessarabia. But the main body of Ukrainian dialects is identical to the Great-Russian type: all soft consonants phonologically opposed to hard consonants are articulated by means of *palatalized* – not *palatal* – sounds (*ibid*., p. 164).

Once he had differentiated palatalizing languages from languages without phonological palatalization, Jakobson geographically delimited more or less concentric *zones*:

1. All languages characterized by phonological correlation of palatalization. For Jakobson this covered all languages spoken in Eurasia[25] except those of the Soviet Far East (*Dal'nii Vostok*)[26] and included "overflows" westward (Polish, Latvian, Lithuanian) and eastward (Japanese).

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25 I will not attempt a refutation here of Jakobson's version of the facts. I would just point out, for example, that vowel harmony in Eurasia's Turkic languages, contrasted by Jakobson to Turkish vowel harmony, is a highly debatable example of "timbre opposition" and that equating the polytony of Scandinavian languages to that of Sino-Tibetans is a questionable move: Are these phonologically the same phenomena? This raises the problem of the *nature* of intra-systemic components and its consequences: Does not "abstracting" a relevant feature from the phoneme run the risk of 1) materializing it (and therefore transforming it into a phonetic phenomenon); 2) being so general that the notion really cannot be used?

26 It is difficult to draw the exact borderline of Paleo-Siberian languages like Chukchi and Yukaghir. But this was not Jakobson's main point. Like most Eurasianists, all his attention was focused on the overall view of the whole and the border between Europe and Eurasia.

2. Polytonic languages. Here Jakobson's border takes in the entire Baltic region, including several Scandinavian languages (however, the phenomenon disappears in northwestern Norwegian and is absent from Icelandic), "some Danish dialects,"[27] northern Kashubian (that is, Kashubian dialects of the Baltic coast),[28] Baltic languages (including Estonian but not Finnish). On the other side – and here Jakobson declared the relation *symmetrical* – are the languages of southeast Asia.

3. A strip (or zone) entirely surrounding this area and defined exclusively in negative terms: languages that are *neither* polytonic *nor* characterized by correlation of palatalization.

4. An even more peripheral band characterized by polytony, among other features; this covers the central African zone, where Bantu languages are spoken.

The following maps present phonological area contours relevant for delimiting Jakobson's phonological union of Eurasian languages.[29] The last one presents a synthesis of those zones, bringing to light the essence or singular specificity of Eurasian languages: they have both a positive feature – correlation of palatalization – and a negative one – absence of polytony – and they form a continuous territory.[30]

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27 It is difficult to represent on a map an indication as vague as "some Danish dialects." Jakobson did not specify his topographical criteria. The entities he was dealing with are often presented as self-evident.

28 Kashubian is a western Slavic dialect spoken in northwestern Poland (the region of eastern Pomerania). In the late nineteenth century there was lively debate as to whether Kashubian was Polish or not; see Sériot 1996c, p. 291ff.

29 The maps were done by Laurent Wenker using the TEGEO method developed by the geographer Georges Nicolas, my colleague at the University of Lausanne. My thanks to both for their help. In Nicolas' terminology these figures are not really maps, as they do not represent geographical objects but rather *discourse* on those objects; see Nicolas 1996.

30 This is why Jakobson rejected the Irish exception: Irish Gaelic is characterized by correlation of palatalization *and* no polytony but the break in territorial continuity invalidates any Irish claim to belong to the phonological union of Eurasian languages. In his review of Jakobson's *K kharakteristike,* Meillet (1931a) cited the Irish phenomenon as a strong counter-argument.
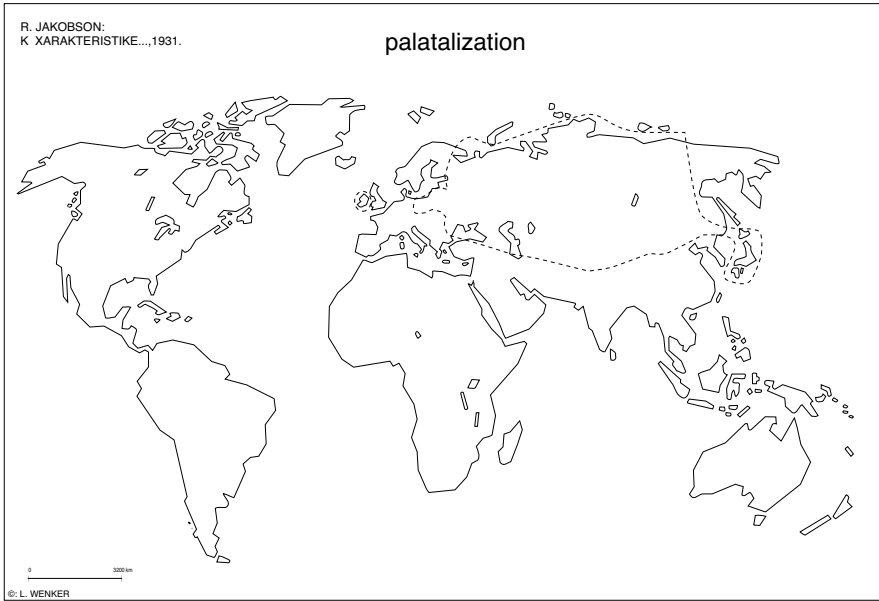
Fig. 3: Map of palatalization
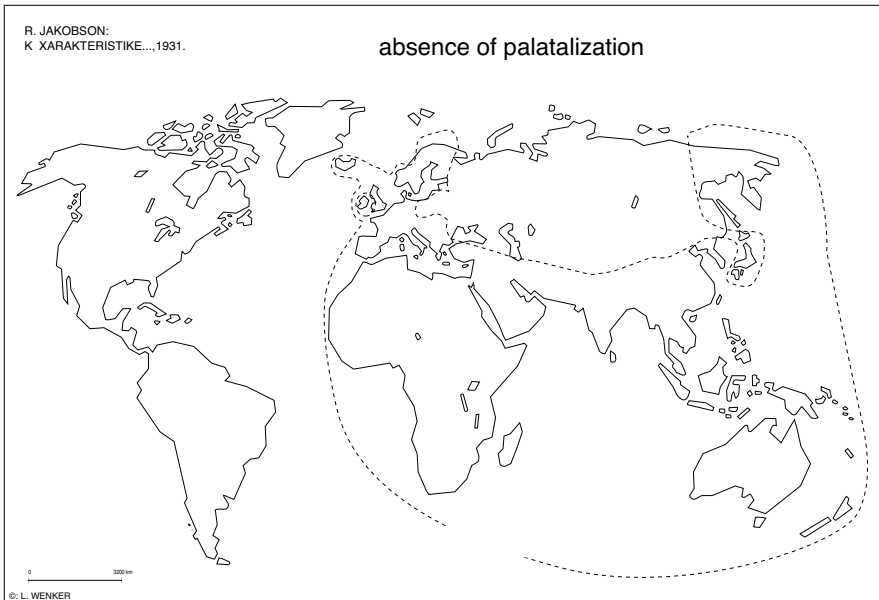
Fig. 4: Map of absence of palatalization
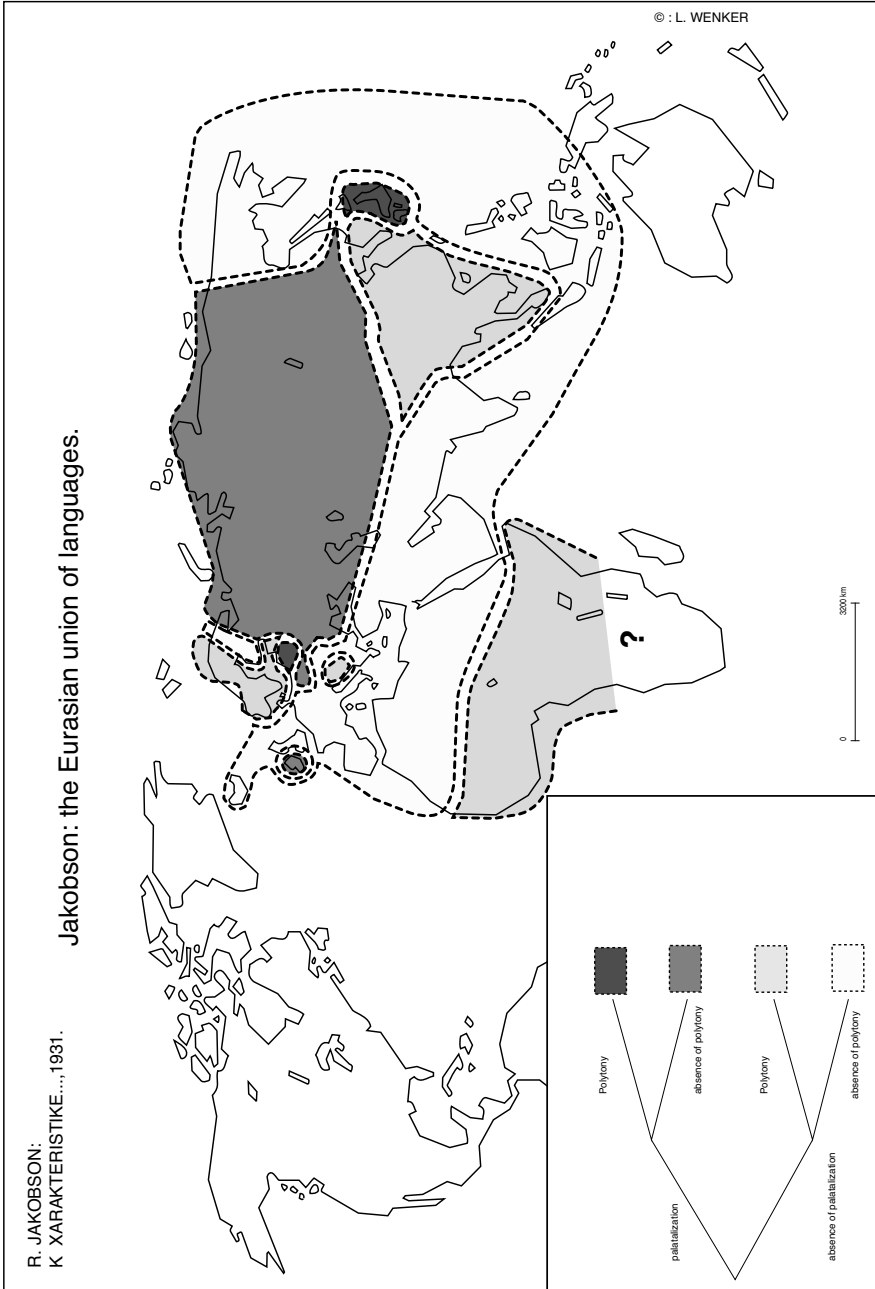
Fig. 6: Map of the Eurasian union of languages according to R. Jakobson
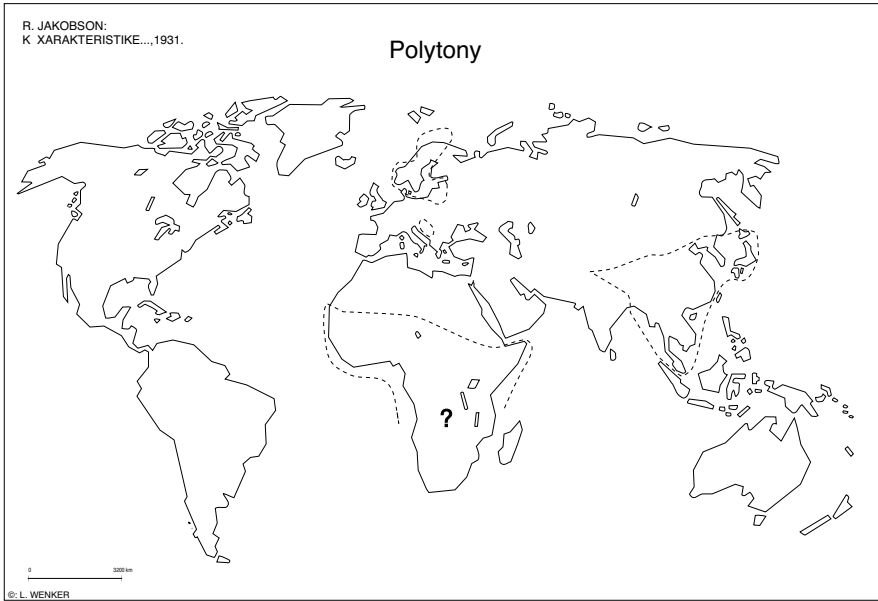
Fig. 5: Map of polytony

3 The "oil stain" metaphor

3.1 Breaking up language families

Now that we have a relevant graphic representation, we can begin to study the epistemological foundations of the language union notion. We need to ask why it was so important for Jakobson to have an overall view of phonological relations among the world's languages and to discover natural ties in the spatial relations between phonological systems.

In the following chapter I discuss how the language union theory was developed in relation to competing theories. Here I will be examining how components defined as intrasystemic (i.e., Jakobson's relevant features) can be considered operative *outside* system boundaries.

Jakobson's main argument is that there are phonological features – that is, intrasystemic ones – that exceed system boundaries. Those phonological features "spread" like an oil stain, a metaphor that Jakobson used regularly in his writings on this topic. The primary feature of interest to him in this connection is phonological palatalization of consonants, which, he explains, *overflows the*

boundaries of Eurasia (it can be found, for example, in eastern Estonian dialects) or else itself *consitutes that border* (e.g., the one separating Romanian proper from eastern dialects of it, namely Moldavian).

> Study of the geographical distribution of phonological facts clearly shows that several of them readily exceed the boundaries of a given language and show a tendency to group together several contiguous languages, regardless of their genetic relations or absence thereof (Jakobson 1938 [1971a, p. 244]).

> In linguistic geography, isophones frequently cross language boundaries; this seems almost a common occurrence. Examining phonological phenomena while confining them to the boundaries of a given language runs the risk of fragmenting and misrepresenting the problem: facts considered within the boundaries of a language or language family seem to us to be caused by a particularistic spirit, but once we imagine them in a wider framework, we discover the action of a spirit of community. ... Complete analysis of a phonological phenomenon cannot confine itself to the boundaries of a particular language or even to those of an association of languages exhibiting that phenomenon (*ibid.*, p. 245).

According to Jakobson, entire language families were "split up" (*rasshchepliaiut*[31]) by "phonological categories" such as consonant palatalization:

> We are familiar with the tendency of many phonological facts to spread like an oil stain on the map, and it has been noted more than once that contiguous languages of differing origin present a great number of resemblances in phonological as well as grammatical structure (Jespersen, Sanfeld, Schmidt, Vendryes and particularly Boas and Sapir). While these affinities bring together unrelated contiguous languages they often break up language families. The Russian area, for example, (including the White Russian [Belorussian] and Ukrainian areas) contrasts with the Czechoslovakian area in that it lacks quantitative vowel opposition, and in this respect it forms a whole with most of the Finno-Ugric and Turkic languages of European Russia west of the Urals, whereas a few other languages belonging to the Finno-Ugric and Turkic families do exhibit this opposition. From this perspective, Hungarian belongs to the same set as Czech and Slovak. The isophones of a given affinity cut across not only language family boundaries but also language boundaries. Eastern Slovakian dialects, for example, should be classified with neighboring languages to the northeast – i.e., Russian and Polish – for absence of quantitative opposition (Jakobson 1938 [1971a, p. 236–237]).

In the studies he did in the late 1920s and early 1930s, Jakobson corrected Trubetzkoy's definition of a language union in a highly significant way. To demonstrate the existence of a Eurasian language union he would consider *phonological*

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31 Jakobson 1931e, p. 9.

criteria only – that is, intrasystemic ones.[32] In a letter to Jakobson included in the appendix of Jakobson's *K kharakteristike,* Trubetzkoy touched on the question of a Eurasian language union only in connection with the distribution of declension.[33] Skalička sharply criticized this declension criterion as unclear.[34] However, Trubetzkoy did return later (1931 and 1939a) to the problem of the geographical distribution of *phonological* features (see below).

> Declension is actually a relatively infrequent phenomenon, unknown to most of the world's languages. The geographical zone of declension is fairly limited. It encompasses the totality of Eurasia and exceeds its borders somewhat. To the east, Eskimo and apparently some of the languages spoken by Indians in northern Canada belong to that zone; to the west we find almost all Slavic languages (with the exception of Bulgarian), the Baltic languages, Finnish, Lapp and Hungarian; further out, we find weak declension in German and Dutch while still further out, in Romance languages and even in English and Danish, there is no more declension. Nor is there declension in Asia or Africa. It is important to note that the border lies between Turkish and Arabic, between Armenian and Kurdish, between Azerbaijani and Persian, between Kirghiz (including Uzbek) and the Iranian languages, and further on between Mongolian and the Sino-Tibetan group of languages. Declension is most highly developed in Finno-Ugric languages (for example, there are 21 cases in Hungarian) and in languages of the eastern Caucasus (up to 30 cases and more); second place goes to Samoyed and Altaic (Turkic, Mongolian and Manchu-Tungus languages); third place to the Slavic languages, along with Latvian and Lithuanian. Of the Slavic languages, declension is most developed in Great Russian (cf. case differences such as *stakan chaiu̱ / vkus chaia̱, govoriu o lese̱ / zhivu v lesu̱*), which has reached the level of the Turkic languages; in Bulgarian, noun declension has entirely disappeared while subsisting insignificantly in pronouns (as in other languages of the Balkan union); in Serbian, declension is in decline (the difference between the dative and prepositional is being effaced in the singular; that between the dative and the instrumental in the plural); in the other Slavic languages (Polish, Czech, Slovakian, Sorbian, Slovenian, Ukrainian and Belorussian), declension is more developed than in Serbian but less so than in Russian (Great Russian) (Trubetzkoy, "Letter to Jakobson on the geography of declension," January 28, 1931, presented in the appendix to Jakobson 1931a, reprint 1971a, p. 196).

With his theory of phonological language unions, Jakobson had to resolve tension between two models:

1. the migration model: central languages (with phonological palatalization) become peripheral (*losing* palatalization) upon "leaving" Eurasian terri-

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tory. According to Jakobson this applied to Ottoman Turkish; for Savitsky it applied to Hungarian. A similar phenomenon occurs in languages "joining" Eurasia: they become "palatalizing";

2. the "on-site" contagion model, without population displacement; i.e., the "contagion" undergone by languages adjacent to the Eurasian development locale: eastern dialects of Estonian, Romanian and Bulgarian present varying degrees of phonological palatalization; eastern Slovakian dialects lost quantitative opposition.

In contrast to Sanfeld and the Italian neolinguists, the problem for Jakobson was not one of *contact* (and certainly not of *substrate*) but rather of purposeful convergence:

> Until recently in the science of language, the comparative method was used – almost exclusively – to bring to light the common historical bedrock of related languages. *Now* when we use the comparative method what we are interested in, alongside the ancestor or common original language, is the independent lives of the offspring, the characteristic tendencies of their development. Comparing divergences in the lives of languages that have separated and studying similar types of evolution, what are called *convergences* – both these methods bring to light the purposeful nature of linguistic change. But the convergent evolution of related languages is only a particular case. Among the crucial problems that linguistics must now resolve is the question of common features in the evolution of contiguous languages of different origin. We are discovering with increasing clarity that even if the points of departure are totally different, strong similarity in development paths is possible: constructions of the same type are created out of dissimilar materials using different means. Alongside the traditional notion of languages of the same origin (*edinorodnye*), we see taking shape the notion of languages with the same orientation (*edinoustremlennye*) (Jakobson 1931a [1971a, p. 144]).

The issue here is as remote from typology as it is from hybridization. Jakobson means to announce a new notion, one that seems to bring into play the innate/acquired debate. As we shall see in Chapter 7, this opposition too became distorted in Jakobson's thinking.

> Language families are characterized by an inherited community of basic lexical and grammatical material and by sound correspondences within this material indicating that the languages have a common origin and making it possible to reconstitute common ancient forms. In contrast, language unions are marked by acquired structural resemblances between two or more contiguous languages: these are changes in mutually independent linguistic systems, but changes in the same direction (Jakobson 1931a [1971a, p. 145]).

In contrast to his predecessors Schuchardt and Baudoin de Courtenay, Jakobson refused to interpret similarities between unrelated languages in terms of causal relations alone (influence or borrowing):[35]

> Influence is only one aspect of the problem, and it is hardly the simplest product of language cohabitation. There are cases where it is difficult to decide whether we are dealing with a case of borrowing or the result of convergent evolution. Borrowing and convergence … are not mutually exclusive and cannot be categorically opposed. The important thing is not the borrowing itself but the fact that there is a demand for the new feature, that it is accepted by the system, consistent with that system's possibilities and development needs. Borrowing is nothing more than a particular case of convergence. The essential problem in comparing contiguous languages is the problem of development convergence (Jakobson 1931a [1971a, p. 149]).

Trubetzkoy's notion of language unions is not identical to the Italian neolinguists' areal linguistics or Schuchardt's or Baudoin de Courtenay's thinking on hybridization. Trubetzkoy spoke neither of mixed languages nor of language mixes but of *parallel development,* acquired affinities (rather than *borrowing*) – not exactly diffusionism but shared inventions and acquisitions.

For Trubetzkoy there was no substrate, adstrate, superstrate or even any *influence* of one language on another. The key term for him was *convergence*, understood as conjoined acquisition of new characteristics and a process of integrating linguistic phenomena.

The question then arises as to what exactly is being compared: structures? systems? phonetic features considered in isolation? All these options seemed good as long as the point was to bring different linguistic or cultural features together. In the thinking of Trubetzkoy and Jakobson, systemic entities were just as comparable as independent empirical objects, depending on the needs of the moment. This is no help at all in defining what a system is.

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35 It is interesting to note how readily commentators of Jakobson's work – some quite renowned – misinterpreted his remarks. (People often find in texts only what they want to read there). For Claude Lévi-Strauss, for example, Jakobson's notion of *affinities* manifested *influence:* "Along with Meillet and Troubetzkoy, Jakobson proved, moreover, on several occasions that the phenomena of reciprocal influence between geographically related linguistic areas cannot remain outside of structural analysis; this constitutes the well-known theory of linguistic affinities" (Lévi-Strauss 1985, p. 275 [1963, p. 240]). Others saw his work as nothing more than research in *typology*, failing to take into account the notion of *space*: "In this new Renaissance of the wave theory, language typology and affinity become virtually indistinguishable, and I think that part of the success of the eminent scholars of the Prague phonological school was as striking as it was because putting the old genealogical ideas on typological ground from the very outset precluding running into errors" (Van Ginneken 1933 [1935, p. 41]).

Jakobson cites an article by Zelenin (1929), "Verbal taboos among the peoples of Eastern Europe and Northern Asia," showing that representations of names and their bearers are different in Eurasia and the West. From this he draws the following conclusion:

> Zelenin establishes features common to all Eurasia on the basis of speakers' attitude toward words. Wherever people are in agreement in their assessment of the word, it is natural to suppose that there are correspondences directly *within* the linguistic structure (Jakobson 1931a [1971a, p. 150].

Leaving aside Jakobson's explanatory recourse to "naturalness," it is important to note here that the "speakers' attitude toward words" is not due to intra-systemic features but rather positive ones, collected only because they were "common" to the entire territory of Eurasia. For Jakobson it was crucial to note that phonemes exceed system boundaries, a phenomenon he thought of as "typical" in phonology. Again, he is not interested in identifying causes:

> Already now, on the basis of the fragmentary materials available to comparative phonology, we can say that it is not characteristic for the fundamental principles of phonological structure, particularly the different correlations, to exist in isolation, confined within the boundaries of a given language or language family. Phonological unions, far-reaching isophones (i.e., borders of phonological phenomena), are more typical than phonological islands. Marking the particular correlations on a geographical map can only lead to discovering the preponderance of broad zones, zones that overflow the boundaries of languages considered in isolation, over a mosaic-like distribution or enclaves of correlations (Jakobson 1931a [1971a, p. 155]).

3.2 System and alliance

Phonology is the quintessential structural science in that it "*relationalizes*" *substantial elements.* Sounds only matter if each is defined as not being what the others are. The fact is that Jakobson, who claimed to have "invented the phoneme,"[36] also, simultaneously, proceeds in just the opposite way; that is, he *substantializes relational elements* – what's more, elements defined by articulatory production rather than acoustic reception. On the basis of Trubetzkoy's "L'élément touranien dans la culture russe,"[37] which shows "a close tie between the structure of the Russian spiritual world and that of the Turanian spiritual world, as well as a strong tie between the structure of the Turanian spiritual world

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36 Reported by C. Van Schooneveld.
37 Trubetzkoy 1925c (1996, pp. 127–151).

and Turanian language,"[38] Jakobson developed a research program on "the structural community of Eurasian languages."[39]

Trubetzkoy's work as a linguist and philosopher of organic wholes comes together around the notion of system closure. For Boris Gasparov,[40] who maintained that Trubetzkoy's linguistics and his philosophy were actually one and the same, the dominant concern in all his scientific work, including *Principles of Phonology*, was the principle that different cultural systems could not be "translated into one another." Gasparov stressed the incompatibility of different phonological systems, so total that even apparently similar sounds and changes in sound have to be understood to involve distinct phenomena if they belong to different languages. This incomparability is due to differences in the systemic relations within which all phenomena exist and develop. And he recalled the metaphor of the "phonological sieve" (*das phonologische Sieb*), the fact that the sounds of a given language are necessarily deformed as they reach the ears of a listener for whom that language is foreign because they pass through the distinctive features network of *that* listener's native language.[41] The image illustrates the closed nature of each system and the fundamental inadequacy of any extra-systemic approach.[42]

But the idea of *necessarily* closed systems is not really compatible with the idea of language alliances; e.g., alliances at the phonological level. We have seen that in the early 1930s Jakobson was trying to establish phonological proof of the reality of Eurasia;[43] his work was even presented as a sensational discovery in Eurasianist publications – precisely those to which Jakobson himself contributed.[44] Jakobson believed he had found the proof he was looking for in the fact that, roughly speaking, all languages spoken on Eurasian territory were characterized by both phonological opposition of palatalization *and* absence of polytony. These system features necessarily *transcended* systems, he explained, because they were common to several of them.

38 Jakobson 1931a (1971a, p. 147).

39 *Ibid.*

40 See Gasparov 1987.

41 See Trubetzkoy 1969: "False Evaluation of the Phonemes of a Foreign Language," pp. 51–54: "Errors in Monophonematic or Polyphonematic Evaluation of the Sounds of a Foreign Language," pp. 62–65.

42 In the same period Polivanov (1927) expressed the same concern to avoid transporting phonemes or cultural terms from one system to another.

43 Jakobson took stock of this period in *The Jakobson-Pomorska Dialogues* (1983, p. 84).

44 "R. O. Jakobson's discovery strengthens the internal ties of the entire Eurasian scientific system and raises the mathematical probability of its being true" (Savitsky1931a, p. 7); see also Savitsky 1931b.

It is important to note the new terminology Jakobson used, as it proves how remote his notion of *Sprachbund* is from that of hybridization. He uses the word *isophone* (the border of a phonological phenomenon) as opposed to *isogloss* (the border of a phonetic phenomenon). Few commentators have been attentive to the difference between *isoglosses* and *isophones*. It is nonetheless on this subtle difference that the whole point of his notion of system rests. What is new here, compared to all other attempts to refute the neogrammarian model (Schuchardt's for example), is the approach in terms of *system*.

However, what Jakobson presents as shared is not a systemic relationship such as declension or no declension but rather a *phonic substance* of the sort that poets love and speakers of languages not characterized by opposition through palatalization reject with feelings of "aversion":[45]

> Alongside phonological features that are likely to exceed the boundaries of one language and extend to vast *continuous* areas, there are other features that only seldom move outside the border of a language or even a dialect. The first are usually sharply felt to be a distinctive mark separating languages that have them from those in the same area that do not. The opposition between soft consonants and hard consonants is perceived as the phonological "dominant" of Russian and neighboring languages. It is this opposition and the facts concomitant with it that the Russian poet and linguist K. Aksakov has proclaimed "the emblem and crown" of the phonic system of the Russian language. Other Russian poets have apprehended it as Turanian (Batiushkov, A. Belyi) or foreign to Europeans (Trediakovsky, Mandelshtam). ... It is also curious that representatives of languages in which phonological palatalization of consonants is unknown sometimes feel a genuine aversion to it. "It is a fairly widespread view," notes M. Chlumský, "that palatalized sounds reflect articulatory weakness. Not only that, people actually attribute part of this weakness to the persons who make these palatalized sounds, notably Russians. ... 'Oh, those poor Russians! Everything with them is palatalized!'" (Chlumský, *Recueil des travaux du 1er congrès des philologues slaves,* vol. II, p. 542). In European languages spoken in areas adjacent to "palatalizing languages," frequent cases of palatalization are observed in the forming of pejorative words. ... Such strong feelings of adherence and repulsion show the strength of contagion and the persistence of the phenomenon in question (Jakobson 1938 [1971a, pp. 241–242]).

Here we are dealing with a line of argument based on highly intuitive psychology, where others' accounts count as proof. But the important point is that phono-

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45 Moreover, Savitsky had no understanding whatsoever of phonology problems. Obsessed as he was by the idea of accumulation and overlap between common features and phenomena that were not genetically or causally related, he believed that palatalization made it easier for allogenes in Russia to pronounce Russian. For his part, Jakobson failed to specify whether these oppositions were "felt" by native speakers of the languages in question or, on the contrary, by speakers of other languages, who should, in principle, be "deaf" to such oppositions.

logical correlation is no longer a structural phenomenon here but a *substance,* perceptible not only to speakers of the language in question but also to those for whom it is a foreign language. The phoneme has become a *sound.* Under these circumstances, what becomes of the notion of *phonological deafness*? What enables non-speakers to *realize* that the opposition is phonologically relevant? The fact is that, phonetically speaking, palatalization is not so infrequent in European languages (by nature there is the Italian word *figlio,* the Spanish *cavallo;* by position, and in British pronunciation, the English word *tube*). What we have here is *ontologization* of a system feature; i.e., extrasystemic perception of a phenomenon that is, by definition, intrasystemic.

But if we follow Trubetzkoy's thinking on the *phonological sieve,* how could someone perceive *from without* a component *internal* to a system? In his own way Trubetzkoy also hypostasized a structural fact when he expressed value judgments on the superiority of the morphological system of *agglutination* compared to inflecting languages:

> [When we rid ourselves of the Indo-European bias,] we will have to admit that purely agglutinating languages of the Altaic type, with their small inventory of phonemes used with the utmost economy, stable roots thrown into relief by their obligatory word-initial position, and unambiguous suffixes and endings are a much more perfect tool than inflectional languages of, for instance, the East Caucusian type, whose elusive roots with constantly alternating vowels are hidden among prefixes and suffixes, some of which have a stable sound shape but a capriciously changing meaning, others an identifiable meaning or function expressed in several heterogeneous, mutually incompatible forms.

> In most Indo-European languages, inflection is not hypertrophied to the extent that it is in the Caucasian family, but they still cannot touch the technical perfection of the [Altaic] agglutinating languages (Trubetzkoy 1939a [2001, p. 98]).

The *Sprachbund* notion generates many paradoxes. The new type of system posited by Jakobson results in a whole where speakers may well share soft consonants and no polytony but this is not enough to guarantee that they understand each other. If this new type of system is not a language, what is it? In what way does Jakobson's phonological union of Eurasian languages constitute a system?

It must be admitted that his phonological language union cannot function unless the features we are discussing are phonetic rather than phonological. Those features cannot be gathered together into a single whole unless they are of the same nature – i.e., substantial.

The main problem is whether distinctive features such as consonant palatalization are comparable once they have been *abstracted* from the phonemes they characterize functionally. The only solution is substantialization of distinctive features: only at that price can we understand why Jakobson cited Chlum-

ský's remark that if a phonological element is not caught in the "phonological sieve," that is because it has a materiality independent of the system it supposedly belongs to. In this case, taking system borders to a higher level – i.e., a phonological language union – fails to solve the problem.

The text of Trubetzkoy's that is best known in the Western world is without a doubt the introductory chapter of *Principles of Phonology*, in which the author distinguishes between phonology and phonetics using Saussure's langue/parole opposition. On this point there was indeed a filial relation between Trubetzkoy and Saussure, and in the West we have seldom looked any further. In fact, it should be clear from Trubetzkoy's view of the relations between phonology and geographic space that his scientific world was very different from that of Saussure.

In his 1931 article "Phonologie und Sprachgeographie" ("Phonology and linguistic geography," Trubetzkoy sets up an opposition in dialectology between *continuous* phonetic variations and *discontinuous* phonological differences. However, his argument spontaneously slips from one level to the other. Regarding "inventoried phonological differences," he says that northern Russian dialect has "four unstressed (reduced) vowel phonemes (ŭ, ŏ, ă, ĭ), while southern Russian dialect has only three (ŭ, ă, ĭ), and no unstressed ŏ" (Trubetzkoy 1931 [2001, p. 39]). The fact is that for the Russian dialectal zone we would expect that, consistent with his own principles, Trubetzkoy would speak not of "unstressed phonemes" but rather the possibility of phonetically realizing vocalic phonemes in unstressed position. Likewise, for a supposed opponent of psychologism like Trubetzkoy, it is surprising to find the following sort of formulations, especially since he does not specify whether "a" is a sound or a phoneme:

> Eastern Belorussian proper is bordered by certain western Belorussian dialects in which ă is realized as ə̆ (a vowel of an indefinite timbre) before a syllable with stressed á. This ə̆ is identical with neither ĭ nor ă but *in the speaker's linguistic consciousness it is perceived*[46] as a combinatory phonetic variant of ă, not as an independent phoneme (Trubetzkoy 1931 [2001, p. 41]).

> Where the vowel in the first syllable of *vĭda* is *perceived as identical*[47] with the vowel of the first syllable of *bĭla* "was" (f.), we have eastern Belorussian phonology; where this is not the case, we have western Belorussian phonology (*ibid*.).[48]

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46 My italics.

47 My italics.

48 My italics.

In fact, it would seem that as soon as Trubetzkoy takes up the question of geographical proximity, the notion of phoneme starts to float and becomes *substantial,* to the point where it becomes a sort of *thing* that can be present or absent *as such* in dialects:

> The dialectologist must answer the question: "Does such and such a phoneme occur in such and such a dialect?" and "In which phonological positions is it used?" (*ibid.,* p. 42).

But there is more. Not only is a phoneme's "structural characteristic" of defying system borders not limited to the framework of a given set of dialects:

> In contrast to etymological differences, *phonological sound differences* can also be investigated *outside the boundaries of one language* and even outside the boundaries of a *language family*. The remarks made above about the cartography of phonological differences apply equally to the study of more than one language.

> That phonological dialectology must sometimes cross language boundaries without regard to genetic relations is beyond any doubt. Certain phonological phenomena are distributed geographically in such a way that they occur in several unrelated but neighboring languages or conversely, are lacking in large contiguous areas occupied by different languages (*ibid.*, pp. 42–43),

but there need not even be *coincidence* between phoneme areas (that is, the area occupied by intrasystemic features) and systems themselves:

> The important thing is that the boundaries of phonological phenomena do not necessarily coincide with language boundaries; since they often cut across language areas, they can be identified only through phonological-dialectological research (*ibid.*, p. 43).

It may be objected that this 1931 article came well before *Principles* and was therefore merely a draft, a project later abandoned. But this is not at all the case, since "Reflections on the Indo-European problem," written in 1937 and published in 1939, takes up the issue of the *phonological* union of languages (without calling it that) in its study of the geographical relations of "structural features":

> The wave theory advanced by Johannes Schmidt holds not only for dialects of a language but also for unrelated but geographically neighboring languages.[49] [Even when they are not related, such neighboring languages "infect one another," as it were, and acquire common phonetic and grammatical features.] Every language has structural features in common with its neighbors, and those common features are the more numerous the longer the geo-

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[49] Here Trubetzkoy was countering Meillet, though he does not name him.

graphic contact has lasted. The same is true of language families. If one looks at the geo-graphic distribution of the language families of the Old World from the point of view of their structural type, one sees that they form an unbroken chain. The Finno-Ugric and Paleo-Siberian languages agree in certain points with the Altaic. The Altaic languages agree, on the one hand, with Korean and, through its mediation, with Japanese, which for its part forms a bridge to the Oceanic languages; on the other hand, Altaic agrees in significant respects with Tibeto-Burmese. (Trubetzkoy 1939a [2001, p. 94]).

In the name of a "universalist" approach understood to be specific to phonology, Trubetzkoy spontaneously uses diffusionist vocabulary:

The search for general phonological rules presupposes leaving aside the question of genetic relations and undertaking comparative study of the phonological systems of all the world's languages. Such comparative study, which has never been undertaken in such dimensions before now, has enabled today's phonologists not only to establish certain general rules, but also to note that many phonological phenomena have spread across fairly vast regions occupied by languages belonging to different families. We are far from having found the explanation for this fact (the hypothesis of action by "substrates" is quite inadequate). But the observation requires constituting a new discipline: "phonological geography" (Trubetz-koy 1933b [Pariente 1969, pp. 161–162]).

And in a note he adds:

... this new discipline (the first sample of which may be found in Mr. Jakobson's book on Eur-asian languages, summarized in his article "Über die phonologische Sprachbünde" [*TCLP-IV*, pp. 234–240]), turns out to be related to the universalist tendency of current phonology. A language's phonological system now appears a member of a larger set encompassing language systems in the same geographical region, and it should be studied in terms of its relation to other members of the same whole.

In light of these considerations, we can return to the question raised above: In what way is a language union a *system?* If it is a *system,* we have to acknowledge either that a system can be defined by a single *structural* feature (example: pala-talization), though there is then no longer anything *systematic* about it, or, on the contrary, by an accumulation of correspondences between positive, material features, in which case there is no longer anything *structural* about it.

The *chain link* metaphor in Trubetzkoy's writing thus refers backs to the *oil stain* metaphor in Jakobson's: intra-systemic components exceed or overflow system borders. But if we push the metaphor to its logical extreme, there is no reason to stop at all: the languages of the earth should form a continuous mesh. The fact is that in both Trubetzkoy's and Jakobson's thinking there is no con-tinuous chain or mesh and the oil stain does not spread indefinitely. At a given moment, diffusion comes to a halt. The *neighbor* relationship between Eurasian

languages and European ones is thus cut through by a sharply drawn border that cuts across genetic solidarities – despite any spreading oil stain.

The question of hybridization had raised the issue of *defying boundaries*. The model of language as an organism was shaken but had not yet yielded. What was not yet clear was whether these thinkers would move on toward the idea of a vast planetary continuum or instead seek to constitute new entities.

Chapter 4
Continuous and discontinuous

A door must be either open or shut
(Alfred de Musset)

There was nothing new in calling into question the validity of the neogrammarian model – many had done so before Jakobson and Trubetzkoy – or the notion of borders between languages. What was new was to create borders that were even sharper and more tightly sealed. We shall now see how Jakobson's and Trubetzkoy's work was related to the far-reaching, seemingly interminable controversy around dialectal boundaries, a debate that entirely undermined neogrammarian certainties.

Relations between history of linguistics and history of geography have not been studied much. The history of each discipline has its own dynamic, which does not run mechanically parallel to that of other disciplines, even neighboring ones. However, each history is linked in some way to the history of other differences, and to history generally. Geolinguistics originated in an internal crisis that occurred in the discipline of linguistics in the second third of the nineteenth century. With very few exceptions, geographers and linguists seem not to have known much about each other in that period. But they do seem to have had a common urge to probe the *boundaries* of their respective objects of study, *regions* for geographers, *languages* or *dialects* for linguists. And their probing looks very much like what biologists were doing in working to define the *species*.

We can try to understand the controversy within geolinguistics that is the matter of this chapter by focusing on the notions of *continuous* and *discontinuous* as they apply to boundaries between languages or dialects. That controversy was more than a "technical" problem; it was run through with ideological conflicts that exceeded it. The period was one of exacerbated nationalism and repeated attempts to come up with a *naturalist* definition of state borders within Europe. There was a strong temptation to use the results of dialectology to justify territorial claims.

The implicit epistemological debate around the organicist model – a model that was beginning to collapse in linguistics at the time – was also rooted in ideological preferences. A question such as language *hybridization* thus represented a key moment in the dispute, which otherwise would have been nothing more than another attempt among many to homogenize diversity across a single territory.

I present the controversy here in terms that do not seem to have been used at the time; namely, the opposition between nominalist and realist conceptions

of the relationship between language and territory. Different ways of graphically representing that relationship were developed by way of that opposition.

The nominalist option was to engage in extremely fine distinctions and infinitely detailed descriptions of differences and individual facts, to the point where the "material" was broken down into excessively fine particles. The realist or essentialist option pulled in the opposite direction: seeking out common features behind differences, the one behind the multiple, working to reconstruct Type, Archetype or Essence. These were two diametrically opposed models for constructing what Bachelard called the object of knowledge.

I aim to demonstrate that the different attempts to get beyond or circumvent this pair of alternatives were all different variants of the same two options, options that in turn underlay another, parallel, controversy specific to the ethno-anthropology of the time; namely, the debate between evolutionism and diffusionism (see Chapter 5).

1 Closure

1.1 Organicism

In the early nineteenth century, linguistics in German-speaking countries was steeped in triumphant Romanticism and resolutely opposed to Enlightenment philosophy and the rationalism and universalism of the preceding century. Language diversity was no longer dismissed as a secondary, superficial phenomenon when compared to some universal human spirit but embraced as an essential reality. Linguists found themselves faced with a problem characteristic of their time: how to bring order to the ever greater multiplicity of language phenomena becoming accessible through new discoveries and increasing interest in diversity as such.

In the chapter of *The Order of Things* entitled "Classifying",[1] Michel Foucault focused on hesitations during the Romantic period about whether to choose typological or genealogical classification. As in biology, a Linnaean-type classification (top-down, an "artificial" method based on arbitrarily chosen criteria) was being replaced by bottom-up classification, understood in the second half of the century as "natural."

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1 Foucault 1966, pp. 137–176 (1994 [1970], pp. 125–165).

The fact is that the two types of taxonomy had at least one underlying assumption in common: languages are natural organisms. The language classes thus identified were constructed on the idea that the languages in them have a common *essence*, to be reconstituted according to degrees of resemblance between them.

> A perfect natural order of arrangement in treating of the peculiarities of different languages ought to be regulated by their descent from each other and their historical relations; a perfect artificial order ought to bring together into the same classes all those genera which have any essential resemblances, that is, such as are not fortuitous, nor adoptive, nor imitative or derived from onomatopeia (Young 1813–14, p. 252; quoted in Morpurgo Davies, 1998, p. 93).

While languages were to be grouped together on the basis of their resemblances, we see that the only resemblances deemed worthy of investigation and study were inherited ones, not those acquired through contact or imitation, for example. But the problem of whether species *change* or not, a problem that had tormented scientific thinking and discourse in biology, was now arising in linguistics: Could changes in a language bring about a shift from one language type to another?

The German linguist August Schleicher (1821–1868) had a categorically transformationalist answer that left no doubt that linguistics was a *natural* science. He identified its focus as follows:

> language as a natural organism subject to invariable shaping laws that are as thoroughly beyond the reach of human will as it is impossible for a nightingale to change its song (Schleicher 1860, p. 118).

Schleicher is known in linguistic textbooks as the genealogical tree man. Using botanical and zoological terminology, he presented change in language as a shift from an original shared language (*Grundsprache* or *Ursprache*) to offspring "daughter languages" that were to be thought of as different species of the same genus. Typological classification, the results of which were identifiable in space, was merely a reflection of genealogical classification, which pertained to the passing of time.

Grundsprache

daughter language   daughter language   daughter language   = species

family (=genus)

genealogical classification

typological classification
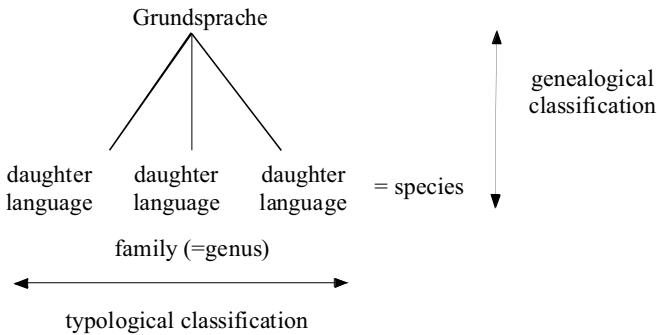
Fig. 7: Schleicher's genealogical tree

In this naturalist view of language evolution over *time* but not in *history* (since human will could in no way interfere), researchers' objects of study are hermetically sealed: each language is a pure body whose organism (or *essence*) can in no way be changed or degraded by contacts or mixes. For Max Müller (1823–1900), languages pursued a natural evolution utterly independent of external events and in accordance with inexorable *laws*. It was perhaps worthwhile identifying Celtic, Norman, Latin and Greek words in English but

> not a single drop of foreign blood has entered into the organic system of the English language. The grammar, the blood and soul of the language, is as pure and unmixed in English as spoken in the British Isles, as it was when spoken on the shores of the German ocean by the Angles, Saxons and Juts on the continent. (Müller 1862, p. 72; quoted in Morpurgo-Davies 1998, p. 198).

For naturalist linguists[2] the very notions of contact between languages, resemblances acquired through geographical proximity, and even hybridization were nonsense. At most they described a monstrosity: a mixed language could only be *monstrous*. Perceived as living organisms, languages were necessarily *mutually impenetrable*. This denial that mixed languages (to be more precise, mixed grammars) were possible guaranteed the validity of the tree model or representation of language change. Schleicher's model *admits* of neither contamination nor diffusion, and this in turn confirmed the validity of reconstructions based on it. What's more, for Schleicher and those who thought as he did, a linguist's work is to reconstruct a proto-language by comparing a number of genealogically related languages – an impossible task for languages with nothing more in common

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2 On naturalist linguistics in France see Desmet 1996.

than similar structures. This is in fact a problem of value systems: resemblances were known of, but in this value system they were not taken into consideration because they *did not prove kinship*:

> Lexical harmony between two languages without grammatical harmony proves nothing. A language can have borrowed many words without this changing its vital essence. Despite the enormous quantity of Celtic and Romance words that English adopted, it remains an entirely Germanic language.... The character of a language consists in deep relationships, so powerful that borrowed foreign words can only submit to them, offering no resistance. In sum, there is no so-called *mixed language,* just as there is no *mixed* natural organism. Every organic being is an energetically constituted unit, circumscribed, turned in upon itself, its center being necessarily within itself.... We may find surprising resemblances between phonetic details of languages belonging to distant groups. Sanskrit has a singular type of sound known as *cerebral*, but it also exists in the primitive idioms of Deccan, which are radically different from Sanskrit.... Ossetian, an Irano-Indo-European idiom, and the Tatar idioms of the Caucasus use the phonetic system called *Georgic* specific to Caucasian idioms strictly speaking; Livonian, a neighbor to Slavic, uses a near-Slavic phonetic system and in this respect is very different from the Lithuanian language.... But these things in no way prove idiom kinship. Like words from a dictionary, they were transplanted from one language to another. Perhaps they are nothing more than the necessary consequence of two neighboring nations sharing the same climate (Schleicher 1852, pp. 38–40).

> At first glance it is surprising to see that idiomatic sections do not correspond to human races; that is, to the differences that exist within the natural organism of the human genus.... It seems to me that the cause lies entirely in the influence that climate, food, the appearance of natural surroundings and way of life exert on the organism of the human body rather than on that of human language. I attach little importance to what has been designated mixing with other races or mutual idiom exchange (*ibid*., pp. 50–51).[3]

This essentialist understanding of language purity operated as a screen or filter in Schleicher's research: only presumably inherited resemblances were taken into account. Facts had been collected, but only some were worthy of attention, i.e., those that did not disrupt the smooth functioning of the theory. And the theory was founded on an unstated epistemological assumption that resemblances could only be explained by common origin; any resemblances that might have called this assumption into question were simply ignored. In biology, look-alike phenomena, i.e., resemblances due to chance rather than kinship, are of no interest; they fall outside the field. Having a single, rigid notion of language can literally *blind* scholars to certain facts.

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3 Schleicher was referring to notions in James Cowles Prichard's *Researches into the Physical History of Man* I, 3, p. 243, but gave no edition date. The first edition was published in 1813.

Schleicher had emulators in France. An entire school of naturalist linguistics developed in his wake. Its members worked on the margins of "official" linguistics as represented by the Société de Linguistique de Paris, founded in 1866. For them too language followed no laws but its own and was quite indifferent to the contingencies of space. Abel Hovelacque, for example (1843–1896), maintained that one need only cross the Asian continent from northeast to southwest to see that the *territorial distribution of languages* is consistent with neither language kinship nor morphological analogies between languages:

> No, we can in no way classify languages by geographical distribution alone. That distribution has been upset many times through history by migration, conquests, encroachments by some idioms in a comparatively more privileged position than others with less power to resist (Hovelacque 1878, pp. 47–48; quoted in Desmet 1996, p. 242).

The organicist model in linguistics corresponds to an essentialist understanding common in nineteenth-century biology according to which each species was characterized by an invariable essence and separated from every other by a sort of radical discontinuity. This understanding formed the basis of fixism in biology but was not actually incompatible with evolutionism; all that had to be done was to include saltation, on the model of generations, rather than a gradual shift from one language to another. As Schleicher saw it, each language breaks off sharply, neatly, from a common trunk at a given moment. There was no intermediate state between Latin and French, for example, but rather an abrupt qualitative change.

1.2 Positivism

The organicist metaphor was gradually abandoned in the late nineteenth centur but positivist ideology continued to be debated vehemently as its certainties collapsed. Approximately until World War I, linguistics was heavily dominated by neogrammarian thinking.[4] The Neogrammarians applied natural science models to language phenomena. They believed linguistics should study evolution within distinct languages. Their positivist creed meant they focused their efforts on trying to interpret phonetic changes as *laws*. In contrast to Schleicher, they were not interested in typology or classification or in reconstructing a parent language but instead sought to develop a rigorous method that would work for ancient and

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4 The neogrammarian idea of absolute phonetic laws was formulated extremely clearly by August Leskien in his introduction to *Die Deklination im Slavisch-Litauischen und Germanischen* (1876), p. XXVIII: *Die Lautgesetze wirken ausnahmslos* ("Phonetic laws admit no exceptions").

modern languages and dialects alike. In thus explicitly or implicitly following the *uniformitarianist* model current in geology at the time,[5] they believed that given sounds might change into others through a regular process over a language's evolution and that those changes followed laws as strict as those of physics, chemistry or biology: the same factors and the same types of causes were operative at all stages of a language's evolution. Languages could no more resist evolutionary laws than man could escape the laws of nature. Consistent with those inexorable laws, languages evolved outside human will; nothing irregular or fortuitous ever occurred; everything could be explained. In the eyes of the Neogrammarians, any anomaly that seemed not to fit those laws could be explained by some *analogy* involving psychological associations that "caused the regular trajectory of phonetic law to deviate."[6] Their empirical methodology, founded on research and *fact*-collecting, was primarily inductive.

This approach, both positivist and naturalist, fell victim to turn-of-the-century reaction against positivism in linguistics and other scientific fields. With the thinking of Henri Bergson (1859–1941) in France and Benedetto Croce (1866–1952) and his idealist school in Italy, philosophy turned toward what was immaterial. Those philosophers denounced the positivists' harsh method wherein man was subjected and enslaved to strict, mechanical, inflexible natural laws. All of them maintained that so called immutable laws were incompatible with human freedom and man's ability to create. But in the field that concerns us here, it was once again the issue of boundaries that revealed the deep crisis into which positivism had fallen.

Curiously, positivism in linguistics was undermined by the *shock of the real.* Attached as it was to facts, positivism worked to establish the laws that governed them. But it was far from clear how extensive an application such laws had. If what was true for one language was not for another, the reasonable conclusion was that the law was only valid within the boundaries of a given language. Since positivism could not accept anything that was incomplete or uncertain, it needed definitively delimited criteria. But the more the research advanced, the more numerous the facts became and the more subdivided, diluted and pulverized the laws. Their field of application was reduced from language to dialect, and they came to hold for ever-shorter periods of time and ever-shrinking areas. In any case, the aim of positivist linguistics was invariably to delimit the field of application of such laws, however tight the spatial and temporal boundaries might already be.

In fact, the Neogrammarians' "exceptionless laws" dogma could only hold up because of the fiction it was based on; i.e., the notion of territorial, as opposed

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5 On uniformitarianism in linguistics, see Wells 1973; Christy 1983; Naumann et al. 1992.
6 Henry, quoted without indication of source by A. Dauzat, 1906; see Normand et al. 1978, p. 28.

to social, dialect. Restricting this dogma by declaring that "a historical phonetic law applies without exception within the boundaries of a dialect or period" only ratcheted the problem up a notch: what, then, were the *boundaries* of a dialect or period? The Neogrammarians were relying on the existence of the very thing they were looking for, and their way of proceeding amounted to an equation with two unknowns.

In contrast to Schleicher, the Neogrammarians accepted continuity over time in language evolution but continued to reject it for space; the idea of diffusion through contact was radically alien to them. They kept to the strict evolutionism of their time, based on the biological model in which everything was open vertically (humans descended from apes with no strict barrier between the two) but horizontally closed: once species had separated they could never come together again or mix (the proof lay in the infertility of hybrids).[7] Lurking beneath the strict tree-branch model of the Neogrammarians and their naturalist predecessors was the model of the life sciences:
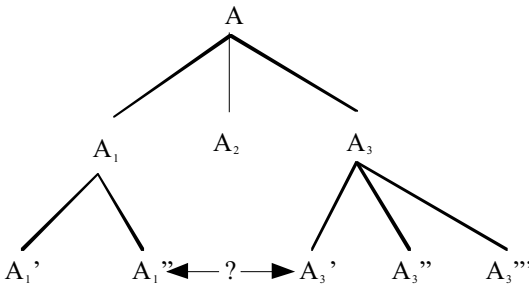
Fig. 8: Evolution by divergence

This results in the following circular reasoning: If A_1" and A_3' are similar or have features in common, this proves they come from the *same source A* (since resemblances are necessarily inherited). But in turn, the existence of source *A* (the *Ursprache*) is only proved by the existence of resemblances between its supposed offspring A_1', A_1", ..., A_3'''. However this may be, the life science model precluded attending to resemblances between languages that were spatially close but genealogically distant (A_1" – A_3'), not to mention resemblances between unrelated

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7 This may also be seen as referring back to the pre-Socratic notion that "like is only known by like," the notion underlying the idea that only relatives can look alike and that resemblances between non-relatives are of no interest.

languages – an absurdity for Neogrammarians. Being thus blinded to the realities of geographic proximity by adherence to a more or less unconsciously applied biological model remained the rule for many years and explains reluctance to take into account the "space factor" during the interwar period. Meillet (1866–1936), for example, the undisputed master of French linguistics during this period and worthy heir to the Neogrammarians, remarked:

> Mr. Kroeber insists on the importance of taking into account the geographic proximity of languages. It probably does usually happen that related languages occupy contiguous or at least neighboring areas. But once this coarse fact has been set aside it must be acknowledged that contiguity is more of a problem than a help when it comes to demonstrating linguistic kinship. Neighboring languages are languages that have undergone the same influences, borrowed from each other, or borrowed the same material from other languages. Language contiguity thus requires us to distinguish carefully between borrowings and the ancient stock of the language; only the latter can prove language kinship. On the other hand, great geographical distance has not prevented linguists from showing that the language of Madagascar represents the same ancient language as that of Borneo, Java and the Philippines (Meillet 1926b, p. 92).

2 Impossible closure

The neogrammarian position was untenable. Even while acknowledging that phonetic laws were *not valid* at all times and for all places and expressly *restricting* each law to a particular language during a particular period, they claimed that a law could only be called such if it applied to all facts of the language in question during the period in question while remaining utterly beyond the reach or control of human will.

In fact, the initial attack came from inside the theory itself. The neogrammarian model presupposed that languages evolved through division and divergence, like branches gradually growing out of and away from a tree trunk. We have seen that the image of the *genealogical tree* represented languages as perfectly independent of each other, living autonomous lives once this separation had occurred; the features they had in common could only be *inherited* from their common ancestors; boundaries between languages and between language families were posited as inviolable. However, the problem of *resemblances* between languages often pushed researchers to engage – unawares – in circular thinking about how to classify languages and dialects: two languages were related because they had features in common, but shared features were only looked for in languages presumed to be related. Possible resemblances between languages assumed to be *un*related were dismissed as chance occurrences of no interest.

The organism metaphor was therefore not merely a rhetorical analogy but played a cognitive role: as founding metaphor, it filtered phenomena, determining which would be selected as scientifically relevant and which would be rejected.

In fact, questions gradually began to arise that did not sit well with the theory, and these concerned marginal or borderline situations. Some nineteenth-century discoveries seriously undermined the idea that languages were characterized by tightly closed boundaries. What was to be done with Armenian and Albanian, for example, which were the equivalent for linguistics of the panda bear for zoology – a curious rarity. As early as the 1830s it had become clear that Armenian, however fully a member of the Indo-European family, exhibited extraordinary resemblances or "affinities"[8] to such unrelated but geographically neighboring languages as Georgian. In 1846 Windischmann, in an article entitled "The place of Armenian in the Aryan linguistic stock," established that Armenian was an Indo-European language while opining that it was a branch of Iranian languages.[9] But numerous facts precluded linking Armenian to the Iranian group. Was Armenian a separate branch or an intermediate link? And how could the idea of an intermediate link be at all compatible with the law of genetic descent?

It was not until 1875 that Heinrich Hübschmann, in an article entitled "On the position of Armenian among Indo-European languages," put forward the idea that the Iranian components of Armenian were *borrowings* and that in terms of flexion and phonetics, Armenian occupied an *intermediate position* between the Iranian group and the Balto-Slavic one. On the basis of knowledge about Armenian that refuted the genealogical tree metaphor and substantiated instead the notion of "waves," Hübschmann concluded that Armenian was not a small branch that had sprouted between bigger ones along the same trunk but rather a link *connecting* the Iranian and Balto-Slavic languages.[10] Extraordinary resemblances were also being noted for the first time between Georgian and Basque. Clearly the Caucasus, that "mountain of languages,"[11] was an extremely fertile field for experimentation.[12]

Similarly, though Albanian did not "originate" in Latin in neogrammarian fashion, it was so saturated with words of Latin origin that if one knew nothing of its history one might take it for a Latin language. How could such *non-inherited*

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8 Here I use the term "affinity" as a first approximation of "resemblance." For a discussion of the epistemological status of this term, see Ch. 6.

9 See Nichanian 1989, pp. 45–47.

10 See Samuelian 1981, pp. 146–147.

11 The "mountain of languages" is Mount Ararat but the term worked metonymically to designate the entire Caucasus.

12 It should be noted that from 1911 to 1919 Marr had done several studies that called into question the "purity" of Armenian as an Indo-European language; see Meshchaninov 1929, p. 24.

resemblances be explained? Perhaps languages were not as fully self-enclosed, as sharply individualized within temporal and spatial limits, as had been affirmed.

Some linguists had assumed extreme positions, claiming that it made no sense for researchers to study what occurred *within* a genetic language family because there simply could not be any pure languages or homogeneous families. Here the idea was that that all languages were *necessarily mixed* (mixoglossia). Meanwhile the notion of hybridization – Schuchardt's main thesis of language mix[13] and the related terms *Mischsprache*, *Sprachmischung*, *Sprachkreuzung*[14] – was making headway. Schuchardt reversed Max Müller's claim "Es gibt keine Mischsprache" ["There is no mixed language"] by saying "Es gibt keine völlig ungemischte Sprache." ["There is no entirely unmixed language"] (*ibid*., p. 131). In 1884 in "Slawo-deutsches und Slawo-italienisches" ["Slavo-German and Slavo-Italian"] he declared: "There is no language that is not mixed, if only to a minimal degree." Baudouin de Courtenay took up this claim, without indicating the source, in "On the mixed nature of all languages."[15] And in his *Comparative Grammar of Slavic Languages* of the same year, he imagined the possibility of comparing "two or more linguistic areas of different historical origin that exhibit similar linguistic phenomena due to their territorial proximity."[16] There was also Wackernagel's "Sprachtausch und Sprachmischung [*"Language exchange and language mix"] (1904) and L. V. Shcherba's "On the notion of language mix" (1925). The remarkable similarity between these titles shows how very much "in the air" the notion was in the first quarter of the twentieth century.

So resemblances could overstep genetic barriers, which were therefore porous. Models based on the discontinuity assumption simply could not account for such phenomena.

The discovery of similarities between genetically unrelated but geographically contiguous languages engendered acceptance of the idea that there had to be something other than genetic origin to explain resemblances. Specifically, some linguists began to accept the idea that a language could be of mixed *origin*. This went directly against the Romantic notion of language purity. The problem of porous borders and blurred boundaries was given special attention by Schuchardt,[17] for whom the fact that languages could mix was proof that

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13 "Sprachmischung," Schuchardt 1922, pp. 128–141.
14 Schuchardt did not use the term affinity because for him there was no difference between acquired affinities and genetic kinship; for him all languages were mixed.
15 Baudouin de Courtenay 1901.
16 Baudouin de Courtenay 1901 (1963, vol. 2., p. 31). In the same passage he mentions resemblances (*skhodstva*) between unrelated but geographically close languages (Armenian and languages of the Caucasus, Latvian and Estonian, and the languages of the Balkan peninsula.
17 Schuchardt 1885.

language was not an organism. He was particularly attentive to the two "border situations" of Slavic-Italian and Slavic-Germanic speech forms, while Baudouin de Courtenay, who had been studying Schuchardt's mixed languages on site (namely the Slovenian dialect of Val de Resia in Italy), believed, as mentioned, that all languages were necessarily mixed.[18]

This position was far from consensual. Meillet, for example,[19] would not allow that languages could have a mixed origin. While accepting the notion of borrowing, he did not believe a language could have several sources. And he could not accept the idea of a genuine mix; a language remained essentially the same; at most there might be borrowings. Here again, Armenian was a case to be considered carefully, but this led him to a solution close to Hübschmann's: Armenian was indeed an Indo-European language, with borrowings from Parthian. Meillet's proposed solution was a means of accomodating the genealogical model, nothing more.[20]

Lastly, and though this point falls outside our interwar time span, it is crucial to recall Stalin's position in the 1950 "discussion" on linguistics in the Soviet Union. He harshly dismissed Marr's ideas on hybridization and "language crossing,"[21] putting forward instead the idea that during contact between two languages one of the two "emerged victorious." In its contact with other languages, Russian had always emerged "the victor"; it had never mixed at all with other languages:[22]

> It would be quite wrong to think that the crossing of, say, two languages results in a new, third language which does not resemble either of the languages crossed and differs qualitatively from both of them. As a matter of fact one of the languages usually emerges victorious from the cross, retains its grammatical system and its basic word stock and continues to develop in accordance with its inherent laws of development, while the other gradually loses its quality and gradually dies away. Consequently, a cross does not result in some new, third language; one of the languages persists, retains its grammatical system and basic word stock and is able to develop in accordance with its inherent laws of development. True, in the process the vocabulary of the victorious language is somewhat enriched from the vanquished language, but this strengthens rather than weakens it. Such was the case, for instance, with the Russian language, with which, in the course of historical development, the languages of a number of other peoples crossed and which always emerged the victor. Of course, in the process the vocabulary of the Russian language was enlarged at the expense of the vocabularies of the other languages, but far from weakening, this

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18 Baudouin de Courtenay 1901.
19 Meillet 1926b.
20 See Meillet 1903.
21 See Ch. 5.
22 Stalin also emphasized the notion of "zonal language" in this text, terminology that recalls the Eurasianists' own.

enriched and strengthened the Russian language. As to the specific national originality of the Russian language, it did not suffer in the slightest, because the Russian language preserved its grammatical system and basic word stock and continued to advance and perfect itself in accordance with its inherent laws of development.

There can be no doubt that the crossing theory has little or no value for Soviet linguistics. If it is true that the chief task of linguistics is to study the inherent laws of language development, it has to be admitted that the crossing theory does not even set itself this task, let alone accomplish it – it simply does not notice it, or does not understand it (Stalin 1950 [2000]).

This text deserves to be taken seriously and analyzed. On the one hand, Stalin's assertions are very close to Meillet's: a language is and remains identical to itself; there can be no crossing; a language cannot have two origins. On the other hand, languages have "inherent laws of development," an expression which was frequently used by Trubetzkoy. There is also the resolutely organicist, or rather energetist terminology: contact can *weaken, strengthen* or *enrich* the languages in contact; those languages can (or should) *advance*; they may even *perfect themselves*. Stalin's only innovation is the notion of a "victorious language" and a "vanquished language," combat terminology nowhere to be found in either Meillet's or Trubetzkoy's thought. Still, all three of these figures, while fundamentally different from each other, were situated on the same side of the dispute; all three rejected the notion of hybridization and worked, each in his own way, to reconstitute the neogrammarian paradigm so seriously shaken in the 1880s. Clearly the crisis into which that paradigm had fallen was still resonating in the Soviet Union in 1950.

2.1 Johannes Schmidt: Languages are like circles in the water

One of the most direct attacks on neogrammarian principles (specifically, the principle of language and dialect closure) came from Johannes Schmidt.[23] In an 1872 work he put forward a radically new metaphor to account for change in languages: "the wave theory" (*Wellentheorie)*. Schmidt maintained that Indo-European languages should not be represented as branches separating off from a trunk but rather as a link chain with no beginning or end, no center or periphery. Countering the genealogical tree theory and the predictions it made possible, Schmidt held that innovations in what seemed a separate, distinct language could spread to spatially contiguous languages as waves undulate and radiate

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23 Schmidt (1843–1901) was a student of Schleicher's.

out from the spot where a stone has hit the water. There was no limit to such waves; they moved imperceptibly first to a neighboring language, then to languages contiguous with that one. For Schmidt, geographically close languages necessarily resemble each other more closely than languages that are spatially distant from one another, and they will have features in common that no other languages have; after languages have separated they continue to influence each other. This understanding is behind his idea that Slavic languages are a link between Indo-Iranian languages on one hand, Germanic languages on the other. The spatial location of Slavic languages both reflects and explains their intrinsic particularities; it makes sense that they have more features in common with Sanskrit than with Germanic languages; one need only look at a map to see that Slavic languages are closer to Sanskrit than Germanic languages. Schmidt discarded the postulate of language closure and worked instead with the notions of *intermediary* and *transition*. He suggested classifying languages on the basis of their geographic distribution.

The wave theory was surely related to the emergence of diffusionism in anthropology and the challenge this represented for the linear evolutionist model. However, the model only *seemed* to call Schleicher's model into question, for Schmidt could only imagine similarities between neighboring languages if those languages were also related. The closure assumption had been shaken but the issue had only shifted to another level, that of *language family*. The language-as-living-being metaphor was not dead.

However that may be, Schmidt's shaking of the family tree model had little impact at the time; on the contrary, it provoked much strong objection – proof of the persistent power of organicist thinking in linguistics.

2.2 Geolinguistics: Each feature is unique and has its own law

The first attempt to represent language phenomena as extending through *space* was made in Germany by Georg Wenker (1852–1911). In his *Deutscher Sprachatlas*, begun in 1876 but never published in its entirety, Wenker's aim was simply to check and confirm *in the field* the validity of the neogrammarian principle that phonetic laws admitted no exceptions.

The results were totally unexpected. He found that zones exhibiting variations *did not overlap* for even two features: each of the lines that would later be called "isoglosses"[24] was unique. But the most astounding thing was that the

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24 Isogloss (modeled on the word isotherm) is the line separating two areas in which a single feature is given different phonic forms.

diffusion area of single features varied by word! The line on the map separating [p] from [f] in *Apfel/Appel* did not coincide with the one between *helfe/helpe*. Reluctant to accept these results, Wenker worked to refine his analyses and so increased the number of research locations, but this only confirmed the initial discovery. Clearly each word, feature, phenomenon had its own territory, its own boundary. Whereas Wenker's *Atlas* was meant to confirm the neogrammarian theory, it actually demonstrated the absurdity of neogrammarian dogmatism: in fact, there is *no* rule without exception; every feature is unique; hence there can be no speakers of "one and the same" dialect.

In the midst of this confusion a major and well-known polemic erupted in Romance dialectology between the Italian linguist Graziadio Ascoli (1829–1907) and the French linguists Gaston Paris (1839–1903) and Paul Meyer (1840–1917). In his 1874 study *Schizzi franco-provenzali*, Ascoli used the term franco-provençal for the first time to refer to dialects of the Rhône basin (Lyonnais, Savoie, Nord-Dauphiné, Suisse romande), differentiating them as a group from both langue d'Oïl and langue d'Oc dialects. Romance linguistics of the time was beginning to search the field for clear indications of borders between dialect groups, and it was in this connection that Bringuier and Tourtoulon began investigating the possibilities of a border between French and Provençal (1873–1875).[25] In their introduction the authors made the following claim:

> The border separating langue d'Oc from langue d'Oïl can be determined exactly, at least in some areas, and there is genuine scientific interest in drawing the line of demarcation with mathematical accuracy wherever possible and otherwise indicating at what precise point the fusion of the two languages, if it exists, begins to preclude classifying the mixed, intermediate idiom (Bringuier and Tourtoulon 1876, p. 6).

Ascoli's thesis offended Paul Meyer's national feeling as much as Bringuier and Tourtoulon's study did. In a review of Ascoli's work published in 1875 in the new journal *Romania*, Meyer claimed that his own field study made it clear that there was no "franco-provençal" and no dialects with set boundaries; "franco-provençal," he explained, corresponded to no existing geographical unit and had been fabricated from information in books:[26]

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25 The results were published as *Etude sur la limite géographique de la langue d'oc et de la langue d'oïl (avec une carte), par Ch. de Tourtoulon et O. Bringuier, membres résidents de la Société pour l'Etude des Langues Romanes, Premier Rapport à M. le Ministre de l'Instruction Publique, des Cultes et des Beaux-Arts* (excerpted from the Archives des Missions Scientifiques et Littéraires, third series, vol. III [Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1876], 63 pp.).
26 Meyer 1875, p. 296.

Dialects as a species are much more artificial than they are natural; any definition of a dialect is a *definitio nominis* rather than a *definitio rei*. And if dialect is by nature indefinite, it is easy to understand that groups of dialects (that is, the franco-provençal group) cannot be perfectly finite (Meyer 1875, p. 294).

As I see it, no group of dialects, no matter how it is formed, can constitute a natural family because dialect (which represents the species) is an arbitrary creation of our minds .... The best way to give a true picture of the variety of Romance languages is to indicate which phenomenon reigns in what expanse of terrain, rather than to draw circles around areas in which this or that linguistic phenomenon is found (*ibid.*, p. 296).

In 1895 Meyer returned to the debate:

Once we have drawn the areas in which these phenomena are to be found on a map, we will simply have to acknowledge – unless we close our eyes to what is plain to see – that the traditional division of the Romance language of Gaul into two languages, langue d'Oc and langue d'Oïl, is purely arbitrary. It is quite clear that this division is based exclusively on vowel treatment, and that if the criterion were consonant treatment, the boundaries of langue d'Oïl would have to be pulled much further south (p. 575).

In similar fashion Gaston Paris emphasized the continuity of the dialect network, comparing the territory of France to a "vast tapestry":

No real border separates the French speakers of the north from those of the south. From one corner to the other of the national territory, our popular forms of speech constitute a vast tapestry whose varied colors blend together on all points into imperceptibly gradated shades (Paris 1905, p. 434).

In a lecture entitled "Les parlers de France" [France's dialects**]** delivered in 1888 to a meeting of scholarly societies, Paris set the tone for the general position of French Romance dialectologists – a resolutely continuist one:

All that exists are language features, each of which enters into various combinations. This means that the dialect of one place has a number of features in common with, say, each of the four places closest to it, and a number of features that differ from each of those others. Every language feature occupies a particular area whose boundaries may be recognized, but those boundaries seldom coincide with the boundaries of another feature or several other features. Most importantly, and contrary to what is still often imagined, they do not coincide with ancient or modern political borders (though this may not be the case, at least to some degree, for natural borders such as mountains, great rivers or settlement areas)....

A villager who knows only his village patois will surely understand that of the neighboring village, and with a bit more difficulty that of the village he comes upon after walking some distance in one direction, and so on until he reaches a place where he will have great difficulty catching the local idiom. If we were to create a vast chain of people around a central

point, each of whom understands his neighbor to the right and his neighbor to the left, we could cover all of France with a star whose rays could be linked by continuous crossing chains. This extremely simple observation, which anyone should be able to check, is of capital importance; it has enabled my learned colleague and friend Mr Paul Meyer to formulate a law which, however negative it may appear, is singularly productive and should renew all our dialectological methods. That law is that in a linguistic mass of the same origin as our own, there really are no dialects, only linguistic features that figure in various combinations (Paris 1888, p. 13).

This strictly continuist position with regard to both time and space[27] did not call into question the notion of genetic language families. Instead, discontinuity existed at a higher level; i.e., at the outer boundaries of a dialect set, later called *diasystem*.

In France the idea that each fact pertaining to a language is unique and that dialects therefore simply *do not exist* as closed, self-contained entities was disseminated first and foremost by way of the *Atlas linguistique de la France*, the work of two Swiss authors, Jules Gilliéron and E. Edmont. For them, dialects were non-count entities. What distinguished this atlas was that it focused less on sounds than words and their distribution, namely the fact that each was distributed differently.

The atomistic vision of linguistic phenomena was not restricted to France. A group of researchers active in Italy from the 1920s to the 1940s and calling themselves "Neolinguists" in opposition to the Neogrammarians – particularly to their idea that dialects and languages were "real" entities – were even more vehement about continuity with regard to the language/territory relationship. In a stock-taking article published after World War II but written long before, G. Bonfante wrote:

> Any linguistic atlas [...] shows that there is no unity, but a tremendous number of dialects, isoglosses, fluctuations, oscillations of all kinds, a vast tempestuous sea of conflicting forces and contradictory trends (Bonfante 1947, p. 8).

The great advantage of scattering and pulverizing facts – a typically nominalist way of proceeding – was that it destroyed the Neogrammarians' excessively "realist" constructions, exposing their *arbitrary* nature. However, rather than mitigating positivist "fact" worship, it reinforced it. Seeing naught but fact "motes" made systematizing impossible. But the reason Meyer and Paris were so committed to the image of French territory as a continuous "mosaic" was doubt-

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27 For Gaston Paris there were no historical "daughter-languages" but rather continuous, uninterrupted development over time: "We speak Latin," he liked to say. Meillet agreed on this point.

less that they wanted to strengthen the barrier along the borders of Gallo-Roman territory.

2.3 Jacques Ancel, a geographer interested in linguistics

The reason Jacques Ancel (1882–1943) had so much trouble with the Nazis during the Occupation of France is that he refused to certify the existence of geographical and political entities using naturalist reasoning based on observed dialect "borders." Ancel waged war on "glossomachia";[28] he was against making political use of dialectology maps (e.g., annexing "irredentist" territories) and railed against "man's cartographic superstition, his obsession with maps."[29] The linguistic border between Germany and Poland was "vague, its boundaries shifting and unstable," he insisted;[30] it could in no way justify a political border. This was a kind of leitmotiv of his 1930 book on the Balkans:

> There is a tendency today to model language on the nation. Each nation that came out of the Ottoman Empire demanded its own language of civilization. Languages are therefore not entirely natural realities; we can get a rough distribution of the world's great civilizational languages. But states have distinct borders; we need to know whether those borders can coincide with language boundaries. First, do such boundaries even exist? According to maps drawn by indigenous scholars, Balkan languages fit into fixed, precise territories. Unfortunately, those boundaries vary with the geographer's nationality. The Paris congress where the most recent treaties were drawn up has given rise to a plethora of studies which, despite their scientific appearance, are actually works of national propaganda. If we compare Greek, Bulgarian, Serbian, Romanian, Italian and Hungarian-drawn maps, we can only succumb to skepticism. Spoken languages cannot be circumscribed (Ancel 1930, pp. 89–91).

2.4 An attempt at compromise: the notion of "approximative coincidence"

Ferdinand de Saussure agreed with what geolinguists working in Gilliéron's school had observed: each phenomenon has its own isogloss:

> Suppose the change from *a* to *e* divides the territory in one way and the change from *s* to *z* divides the same territory in another way:

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28 Ancel 1939, p. 109.
29 *Ibid*., p. 184.
30 *Ibid*., p. 64.
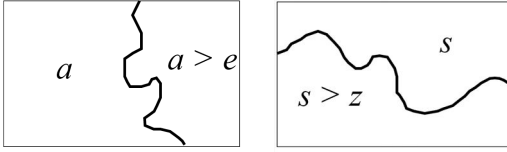
The existence of all these different areas explains the differences which are found at all points in the territory over which a language is spoken, assuming the language follows its own natural course of evolution. These areas cannot be predicted. Their extent cannot be determined in advance. All that can be done is to describe them when they are established. Superimposed on a map, they cut across one another and overlap in patterns of great complexity. Sometimes they show surprising configurations (Saussure 1979 [1916], p. 274 [trans. Harris 1983, pp. 198–199]).

At approximately the same time, Joseph Vendryès (1875–1960) took up the issue of border non-overlap:

The phonetics, grammar and vocabulary of speech forms vary from village to village, and a distinct discription could be given of each village's forms. Very often village particularities extend somewhat to neighboring villages. But the geographical limits of each particularity almost never coincide. In five or six of the ten villages under investigation, *a* is pronounced whereas the others pronounce *e*, and *o* is pronounced instead of *u*. But the line between *a* and *e* villages is not the same as the line between *o* and *u* villages; in each case different villages switch. In other words, the distribution varies (Vendryès 1923, p. 273).

Saussure was the first to develop the notion of *approximative coincidence*, which appeared a compromise solution: "When these convergences are numerous, one can use 'dialects' as a roughly appropriate term" [*trad. Harris*]."[31] This text is accompanied by the following diagram:
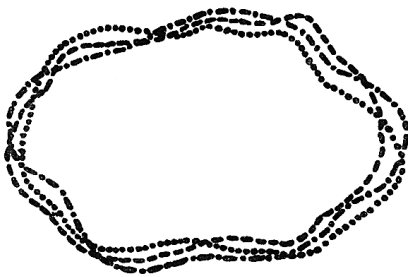
Fig. 9: Saussure's "approximative coincidence"

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31 Saussure 1979, p. 278 (trans. Harris, 1983, p. 201).

The Italian Neolinguists used the same reasoning (without citing Saussure) to argue that a language is a *bundle of isoglosses* and that anywhere that few isoglosses intersect is a center.

Gradually linguists came to reflect on the issue of scale. They proved more or less sensitive to bundles of features and isogloss non-overlap by scale used.

Geolinguistics had simply added a dimension – space – rather than overturning the time/space hierarchy. That is, as Gilliéron repeatedly indicated, space is a mirror of time; it is the key to understanding evolution over time. Maps are what makes evolution "visible."

3 The overlap theory: synthesis or a backward move?

Many linguists did not accept the idea that dialects were purely arbitrary constructions, and there was soon strong reaction in Europe to the nominalist option.

3.1 Theodor Frings in Germany

In Germany during the interwar period, linguists working in the school of Theodor Frings sought correspondences between administrative, church or political borders and dialectal ones, correspondences that Frings believed had been *caused*. As he saw it, non-linguistic borders of this sort exerted a determinant influence on the spread of linguistic features.[32] A dialectal area (*Sprachlandschaft*) was defined by radiation outward from an administrative center (*Kernlandschaft*), and this process had the effect of pushing older language features outwards towards the periphery (*Saumlandschaft*). The former naturalist understanding of dialects was discarded here and replaced by dialectal entities whose existence had administrative causes: the *Sprachlandschaft*-s of Trier and Cologne, for example.

According to Frings, the custom of marrying within a given political unit seemed to bring about some degree of linguistic uniformity. It was observed that in less than fifty years, a new administrative border would bring about some degree of linguistic differentiation and that the isoglosses corresponding to a

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32 Frings 1928, p. 83.

given political border tended to subsist, with minimal changes, for centuries after the disappearance of that border. However, isoglosses only corresponded to geographical borders that had been political borders as well. For example, forty kilometers east of the Rhine there was a considerable bundle of isoglosses separating Low German from High German. Frings looked for *covariance* or variation parallelism between linguistic and other social realities. It was not enough to understand the isogloss *helpe*/*helfe* or *lucht*/*luft* as marking the borders between the Ripuarian and Moselle Franconian dialects. Frings discovered a series of covariances corresponding to the Cologne and Trier areas, separated from each other by the Eifel mountain range. Such oppositions as *kend*/*kenk* (child), *haus/hus* (house) and *grumper/erpel* (potato) corresponded to the oppositions "long-bladed scythe"/"short-bladed scythe," "oval brown-bread loaves"/"rectangular black-bread loaves" and "Saint Quirinus, patron saint of livestock"/"Saint Quirinus, patron saint of horses."

In Frings' school, covariance between dialectal and external phenomena were explained in causal terms: the customs and ways of an administrative center were a model to be imitated; mountain ranges cut communities off from each other and impeded trade.[33]

3.2 In France

In France too the dispute was resparked, tempered only – and only occasionally – by the notion of "approximation." The issue of whether or not France was cut in two by a linguistic barrier was still an emotional one among linguists. Auguste Brun came out in support of the dividing line previously drawn by Bringuier and Tourtoulon:

> And here is my answer to Gaston Paris. Our eyes can no longer see the high wall dividing France in two but it did exist, it did last, built by nature and the centuries; not those close to us but those of the prehistory that silently shaped us as a human group. Written documents do not speak of it at all, but a line indicating where it stood does subsist for dialects, law, the color of horses, eye color, the agrarian system. Its existence has been noted by geographers, ethnologists, jurists. Let me clarify so as to parry the following objection: The line recognized by ethnologists does not coincide in all points with the one recognized by linguists, and there are points, curves and convex areas that do not overlap. What matters is that the direction is the same for all: from west to east, never from north to south. The barrier is horizontal, never longitudinal or diagonal. The divergences will all be explained one day, after patient, meticulous, exhaustive studies of each region, carefully circumscribed in space

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33 See Dubois et al. 1973, p. 233.

and attentive, like mine, to changes over time. The purpose of my study is simply to shed light on the problem as a whole, reduced to a few simple facts (Brun 1936, p. 249).

Several years earlier, in 1903, in an article provocatively entitled "Gibt es Mudartgrenzen?" [Are there dialectal borders?] in which he sharply criticized Paul Meyer's and Gaston Paris's theoretical positions, Louis Gauchat had sought to prove that borders "become virtually self-evident."

3.3 The Prague Linguistic Circle: the rainbow and closed systems

It was against the backdrop of this controversy on the open or closed nature of languages and dialects that the Prague Circle constructed its *structural* theory.

Though based on a theory of *correspondences* (see Chapter 8), the relationship between language and territory in the nascent structuralism of the Prague Linguistic Circle involved quite different issues. The Prague Russians were not at all interested in causality; on the contrary, their theory actually amounted to a new kind of naturalism, this time developed in the name of explicative teleology.

As noted, positivism was contested in Western Europe on the grounds that it failed to recognize man's freedom and in a general move to reject determinism. In Prague Linguistic Circle thinking, on the other hand, especially in that of its Russian members, man's freedom had no place. What they were interested in – consistent with their neo-Platonic world view in which wholes became manifest through the link between a whole and its parts – was correspondences between sets of genetically unrelated phenomena. The aim of the Prague Russians' "structural science" was precisely to bring such links into the spotlight.

In turning to "modern geography," Jakobson was bringing back in the notion of dialect but in a way that was no longer inductive. In a brief, little-known text, a review in German of the linguistic research presented at the First Slavicist Congress (Prague, October 1929), he transformed that notion into a "structural" one. His main move was to reject the notion of dialectal continuity as "anarchic" and to look for clear, sharp boundaries to the entities in question:

Until today, dialectology's point of departure has been the notion of dialect characterized as a mechanical sum of heterogeneous distinctive markings. In geolinguistics (*Sprachgeographie*) it was discovered that the notion of a hermetically sealed dialect with fixed borders is a fiction. What geolinguistics in its most extreme forms offered in exchange was the anarchy of unrelated isoglosses. Furthermore, it called into question the very existence of sound phenomena borders, concluding that the sound form of each separate word had its own particular destiny. Modern geography has quite naturally reacted negatively to promoting

isolines that are not linked by some auxiliary means to an independent scientific task. And the current special emphasis in geography is on the problem of correlativity; that is, on the fact of linking isolated characteristics together, establishing zones marked by several characteristics, and determining what seems the most promising zonation. The geographer P. Savitsky has undertaken to adapt geography's methodological conquests to geolinguistic research. With an understanding such as this, the notion of dialect acquires new meaning, *becoming a structural concept*. Comparison of isoglosses shows which ones are linked regularly and even indissolubly and which were simply thrown together by chance. A hierarchical ordering of isoglosses thus appears. Some isoglosses designate borders of various phonological systems, and in this case we can speak of the borders within which phonetic laws, or isophones, apply. Other isoglosses are merely borders for different ways of phonetically realizing (to use Trubetzkoy's expression) one and the same phonological system. The third type of isogloss corresponds to the borders of different uses of the language's phonological system. The papers presented by the Prague Linguistic Circle at this Congress have revealed the highly imaginary nature of isoglosses considered in isolation: apparently identical features can be functionally different within the framework of different systems (Jakobson 1930, p. 385; my italics).

In proposing that isophones (which are phonological and therefore system-bound) replace isoglosses (which are phonetic), Jakobson was presenting a *structural* solution to the problem of determining clear borders. But now the notion of system itself had to be redefined.

4 Where does a thing begin and end?

Geolinguistic studies raised theoretical questions. It has not been my point in comparing linguistics and geography to determine the entity operative in their interaction (the language/territory relationship) but rather to observe how each of these disciplines constructed its object of study in its own way by carving discontinuous entities – be they languages or regions – out of continuous "matter." Comparing the history of linguistics with that of geography is important for understanding the history of scientific thinking, regardless of how different the two disciplines' objects of study are. The demonstration that a map is not the equivalent of a territory – i.e., that it is impossible to produce a neutral, transparent representation of the spatial extension of speech forms – offers one more reason to be wary of empiricist good faith, while presenting a scientific controversy against the backdrop of a venerable philosophical opposition – realism versus nominalism – when it comes to determining the entity to be "known" or learned about.

To return to the nominalism/realism opposition, it is clear that Berdaev had no grounds for accusing the Eurasianists of nominalism. Eurasianist linguistics was actually a sophisticated form of realism, what we could call dynamic essen-

tialism in that essences for Eurasianists were not eternal as in Plato's thinking but evolved over time while nonetheless remaining identical to themselves – *like organisms*. The fundamental question for Eurasianist linguistics was "How can we know where the *real* borders lie?" Eurasianist linguistics was a deeply polemical undertaking, an incessant battle to shift and tear down false borders. Like biology and geography or at least some of their practitioners, Eurasianist linguistics clung to essentialist reasoning. But then in what way was it structuralist? The following chapters attempt to answer that question.

Chapter 5
Evolutionism or diffusionism?

The paradox of Eurasianist theory is that Eurasian culture was understood to be made up of cultures that are open to each other, constituting an open set within an otherwise closed system defined as an organic unit. This remarkable topology makes sense, however, if we consider it in connection with a dispute that originated in anthropology: evolutionism *versus* diffusionism.

In the early 1920s the general atmosphere was one of scientific *crisis*. Linguistics too was in turmoil over the issue of *boundaries*. The organicist paradigm in European linguistics had been shaken by evolutionist discoveries in biology concerning the non-fixity of species,[1] leading linguists to start exploring such notions as language *crossing*, *mixture* and *hybridization*. Nineteen-twenties Russian linguistics was hardly exceptional. It was deeply rooted in European debates around evolutionism and may in fact be thought of as a *local answer* to a much broader European problematics of the time, centered around the issue of the borders between the natural and social sciences.

It is this complex relationship between *air du lieu* (place) and *air du temps* that I shall now explore by way of two movements, two Russian approaches to language that came to the fore after the Revolution. The first, Marrism, triumphed in the young Soviet Union and was declared the nation's official linguistics; the other was Eurasianism, favored by Russian emigrant intellectuals, who anathematized Marrism. The idea of drawing parallels between such extremely different linguists as Marr and Trubetzkoy is decidedly iconoclastic, but it allows for simultaneously observing the effects of *air du lieu* and *air du temps*. I hope to demonstrate that these antithetical approaches actually had much in common.

To do so I will show that two presumably opposed systems of metaphor belonging to two different "families of ideas" are in fact a dynamic *pair* in the sense that they correspond to two notions that evolved together, each making use of the other to develop. The two sets of metaphors are situated on either side of the dividing line between *universalism and relativism, evolutionism and diffusionism* – clearly they overflowed the framework of linguistics strictly speaking. Focusing on the key issue of borders between objects of scientific study, as well as the notions of whole and system (that is, moves to call into question the naturalist paradigm of language organism purity) brings to light paradoxical exchanges between two models of the world and of language change, models which, though

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1 Though, paradoxically, Schleicher cited Darwin's evolutionary theses as the foundation for his organicism.

opposed to each other on grounds of principle and therefore incompatible, none-theless overlapped or at any rate were not themselves separated by any neatly drawn borders. They were in fact two ways of answering an age-old question: Why do languages change? For Marrists the question was *Pochemu*? ("For what reason?") whereas for Eurasianists it was *Zachem*? ("To what end?").

1 Marrism

The organicist relativism of Eurasianist theory as I have expounded it obviously stands opposed on every point to Marrist determinist evolutionism.

In contrast to Eurasianism, Marrism is fairly well-known in the West or at least regularly described in the abundant, varied literature available in the West, which can be divided into two subsets: apology and anathema. Few studies are neutral or dispassionate about Marrism. Two American studies, Thomas 1957 and Samuelian 1981, do exhibit those qualities to some degree.

It matters little whether Marr was a madman,[2] whether he "ideologically perverted science,"[3] whether he was a megalomaniac psychopath[4] or an unri-valled genius.[5] The question that concerns us here is the place of his theory in the history of ideas on language. Marr's theses were of course highly fanciful, speculative and non-demonstrable to say the least (thought not really any more so than the Romantic linguists' or Schleicher's). He clearly had a vivid imagina-tion. But taking off from the principle that even the greatest follies and wildest discourses have something to teach us about language, I shall try to explore why Marr thought what he thought and in what way his ideas fit with the *air du temps* and *du lieu*.[6]

Of the many biographies of Nikolai Yakovlevich Marr (1864–1934) written in languages other than Russian, the most useful are Thomas,[7] L'Hermitte[8] and Samuelian.[9] It should be noted that at the time of the 1917 Revolution, Marr was already 53, an Academician since 1912 and dean of the faculty of arts of the Uni-

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2 Trubetzkoy 1985, *LN,* Nov. 6, 1924, p. 74.

3 See the subtitle of L'Hermitte's 1987 work: *Science et perversion idéologique*.

4 Alpatov 1991.

5 Frejdenberg 1937.

6 Marr made the same claim to scientific novelty as the Eurasianists, calling his theory "the new theory of language" (*novoe uchenie o iazyke)*.

7 Thomas 1957, ch. 1.

8 L'Hermitte 1987.

9 Samuelian 1981, pp. 107ff.

versity of Saint Petersburg since 1911. He was not at all a Bolshevik, and nothing in his activities prior to 1917 would suggest he had any revolutionary sympathies whatsoever. He was first and foremost a comparativist who had been frustrated in his attempts to establish a comparative grammar of Caucasian languages. As early as 1888 he had suggested linking Georgian to the Semitic languages, an idea poorly received in Russian and foreign academic circles alike. Marr's *idée fixe* was to develop a unified theory of language and culture, and in this he hardly differed from European linguists of the first half of the nineteenth century.

Either opportunistically or because he was sympathetic to the related philosophical orientation, Marr was the only Academician to look with favor on the new regime, and in 1924 he became president of the State Academy for the Study of Material Culture (GAIMK in Russian, created in 1919) and director of the "Japhetic Institute."[10] At that time he broke definitively with the historical-comparative tradition of Indo-European studies, denying there was any tie between language and ethnic membership, rejecting the idea that migration played a role in diversifying and dispersing languages, and dismissing notions of protolanguage and language families as useless fictions. Instead he proposed a theory of "sedimented" language strata which could be studied by way of survivals of them in existing languages, all of which had appeared through language crossing or hybridization. Marr developed a typology in terms of stages that he related to "language paleontology."[11] Shifting from the study of specific languages to language in general, he put forward a universal linear evolution theory covering all the world's languages. In this he was perfectly consistent with dominant discourse in the USSR in the 1920s, which rejected the idea of national origin and emphasized the universal and cosmopolitan dimensions of social phenomena. And in overt opposition to the linguistic theory preceding his own, Marr represented language evolution by an overturned pyramid; i.e., progression from diversity to unity.

Using the same terminology as Schleicher, Marr gradually developed a theory of successive typological language stages. Within what he called the "single glottogonic process," human language *necessarily* moved through three consecutive stages: isolating, agglutinating, inflecting. These stages corresponded to

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10 This Russian Academy of Sciences institute was founded in September 1921 under the name Institute of Japhetidological Research, renamed Japhetic Institute in September 1922. In 1932 it became the Institute of Language and Thought. The institute's research program was to study the historical process of language evolution, especially phenomena of "crossing"; see Alpatov 1991. In his quest to discover kinship relations among Caucasian languages, Marr named those languages "Japhetic" after Moses' son Japhet. The idea was to establish a distinction between Caucasian languages and Semitic and Hamitic ones.

11 That term had long been in existence; see Adolphe Pictet, *Origines indo-européennes: Essai de paléontologie linguistique* (Geneva, 1863).

"thought mutations [*sdvigi*]" which had been *conditioned* by "mutations in production techniques."

In contrast to Schleicher, however, for whom language was an organism, Marr claimed it was a *superstructure* (here he was close to Lenin's reflection theory and Plekhanov's monism). But his overt anti-organicism led him into problems of inconsistency.

This proliferating theory, which Marr was constantly reworking, attained a certain stage of completion, at least regarding its guiding ideas, toward the end of the late 1920s. His most loyal disciple, Ivan Meshchaninov, summed up the theory thus:[12]

1. all languages are different versions of one human language development process, the "single glottogonic process";
2. the various language types move through determined *stages* in compulsory order;
3. those stages may be discerned by means of their specific features, conditioned in turn by a particular state of human groups at that time, all of whom share similar socio-economic needs and a particular vision of the world …;
4. languages are characterized by sets of specific features, on the basis of which they can be grouped into systems;
5. the characteristic features of both stages and *systems*[13] as well as particular languages are all unstable, subject to change that upsets balance and so brings about a shift from one stage to another.

2 Bringing together apparently opposed theories

It is hard to imagine two more firmly antithetical positions – at the level of principle itself – than these Russian approaches to language. Marrism and Eurasianism were each fully entrenched in diametrically opposed positions: evolutionism and relativism. However, that very opposition meant they were in contact: they belonged to the same *air du temps*.[14]

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12 Meshchaninov 1929, p. 138.

13 In Marr's thinking the word *system* designated the rough equivalent of what is usually meant by language family, but in the sense of a synchronic set.

14 Marr and Trubetzkoy never met, and whenever Trubetzkoy spoke of Marr it was negatively. On November 6, 1924, he wrote to Jakobson that it was impossible to review works by Marr because doing so required practicing psychiatry rather than linguistics (*LN*, 1985, pp. 74–75). In the Russian version of his 1939 article "Thoughts on the Indo-European problem," he accused Marr of having a servile attitude toward European linguistics (Trubetzkoy 1939a, French trans. 1996,

We can now examine the presuppositions and licit discourses of the two approaches as being consistent with their historical context, using Marrism and Eurasianism to shed light on each other. The differences between them are hardly superficial, but I would like to show how they were two manifestations of the same specifically nineteenth-century episteme (rather than paradigm) and how, for reasons yet to be clarified, each constituted a receivable discourse or *doxa* in the Russian-speaking world of the 1920s and 1930s.

Both approaches were implicated in the crisis of historical and comparative grammar, a crisis particularly manifest, if seems to me, in thinking on the problem of acquired similarities or *affinities* (see Chapter 6). In the second half of the nineteenth century, the discovery that borders between systems were not clearly defined rendered the naturalist and more generally speaking organicist model inadequate and incapable of answering the questions raised by that discovery. The real problem was the biological metaphor. While there was general agreement that borders between living species could be defined by the *interfertility* barrier, it was much more difficult to use the *intercomprehension* criterion to determine boundaries between languages.

Both Eurasianists and Marrists explicitly rejected Schleicher's *naturalism* model but they went further still, calling into question the entire genetic explanation of language diversity in its classic *genealogical tree* form. However, criticizing that model did not suffice to disqualify it; it had to be replaced with another that could encompass old issues such as diversity and new ones pertaining to affinities within a single, consistent explanation. Eurasianists offered an explanation in terms of *space* – similiarities were acquired through contact – while Marrists explained those phenomena in terms of *time*: similarities indicated that the languages in question were at the same developmental stage in the set of stages that all languages passed through.

However, the biological model resisted in their thinking, despite denials by protagonists in both movements. Everywhere in Europe, the general theme of hybridization attested to the persistence of the biological metaphor, stronger than the general dissatisfaction with the notion that languages and language families were genetically sealed phenomena.

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p. 229). Marr never wrote a word about Trubetzkoy. But he very probably had no access to the papers of the First Linguists' Conference in The Hague, 1928. Savitsky quoted Marr as an authority among others (Savitsky 1927b, pp. 31–32). Jakobson's obituary notice on Marr was sober and neutral; he noted his great "organizing ability," his "exhortations to take account of language mix phenomena and pre-Indo-European features of Indo-European languages" (Jakobson 1935, pp. 135–136).

Both Eurasianists and Marrists participated fully in the linguistics of their time. They focused on the same question: language change and diversity. They analyzed it in the same general terms; i.e., "continuous" and "discontinuous" as they pertain to collective entities, either peoples or languages. They both wielded the same overarching metaphor, present throughout the nineteenth century from the Romantic period: "a group is like an individual."

That collective individual had its own psychology, determined for Eurasianists by symbiosis with a given territory and neighboring groups and for Marrists by the socio-economic system the speaking group belonged to and its place in what was understood as the evolutionary progression of history. For both Eurasianists and Marrists, languages and cultures were distinct, discrete entities whose boundaries they meant to discover and define.

Despite irreconcilable philosophic principles, both looked for the principles of language evolution in the notion of *language convergence*. Lastly, they were both impelled forward by the same certainty, the same faith in determinism. As readers of Hegel's reception in Russia and tireless builders of philosophies of history, they were on a constant quest for the *laws* of language evolution.

3 Philosophical categories

3.1 Being

3.1.1 "Absolute singularity" and the theory of two sciences

Eurasianists claimed that Russian science was specific; Marrists denied this, but both had overtly broken with "Western science" (particularly Indo-Europeanist linguistics), qualified by Marrists as "bourgeois" and by Eurasianists as "Romano-Germanic."

Was this a real or imaginary divide? Was there a real "epistemological break," to use Bachelard's term? For Eurasianists, the break was primarily ethnogeographic: "Eurasian science" was opposed on all points to "Romano-Germanic science." But this should be qualified. In the late 1920s, Jakobson insisted on the *continuity* specific to "Russian science," as opposed to "Western science."

Trubetzkoy was less likely to speak of "Russian science" than "Eurasian science." In his fascination for the "Turanian mentality"[15] and belief in the eth-

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15 Trubetzkoy used the word "Turanian" in the ethnogeographic sense of "peoples of southern Russia and Turkestan" rather than the linguistic sense of "Ural-Altaic languages." This is

nogeographic determination of science, he broke much more radically than Jakobson from "Russian tradition." As explained, Trubetzkoy was deeply hostile to "Romano-Germanic science." In his first great Eurasianist work, published in 1920, he called for "reject[ing] the mode of thought characteristic of Romano-Germanic scholarship."[16] But for both Jakobson and Trubetzkoy, "national science" – not in the sense of state institutions but in the Romantic sense of an ethnic "mentality" or "cast of mind" – was a perfectly viable proposition. For both these thinkers, Russian science had prototypical orientations, namely its globalizing, holistic, goal-oriented thinking.[17] Trubetzkoy and Jakobson believed that "Romano-Germanic science" was *by nature* positivist and that systematic theories such as phonology could only develop in a quite different cultural world – the Eurasian one.

For Marr, Western science was "bourgeois," just like the Russian science that had preceded his own thought. Here the break was programmatic, and it went together with the following injunction:

> The new theory of language requires renouncing not only the old way of scientific thinking but also the old way of social thinking (Marr 1929, p. 56).

There was of course no Russian science for Marr (since he denied all national specificities) but rather a new science, the *new theory of language,* diametrically opposed on all points to bourgeois science. Marr accepted that there could be fortuitous resemblances between his own and existing theories – Schuchardt's on language crossing, Meillet's on sociologism, Cassirer's on the origin of language, Boas' on relations between living languages – but nonetheless claimed total independence for his theory.[18]

However, in both cases what we actually have is rejection of the European scientific world and deep hostility toward something that may have existed only in their imaginations: "Western science." This explains why in both cases there were *calls* for an absolute break, and *criticism* of "continuism" with Western science:

> Most of the Russian intelligentsia continue to bow down slavishly before European civilization and to view themselves as citizens of a European nation; they strive to imitate native

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what allowed him to withhold his support for Hungarian and Turkish "pan-Turanian" nationalist movements, which he saw as based on imaginary solidarity between the Finno-Ugric and Turkic-Mongolian peoples.

16 Trubetzkoy 1920, p. 15 (1991, p. 14).

17 On the notion of *tseleustremlennost'*(*Zielstrebigkeit*, purposeful or goal-oriented action or thought) in Trubetzkoy and Jakobson's thinking, see Ch. 7.

18 Marr, "Iafeticheskaia teoriia", *IR*-II, 1936, p. 1.

Romano-Germans and dream that Russia will one day resemble the Romano-Germanic countries culturally in all things. (Trubetzkoy 1922, p. 306 [1991, pp. 109–110]).

Echoes of this type of writing may be found in Marrist texts at the time of Zhdanov:

(Our) national linguistics developed in concrete, determined historical conditions within a determined class context and national situation ... Servility and obsequious imitation of foreign science are absolutely unjustifiable (Meshchaninov 1949, pp. 3 and 4).[19]

However, both Marr and Trubetzkoy kept at least one eye trained on the Western world they abhorred – to check how they were being received in Paris, for example:

Naturally in Vienna people still speak a little of Japhetidology, but in Paris, *lasciate ogni speranza*! People there are far too well-educated to benefit from the New Theory (Marr 1927, in *IR*-I, 1933, p. 249).

And on his return from London via Paris, Trubetzkoy wrote to Jakobson:

In addition to their personal antipathy toward you, the French entirely reject the Eurasian-Danubian forms of culture in which current phonology is expressed. It was while chatting with Martin and Novák that I realized how strong this specific attitude is concerning phonology. Novák is an "Oriental" and all his phonology has an "Oriental accent." People who have never been to Russia or Slavic countries do not associate anything in particular with this accent; for them it's just a foreign accent like all the others, exactly as it is for an Indo-Germanist who has no personal relations with Central Europe or Eurasia. But for a Slavist it is completely different. Regardless of what they say, everything Slavic, whether from Central Europe or Russia, is profoundly scorned and considered barbarian by French Slavists. Slavic scholars are just good for collecting material; as soon as they start reasoning, their *manque de culture* [lack of culture] and their *âme slave* [Slavic soul][20] appear. Everything they say is sheer fantasy, the sectarianism of little groups, etc. This is why a French Slavist will never agree to take lessons from a Russian or Slav if he has not French-ified himself (Trubetzkoy 1985, *LN:* May 1934, p. 301).

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19 Trubetzkoy's "Thoughts on the Indo-European problem" (1939a ; Engl. transl. 2001) amounted to a strange mirror game in which he accused Marr of servility toward foreigners: "Regarding this issue [different morphological types], Marr's 'New Theory of Language' is not the least bit different from 'bourgeois linguistics.' And while the claim that agglutinative structure is more 'primitive' than inflecting structure, when made by 'bourgeois linguists,' can be attributed to 'the social demand of world imperialism,' when made by Marr and his disciples it is pure and simple servility toward Western science – superficially assimilated science to boot." This note, omitted from the Russian edition published in the Soviet Union in 1958 and republished in 1987, is mentioned by Jakobson in Trubetzkoy 1985, *LN*, p. 74 (1996, p. 229).
20 In French in the original.

3.1.2 Rarely studied languages, scorned cultures

Trubetzkoy and Marr had access to the same material: living languages unknown to most European and Western linguists. Both knew several Caucasian languages and had regularly spent time in the Caucasus. Trubetzkoy had studied several Ural-Altaic, Turkic and Siberian languages, which he grouped together under the name "Boreal languages." And Marr knew many languages of the Soviet Union, as well as Ural-Altaic and Turkic ones, including Chuvash.

Eurasianists and Marrists were moved by the same anti-Western third worldism. Eurasianists made the same appeals to Oriental peoples as the post-Slavophile Leontiev, for example. But what is most striking is how similar their position on the Orient was to Soviet positions, as reflected in the following 1925 declaration by Trubetzkoy:

> Eurasianism calls on all peoples of the world to rid themselves of the influence of Romano-Germanic culture ... and on colonized peoples to emancipate themselves from European economic power (Trubetzkoy 1925b, p. 79).

In *Europe and Mankind* (1920), Trubetzkoy took out after Western imperialism. He did not believe in any universal civilization; the values of "progress" cited by European colonizers were merely a reflection of Romano-Germanic chauvinism. Nothing must be *borrowed* from European civilization. Because of their different culture and psychology, non-European peoples would never belong to Romano-Germanic civilization. It was a pernicious intellectual error to think there could be a world culture continuous with Romano-Germanic civilization: cultures *had to* be separate, kept within boundaries.

Eurasianists wanted to shape Russia into a future guide for oppressed nations, all the while maintaining that Eurasia (the new name for the Russian Empire), was an indivisible, natural, organic whole. They therefore favored a fundamentally imperial policy opposed to all separatism, and their argument was based on naturalist reasoning: Where organic unity existed, it would be a crime to destroy it. Europe was therefore seen as radically foreign to Eurasia:

> Non-Romano-Germanic peoples need a new culture that is not Romano-Germanic. The Romano-Germanic masses do not need a new culture; all they want is to change places with the ruling class so as to continue what that class has been doing up to the present time: running factories and ordering mercenary "colored" troops around, oppressing "blacks" and "yellows" and forcing them to imitate Europeans, buy European commodities and furnish Europe with raw materials. We have nothing to do with them (Trubetzkoy 1985, *LN,* March 7, 1921, p. 15).

Marr exhibited a similar interest in all that was not Western Europe:

> Indo-European linguistics is the very flesh and blood of the bourgeois society now on the road to extinction, [a society] built on the European peoples' murderous colonial policy and their enslavement of the Oriental peoples (1924, in *IR*-III, 1934, p. 1).

Marr defined his research program thus:

> [the research must bear] above all on the unwritten languages of culturally enslaved peoples (*ibid.*, p. 34).

The Eurasianists' professed relativism operated in opposition to a particular culture – Western culture. They were not the least bit interested in the Other for "Himself," but rather in a very particular other: the non-Russians of Eurasia. Other "Others" were of no interest to them.

Marrists were rather more open to Others, precisely because they did not present themselves as "we." However, they too had their preferred Others, who were exactly the same as the Eurasians'; i.e., those called in Boris Yeltsin's time "the near-abroad": Caucasian mountain-dwellers or "Russia's non-natives": Chuvashes, Bashkirs, Yakuts, etc.

If for Trubetzkoy it was obvious that there were distinct peoples and nations, the same was nearly so for Marr, who claimed that the languages of antagonistic classes "descended" from languages of different peoples.

3.2 Space

3.2.1 Closed systems and the rainbow

Where Eurasianists and Marrists do seem to have clashed was around the notion of borders between systems. Here we have an image of two irreconcilable worlds.

For Marrists, humanity was characterized by unity and therefore linguistic consubstantiality, the universal linear evolution of cultures and languages, and evolution from diversity to unity. Just as transformism in biology called into question the apparent fixity of living species, so Marr rejected the idea that "linguistic systems" could be closed.

Eurasianists maintained the opposite: There was no universal culture; the concept of mankind was a pure abstraction devoid of content;[21] languages and

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21 See Joseph de Maistre, often cited by Jakobson for his hostility toward the idea of chance-driven evolution: "There is no Man in the world. In my life, I've seen Frenchmen, Italians, Russians,

cultures were closed sets (systems, "organisms"). And their very diversity, which engendered closure, was both a law and a good thing. However, the Eurasian model cannot be summed up as hermetic closure because geographically contiguous languages and cultures could affect each other and be encompassed in such a way as to form larger and even more "organic" areas.

Eurasianism was therefore a particular type of diffusionism, with two sorts of borders: porous ones that created affinities, and hermetically sealed ones that guaranteed the maintenance of the systemic principle. This tension between continuous and discontinuous models of boundaries between languages and language groups, between cultures and cultural sets or wholes, comes through in Trubetzkoy's "Tower of Babel and the Confusion of Tongues" (1923); it was relevant in both general linguistics and "ethnic culturology":

> Language is a continuity of dialects, gradually and imperceptibly merging into one another (Trubetzkoy 1923a, p. 115 [1991, p. 153]).

> While the distribution and interrelation of cultures are based on the same general principles as the interrelation of languages, the unit of culture correspondung to a language family is of far less consequence than the one corresponding to a language union. The cultures of neighboring peoples always exhibit comparable features. Therefore, among such cultures we find certain cultural-historical "zones." For instance Asia falls into zones of Islamic, Hindustani, Chinese, Pacific, Arctic, steppe region, etc., cultures. The boundaries of these zones intersect one another, so that cultures of a mixed, or transitional, type emerge. Separate peoples and their subgroups appropriate definite cultural types and contribute to them their own cultural traits. As a result, we have the same rainbowlike network, unified and harmonious by virtue of its continuity and infinitely varied by virtue of its differentiation (*ibid.*, p. 118 [1991, pp. 155–156]).

For Trubetzkoy and Jakobson it seemed self-evident that "peoples," "languages," and "cultures" exist as countable, definite objects, yet their borders had to be studied in detail and even constructed, because intrasystemic components could shift to an intersystemic level (see Chapter 3).

However, for Trubetzkoy, one culture did not play the game, and differed from all others because of its unjustified claim to universality:[22]

> From the moment Romano-Germanic culture began to parade as the universal civilization of mankind, technology, rationalistic science, and an egoistic, utilitarian world view gained

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etc. I know thanks to Montesquieu that there may be Persians. As for 'Man,' I must confess I've never met him. If he exists, I know nothing about him" (*Considérations sur la France* (1797–1797), livre I, chap. 6).

22 See the title of his 1920 text, *Europe and Mankind*, where the two entities become two opposed blocs: Europe and the rest of the world.

a decisive advantage over everything else, and such a relation of elements in culture is only increasing with time (Trubetzkoy 1923a, pp. 113–114 [1991, p. 152]).

3.2.2 Language and territory

Marr rejected the idea that geography could have any determining effect on evolution and that languages could be specific. Because of the "single glottogonic process," which operated in conjunction with a progressive series of socioeconomic stages, *one and the same innovation* occurred in *different places* and there could be no idiosyncratic language "types" or "archetypes":

> Neither place, geography, landscape, nature in itself – even with its production resources (which we continue to call, erroneously and even in our own land, natural productive forces) – nor time, unless it has a specific function determined by production, have or have ever had the least impact on the evolution of thought – human collective thought – and even less on the evolution of the economic base, production itself, and social structure types (Marr 1931, *IR*-III, p. 97).

In this sense Marr was a profoundly classical evolutionist whose position was clearly anti-diffusionist. Likewise, for Meshchaninov, writing on the subject of language types:

> Such types are not independent in the least; they are linked by their evolution to the demands made on language to meet the communication needs that developed in human groups. Consequently, we must not think they appeared in a single place. They were able to develop everywhere that the conditions they needed had been created (Meshchaninov 1929, pp. 121–122).

Eurasianist thinkers believed quite the opposite. They belonged to the opposite tradition – relativism – while accepting a certain type of diffusionism, one emphasizing spatial contact.[23] In Chapter 8 of the *Dialogues*, Jakobson returned toward the end of his life to his cherished preoccupation of the 1920s and 1930s: the "space factor." The idea was that "neighborhood can be traded for kinship"[24] – a leitmotiv of his 1931 texts.

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23 For Meillet, on the other hand, "nothing is to be gained from the notion of contact."
24 Jakobson 1983, p. 79.

3.3 Time

3.3.1 Progress and relativism

Anthropologists and linguists at the turn of the century had two antithetical solutions for explaining differences between languages and between cultures: *backwardness* and *singularity*. Anyone trying to grasp the difference between Russia and Western Europe rushed to take a stance on this set of alternatives.

The backwardness idea fueled *evolutionist* thinking, wherein all human history was seen as a one-way linear progression from simplicity to complexity, a process understood from a value-judgment perspective as *progress*: What comes later is superior to what went before.

Relativists, on the other hand, drew upon the notion of singularity, which ran directly counter to evolutionism. In the relativist view, modern societies lost their *supremacy*; they were no longer thought of as the ultimate phase of human development. All forms of social organization were equally good or desirable, and ethnocentrism should yield to cultural relativism.

There were quite different forms of evolutionism – e.g., the cultural evolutionism of James Frazer, Edward Tylor and Lewis Morgan; Engels' socioeconomic evolutionism – but all variants shared the postulate of human unity and set out to find a single explanatory principle. In all cases the assumption was that differences in culture or economic organization among peoples were the result of different degrees of evolution.

The different forms of evolutionism shared certain principles, particularly the notion that there was a *necessary* order of succession:

> It can now be asserted upon convincing evidence that savagery preceded barbarism in all the tribes of mankind, as barbarism is known to have preceded civilization (Morgan 1877, author's preface [1995, p. XXIX]).

Engels thought the same way, developing a six-stage program of evolution: primitive communism, slaveholding society, feudalism, capitalism, socialism, communism (*The Origin of the Family,* 1884).

Marrism fit perfectly into the evolutionist paradigm[25] in linguistics and anthropology that reigned in the late nineteenth century in Europe and the

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25 Here again, the fundamental question for evolutionism was boundaries. Lévy-Bruhl, often cited by Marr (and disparagingly by Trubetzkoy in a letter written in April 1938 [*LN,* 1985, p. 424]), long hesitated about whether the relationship between "primitive" and "civilized" mentalities was continuous or discontinuous.

United States. Just as Morgan claimed that "the history of the human race is one in source, one in experience, one in progress,"[26] so Meshchaninov, writing in 1929 of "the history of the evolution of human thought,"[27] claimed that "human language followed one and only one evolutionary process."[28]

It was just as impossible to conceive of "separate" human groups as of languages unrelated to other languages:

> There are no isolated cultures attached to a single race, any more than there are languages whose origin is attached to a single race. No culture was generated ethnically; no culture came into being in isolation. Rather there is one human culture, to be found at different stages of development. Those stages are partially preserved today by isolated ethnic groups; their cultural progression is behind that of others. Culture itself is unified in origin, and all varieties of it are merely the course of a single creation process at different degrees of its evolution. Each evolutionary stage gives a characteristic shape to cultural creations and a characteristic shade or detail to various cultural areas in geo-ethnic units of cultural life already developed by means of tribal formations in the above-mentioned sense (Marr 1927b, quoted by Meshchaninov, 1929, pp. 86–87).

Evolutionists were particularly attentive to survivals, for they attested that the most advanced societies had undergone earlier stages of civilization. As for the fact that languages like Chinese, which in Marr's thinking represented the earliest stage of language evolution, nonetheless corresponded to a highly advanced civilization, Marr explained this by his theory of "arrested evolution": languages could be immobilized at one or another evolutionary stage. The same was true of the so-called Japhetic – i.e., Caucasian – languages.

Eurasianists, on the other hand, professed cultural relativism. Trubetzkoy was of the opinion that every language, culture and people amounted to (or should be thought of as) an idiosyncrasy. This was the self-sufficiency principle:

> Thus the cultures of all nations should be different (Trubetzkoy 1921a, p. 78 [1991, p. 72]).

Moreover, he believed this idea itself had been generated by a specific "mentality," the Eurasian one, which once again contrasted on all points with the

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26 Morgan 1877, author's preface. On Morgan's extremely important role for Soviet anthropology of the 1920s and 1930s see Tolstoy 1952. Engels too had flattering words: "Morgan is the first man who, with expert knowledge, has attempted to introduce a definite order into the history of primitive man" (Engels, at http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1884/origin-family/ch01.htm).

27 Meshchaninov 1929, p. 11.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

Romano-Germanic one. On Russian intellectuals who had accepted the Bolshevik regime, he wrote:

> A people that has revolted is now ruled by heads who are representatives of the intelligentsia. However, the revolution that I consider essential has not yet taken place in the consciousness of those representatives. They are still captive to European prejudices; they continue to support evolutionist science, the theory of progress and everything produced by Romano-Germanic egocentrism (Trubetzkoy, letter of March 7, 1921, *LN*, 1985, p. 14).

It was therefore vain to say that humanity shared a single culture:

> A universal human culture, identical for all nations, is impossible. Given the great diversity among national characters and psychological types, such a "universal culture" would lead either to satisfaction of purely material needs at the expense of the needs of the spirit or to the imposition on all nations of forms of life reflecting the national character of a single ethnograpic type (Trubetzkoy 1921a, pp. 78–79 [1991, p. 73]).[29]

As mentioned, Trubetzkoy and the Eurasianists advocated a theory of self-awareness (*samosoznanie*) and a quest for authenticity. In 1921 Trubetzkoy wrote to Jakobson:

> I say in my book that all value judgments are based on egocentrism and that consequently they should all be eradicated from science. But in cultural creation, art, politics and any form of activity (but not theorizing, which is science), we cannot do without value judgments. Some egocentrism is therefore essential. But it should be lofty egocentrism, conscious rather than unconscious, relative rather than absolute. I find it in the Socratic principle "Know thyself" – or "Be thyself," which amounts to the same thing. All aspirations to be something I am not in reality, any desire to "be Spanish," as Kozma Prutkov put it, are misguided and pernicious. "Know thyself" is both a universal and relative principle. It is on this basis that value judgments should be uttered, whether they are of a person or a people. Everything that enables a person or a people to be himself or itself is good; anything that prevents him or it from doing so is bad. This explains the necessity of having original national cultures (Letter of March 7, 1921, *LN*, 1985, pp. 13–14).

In a text written the same year he clarified:

> If a person can be acknowledged as truly wise, virtuous, beautiful and happy only after he has "come to know himself" and "be himself," then the same applies to an entire nation. But here it means "to possess a unique national culture" ... True happiness is to be found not

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29 Sapir (1884–1939), a contemporary of Trubetzkoy's, also demonstrated that there was no point in developing linear social evolution schemes; primitive man was simply not the precursor of civilized man. These thoughts may be found almost word for word in Trubetzkoy's *Europe and Mankind* (1920). However, in his letters Trubetzkoy cited only Sapir's phonology, never his anthropological ideas.

> in comfort and not in the satisfaction of personal needs, but in an equilibrium, a harmony along all the elements of spiritual life (1921a, p. 78 [1991, p. 72]).

Harmony and system closure are thus the foundation of Trubetzkoy's structuralism. In his systemic principle, all system components are combined and indeed melded into a unique, inalienable whole, and even if some components resemble those of other systems on certain points, that resemblance is illusory because hidden beneath external resemblances are different systemic ties. Consequently, no given system can be understood from the perspective of another system.[30]

However, at the very heart of this apparently irreconcilable opposition, the metaphor occasionally becomes blurred. Eurasianists and Marrists may have used different weapons but they were combating the same enemy; both meant to defend oppressed peoples against the Western world. The Marrists actually applied the same Socratic principle as Trubetzkoy:

> To understand a phenomenon specific to a given language, we need to know how that language developed and is developing, what its historical stages have been and how regular its advancement has been. "Know thyself," said the Ancient Greeks; "Know thyself," said N. Ia. Marr in one of his many writings, addressing nationalities engaged in building their own languages. "Know thyself": know your language, your history, your life. Few nationalities have been able to know their history and language. The October Revolution, which has granted national equality and national freedom to all nationalities living in the USSR, has thereby granted them the possibility to know themselves in their full diversity, and there is no nationality that is not currently studying its history and language. But in studying its national language, it must not pull away from the single glottogonic process (Vrubel' 1936, p. 69).

On the other hand, the idea of developmental stages was not entirely foreign to Eurasianists. It enters obliquely, for example, into thinking on relations between dialects and normative language:

> Dialects evolve more quickly in phonetics and grammar than the normative language (*literaturnyi iazyk*), whose evolution is artificially slowed by schooling, the authority of the classics and archaic norms. This explains why there are moments when the normative language and popular dialects represent such different developmental stages that they come to appear incompatible to a single linguistic consciousness. At this point, a struggle between two features – archaic-normative and innovative-popular – gets underway that ends either with victory for the old normative language or the popular form of speaking – in the latter case, it then provides the basis for a new normative language – or else with a compromise (Trubetzkoy 1927b, p. 58).

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30 On this point see Gasparov 1987, p. 57, and Toman 1981.

However, this does not allow us to identify Trubetzkoy's thinking with Marr's. For Trubetzkoy, there were two species within the same language, each having reached a different stage of development, whereas Marr would have seen two distinct languages, differing in class and origin, within what appeared the same national language. But the terminology slips, goes off course. Clearly the *air du temps* and the *air du lieu* formed a *doxa* that shaped thinking habits.

3.3.2 The problem of laws

Eurasianists and Marrists were both committed to the nineteenth-century episteme in that they were both on an ardent quest for the *laws of history* that applied to languages. Children of the preceding century, of Hegelianism and German Romanticism, they believed in philosophy of history. For both sides, languages evolved in coherent, ultimately comprehensible fashion rather than by chance; they moved along a determined path.

Distinguishing between historical idealism and historical materialism is of no help here. It is of course true that for Eurasianists there were "immanent laws" of evolution but at the same time language evolution was subject to strong geographical determinism. It is likewise true that for Marrists language evolution was subject to socioeconomic determinism, but at the same time the order of evolutionary stages imposed such heavy constraints that it very much looked as if the *process were self-propelled* – which brings us back to the very definition of organicist thinking.

Shortly after the Prague Linguistic Circle was officially founded in October 1926, Jakobson sent a "long, worried letter" to Trubetzkoy in which he explained "that linguistic changes were systematic and goal-oriented, and that the evolution of language shares its purposefulness with the development of other sociocultural systems."[31] Trubetzkoy's answer, a veritable manifesto for the belief in law-governed evolution (*zakonomernosti*[32]) and parallelism between different series, was also an attack on what he considered the "Western" ideas of *progress*, *causality* and *chance*:

> I fully agree with your general views. Many things in the history of language appear fortuitous, but the historian cannot be satisfied thereby. Upon a bit of attentive and logical reflection we notice that the general lines of language history are not at all accidental, and that accordingly small details are by no means accidental either. One must only grasp

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[31] Jakobson 1983, pp. 64.

[32] The word *zakonomernost'* (regularity, compliance with a law) is a leitmotiv in both Eurasianist and Marrist writings.

their meaning. The logical character of language development is the result of the fact that 'language is a system.' In my lectures I always try to demonstrate the logic of the development.... One does not concede that history has any meaning other than the notorious one of 'progress.' This is a mistaken conclusion, in which meaning is deduced from absurdity. From the viewpoint of the historian, only 'laws' such as the following can be ascertained in the development of language: 'The progress of culture destroys the dual' (Meillet). But, strictly speaking, these laws are neither definitive nor purely linguistic. Yet we are taught by a careful reflection on languages, which [are] oriented toward an inner logic in their development, that such logic exists, and that a whole series of purely linguistic laws can be established which are independent of extra-linguistic factors such as 'culture,' etc. Naturally, these laws will not tell us anything about 'progress' or 'regresssion.' ... The various aspects of culture and the existence of peoples also develop in accordance with an immanent logic, and their own laws have nothing in common with 'progress' either. ... The time is not yet ripe for a synthesis. But there is no doubt about a certain parallelism in the development of the various aspects of culture. Accordingly there must be laws that deny such parallelism. ... A special science must be created which focuses on a synthetic study of a parallelism in the development of the various aspects of life. All this would also be applicable to the problems of language. ... Accordingly one may not only ask oneself in the final analysis why a particular language, after choosing a particular direction, has developed in one way rather than in another, but also why a given language, spoken by a particular people, has developed just in this direction and not in another. For example, why has Czech preserved vocalic quantity and Polish the palatalization of consonants (Letter of December 22/29, 1926, quoted by Jakobson in "Autobiographical notes on N. S. Trubetzkoy," in Trubetzkoy, 1969, pp. 318–319).

It may well seem that this manifesto was aimed at Marr and his fundamental attachment to the idea of progress. But in Marr's writings there is no mention of random developments because his stages must be strictly followed. Causality, meanwhile, is a delicate question precisely because of that determinism. Marr's main positions on evolutionary *laws* were the following:

- language is not an autonomous entity independent of society but the necessary product of a historical and social process that unfolds in response to human needs in the areas of practical activity and communication;
- the history of languages is not a chaotic flow of multidirectional changes governed by chance but a regular (*zakonomernyi*) process by means of which inferior forms are elevated to superior ones, a process conditioned by the gradual unfolding of sociohistorical development;
- the rules (*zakonomernosti*) for grammatical structure formation are the same for all languages.

While Marr did not use the expression "internal logic" he did perceive the requirement of stage-based evolution to be in constant tension with socioeconomic causality. He used classic morphological typology inherited from Schleicher (i.e.,

the understanding that languages were *successively* isolating, agglutinating, inflecting), but since Caucasian languages, which he called "Japhetic," loomed large in his imagination,[33] he developed a four-stage evolutionary theory that would grant that language set the status of a full-fledged stage in itself. Marr's four stages resemble geological *periods* whose coexistence was to be explained by the *survivals* theory. By 1929 he had fairly completed his evolutionary schema, composed of

1. "languages of the Primary period system"; i.e., monosyllabic and polysemantic languages (Chinese and the languages of middle and remote Africa);
2. "languages of the Secondary period system"; i.e., Finno-Ugric, Turkic and Mongolian languages;
3. "languages of the Tertiary period system"; i.e., surviving "Japhetic" languages, Hamitic languages (of near and middle Africa);
4. "languages of the Quaternary period system": Semitic and "Promethean" (Indo-European) languages.[34]

The fascination with *laws* and *regularities* shared by Eurasianists and Marrists shows that the naturalism problem had not at all been solved or surmounted, despite various claims to the contrary. The *denials* on both sides were so insistent that it is tempting to see them as a kind of return of the repressed. Consider the following judgment by Jakobson in his obituary tribute to Trubetzkoy:

> Trubetzkoy's ideas, firmly directed against all naturalist notions of the spiritual world (be they biological or evolutionist) and all deliberate egocentrism, were indeed rooted in Russian ideological tradition but also contributed much that was personal and original (Jakobson 1939 [1971b, p. 505]).

These denials are particularly difficult to take at face value given that the Eurasianist theory of language alliances and even the very idea of language as a system were based entirely on the idea of an "organic tie," an "organic whole" understood as a *body* from which no single organ could be removed without damaging the body's integrity.[35] This type of thinking had deep roots in the nineteenth-century organicist tradition in Russia.[36] And the very same organicist met-

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33 Marr's native language was Georgian.

34 Marr 1929, pp. 14–15.

35 Nor could a region, people or language be detached from Eurasia (the USSR) without destroying that "living organism."

36 Here it is important to recall Danilevsky. In *Russia and Europe* (1869), a study in what he called "historical morphology," he presented a naturalist view of humanity as divided into ut-

aphors are to be found in profusion in Marrist writings, despite their particularly virulent attacks on the natural science model in linguistics:

> The agglutinating type, which does not yet have endings expressed organically in nouns and adjectives, is close to the amorpho-synthetic type (Meshchaninov 1929, pp. 163–164).

The difficulty these linguists had shaking themselves free of the organicist model is likewise reflected in the highly resistant metaphor of language-as-subject. It was against this metaphor that Schuchardt targeted his critique of organicism:

> Until recently language was generally thought of as an autonomous organism, like a subject, when in fact it is the product of a subject's activity (Schuchardt 1922, p. 128).

The subject metaphor is strongly present in Trubetzkoy's diachronic studies:

> As soon as the dispersal occurred, such a language can be thought of as having burst; that is, lost its unity as a "subject of evolution." From that point on, only the various dialects are subjects of evolution (Trubetzkoy 1927b, p. 56).

> The Russian protolanguage came apart; that is, it stopped being a single subject of evolution, between the mid-twelfth century and mid-thirteenth century.... These dialects (Great-Russian, Belorussian, Little-Russian) cannot be thought of as subjects of evolution in the full sense of the term (*ibid.*, p. 57).

> During the time the Slavic apostles were active, the various branches of Common Slavic had not yet lost their ability to change together and Common Slavic as a whole had not yet ceased to be a subject of evolution (*ibid.*, p. 60).

Jakobson returned to this theme in his text for Trubetzkoy:

> Trubetzkoy convinces us that proto-Slavic continued to live on as a "subject of evolution" up until the threshold of our millenium, when the last common phonetic change – the loss of reduced vowels – began to spread (Jakobson 1939 [1971b, p. 510]).

In fact, Russian linguistics of the 1920s in both the USSR and in the Russian émigré milieu was deeply rooted in the ideology of *Life*, a continuation of Romantic diatribes against *mechanistic* explanations:

> All past and present attempts to exclude questions of time and space from the study of linguistic systems impoverish and destroy the vital principle of the linguistic system itself,

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terly distinct and hermetically sealed "historical-cultural types." This book was a great source of inspiration for Trubetzkoy.

which inevitably includes the vast subject matter of time and space (Jakobson 1983, p. 89; uttered in the context of a reflection on the 1920s and 1930s).

No linguist or historian of culture can deny the *vital process* that governs each form of culture (Meshchaninov 1929, p. 110).

4 The enigma of resemblances

If affinities did not require a shared origin (that is, if the genetic theory were not the last word), then there were two possible solutions.

The evolutionist solution held that affinities appeared independently in different places through parallel, independent evolution processes (with the understanding that geographical context or the "space factor" played no role). In that case there could be affinities between different systems within a single type. This was Marr's thesis, but it was competing with the model of change through language crossing.

The diffusionist solution held that affinities appeared through spatial contact and diffusion. This was the Eurasianist theory, except that in some cases diffusion by contact involved natural symbiosis between languages and cultures on a naturally determined territory of the sort that today might be called an *ecological niche*. The role of *milieu* or *context* (meaning physical and cultural environment) was determinant but ran into conflict with Trubetzkoy's beloved notion of "internal evolutionary logic."

Both approaches called into question the classic genetic model of Indo-European linguistics;[37] both were particularly attentive to facts that did not comply with that model. But in both cases evolutionist and diffusionist models mingled, though to different degrees.

Before Marr's definitive break with comparative grammar in the mid-1920s he was fairly willing to explain language crossing by population migration. His "Japhetids" encompassed all indigenous populations of the Mediterranean perimeter who had then crossed with Indo-Europeans, Semites and other peoples, coming into *contact* with them during those groups' *migrations*. In contrast to the mixture model (*smeshenie*), the crossing model (*skreshchenie*), presupposed that *two* languages could engender a third; that a language could have

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37 A model that both Marr and Trubetzkoy were fully familiar with: Marr had spent the summer of 1894 in Strasbourg; Trubetzkoy had spent the year 1913 in Leipzig.

not just a "mother" but also a "father." Obviously this remains a strongly organicist model.[38]

After 1924, however, Marr's model became more strictly evolutionist; the idea now was that similar phenomena appeared independently in different places at different times. The migration and contact-by-diffusion theory became useless to him and he came to accept the indigenous character of ethnic groups. One implication of this was that the respective languages of the Russians of Eastern Europe and the Russians of Tmutarakan developed independently through evolutionary jumps without those peoples having left their respective territories.[39] Languages, then, changed all by themselves by way of sudden bounds – evidence of stage-like mutations.

However, Marr never abandoned the hybridization model. The coexistence in his thought of change through stages and change through hybridization – an attempt to reconcile evolution and diffusion – remained an unresolved contradiction.

Trubetzkoy, though not asserting outright fusion, maintained that the languages and cultures of Eurasia developed in parallel and in harmony. Marr had no spatial theory; he simply predicted the total fusion of all languages at the scale of the entire planet. The Marrists did eventually turn to a form of correspondence theory: A given type of language corresponded to a given type of social organization. But despite the crossing idea, which implies contact, Marr's intellectual world had little to do with that of geographers.

Paradoxically, then, the Eurasianists actually came closer than the Marrists to Stalin's theory of fusion between the peoples and cultures of the Soviet Union.

In their attempts to account for language diversity by way of diametrically opposed models, Eurasianists and Marrists alike had to cope with the problem of borders between languages and to try to resolve the same question, a foreshadowing of modernity: *How can closed systems be made compatible with open borders?* Both sets of linguists called into question the notion of an Indo-Euro-

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38 Meillet himself warned against the dangers of the organism metaphor: "Like all figurative expressions when used in linguistics, the expression 'kinship' is misleading: language kinship is different from what we ordinarily call kinship: a 'daughter' language is not an offspring but a transformation of a 'mother' language. The expression is too well-established to be dropped; it suffices to define it to avoid confusion" (Meillet 1921 [1926a, p. 102]). Marr expressed the same idea in nearly identical terms: "The term 'kinship' was introduced into linguistics when nothing was understood of the origin of language, or else when it was thought of in terms of physical kinship, that is, blood relations. It is natural that with such a perspective on the nature of language, a biological term was unreservedly adopted. We can keep the term, but it is important to shake it free of the meaning usually attributed to it in biology" (Marr 1929, p. 2).

39 Marr, *IR*-5, pp. 184–185.

pean protolanguage; both were looking for a non-genetic typology, i.e., one based on *acquisition*. As we have seen, it was through their shared rejection of the idea that languages were genetically pure and their close attention to *boundaries* – boundaries within which Same remained Same despite differences and beyond which Other was still Other despite similarities – that they belonged to the *air du temps*. Meillet had worked to maintain boundaries: contamination, if it existed, was vague and always occurred within a genetic family. Trubetzkoy abolished all genetic barriers, but only to better construct *natural,* still more impassable, more tightly sealed ones. As for Marr, he was torn. Universal hybridization, which became an evolutionary principle in his thinking, had to lead to the overall *fusion* of all languages, yet his stages were likewise hermetically sealed, and the shift from one to the next always involved discontinuity (leaps), though there could be traces of earlier stages: *survivals*.

These two approaches, each of which proclaimed it had reversed the organicist model, actually protracted the use of that model, each in its own way. Both were developed in the 1920s yet partook of a nineteenth-century episteme; neither succeeded in making or perhaps even sought to make linguistics an independent science defined by a specific object of study. Above and beyond the two metaphorical systems – Marr's geological metaphor with its strata and sedimentation, its periods (primary, secondary), fossils (survivals), streaks of biologist thinking (crossing); the organicist metaphor of the Eurasianists with their non-Darwinian evolutionary model of teleological convergence – both these types of thought about language and languages explored fundamentally *anthropological* concerns.

And the opposition between the two groups becomes blurred because while both read Hegel, each did so in its own way. Both borrowed the Hegelian notion of philosophy of history and expressed Hegelian confidence that laws could be found and absolute certainty about determinism. Lastly, both saw individuals as nothing more than representatives of a group that transcended them. For Eurasianists that group was a stratified national community; for Marr it was alternatively an ethnic group or a class-based one. In this sense, both approaches were thoroughly anti-humanist.

It matters little, then, that for Marr there was a single human language of which the various living or dead languages were manifestations in time and space and that for Trubetzkoy, on the contrary, the various languages were *necessarily* different and could at best be grouped together within closed historical-cultural sets. For in the end both sets of thinkers thought of systems as closed and separate. For Marr the idea that language "systems" were dependent on socioeconomic stages presupposed the coexistence of social formations entirely cut off from each other, devoid of any contact, each with its own "ideology" and "way

of thinking." For Trubetzkoy, drawing on Danilevsky's ideas, and for Jakobson, drawing on de Maistre's, communities were not only separate but impenetrable to each other.

Russian anthropological thinking of the 1920s and 1930s was of course based on new material, unknown to Western scholars. But we can also discern in it a degree of existential insecurity in the confrontation with the West, and this applies both to emigrants and scholars working within the triumphant Stalinist world.

However, despite all their declarations, Marrists and Eurasianists did not create any epistemologically *other science*. Both belonged more to the *air* of their *temps* than to an *air du lieu*. On the other hand, we cannot have full knowledge of the European *air du temps* if we do not take into account the Russian way of partaking in European intellectual life. Eurasianists participated in the birth of European structuralism; Marrists in the birth of modern typology (primarily through Meshchaninov's school).

In fact, if "Russian thought" is not absolutely unique this is because behind the opposition between Marrists and Eurasianists can be discerned the well-known opposition between evolutionist, universalist thinking derived from Enlightenment philosophy and the relativist understanding of separate spaces that came into being in the Counter-Enlightenment Romantic movement and served as inspiration for German anthropogeography in Bismarck's time though it can be traced back to Vico and as far as the Sophists.[40] That opposition is rooted in late eighteenth-century philosophical and ideological movements and the reshaping of scientific questions in the natural and social sciences and humanities that followed on the failure of the French Revolution and on changes in how the Revolution was received in the Germanic and Slavic worlds. And it is profoundly paradoxical that Eurasianists and Marrists, opposed to each other just as Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment thinkers were, should have come together in rejection of the West in a manner continuous with the great discomfort around Russian self-identity that had begun with the reforms wreaked by Peter the Great.

After this detour through Marrism – crucial if we are to grasp what was at issue in the controversial opposition between evolutionism and diffusionism – we can return to the issue of language unions, this time in connection with the notion of *affinity*.

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40 See Berlin 1976.

Third part: **Nature**

Chapter 6
Affinities

With their notion of language union, Jakobson and Trubetzkoy, each in his own way, set about reversing perspectives on the classic problem of relations between languages. Refuting the genetic model that had dominated since the emergence of comparative grammar, deriding like many others the rigid image of the genealogical tree popularized by Schleicher, they belonged to a current of thinking that called into question the acquisitions of comparatism, particularly neogrammarian dogma. In this they belonged to their time. However, they also stood out within the overall linguistic community for their new thinking on relations between languages, thinking founded on a subtle interpretation of the notion of *affinity*. Affinity for them did not amount to mere *resemblance* between languages but rather the wonder-inducing discovery of an *attraction* between them.

The complex problem of identity, difference and similarity between languages was a focus of intense activity in the Prague Linguistic Circle not only for Jakobson and Trubetzkoy but also for the Czech members of the Circle, Havránek and Skalička. Nonetheless, it was Trubetzkoy who first put forward the *language union* notion (in 1923) and Jakobson who introduced the notion of *convergences* into linguistics.[1] The great innovators were the Russians.

We can now explore the historical phases through which the concept of affinity developed in linguistics. I first review how it was used in other fields of knowledge. A critical comparison of several approaches should enable us to determine if not the common point of departure at least the commonly accepted alternatives underlying the various reversals of the relation between *affinity* and its counterpart, *kinship*.

The notion of affinity was interpreted in two very different ways across history and in the different disciplines. One was static and as such close to the notion of *resemblance*; the other dynamic and close to *attraction*. The two were antithetical yet constantly dependent on each other; at times they became quite inextricable. Do two entities have to be similar in order to be grouped together (i.e., "birds of a feather flock together"), or on the contrary, do they have to be different in order to come together? Two different types of reasoning are implied here, two sets of metaphors, meanings that were constantly slipping and sliding, interpretations that involved the interchanging of terms. The epistemological consequences of those interchangings and reversals are still being felt to this day.

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1 Jakobson 1931a; 1931b.

As explained, it makes no sense to study a linguist's work in isolation. Scientific linguistic work is always produced against the backdrop of other sciences, other writings, background *doxa*, a "climate of opinion." Jakobson was no more of a solitary genius than anyone else. He was quite active at linguistics conferences throughout the interwar period ; he read continuously, occasionally quoting what he read, and he had a tendency to cite anything that could possibly serve his own thinking, regardless of discipline or source – whatever would serve his cause.[2] It is not easy to reconstitute the coherence of Jakobson's intellectual world but the affinities notion is a good avenue of investigation, allowing us to discern successive layers of knowledge and metaphor, discovery and terminology transfer. In science nothing is ever forgotten. Quite often one does not even know that one knows something; one does not know where what one knows comes from; at times one remembers something without recognizing the process as one of memory. There is no mystery in this: we are all constantly reading writers who have read other writers who have read still other writers and so on. More significant here than pseudo-forgetting are successive rearticulations. Taking seriously Jakobson's many allusions to fields other than linguistics, particularly the anti-Darwinian biology of his time, and to Goethe's novel *Elective Affinities* will eventually lead to a philosophical inquiry into identity and difference, an inquiry that in turn constitutes the basis for the shift from nature to culture in the field of anthropology.

1 Two types of resemblance

1.1 A matter of boundaries

There is something profoundly disturbing in the inherent ambivalence of our keyword "affinity." Depending on period, field and doctrine, it could designate mere resemblance, near-kinship, real kinship or something understood as both superior to kinship and radically different from it.

Etymologically, the word derives from the Latin *adfinitas > affinitas*, in turn derived from the adjective *adfinis*, formed from *finis*: limit or boundary. Initially the term was used in Roman cadastral law and designated neighboring proper-

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2 For example, he championed Van Ginneken's interest in affinities but neglected to mention that Van Ginneken's biologistic position was very different from his own. The two linguists' ways of formulating the problem were similar but their proposed solutions were not only different but virtually incompatible; see Van Ginneken 1935.

ties. Thus *adfinis* meant "bordering" or "adjoining" (*regiones adfines barbaris*: "regions bordering on the Barbarians or Barbarian territory").[3] The related noun meant "relative by marriage" (the spatial meaning of "neighborhood" had thus been extended to *chosen* kinship relations). The noun *adfinitas* also designated 1) immediate surroundings and 2) kinship through the marriage tie. By extension, it could mean "special relationship": *literarum adfinitas*: "the kinship or close relationship between certain letters." The shift from *boundary* to *marriage tie* can probably be explained by the development of property law.

1.2 Codifying the act of coming together: the legal and anthropological notion of "alliance" (union by marriage)

The French word *affinité(s)* first appeared in legal vocabulary in the twelfth century with the meaning of neighborhood. By the thirteenth century it had come to mean kinship by *alliance* – i.e., marriage. In French civil law, marriage-based kinship indicated *degree* of proximity with spouse's family induced by matrimony. Affinity generated legal obligations similar to those of kinship: the husband's obligation to feed the family and prohibitions on who could marry whom. *Spiritual affinity,* meanwhile, was *contracted* by the godfather and godmother of a baptized child or by each with the child's father or mother. Under the general term "kinship," canon law established a systematic opposition between relatives by marriage and blood relatives, the latter being defined as all relatives to whom one is not related by marriage, or *alliance*.

In the fourteenth century, through a kind of slippage, the meaning of similarity or resemblance between two things appeared, followed by that of harmony between two persons' tastes, sentiments, etc., a meaning which could extend to the idea of agreement, sympathy, attraction, inclination: *the affinity between their characters and tastes inclined them to live together.* The implicit understanding here is that attraction is generated by resemblance.

Relations between the words "affinity" and "kinship" in the field of anthropology deserve special attention. In connection with what is currently called "kinship systems," the word "parenté" (kinship) according to Littré's dictionary of the French language could have two different meanings: blood relations and "collectively, all of a given person's relatives, by blood or marriage." In the first case, *affinity* designates the marriage relationship and thus stands opposed to

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3 Another sense of *adfinis* is "mixed up in something, having taken part in something" (*ejus rei auctores adfinesque:* "the instigators of and accomplices to this crime"). This meaning was not kept in French but its sense of "participation in" should be kept in mind.

kinship at the same level, whereas in the second, *kinship* is a generic term divided into genetic kinship (or consanguinity; that is, a narrower sense of kinship) and kinship by marriage, another name for which was affinity. *Kinship* is thus all or part of this "system" of relations. But it seems commonly acknowledged that resemblance (that is, a phenomenon due to consanguinity) should not lead to attraction – this is of course the gist of the incest prohibition.

1.3 Cohesion and attraction: alchemy and chemistry

The use of the word *affinity* in chemistry is of more direct interest in this chapter than its use in anthropology as it leads us to Jakobson by way of Goethe.[4] The notion was already present in the thinking of the Greek atomists, where it was understood to mean *sympathy*, *tendency to come together* – i.e., that which caused atoms to unite. The word itself was first used in the Middle Ages in alchemists' speculations on the transmutation of metals; it referred to the combination of two substances (Albertus Magnus [1193–1280] used it in this connection). The belief at the time was that chemical compounds only formed if the bodies they were composed of possessed similar *qualities*: only similar things could come together. In the eighteenth century, the term affinity designated the *property* of two bodies to come together by way of their similar particles (Etienne François Geoffroy, *Affinity Tables*, 1718). However, some time later it came to designate the *tendency* of one or more substances to combine chemically. Resemblance was no longer a necessary condition of attraction; a given element could have an *affinity* for oxygen, for example.

In differentiating between the chemistry question and the common meaning of resemblance, Pierre Larousse's *Grand dictionnaire du 19ème siècle* offered an important clarification:

> The language of chemistry gave the word affinity an entirely different meaning than the common one. In chemistry it can be said that two bodies have an affinity for one another when they are likely to combine immediately upon contact. This definition would be entirely false if it meant that the bodies were akin to each other; that is, that they presented the same or analogous properties. On the contrary, *the less similar they are, the greater their aptitude and tendency to combine (*entry "affinités"; my italics).[5]

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4 Jakobson drew arguments from Goethe and translated *Wahlverwandtschaft* into French as "convergence de développement" [converging development] (Jakobson 1938 [1971a, p. 236]).

5 However, any reversal here is more a matter of alchemical than "vulgar" causality. It is not at all clear why attraction should be conditional on resemblance in the common meaning.

The *theory of affinities* is linked to the name of the Swedish chemist Torbern Bergman (1735–1784). In his *Affinity Tables* (1775) Bergman defined the affinity of one body for another using new terminology drawn from algebraic notation:

Simple affinity is when both bodies are free: A + B – >AB;

Elective affinity is when a simple body destroys a composite one by seizing one of its components: AB + C – >AC + B;

Complex affinity is when contact between two compound bodies leads each to divide so that their composite elements become part of two different compounds: AB + CD – >AC + BD.

Elective affinity alone allows for measuring degree of *simple affinity*.

Goethe was interested in chemistry.[6] In 1785 a German translation of Bergman's work was published under the title *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, a word modeled on the Latin scientific term *attractio electiva*.[7] Goethe meant his work to operate as a counterforce against the threatened destruction of the unity of knowledge, the breaking down of knowledge into separate disciplines, especially the division into exact and human sciences or "sciences of the mind": *Geisteswissenschaften*. On this point *Elective Affinities* (Goethe reused Bergman's title) was perfectly in line with *Naturphilosophie*. The novel runs on the thesis that everything in nature obeys the same laws. For Goethe there were inexorable *correspondences* between attraction between chemical bodies and attraction between human hearts in love – therein lies the intrigue of the novel. Science and life, chemistry and literature could not be separated: if the force attracting B to C was stronger than the one linking B to A, then B and A would separate – a perfect reproduction of Bergman's elective affinity: AB + C – >AC + B. Goethe set out to prove not that life was governed by the laws of chemistry but that the different levels of reality were in fact coextensive. Though a declared opponent of Newton in many areas (particularly color theory), Goethe shared Newton's hope that a general theory of attraction might unify "celestial physics" and "earthly chemistry" under a single law. His particular contribution was to suggest that this superior law might also apply to the sphere of human rela-

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6 On Goethe's scientific ideas and the Romantic episteme overall, see Gusdorf 1993, vol. 2, p. 197ff. On the scientific bases of Goethe's novel *Elective Affinities,* see Adler 1990, from whom I have borrowed a number of ideas here.

7 The Latin title of Bergman's 1755 work was *Disquisitio de attractionibus electivis* (A Dissertation on Elective Attractions). It is of no help to us that *attractio* was translated *Verwandtschaft*, for that word also means "kinship." The ambivalence of the German term should probably be considered yet another source of the misunderstandings that the word *affinity* has been giving rise to ever since it was introduced into linguistics.

tions – and serve as a foundation for esthetics. Humanity was thus apprehended in terms of a universal order – thitherto unexplained because insufficiently studied – that encompassed all levels of reality from molecules to stars. In fact, that order recombined components of a tradition whose origins can be traced back to the neo-Platonists, then forward again to the Renaissance and the theory of universal *sympathia*, the force understood to link together all parts of the cosmos.

In the work of the Florentine philosopher and propagator of Platonist ideas Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499), *sympathia* operated as an "occult quality," giving rise to otherwise inexplicable phenomena ranging from human love to the movement of the planets. Descartes' critique of "occult qualities" two centuries later in his *Principia philosophiae* (1644) undermined the basis of these theories, and *sympathia*, now understood as "attraction," was transformed in Newton's thought into a physics concept. Though Goethe constantly moved about among these successive strata, the framework of his thought was fundamentally contemporary and paradoxically Newtonian.

In *Elective Affinities,* Eduard and his friend the Captain try to explain to Charlotte how all animate beings are held together through a force for internal cohesion and consistency. Charlotte takes up the lesson mid-course and moves it in the direction of external attraction between persons, thus shifting the focus from the power of *cohesion* (which ensures identity) to the power of *affinity* (the basis for attraction):

> "Let me hurry on," said Charlotte, "and see whether I have guessed aright what you are coming to. Just as each thing has an adherence to itself, so it must also have a relationship to other things."
>
> "And that will differ according to the difference between them," Eduard hurriedly went on. "Sometimes they will meet as friends and old acquaintances who hasten together and unite without changing each other in any way, as wine mixes with water. On the other hand there are others who remain obdurate strangers to one another and refuse to unite in any way even through mechanical mixing and grinding, as oil and water shaken together will a moment later separate again (Goethe [1809] 1971, pp. 51–52).

The notion of cohesion soon leads to defining affinities and trying to figure out what causes them:

> "Not too fast with your lecture," said Charlotte, "Let me show that I am keeping up. Have we not already arrived at the affinities?"
>
> "Quite right," the Captain replied; "and we shall straightway go on to see exactly what they are and what their force consists in. Those natures which, when they meet, quickly lay hold on and mutually affect one another we call affined. This affinity is sufficiently striking in

the case of alkalis and acids which, although they are mutually antithetical, and perhaps precisely because they are so, most decidedly seek and embrace one another, modify one another, and together form a new substance. Think only of lime, which evidences a great inclination, a decided desire for union with acids of every kind." ...

"Let me confess," said Charlotte, "that when you call all these curious entities of yours affined, they appear to me to possess not so much an affinity of blood as an affinity of mind and soul. It is in just this way that truly meaningful friendships can arise among human beings: for antithetical qualities make possible a closer and more intimate union" (*ibid.*, pp. 52–53).

With the terms *inclination* and *decided desire for union,* we come to the central notion of *predisposition*, which implies a necessary rather than fortuitous or contingent union:

"Let us then go straight ahead," said the Captain, "and connect this idea with what we have already defined and discussed. For example: what we call limestone is more or less pure calcium oxide intimately united with a thin acid known to us in a gaseous state. If you put a piece of this limestone into dilute sulphuric acid, the latter will seize on the lime and join with it to form calcium sulphate, or gypsum; that thin gaseous acid, on the other hand, escapes. Here there has occurred a separation and a new combination, and one then feels justified even in employing the term 'elective affinity,' because it really does look as if one relationship was preferred to another and chosen instead of it."

"Forgive me," said Charlottte, "as I forgive the scientist, but I would never see a choice here but rather a natural necessity" (ibid., p. 54).

Goethe's novel ends tragically with the death of the two protagonists: the law of affinities seems to run contrary to human happiness. But it offers reliable assistance in understanding the epistemological and cultural bases of Jakobson's and Trubetzkoy's world, ruled by an order both harmonious *and* implacable.

1.4 Impossible taxonomy: affinity in biology[8]

While in legal terms affinity is contingent (acquired) union and in chemistry, necessary union (that is, based on a natural, *innate* predisposition), biology inherited both understandings, and with them a metaphorical material as copious as it was unwieldy when it came to resolving the infinitely more complex issue of taxonomy as raised in *Naturphilosophie.* In the eighteenth and pre-Darwinian nine-

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8 In this section I have drawn primarily on Mayr 1989.

teenth century, the term *affinity* had two meanings in biology that were not only opposed but also intertwined. The first was *resemblance,* called *natural affinity* and deduced from similarities between living beings. Resemblances of this kind were the basis for classification. But natural affinity operated within groups (attraction between members of a single species) and between sexes, and when biologists grew more interested in the issue of hybridization they began to use the word affinity to designate attraction between members of *different* species and to define distinct degrees of affinity in terms of the possibility and/or results of hybridization.

In the nineteenth century the term *affinity* was used in biology with the meaning of *resemblance* between individuals and between species and as a basis for classification. It designated different species' faculty for mating and producing viable hybrids. The term here referred to sexual or physiological affinities.

Linnaeus had compared affinities between plants to territories on a geographical map: "*Plantae omnes utrinque affinitatem monstrant, uti territorium in mappa geographica*" (*Philosophica botanica*, §77). The map, then, could figuratively *represent* affinities, whereas for Jakobson the spatial distribution of languages *explained* affinities.

Hybrids in biology are not the same things as compounds in chemistry. As we shall see, mixed languages in linguistics raised still other problems. But the metaphorical chain was omnipresent.

Prior to evolutionism the word "affinities" meant "similarities" of a sort that reflected the general order of the universe, the Creator's plan. All living beings were classified by way of a single scale of perfection, the *scala naturae*. Then, in the early nineteenth century, during the period of *Naturphilosophie*, the notion begin to emerge that there could be *two types of similarities*: "true [essential] affinity" and another kind, designated *analogy* by Schelling, Oken and their successors.[9] Thus penguins were linked to ducks by true affinity but to aquatic mammals such as whales by analogy. Falcons were akin to parrots and pigeons but "analogous to carnivorous mammals." The notion of *function* would soon emerge. It was on this basis that the English anatomist Richard Owen (1804–1892) developed the opposition between *homology* and *analogy* that from then on dominated comparative anatomy, especially after it was redefined in the theory of evolution.

In 1843 Owen systematized the *Naturphilosophie* opposition between *affinity* and *analogy,* except that the word *affinity* was replaced by *homology*. Organs or body parts that had the same *function* in different animals regardless of their

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9 Curiously, it was only *after* the work of linguists such as Schleicher that Darwin published his ideas on similarities as evidence of descent from a common ancestor (*The Origin of Species*, 1859).

origin (e.g., wings in birds and wings in insects) were *analogous* while organs of the same origin in different animals and regardless of form or function were *homologous* (e.g., birds' wings and whales' pectoral fins).

The above opposition between inherited and acquired similarities became important for the Prague Russians' structural linguistics through the work of the geographer and biologist Lev S. Berg (1876–1950).[10] In a letter to V. Shklovsky dated February 26, 1929, Jakobson wrote, "I read Berg's book on nomogenesis with passionate interest."[11] In later years he recommended the work several times to Noam Chomsky.[12]

In *Nomogenez* ("Nomogenesis" or law-determined and regulated evolution), published in 1922, Berg explicitly rejected Darwinian theory. Drawing support from Owen's theories, he emphasized the notion of *convergence*; that is, unrelated organisms' independent acquisition of similar characteristics.[13] But whereas Owens was trying to understand homologies, Berg overturned the value scale. The focus of his research was *analogies*, and he sought to show that in diametric opposition to Darwinian theory, evolution did not proceed by divergence from a common ancestor but rather by the convergence of unrelated organisms living in the same environmental conditions.

For Darwin as for Schleicher, once species (or languages) had broken off from the common trunk, the only species or languages they could resemble were those they descended from; there were no acquired similarities. For Berg the opposite occurred: the reason whales so strongly resemble fish while being unrelated to them is that they have *acquired* fish-like attributes – similarities – by living in the same medium as fish. This was not some new form of determinism or climate theory. Berg insisted that there were *predispositions* (*predraspolozheniia)* to *predetermined* (*predopredelennaia)* evolution:

> Characters by which highly organized groups are distinguished appear in the shape of rudiments much earlier in lowly constituted groups. Hence it may be seen that evolution is to a

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10 Berg initially trained as a zoologist but his wide-ranging interests led him from biogeography to geography understood as the "science of *Landschaft*." Berg was a remarkable figure whose life and work deserve to be studied in detail. His theory of *nomogenesis* was qualified as "idealist" in the first and second editions of the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, though this did not prevent him from serving as president of the Geographical Society of the USSR from 1940 to 1950, at the height of the Stalinist period, or being admitted to the Academy of Sciences in 1946. On Berg and the ways in which his thought drew on Karl Ernst von Baer's, see Caussat 1997. Berg's *Nomogenez* attracted considerable attention abroad; it was translated into English four years after it came out in Russian (Berg 1926).

11 Letter published in Toman 1994, p. 61.

12 *Ibid*., p. 23.

13 Berg 1922, p. 105.

considerable degree *predetermined*; that it is in the same degree an *unfolding* or manifestation of preexisting rudiments (Berg 1922, p. 278 [1969 (1926), p. 403]).

Jakobson later seized on this theory of imitative development among organisms living in the same medium or environment, and with Savitsky's help he used it to develop a notion of language convergence, the basis of his *language union* theory. What is particularly destabilizing in Jakobson's text is that he used the word *affinity* with its biological meaning of *analogy*, thereby reversing the terms of the *Naturphilosophie* opposition. Taking the binary opposition *inherited similarities / acquired similarities* as a guideline, we can follow the terminological and conceptual changes in the course of which the word *affinity* switched sides:

	Inherited similarities	Acquired similarities
Naturphilosophie	<u>*affinity*</u>	*analogy*
Owen	*homology*	*analogy*
Berg	*divergence → homology*	*convergence → analogy*
Jakobson	*divergence → kinship*	*convergence →* <u>*affinity*</u>

It thus seems possible to identify three fundamental, intermingled meanings of the word *affinity* in modern English: from marriage-based kinship and simple resemblance by similarity or analogy we move by way of chemistry in the Romantic period to the idea of predisposition, propensity to come together, mutual attraction, spontaneous attraction between different, genetically unrelated objects or beings.

We can therefore distinguish two different evolutionary lines for the term *affinity* (or *affinities),* lines that seem divergent but are actually quite sinuous and occasionally come so close together as to touch. There is the legal line, where affinity is *contracted* union, and there is the alchemical and later chemical line, where affinity is the *force* of attraction between bodies *predisposed* to that attraction.

2 A disconcerting ambiguity: acquired or innate resemblances in linguistics

The misfortune, or charm, of linguists' work is the difficulty they have agreeing on the meaning of the words they use. The threat is particularly serious in this case, where the problem is not one of proliferating specialized terminology; rather, a word as innocuous and frequently used as *affinity* was used quite confi-

dently with two opposite meanings, and no precautions were taken to stabilize its content or even point up the divergence.

2.1 From an evolutionist to a diffusionist model

The term affinities seems to have been used for the first time in linguistics by William Jones (1746–1794) in his renowned Discourse to the Royal Asiatic Society of Calcutta in 1786. When he spoke of Sanskrit's "affinities" to Greek and Latin the meaning was "resemblances":

> The Sanskrit language, whatever be its antiquity, is of a wonderful structure; more perfect than the Greek, more copious than the Latin, and more exquisitely refined than either, yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity, both in the roots of verbs and the forms of grammar, than could possibly have been produced by accident; so strong indeed, that no philologer could examine them all three without believing them to have sprung from some common source, which, perhaps, no longer exists: there is a similar reason, though not quite so forcible, for supposing that both the Gothic and the Celtic, though blended with a very different idiom, had the same origin with the Sanskrit, and the old Persian might be added to this family (Jones 1786, p. 34; my italics).

In Jones's time, linguists were just beginning to be able to explain resemblance in terms of common origin; that is, genetic kinship. No other explanation seemed possible. Languages that exhibited so many similarities had to be *consubstantial*. Two years earlier, in *On the Gods of Greece, Italy and India*, Jones had already interpreted resemblance as an *indication* of common origin:

> When features of resemblance, too strong to have been accidental, are observable in different systems of polytheism, ... we can scarce help believing that some connection has immemorially subsisted between the several nations who have adopted them (Jones 1807, vol. 3, p. 319).

He concluded that

> [w]e shall perhaps agree at last ... that Egyptians, Indians, Greeks and Italians proceeded originally from one central place, and that the same people carried their religion and sciences into China and Japan: may we not add even to Mexico and Peru?
> (ibid., p. 387).

For Max Müller the notion of kinship was an improvement on the notion of affinity, which for him clearly meant nothing more than similarity:

> The first great step in advance, therefore, which was made in the classification of languages, chiefly through the discovery of Sanskrit, was this, that scholars were no longer satisfied with the idea of a general relationship, but began to inquire [into] the different degrees of relationship in which each member of a class stood to another. Instead of mere *classes*, we hear now for the first time of well-regulated *families* of language (Müller 1862, p. 170; quoted in Claudine Normand 1976, p. 73; http://www.gutenberg.org/files/32856/32856-h/32856-h.html; my italics).

In that value system, genealogy beat out taxonomy. Resemblances were considered interesting only in so far as they helped prove genetic kinship, the only phenomenon worthy of linguists' attention.

Saussure too used the term "affinity" in his *Cours de Linguistique générale,* in this case to mean resemblance explicable by genetic kinship (p. 14); here the term referred anaphorically to "relations that unite" (e.g. that unite Sanskrit to Germanic, Greek, Latin, etc.).[14]

The fact is that other linguists at the same time gave the word the opposite meaning from its initial one of "resemblance" between languages. This was how the shift occurred from the legal meaning of marriage tie to the chemical one of *predisposition to attraction*. There was no particular reason for *resemblance* to be at all related to *attraction*, nor for it to be an effect or even a cause. Yet it was in this direction that Jakobson began speculating in the late 1920s.

It is hard to identify the exact moment that *affinity* as a linguistic term switched meanings from similarity due to genetic kinship to similarity due to acquired kinship or union, from innate to acquired, from derivation to borrowing, from descent to imitation – in sum, from evolution to diffusion.

In Pierre Larousse's *Grand Dictionnaire Universel du 19ème Siècle,*[15] the notion of affinity in linguistics was still synonymous with kinship. The exact word was not used, surely because it seemed self-evident that similarity could only indicate descent, shared origin:

> Language affinity: the relation obtaining between various languages belonging to the same family:
> *There are several affinities between Arabic and Syriac.*
> *The affinity between French, German and Russian is obvious to the scholar* (Renan).
> *No conclusion can be drawn about original affinity between languages from the fact that a certain number of roots are identical* (Renan).

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14 In a note on this passage, de Mauro cites a handwritten version of the *Cours* (Engler 1967, B18–25) in which the key words are *analogie*, *parenté* [kinship], *similitude* [similarity] (between Sanskrit on one hand, Greek, Latin and Germanic on the other) rather than *affinité*; see De Mauro 1979, p. 411.

15 Republished by Slatkine, Geneva and Paris, 1982; date of the 1st edition not indicated.

But already in the *Grand Larousse Encyclopédique* (Paris, 1960), affinity was opposed to kinship:

> Linguistics: language affinities: features shared by languages of different groups (for example, monosyllabic words, which are common to Chinese, Vietnamese and Thai).

Likewise in the nine-volume *Dictionnaire Robert* (1985):

> In linguistics, the fact of exhibiting analogies in structure regardless of genetic kinship.

No French dictionary or encyclopedia notes the moment at which the shift occurred from one meaning to the other or provides a source for it. For Dubois et al. (1973), "People speak of ...": for Ducrot and Schaeffer (1995), "It has been observed that ...." Mounin (1974) does not mention affinities. Marouzeau (1969) gives the tersest of definitions, and it seems to have been adopted by all post-World War II dictionaries and encyclopedias:

> Affinity: quality of two languages exhibiting structural analogies regardless of whether they are related.[16]

It is interesting to note the *negative* nature of this definition. These are *non-inherited* similarities; that is, phenomena that do not fit into the generally accepted model of relations between languages. A *typological* problematic was coming into focus, disengaged from the purely genealogical approach yet not implying geographical *contact*. Consider the following example:

> We speak of *affinity* between two or more languages that are not in the least genetically related when those languages exhibit certain typological resemblances (sentence organization, general vocabulary, declension, etc.). For example, the similarities between Latin declension and Russian declension are due to genetic kinship since comparative grammar attributes a common Indo-European origin to them. On the other hand, resemblances between Takelma and Indo-European are due to a certain affinity (Dubois et al. 1973, pp. 16–17).

August Friedrich Pott seems to have been the first to establish an explicit opposition between *affinity* (*Affinität*) and *genetic kinship* (*Sprachkonsanguinität*).[17] In

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16 Interestingly, the break has not even been definitive: in a recent edition of the great *Oxford English Dictionary* (1989) language affinity is still defined in terms of genetic kinship: "Affinity: Structural resemblance between languages arising from and proving their origin from a common stock."

17 Pott 1859, p. XIV. On this point see Makaev 1972, p. 292.

1859 Pott suggested distinguishing between inherited resemblances and language affinity, the latter characterized by appropriation of foreign features (*borrowings*) that gives rise to *mixed* entities. He emphasized hybridization and language mix, thus breaking for the first time with the strictly organicist model of language, though his work did not call into question the great biological metaphor. It was also in reflecting on hybridization that Schuchardt came to reject any kind of opposition between affinity and kinship (*elementar Sprachverwandtschaft* and *Urverwandtschaft*); for him all languages were the product of mixing.[18] This is of course the theme of generalized hybridization, later found in the thought of both Baudouin de Courtenay (1901) and Shcherba (1925). That idea amounted to effacing boundaries between languages (see the thinking of the Italian Neolinguist Bartoli[19]): anything could be borrowed.[20]

Martinet (1959) was extremely skeptical about the notion of affinity, which he understood as a subcategory of the generic term *kinship*:

> Contemporary linguists are increasingly tempted to accept the idea that there is a kind of linguistic kinship called "*affinity*" that unites languages that do not ultimately go back to the same prototype. This is not a universally accepted opinion; there are still linguists who would reject as fantastic any suggestion of structural resemblance between genetically unrelated languages, or view such resemblances as due to chance, the effect of a psycho-biological substratum common to all mankind – in sum, a case of what Hugo Schuchardt called *Elementarverwandtschaft* (Martinet 1975 [1959], p. 25; my italics).

2.2 Jakobson's phonological affinities

More than 2000 years of history of philosophy lie behind the question of whether two things are similar or different. Jakobson's thinking on the subject does not offer any philosophical revelations, but it has the advantage of being explicitly confined to linguistics, though this does not exclude the problem of resemblance

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18 See Schuchardt 1917 and 1922, pp. 194–199. "Elementary affinities" are features that could be thought of as belonging to human language in general, to all human languages, regardless of genetic kinship. This notion is linked to the anthropological notion of *Elementargedanken* in the work of Adolf Bastian (1868).

19 Reference here is to Bartoli's "proposition 20," less frequently cited than "proposition 22" but just as important: "All creations of language, whether lexical or not, stylistic or not, Latin or not, can be imitated; that is, borrowed" (Bartoli 1928, p. 32).

20 On this basis Daniel Baggioni (1986) suggested establishing an opposition between linguistics of *langue*, based on the idea of closed systems, and linguistics of *langage*, in which the notion of system is rejected and anything can become part of anything else (Schleicher, the Italian Neolinguists).

by way of common properties or common origin from the broader debate on innate and acquired features.

Jakobson and Trubetzkoy's problem was to explain why and how languages not at all genetically related to each other could exhibit shared features, features they considered *superior* to resemblances that could be explained in terms of common origin, features they believed *revealed* a higher order of phenomena. They thus partook of the aforementioned reversal of values, but they never clearly presented any justification for it. In what way were *acquired* resemblances superior to *inherited* ones?

The question here is which more or less latent metaphorical system did Jakobson use when *constructing* his "linguistic affinities" – which were first and foremost "phonological affinities" – all the while claiming to have *discovered* them, to have defined a resolutely new object of study, to have brought about what, following Bachelard, is called an epistemological break.

It is against the background of the hybridization and language purity problematic that Jakobson's use of the term affinity in the 1920s and 1930s acquires meaning, and it does so by contrast. This does not seem to have been pointed out – and that oversight has had many consequences. In fact, Jakobson established an explicit opposition between affinity (*srodstvo*) and kinship (*rodstvo*). The problem of translating these terms is particularly delicate given that in Russian they are sometimes used interchangeably, both in opposition to *svojstvo*, which means affinity but only in the sense of *kinship through marriage*. The idea was that not all resemblances were necessarily due to genetic kinship.[21] In the late 1920s and early 1930s Jakobson was fine-tuning his theory of the "phonological union of Eurasian languages"; that is, the languages spoken in the USSR. As we know, he maintained that they all had in common one positive feature – phonological correlation of palatalization – and one negative one – absence of polytony (Jakobson 1931).

For Jakobson, then, affinities were resemblances that in no way depended on genetic kinship but did not pertain to typology either.[22] They were not inherited but acquired through spatial contact and convergence:

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21 Here Jakobson was disagreeing with Meillet without naming him. In "Convergence des développements linguistiques" (1918), Meillet had asserted that resemblances, or what he called *concordances,* could only appear within one and the same genetic language family.

22 It is worth noting that in his 1958 text (see below), areal studies are quite different from typology; they do not use the same method or investigate the same thing. But Trubetzkoy, speaking in 1933 at the Third Congress of Linguists in Rome, did use the word *typology* in opposition to *kinship* (Trubetzkoy 1935c, p. 327). In the 1930s, then, the terminology was still loose, evidence of thought in gestation.

An affinity – in other words, a structural similarity unifying contiguous languages – brings them together in an *association*. The notion of language association is broader than that of family; a family is only a particular case of association. Meillet has said that "when evolution has been fairly identical, the result is the same as when languages were highly similar from the outset." *Convergence des développements* (*Wahlverwandtschaft,* as Goethe called it) manifests itself in both system modifications and conservation tendencies, namely the sorting that occurs to determine which construction principles will remain intact. The "initial sameness" revealed by comparative grammar is only another state of converging development and in no way precludes simultaneous or earlier divergences (Jakobson 1938 [1971a, p. 236]).

In a 1958 article entitled "Typological studies," Jakobson made an even sharper distinction between the problematic of affinity and that of typology. He classified similarities between languages into three types, defined by object of study, method, and whether or not these involved time-space coordinates.[23] That classification can be represented as follows:

method	object	factor
genetic	kinship	time
areal	affinities	space
typological	isomorphisms	(neither time nor space)

The three methods were in no way mutually exclusive; their "objects" coexisted, and differed.

We have already seen how Jakobson used all sorts of material to support his argument, citing other linguists to corroborate his theses without noting profound differences between his thinking and theirs. What matters here is that for him affinity was not a state but a dynamic process. That dynamic was based on a principle of *preformation*: languages converged not by adaptation but through the development or use of rudiments *already present* in them. Just as in Trubetzkoy's thinking languages followed a particular "evolutionary logic," so in Jakobson's they only came together because of a propensity to do so:

Languages only accept foreign structural components when those components correspond to their own developmental tendencies (Jakobson 1938 [1971a, p. 241]).

Some of your material enables us to look straight into the "mysteries of the universe." Is not the destiny of languages, like that of living forms, predetermined (the biologist Khitrovo's

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23 Jakobson 1958 [1971a, p. 524].

expression)?[24] (Savitsky in a letter to Jakobson of August 9, 1930, Jakobson Archives, MIT, published in Toman 1994, p. 134).

The notion of preformation, which is sometimes considered the equivalent of *predestination* in philosophy of history, is clearly biological in nature, that is, *naturalist*. It is highly enlightening to contrast that notion to the one developed by a contemporary of Jakobson's, J. Vendryès. Vendryès' term was *predisposition*, but by it he meant not a "tendency" to unite or resemble each other but practical similarity of the sort that facilitated "combination" or hybridization:

> The basis of pidgin English is Chinese – a grammar-poor language. Strictly speaking, [pidgin English] is Chinese that uses English words. Using English vocabulary, which lends itself remarkably well to the purpose, sentences are built whose word order perfectly reproduces Chinese word order. This gives rise to an odd combination that proves the aforementioned *affinity* between the two idioms. In this case there is indeed a particular language at the basis of the mix, but the very nature of that language – the fact that it is virtually devoid of grammar – particularly *disposed* it to the role that fell to it (Vendryès 1979 [1923], p. 323); my italics).

Not enough attention has been paid to the fact that the notion of affinities as an innate disposition to match up (a biochemical metaphor) was the dividing line between Jakobson and the immense majority of linguists studying language contact in his time. In Jakobson's thinking (in contrast to Sanfeld's and Pisani's) there was no room for the notion of "substrate" and there was no notion of "articulatory base" (in contrast to Van Ginneken's). The notion of space, meanwhile, which had been used unsystematically by Schuchardt and Baudouin de Courtenay (see the notion of "border bilingualism"), was geometric in Jakobson's thinking: a Platonic and Pythagorian notion of order and harmony.[25] We begin to glimpse the abyss between Jakobson and Meillet,[26] despite the Russian linguist's repeated, superficial curtseys to the French one. For Meillet, change was caused both "socially" and internally and only occurred within language families. Jakobson's idea of change was one of teleological evolution in which unrelated languages converged by means of affinities.

We have seen how the notion of affinity was pulled back and forth in conceptual history between the meaning of resemblance and that of attraction. The

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24 Vladimir Nikolaevich Khitrovo (1878–1949), biologist (Toman's note).

25 See Ch. 8.

26 Meillet's review of Jakobson's work on "the Eurasian language union" (Meillet 1931a) is a model of intellectual *malentendu*.

originality of Jakobson's position, founded on his interest in Berg's anti-Darwinian biology, was to maintain that that resemblance was *explained* by attraction:

Similarity

KINSHIP ⟋ AFFINITY

KINSHIP   AFFINITY
(inherited similarity)   (acquired similarity)

homologies   analogies
(langage families: (*Sprachbund*:
DIVERGENCES)   CONVERGENCES)

evolutionism   diffusionism
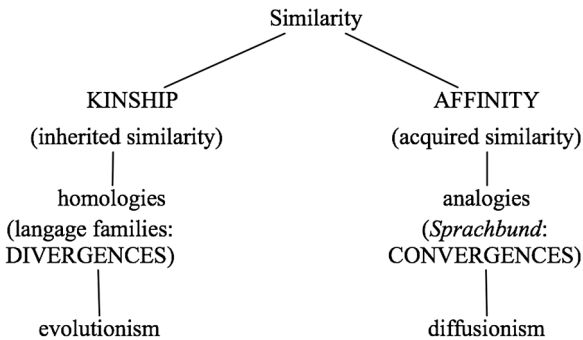
Fig. 10: evolutionism *vs* diffusionism in explaining similarity

What I presented at the start of this chapter as a terminological inquiry has shown beyond question that the problem of affinities greatly exceeds the matter of metaphor and the transfer of terms from one discipline to another. In fact, the issue is as much how a research object is defined, what its boundaries are, as it is the extremely ancient philosophical problem of sameness and difference. Surely the most surprising result is that Jakobson's solution was perfectly in line with nineteenth-century naturalism, despite his denials and claims to the contrary.

The next chapter examines that relation to naturalism.

Chapter 7
The biological model

Prosto tak nichego ne byvaet
[Nothing happens just like that]
(Russian idiom)

The question of affinities leads us to a new shelf in the ideal library of nascent structuralism; namely, *thinking in biology* as it relates to what we would today call *global ecology*. Many of the Prague Russian's concerns and ways of proceeding were related to highly specific contemporaneous debates on evolutionism in the field of biology, a science that long competed with linguistics as a source of models.

A superficial reading of Jakobson's multiform body of work might suggest that his many diatribes against Schleicher's naturalism meant he was one of the main representatives of a sociologistic tendency in linguistics that was quite widespread in Meillet's time:

> Need I recall that linguistics belongs to the social sciences, not natural history? Isn't this obvious? ... Schleicher's doctrine – the doctrine of a great naturalist in linguistics – was discredited long ago, but there are many survivals of it. ... That approach runs counter to the sociological orientation of modern linguistics (Jakobson 1938 [1971a, p. 234]).

Nonetheless, I shall be demonstrating that the approach of the two main representatives of the Prague Linguistic Circle was in fact extremely remote from sociological models of the type Meillet had borrowed from Durkheim. In fact, Trubetzkoy and Jakobson's understanding was based just like Schleicher's on a biological metaphor, except that theirs was resolutely anti-Darwinian and their biologistic model heavily dependent on specifically *Russian* reception of Darwin's thought.[1]

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[1] My reading here is not meant to be reductionist; Jakobson's and Trubetzkoy's thought obviously amounts to more than anti-Darwinian reaction. This is simply *another* reading, one that takes account of an aspect of that thought which has hardly been explored and deserves to be. Without this piece of the puzzle, our reception of structuralism would be incomplete and our apprehension of it inaccurate.

1 Teleology or causality?

Darwin's *Origin of the Species*, published in England in 1859, was translated into Russian in 1864. For Russians it came out at a perfect time: the country had recently lost the Crimean War (1855) and Alexander II was just undertaking his great reforms (serfdom was abolished in 1861); Russia was in a state of intellectual and ideological effervescence. In this context, the "radical" Russian intelligentsia enthusiastically embraced Darwin's theory as a total worldview, pleased to discover this source of support for its own anti-idealism and anti-Romanticism. For Darwin rejected all teleological understanding, explaining evolution instead in terms of causality: struggle for life, natural selection, survival of the fittest.

As in western European countries, theologians, philosophers and scientists in Russia were soon expressing anti-Darwin reaction. For our purposes, the most important member of the last category was undoubtedly the Baltic naturalist Karl Ernst von Baer (1792–1876), who favored a notion of universal natural development in the spirit of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*, where evolution was understood as the mind gradually expanding to dominate matter. This led Baer to emphasize Aristotelian teleology over Newtonian causality and to advocate a non-mechanistic explanation of evolution, at least in interpreting the organic world.[2] One particularity of the Russian situation, though, was the near-symbiotic relation between the natural sciences and Slavophile conservatism. Danilevsky, an influential essayist and philosopher of history who we know had strong Slavophile and pan-Slavist leanings, was himself a naturalist – an ichthyologist – and a student of Baer. In his *Darwinism* (1885), he refuted (external) causality, claiming that teleology was the correct explanatory approach to evolution: "internal factors" were the true source of *directional* organic change and universal harmony in living nature. But the most important point is that Danilevsky's argument was founded on the belief that Darwinism derived from "Western materialism." Like his friend K. Leontiev, Danilevsky viewed the conquests of Western science as a fundamental threat to the spiritual values that kept the Russian soul intact and gave it its distinct cultural and historical individuality.[3]

While Jakobson occasionally mentioned Danilevsky (in "Le mythe de la France en Russie," for example),[4] he quite often quoted Baer – whenever he needed him to provide a foundation for his attacks on a paradigm that many in the 1920s and 1930s thought of as a brand new type of scientificity; namely, the

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2 See Vucinich 1988b, p. 252.
3 See Vucinich 1988a, ch. 4.
4 Jakobson 1931f (1986, p. 161).

neogrammarian principle that all change in language had strictly *causal* origins.[5] However, the main biological reference for Jakobson during his Prague period was once again Lev S. Berg, whom we met in the last chapter in connection with *affinities*. In *Nomogenesis* (1922), which we know was a very important book for Jakobson, Berg laid out his explicitly anti-Darwinian conception of evolution, giving pride of place to the notion that living beings always complied with an aim (*celesoobraznost'*; *Zielstrebigkeit* in German, purposefulness or the quality of being goal-oriented). In his battle against the neogrammarians' causality principle, Jakobson drew on Berg's thinking to expound the principles of his own anti-Darwinism:

> According to Darwin, evolution is the sum of divergences resulting from accidental varia-
> tions undergone by individuals, variations that produce slow, perpetual, almost impercep-
> tible change; there are innumerable hereditary variations of all sorts and in all directions.
> Contemporary biology, particularly Russian biology, has been increasingly refuting this
> doctrine by means of nomogenesis, which holds that evolution is highly convergent and
> involves internal laws that apply to enormous masses of individuals across a vast territory;
> [convergence occurs] through leaps, paroxysms, sudden mutations; the number of heredi-
> tary variations is limited and they follow determined directions (see Berg, 1922, pp. 280–
> 281) (Jakobson 1929a [1971a, p. 110]).

This passage gives us the substance of Jakobson's understanding of language evolution, which he then used to refute Saussure – whom he likened to the neo-grammarians – on epistemological grounds. Claiming that what defined modern science (and primarily *Russian* science) was to have replaced *why?* (*warum?*) with *to what end* (*wozu?*),[6] Jakobson called for "the substitution of a teleological approach for the mechanical view."[7]

It is interesting that while Jakobson did not draw an analogy with the research object like Schleicher, for whom languages *were* living organisms, he did draw an

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5 It is interesting that in 1929 Voloshinov rejected causal explanation in exactly the same terms as Jakobson. For him "mechanical causality" was an "inert category" typically used by "repre-sentatives of positivist thought in the natural sciences" (Voloshinov 1929, pp. 20–21).

6 At that time there were many variants to Jakobson's thinking, all of which came down to a single guiding idea: "In the current hierarchy of values, the question 'where to?' (*kuda?*) is rated higher than the question 'where from?' (*otkuda?*). Self-determination has taken the place of genetic indications as chief characteristic of national membership; the idea of caste is being replaced with that of class; in both social life and scientific constructions, shared origin now comes after shared functions and fades in comparison with unity based on shared orientation toward the same end or goal. The idea of an end or goal – the equivalent of Cinderella in ideology of the recent past – is gradually being rehabilitated everywhere" (Jakobson 1931a [1971a, p. 144]).

7 Jakobson 1928 (1971a).

analogy with the method: language evolution could be studied *in the same way* as living beings were studied.

> In the Russian spiritual understanding, it is typical for "to what end?" (*Wozu*?) to dominate "why?" (*Warum*?). Vinogradov was right to point out the teleological coloring of Russian thought as developed by it main representatives. An anti-Darwinian streak runs through Russian *Naturphilosophie* like a red thread; … it suffices to recall the argumentative line of Danilevsky, Strakhov and Berg, which has crystallized today in the theory of nomogenesis, a harmonious state entirely suffused with the idea of being oriented toward an end or goal. The category of mechanical causality is foreign to Russian science (Jakobson 1929b, pp. 55–56).

2 Nomogenesis or chance occurrence?

Savitsky's ideas, especially his understanding that an organism's *development locale* (be those organisms living beings, cultures or languages) was more important than its origin clearly belongs to the current of thought that developed in Russia in the early twentieth century and was marked by Berg's "nomogenetic" theory, an explicit alternative to Darwinism. As explained, the theory of nomogenesis maintains that evolution is not due to chance occurrences and natural selection of divergent individuals but rather *complies with laws*.

This refusal to admit of chance or genetic causality, this fascination for space-driven convergence of features acquired through contact, is expressed in the Eurasianist linguists' constantly reiterated attempts to dismantle false wholes (e.g., the "European continent" assumed to stretch from the Atlantic to the Urals, and Trubetzkoy's calling into question the existence of "Indo-European languages")[8] and identify truer ones (Eurasia as a geo-ethno-economic-cultural whole; the *set* of Eurasian languages). In contrast to Jespersen's idea,[9] the purposefulness Trubetzkoy had in mind was detached from any and all notions of progress.

One particularity of the Russian critique of Darwinism was its emphasis on the conflict between chance-driven and law-governed evolution. The Russian reading was undoubtedly biased, for Darwin had repeatedly asserted that evolution does follow laws. But his causal laws could not satisfy his Russian detractors, for whom a law had to be deterministic, predictable.

Danilevsky accused Darwin of neglecting the teleological, predetermined character of evolution when he asserted its random nature. Following the

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[8] Trubetzkoy 1939a.
[9] See Jespersen 1894.

German evolutionist Theodor Eimer,[10] Danilevsky called the aspect of evolution that Darwin had neglected *orthogenesis.*

Berg, who cited Danilevsky,[11] thought it preferable to replace Darwinian chance by the idea of *nomogenesis* or law-based evolution.[12] One of his guiding ideas was analogy or parallelism between individual development (ontogenesis) and species development (phylogenesis).[13] This was in line with Haeckel's recapitulation theory. For Haeckel, phylogenesis followed the ontogenesis model in that what would become a feature in superior organisms was "anticipated" in inferior ones. Once again, nomogenesis was an explicit alternative to Darwinism; it was an *autogenetic* theory of evolution according to which the evolutionary process amounted to the development of preexisting rudiments or potentials (following Baer's embryology model) rather than a series of adaptations by species to their environment, which implied the random formation of new features (as in Darwin's thinking). Jakobson contantly drew on Berg's theses, particularly his notion of *preformationism:*

> The combination of borrowings and convergence very much recalls the mimetism idea in modern biology: 'factors of resemblance existed from the outset in both the imitator and the model, and all it takes is a certain impetus to bring them to light' (Berg 1922, p. 224). This convincing biological theory, according to which mimetism is a particular case of convergence and there are no grounds for attributing any particular origin or meaning to that convergence (*ibid.*, p. 229), has an equivalent in linguistics (Jakobson 1929a, p. 197 [1971a, p. 107]).

To this internal determinism must be added an external one due to the "geographical landscape" (*Landschaft*), which acted coercively, "forcing all species to vary in *a given direction*" (Berg 1922, p. 180).

In addition to citing Joseph de Maistre – "Let us therefore never speak of chance and arbitrary signs"[14] – Jakobson repeatedly declared his formal rejection of the idea that evolution could occur randomly. In the *Theses of '29*, cosigned by Trubetzkoy and Kartsevsky, he wrote, "It would not be logical to suppose that changes in language are nothing more than destructive blows that occur by chance and are heterogeneous from the perspective of the system," and in

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10 See Vucinich 1988, p. 125.

11 Berg 1922, p. III.

12 From *nomos*: law. Berg also spoke of orthogenesis, defining it as "evolution in a single direction rather than all over the place" (Berg 1922, p. 75), here again explicitly countering Darwin.

13 Berg 1922, p. 102.

14 De Maistre 1821 [1980, p. 103]. Jakobson frequently cited this line from *Les Soirées de Saint-Petersbourg* in his 1930s writings, and he came back to it in the *Dialogues* at the end of his life (1983, p. 88).

"Proposition 22" of the 1928 Congress in the Hague, he explained that the history of a language was "no longer a series of blind disorders and destructions caused by factors external to the phonological perspective." To combat the idea of "blind chance," Jakobson favored the idea of "goal-oriented evolution."[15] Here we should also recall Trubetzkoy's, term, the "logic of evolution."[16]

Close study of Jakobson's argumentative line in his critique of Saussure will enable us to identify the sharp opposition between these two scientific approaches. According to Jakobson, Saussure maintained that "changes occur without there being any intention behind them; they are fortuitous and involuntary ..., language does not premeditate anything and its pieces move fortuitously, ... these disordered actions are only unfortunate burglaries that work to no end whatsoever";[17] "diachrony [is] an agglomeration of accidental changes."[18]

Jakobson likewise claimed to find in Schleicher's thinking "the idea that language evolution is directionless and blindly random"[19] and in neogrammarian thought the idea that "the entity that undergoes change [is] a fortuitous agglomeration."[20]

By reversing one by one the terms that Jakobson criticized in the other linguists' thinking, we can reconstruct his nomogenetic model of evolution. But what he saw as Darwinism's insistence on the random character of evolution is curious and deserves closer examination.

As explained, Jakobson borrowed the term *nomogenesis* from Berg. According to that model, languages can evolve in only one direction and in a sequential order that complies with system laws. Jakobson was even at pains to point out that this thesis represented a genuine *break*[21] from earlier theories, theories of essentially two sorts: Schleicher's naturalism, followed by the neogrammarians' rigid positivism. But what is striking is that in fact both Schleicher and the neogrammarians

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15 Jakobson 1929a, p. 110.

16 Trubetzkoy 1939b [1986, p. XXIV].

17 Jakobson 1929a, p. 17.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 110.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 17.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 109.

21 Jakobson himself did not use the word *break* but rather developed his argument by means of pairs of contrasting notions identified with the opposition old/new: "In the current hierarchy of values // now" (1931a [1971a, p. 144]); "Against the atomism of the past I oppose ...," "Whereas orthodox evolutionism taught that ... today's research brings to light that on the contrary ..." (1938 [1971a p. 235]); "the European ideology that dominated in the second half of the nineteenth century // contemporary ideology" (1929a [1971a, p. 110]); "traditional historical phonetics // modern psychology" (1931c [1971a, pp. 202–203]); "traditional dogmas // the new approach to language" (Jakobson 1963 [1973, pp. 312–313]).

constantly stressed that they were discovering or formulating *laws*. Schleicher explained that evolving languages *necessarily* went through three stages, from isolating to agglutinating to inflecting (a process analogous to the hierarchical order of the mineral, plant and animal kingdoms), while the neogrammarians claimed that phonetic *laws* admitted of *no exceptions (Ausnahmlosigkeit)*.[22] But the *break* was not merely temporal. For Jakobson, those scientific paradigms also had a spatial – that is, cultural – dimension: they reflected a "European ideology," which he contrasted to "contemporary ideology." And in the latter, valued ideology, "Russian science" played a very particular role:

> Mechanical accumulation due to the play of chance or heterogeneous factors – that is the image that European ideology, the ideology that dominated in the second half of the nineteenth century, prefers to put forward over all others. Contemporary ideology, on the other hand, in its varied, genetically independent manifestations, is bringing ever-more distinctly to light a functional system instead of a mechanically attained sum; structural laws instead of a wholly bureaucratic reference to neighboring cases; and goal-oriented evolution instead of evolution due to blind chance (Jakobson 1929a [1971a, p. 110]).

It seems best to understand Jakobson and Trubetzkoy's critique of their predecessors (in chronological order Schleicher, the neogrammarians and Saussure) in light of the dispute in biology between nomogenesis and chance-driven evolution. For Jakobson, languages evolved in a given way because they were *like* living organisms (rather than because they *were* living organisms). It is true that there are many passages in his writings in which he says that languages are not living organisms.[23] However, those declarations are less important than his concern with how knowledge was acquired. What Jakobson and Trubetzkoy's thinking in the area of diachrony had to offer was essentially a *metaphor imported from anti-Darwinian biology.*

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22 The neogrammarians were looking for a coherent theory of phonetic change. In their view, if linguistics wanted to become a science it had to discover linguistic *laws* just as the natural sciences discovered natural laws. To *define* phonetic change they proposed a law that admitted of no exceptions. This strict definition of laws is incompatible with the idea of chance or randomness. See Leskien, *Die Deklination im Slavisch-Litauischen und Germanischen* (1869): "To admit haphazard deviations, impossible to coordinate, is to assert in reality that the object of our science, language, is inaccessible to science." (quoted in Harris and Taylor 1989, p. 171).

23 "Baudouin de Courtenay ultimately rejected Schleicher's genealogical tree theory and J. Schmidt's wave theory: both doctrines underestimated the effect of the systematic, goal-oriented, social character of language as well as the importance of crossing in relations between languages. Despite their being mutually opposed, these two theories were fueled by the same myth, of language as an organism: 'it was just that for Schleicher language was made of wood while for Schmidt it was made of water'" (Jakobson 1960 [1973, p. 209]).

The dispute on random evolutionary development which had raged in the closing decades of the nineteenth century[24] had subsided almost everywhere in Europe except the Soviet Union, where Lysenko was claiming that "chance was foreign to science" and rejecting the notion of random variation (mutations) as a basis for evolutionary processes.[25] Lysenkoism was on the rise in Soviet biology at the same time as Jakobson was formulating his anti-Darwinian ideas in Prague.

In sum, Jakobson accused Schleicher, the neogrammarians and Saussure – without regard for the differences between them[26] – of seeing language evolution as exclusively a matter of 1) chance and 2) progress. These two notions are contradictory and cannot at all be applied to the three indicted schools in the same way, but that is another issue.

Here is Jakobson's negative account of these three bodies of linguistic thought:

> For Saussure, changes occur without their being any intention behind them, they are fortuitous and involuntary. Saussure's brilliant comparison between the language game and a game of chess loses persuasive power if we agree with Saussure that language premeditates nothing and that its pieces move fortuitously…. Schleicher reconciled recognition of the internal, functional meaning of the language system as furnished by direct experience with the idea that language evolution was meaningless and was driven by blind chance by interpreting internal, functional meaning as a residue of the original perfection of the linguistic system. From that perspective, evolution is nothing more than disintegration and destruction (Jakobson 1929a [1971a, p. 17]).

In fact, Jakobson formulated his rejection of the notion of randomness in both language evolution and synchronic language states in opposition to his perception of the thinking of Schleicher, the neogrammarians and Saussure. On the apparently heterogeneous set of languages spoken in the USSR-Eurasia he asked rhetorically:

> In this multitude of languages that seems to trouble Europeans, is there any unity? What is it then? A fortuitous conglomeration, a chaotic mass, or a regular combination, a harmonious union? (Jakobson, 1931a [1971a, p. 148]).

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24 Strakhov, Chicherin and Rozanov, following Danilevsky, had all virulently attacked Darwinism precisely for what they understood as Darwin's notion of the random, multidirectional nature of evolution. Chicherin actually anticipated Bergson with his idea of an internal, goal-oriented *vital force* in organism evolution. Berg, on the other hand, was at pains to clarify that he was not a vitalist. For him, goal-oriented development was not some mysterious force but simply a "property of living things" (Berg 1922, pp. 5–6).

25 See Kline 1955, p. 318.

26 It is reasonable to think that when Saussure claimed that "language is a form, not a substance," he was thinking of the neogrammarians. Jakobson, on the other hand, associated that idea with the neogrammarians because of its anti-finalism.

We know that Jakobson and Trubetzkoy thought that languages evolved in accordance with *laws* – this is the idea that diachrony itself is a system. But what is less well-known is that in their understanding of synchronic systematicity not only was a given language a system but that language was also caught up in a systematic whole greater than itself, a whole of which it was only a part. Language, then, was perhaps a "system of systems." In any case, a language was itself part of a greater whole that transcended it.

Consider the following veiled allusion to this belief:

> The raw material has to be reexamined. Certain convergences are too striking to be mere fortuitous coincidences (Jakobson 1929a [1971a, p. 109]).

Gradually an internal rationalization for the notions of territory and contiguity began to take shape. Jakobson noted spatial symmetries: the Eurasian phonological union, characterized as we know by languages with correlation of palatalization, was the "central" phenomenon, surrounded on both east and west by polytonic languages, a "peripheral" phenomenon. These facts worked to corroborate Jakobson's claim that the spatial distribution of systemic phenomena was a matter of *necessity*.

The above–cited passages bring to light an intellectual world that was extremely remote from Saussure's, a world in which linguistics, while it may have been a "social science," was characterized by *necessary* laws and studied a society which looked very like a *natural* formation.

3 Convergences or divergences?

3.1 Fish and whales

At the founding meeting of the Prague Linguistic Circle in Mathesius' office at Charles University on October 6, 1926, Jakobson, Mathesius and four other colleagues gathered to discuss the talk entitled "Der europäische Sprachgeist" that Henrik Becker, professor at the University of Leipzig,[27] had delivered that very day in Prague. Becker's idea was that Czech and Hungarian, two genetically unrelated languages, had each been profoundly marked by their ongoing contact, which was both cultural and territorial – "cultural" rather than "natural." This

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27 In 1948 Henrik Becker published *Der Sprachbund*, in which he assessed his twenty years of research on languages in contact.

approach went directly counter to the genetic "genealogical tree" theory established by nineteenth-century comparatists and adopted by the neogrammarians as the basis for their quest for the general laws governing language evolution.[28] But it will become much clearer if we relate it to a dispute under way in biology at the time.

Lev Berg had reached his *convergence theory* by questioning the idea that evolution occurred randomly. For Berg the probability of a given feature appearing fortuitously at the same time in two distinct spaces was virtually null.[29] His observations of fish living in Russian lakes and internal seas had led to his discovery that apparently genetically unrelated organisms could develop (acquire) common characteristics. In support of this argument he gave the simple example we saw in the preceding chapter: whales are mammals that developed features very similar to those of fish. In sum, whales "became" a kind of fish by living in the same medium as fish.[30]

One effect of this dispute was to elicit a theory of origins that reversed Darwin's. While for Darwin all organisms developed through divergence from an extremely restricted number of original species, for Berg they developed primarily though the *convergence* of tens of thousands of original forms. It was from Berg that Jakobson and Trubetzkoy took the term *convergence*, which they then applied to language evolution. We should not be misled by the fact that Meillet too used the word convergence: the problematic was different: in Meillet's thought, convergence is only possible and even thinkable among related languages.[31] As for the hybridization problematic dear to Schuchardt and Baudouin de Courtenay, it will be recalled that as far as Jakobson was concerned resemblances could exist that had nothing to do with any sort of hybridization. On this point Jakobson and Trubetzkoy's thinking was inspired by Berg's on mimesis.

3.2 Chains and bricks

Following the same suggestion by Trubetzkoy,[32] Jakobson as we know called for "reexamining the raw material."[33]Again, his research program was fueled by the understanding that "certain convergences are too striking to be mere fortuitous

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28 See Matejka, "Preface" in Matejka 1978, p. 1X.

29 Berg 1922, p. 105.

30 *Ibid*., p. 103.

31 Meillet 1918.

32 See Trubetzkoy 1923, 1928.

33 Jakobson 1929a [1971a, p. 109].

coincidences" – nothing happens by chance or "just like that." In 1938 he reached the conclusion that phonological affinities between languages are *necessary*, a notion very close to the ecological one of plant associations[34]: "areas of polytony usually border on ones where vowels are pronounced with glottal stops."[35]

Hybridization had been a very important theme in biology from the late nineteenth century, just as it had been in linguistics with the notion of *Sprachmischung* used by both Schuchardt and Baudouin de Courtenay. As we know, Marr also made that notion a foundation for his theory, dubbing it "crossing" (*skreshchenie*). This notion, fully part of the "air du temps," was subtly contested by Trubetzkoy in a lecture he delivered to the Prague Linguistic circle on December 14, 1936, entitled "Reflections on the Indo-European problem."[36]

After recalling that the "Indo-European" notion was a purely linguistic one "like *syntax, genitive, sound change* [or *stress*],"[37] and that the "supposed Indo-European proto-people... may never have existed,"[38] Trubetzkoy set out to show that Indo-European languages were *initially* diverse: "Today there are many Indo-European languages and many Indo-European peoples. When we look back, we find that it was the same in the past, too – as far as the eye can see. In addition to the ancestors of the living Indo-European languages, there also existed other Indo-European languages that disappeared without leaving descendants";[39] "No matter how far we peer back into history, we always find a multitude of Indo-European-speaking peoples."[40]

On these grounds he was able to put forward his hypothesis that an Indo-European "family" had been formed by convergence. It is striking that not once in the 1936 text does he use the term "Sprachbund" (*iazikovoi soiuz)*: clearly he was no longer using the opposition he had established at the 1928 conference in

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34 This term was coined by Alexander von Humboldt in 1805.

35 Jakobson 1938 [1971a, p. 245].

36 A written version of Trubetzkoy's talk in Russian was scheduled to appear in the Eurasianist journal *Evraziiskaia Khronika* XIII (Prague, 1939) but the journal was banned by the Nazis. A brief abstract in Czech, entitled "Myšlenky o problému Indoevropan" was published in 1937 in Prague in the Prague Linguistic Circle journal *Slovo a slovesnost* 3, pp. 191–192. A German version, cut by approximately one quarter and without notes, was published under the title *Gedanken über das Indogermanenproblem* in *Acta Linguistica* vol. I, section 2 (Copenhagen, 1939), pp. 81–89. The original Russian, preserved by P. N. Savitsky, was published in the Soviet Union in 1959 as "Mysli ob indoevropeiskoi probleme" in *Voprosy iazykoznaniia* 1, pp. 65–77 (a critical note on Marr was deleted), then republished in N. S. Trubetskoi, *Izbrannye trudy po filologii* (Moscow: Progress, 1987), pp. 44–59.

37 Trubetzkoy 1939a (2001, p. 87).

38 *Ibid*., p. 90.

39 *Ibid*., p. 87.

40 *Ibid*.

The Hague between *Sprachbund* and *Sprachfamilie* but instead endeavoring to make the notions of convergence and divergence work together in his argument.

> There is, therefore, no compelling reason for the assumption of a homogeneous Indo-European proto-language from which the individual branches of Indo-European descended. It is equally plausible that the ancestors of the branches of Indo-European were originally dissimilar but that over time, through continuous contact, mutual influence, and loan traffic, they moved significantly closer to each other, without becoming identical (Trubetzkoy 1939a [2001, p. 88]).

Trubetzkoy believed that initially dissimilar languages *had become* Indo-European. But the language evolution table he drew up for the Slavic languages in the same paper was utterly different. For those languages Trubetzkoy suggested the image of chain links (or a coat of mail):

> Each [Slavic] language is a kind of link between two others, and neighboring languages are connected by means of transitional dialects, with individual threads extending across borders from group to group ... However, if we compare Slavic to the rest of Indo-European, we will see none of this chain-like segmentation. To be sure, the closest group to Slavic is Baltic (Lithuanian, Latvian, and the extinct Old Prussian), but it cannot be ascertained which Baltic language is closest to Slavic and which Slavic language is closest to Baltic. Instead of a "chain," we find "blocks." Different types of segmentation observed in the groups of "related" languages can well go back to the different ways these groups emerged: possibly, the "chain" develops when divergence predominates, while "blocks" are mainly the product of convergence (*ibid.*, p. 90).

The importance of the notion of convergence in Trubetzkoy's thought has been misunderstood and so has generated further misunderstandings. In Vittore Pisani's panoramic overview of Indo-European linguistics written from 1926 to 1936,[41] the only idea he could see in Trubetzkoy's text was that Indo-European languages had *evolved* from languages similar to those of the North Caucasus to a type similar to the Finno-Ugric and Altaic languages; he failed to grasp the crucial idea of areal convergence among unrelated languages.

In fact, Trubetzkoy's aim in this lecture was twofold: to lambaste both the idea of strictly genetic language divergence (Schleicher's genealogical tree theory) *and* theories that sought to link study of prehistoric languages to archeological study of cultures. Specifically, he set out to discredit Nazi theories meant to prove that the ancestors of the Germans had their primitive settlements (*Urheimat*) on what was now German territory and that their language was the ancestor (*Ursprache)* of the language spoken by modern-day Germans.

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41 Pisani 1953.

In a letter to Jakobson dated January 7, 1937, Trubetzkoy applauded the founding of a circle of young Orientalists, ethnographers and linguists in Vienna who were discreetly protesting against the approach being applied in the "Indogermanistik" dominant in German science in a journal entitled *Klotho* (*Historische Studien zur feudalen und vorfeudalen Welt)* in which they had also ironically taken to task the racist archeologist Menghin (it was he who launched the accusations that led the Gestapo to search Trubetzkoy's home in the spring of 1938). In the same letter Trubetzkoy mentioned Father W. Schmidt's "Vienna School,"[42] which was also (and just as discreetly) taking a stance against official Indo-Germanism. A review of Trubetzkoy's talk to the Prague Linguistic Circle, published in German in *Prager Presse,* was followed by several requests from these schools and societies to publish the text in its entirety.

In fact, the convergence notion was the foundation for Trubetzkoy's idea of "language union." It only acquires full meaning if we read the text on the Indo-European problem in conjunction with two other publications: "The Tower of Babel and the Confusion of Tongues" (1923, Eng. transl. in Liberman 1991a) and "The Upper and Lower Stories of Russian culture" (1921, Eng. transl. in Liberman 1991a). In the latter text he had already presented a geographical, areal understanding of the history of languages and cultures.

The 1936 text should be understood as a polemic piece against Nazi theories on the genetic, ethnic origin of an "Indo-European people." But it should also be read in connection with the older, broader debate on language evolution. Linguists who theorized purely genetic language evolution were imprisoned in their naturalistic metaphor and so had never resolved the problem of whether languages were *like species* (one species changing into another, enabling us to say, for example, that the mammouth was the "ancestor" of the elephant) or *like individuals of a given species* (who genetically inherit a parent's features, as when a mother gives birth to a daughter, but here the idea was also of a kind of parthogenesis, without any parental couple).[43] The model of evolution by convergence, while remaining within the biology metaphor, allowed us to account for many loan and contagion phenomena that could not be explained in strictly genetic terms.

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42 Meshchaninov had noted that Father Schmidt's school and the journal *Anthropos* showed intense interest in Marr's Japhetidology and cited the works of R. Bleichsteiner (Meshchaninov 1929, p. 7).

43 Van Ginneken had a diametrically opposed, non-metaphorical understanding of the biological model in linguistics: "procreation always requires two hereditary lines, and the structuring base of the offspring is the combined result of the two parents' structuring bases" (Van Ginneken 1935, p. 32).

We see how deeply "Prague Russian" structuralism was marked by an epistemological issue specific to the natural sciences of the last third of the nineteenth century (though of course their structuralism cannot be reduced to that), an issue introduced by way of metaphor into linguistics.

I might have cited other aspects of the biology dispute that accounts for so many of the references on this shelf of the Prague Russians' ideal library; namely, the "holistic" argument against Darwinism developed in Czechoslovakia in the 1920s and 1930s,[44] the opposition between catastrophism and unitarianism (*Natura non facit saltum,* claimed Darwin, whereas for Berg, Jakobson and Marr alike, evolution involved "leaps, paroxysms") or "leftist" opposition to Darwinism in Russia, which rejected the struggle for life idea in the name of the "cooperation principle" (the anarchist Kropotkin, followed by Lysenko, are representatives of this line of thinking).

4 The organic metaphor

Trubetzkoy seldom mentioned language and almost never used the term structure in his culturological texts. On the other hand, what J. Schlanger has called the vocabulary of "organic wholes" is abundantly represented.

For Trubetzkoy there are no *citizens*, only "representatives of a given people." Every group or "historical-cultural type," every "sociocultural whole" (see "The Tower of Babel and the Confusion of Tongues"), even one that was socially fragmented into an "upper" and "lower" story (see "The Upper and Lower Stories of Russian Culture"), was a monad, a closed, homogeneous entity, precisely because it was understood to *be* an organic body.

This explains Trubetskoy's disparaging view of democracy, which he thought of as atomizing individuals, and his revaluing of ideocracy and the demotic principle of individual sacrifice for the good of the group or "social whole." It is important to stress that this opposition between individualism and the collective or holistic principle, an opposition that Louis Dumont expressed in terms of *time* as the difference between "the modern type of culture" and "the non-modern type,"[45] was expressed by Trubetzkoy in terms of *space*, as the difference between the "West" and "Eurasia." This was not a new manifestation of the opposition between diachrony and synchrony, evolutionism and fixism, but rather an

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44 See Steiner 1978.

45 Louis Dumont, "La valeur chez les modernes et chez les autres," in Essais sur l'individualisme (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1985), pp. 254–299.

opposition between a linear understanding of time and an extremely relativist conception in which different, incommensurable "types" could and did exist synchronically. Trubetzkoy's understanding amounted to genuine *cultural solipsism*, wherein the values of a foreign culture could only be successfully borrowed if they could be *organically assimilated* rather than *mechanically transplanted*. These organic metaphors, never acknowledged *as metaphor*, functioned as key words and the supreme justification of Trubetzkoy's argument, an argument he claimed to be a *demonstration*. It is true that Trubetzkoy himself used another metaphor, an architectural one this time, in which "the masses making up the people are the natural foundation of the entire edifice of Russia" (see "We and the others," 1925). But here he immediately added: "But the bearing posts have turned out to be alive."

This organicist way of thinking, with its vitalist connotations, has a history that encompasses Russian reception of Schelling's thought (Odoevsky and the *Liubomudry*)[46] and more generally what Isaiah Berlin called the Anti-Enlightenment.

Whereas in structuralism what gives meaning to each of two related terms is studying the relations between them, Trubetzkoy's world consisted of a plurality of self-contained, self-sufficient entities, living wholes whose "true natures" needed to be discovered. In Eurasian culture everything was linked: music, ornament, mentality, language. (We are not likely to find Saussure establishing a connection between ornament and language.) One key to understanding Trubetzkoy's thinking is the opposition between hybridization, which is *mechanical,* and convergence, which is *organic*; this was what allowed him to establish an opposition between what is artificial and comes from the West and what is natural and comes from the Russian East. It is important to dig deeper into these systems of self-evidences, as they seem to have been the ultimate foundation for Trubetzkoy's reasoning.

Lastly, Trubetzkoy had an odd way of proceeding for a structuralist. In "The Upper and Lower Stories of Russian culture," he sought to reconstitute the "mental physiognomy" of the ancient Slavs by studying the roots of their language, thereby aligning his work with that of Adolphe Pictet and linguistic *paleontology* (the latter being precisely the labor that Marr pursued all his life).

For Jakobson and Trubetzkoy, then, the relevant metaphor was no longer the growth of a crystal, plant or animal but the more complex growth of a living organism in symbosis with its environment. Nonetheless, their metaphor too

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46 See V. F. Odoevsky, *The Russian Nights* (1844).

remained within the compass of the natural sciences. In fact, these thinkers naturalized culture.

Chapter 8
The theory of correspondences

One particularly illuminating example of what Jakobson and Trubetzkoy thought of as a new (and specifically Russian) science is the theory of correspondences, which they used, together with the geographer Petr Savitsky,[1] to try to make isoglosses *coincide* with isotherms and other cultural and natural isolines.[2]

Jakobson and Trubetzkoy's world was one of order and harmony, plenitude without want or desire, chance or chaos. Though for Jakobson linguistics was decidedly a "social science," a definition that went directly and deliberately counter to Schleicher's definition of it as a "natural science," he nonetheless maintained that language evolution followed its own "internal logic," and that the distribution of languages in space obeyed geometric laws. As soon as the "space factor" came into play in their thinking, the Prague Russians' world became devoid of human beings.

1 "Development locale": a non-deterministic object of research?

Up to this point I have presented Eurasianist theory and its linguistic branch primarily in connection with the evolutionism/diffusionism set of alternatives, showing it to be closer to the latter than the former.[3] However, in many respects this classification is inadequate, and it is time now to clarify the point by explaining the *development locale* theory. Once again, the main issue here was *boundaries*.

The Eurasianists were often accused by their contemporaries of promoting *geographic determinism*, even a kind of "geographic mysticism."[4] However, their

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1 Nearly all of Savitsky's articles are concerned in one way or another with the theory of correspondences. His most interesting study of the relationship between language distribution and the spatial distribution of natural regions was an article published in French in the first collection of Prague Circle research studies: "Les problèmes de la géographie linguistique du point de vue du géographe" (*Travaux du Cercle Linguistique de Prague*, 1929). Though crucial for the history of structuralism, this article is virtually unknown in the Western world.
2 See Jakobson 1931a; Trubetzkoy 1925c.
3 The Eurasianist theses were contemporaneous with the great debate on diffusionism in anthropology; see for example Elliott Smith et al. 1927.
4 Kizevetter 1928, p. 427.

thinking differed not only from Ratzel's determinism, which went by the name of anthropogeography,[5] but also Vidal de la Blache's "possibilism" or human geography, in that their theory of the tie linking people to a territory was based not on *determination* but *interaction*. It is true that all these lines of thought were grounded in the idea that the natural earth sciences and social "human sciences" should not be separated, that countries and men should be thought of as forming a "Whole." But the Eurasianists' originality and indeed their leitmotiv was to insist on the existence of ties between a given *socio-historical milieu* and the corresponding *geographical environment* (*geograficheskaya obstanovka*) *without* bringing causal relations to bear in the explanation, stressing instead *symbiosis* and *organic wholeness*. The purpose and aim of their scientific labors was to bring these ties to light and so to have data for determining the boundaries of the wholes in question. Once they judged they had reached that goal, these researchers' scientific potential seems to have been exhausted. At any rate, Eurasianist science did not have time to move beyond that research program.

I was led to identify these overall guiding ideas, which seem to me fundamental to understanding the key notions of structure and the whole in the thinking of the Prague Russians, by Jakobson's own repeated allusions to Savitsky's work and his use of Savitsky's concept of development locale.

> A correlation or close, regular tie between phenomena belonging to different fields is becoming more sharply apparent every year (and this has indeed become the direction and focus of scientific research). These links between phenomena should not be interpreted as a literal overlapping of borders; usually the lines marking the boundaries of conjoined features come together in bundles. Phenomena can be linked either chronologically or territorially. In neither case, however, does the fact that two or several fields are correlated efface the immanent legality [*samozakonnost'*] of each. On the contrary, the correlation cannot even be discovered without first studying each particular field – an indispensable condition. The structural diversity of the concrete manifestions of each field must be studied: historical diversity [must be studied] in light of the legality of self-development,[6] territorial diversity in light of geographic zone-based legality. The diversity of one area

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5 Ratzel maintained that the same environment produced the same cultural types. For him the relationship between territory and culture was strictly causal and one-way: the "spirit of a people" was *produced* by its local geographic setting, landscape, climate, natural resources. For his student Boas, this deterministic hypothesis was wrong. On Ratzel see Müller 1996.

6 The expression "legality of self-development," quite awkward in English, is an attempt to translate the Russian "zakonomernosti samodvizheniia," which in turn looks very much as if it had been modeled on the markedly Hegelian expression *Gesetzmässigkeiten der Selbstbewegung*. For Jakobson and Trubetzkoy alike, things moved of their own volition and in accordance with their own laws, leaving no room for indetermination, chance or conscious choice. In the "légalité" entry of his *Vocabulaire technique et critique de la philosophie,* Lalande made a case for translating *Gesetzmässigkeit* "légalité" rather than "régularité."

cannot be mechanically deduced from the diversity of another area; there is no unequivocal relationship here between superstructures and base. The task of science is to grasp correlations between phenomena located on different planes, to discover regular order in the ties between them. This research approach may be called the linkage method [*uvyazka*] – thereby transforming a common word of contemporary Russian into a scientific term. One manifestation of the method is the concept of development locale, wherein a given sociohistorical area and its geographical territory meld together to form a single Whole (the term and definition are Savitsky's in *Geograficheskie osobennosti Rossii* I [Prague, 1927], ch. IV) (Jakobson 1931a [1971a, pp. 146–147]).

It was Savitsky who forged the notion of *mestorazvitie* and he who translated it into French as *lieu de développement* (and into German as *Raumentwicklung*) in the aforementioned article of 1929. In a later article, "L'Eurasie révélée par la linguistique" (1931) he changed the translation to *développement local*. In 1981, Toman proposed the translation *topogenesis*[7] and in 1994 *genotope*.[8] The advantage of this last translation is that it gives priority neither to the process (*development, genesis*) nor the locale itself but rather presents the two notions as interacting. Moreover, it echoes Bakhtin's *chronotope*. The drawback is its ambiguous evocation of genetics, which, for a contemporary reader, may elicit associations diametrically opposed to Savitsky's intention and undertaking. For this reason, and to steer clear of anachronism, I shall keep Savitsky's French translation, *lieu de développement* [development locale]. The distinguishing feature of all such "locales" was that they provided impetus for development in a certain direction. This is not unrelated to the later notion of "ecological niche," but for Savitsky the point was to use a scale where natural and human phenomena could be systematically related to each other. This explains why his *development locale* was both *place* and *process*.

The *development locale* notion has many points in common with the *Raum* notion in German anthropogeography; both stress the *whole* formed by a given territory and the people living on it:

> Through its new, original approach, which involves the idea of a substrate on which men live and engage in economic activity – the land and its botanical covering, on which and in the midst of which the history of human societies unfolds – current Russian geographical science invites us to explore corresponding approaches in the sciences of society.

In the indissoluble tie that links all that exists, in the formal coherence of the creatures' world, threads of dependencies and resemblance link the human

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7 Toman 1981, p. 280.
8 Toman 1994, p. 126.

world with worlds that take very different forms. And what has been developed by the bio-socio-geographical sciences contains components that are applicable to the human socio-historical milieu, on condition that we undertake the necessary adaptations. …

> Establishing the *development locale* category, defining its content, applying it to concrete situations – this is infinitely more difficult and complex than working with the notion of biocoenosis, itself not at all simple. The socio-historical milieu and its territory have to be melded together into a single Whole, into a geographical unit or *Landschaft*. Not only can we not imagine a socio-historical milieu independently of its territory, but without knowing the properties of that territory it is impossible to attain any understand whatsoever of the particularities of the lifestyle [*obraz zhizni*] of the given socio-historical milieu (Savitsky 1927a, pp. 29–30).

In speaking of socio-historical worlds, Savitsky's intention was to establish ties "between the plant, animal and mineral kingdoms on one hand, and on the other man and his lifestyle, even his spiritual world."[9] But he made clear his refusal to imagine any *causal* relationship between territory and way of life:

> These components are adapted to each other; they undergo the influence of the external mileu but in turn they influence that milieu. … It is this great shared habitat of living beings[*obshchezhitie*], all adapted to each other and to their surrounding milieu and adapting that milieu to themselves, that I am calling *development locale* (Savitsky 1927a, p. 29).

> The concept of development locale posits the existence of "phenomena ties," meaning that the question of causality ties is not essential. The development locale concept maintains all its power regardless of whether we believe that the geographic environment exerts unidirectional influence on the socio-historical milieu or that on the contrary the socio-historical milieu actually creates its environment; it can also account for the simultaneous operation of those two processes. In fact, only this last understanding is genuinely scientific. The process linking a socio-historical milieu to its geographical environment is a bilateral one.[10] … The active attitude of the socio-historical milieu toward its geographical milieu is expressed in the fact that the former "chooses" an environment for itself. Philosophers of history and ethnologists often speak of a particular people "choosing" a given settlement location. For example, Nikolai Marr alludes in *The Ethnic Composition of the Population of the Caucasus* (Petrograd, 1920) to the fact that a group of immigrant Japhetic peoples chose to settle on the coast of the Caucasus region. If a socio-historical milieu chooses an environment for itself, then once it is settled there it together with its environment constitute a "geographical individual" (Savitsky 1927b, pp. 31–32).

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9 Savitsky 1927a, p. 30. Once again, Eurasianist theory is close to Ratzel's thinking, though he spoke of *Volk* rather than *Menschen*.

10 This "bilateral process" calls to mind Hegel's notion of reciprocal action (*Wechselwirkung)*, where cause is also, simultaneously, effect.

However, though a given people "chose" an environment for itself and entered into a symbiotic relationship with it, languages at least underwent the influence of the development locale. By moving to *another* development locale – i.e., when the peoples speaking a given language migrated – that languages could lose some of its essential characteristics.

> The facts gathered by Roman Jakobson brilliantly confirm the following thesis: in the area of phonology too, "the local development principle is stronger than the kinship principle"; by virtue of the tendencies of their governing laws, certain languages tend to become differentiated from the languages to which they are related and to come closer to other languages, with which they themselves have no kinsip ties. In the few lines he devotes to this question, Jakobson offers numerous examples. The languages of Slavic peoples who chose to settle in European regions (Serbo-Croatians, Slovenians, Slovaks, Czechs, Lusatian Sorbs) underwent – from the perspective of interest to us here – "Europeanization." In those languages "differentiation of consonants by pitch" has disappeared. The Magyar language also falls under the phenomenon of "Europeanization." A few years back, in developing my general theory of development locale, I was led to speak of the "Europeanization" of Hungarian. Whether we like it or not, the Hungarian plain is an isolated steppe subject to the laws governing European local development. At that time, I did not have the slightest suspicion that such clear linguistic proof existed of this case of Europeanization. The process resulted in the Magyar language breaking off phonologically from its Eurasian relatives. The same Europeanization process continued at a smaller scale in two other Finno-Ugric languages, the language of the Suomis (Finland Finnish) and that of the Estonians (Savitsky 1931b, pp. 368–369).

Clearly for Savitsky a language could lose a given feature by changing development locale. Though linguistic features were understood as specific to the territory in which the given language was spoken, this is clearly no longer a diffusionist perspective but indeed the notion of a literal, *intrinsic tie*, between language and territory.

In a text he signed with one of his many pseudonyms, Savitsky pushed this theory of non-causal ties all the way to an *energistic* conception of *development locale*:

> The term "peoples of the USSR" provides no unifying scientific principle that would account for [those peoples'] historical past. That principle is to be found in Eurasianist theory, in the concept of development locale, a single ground in which those peoples live and move, from which they receive impetuses and on which they exert influence, with which they meld into a particular historical and natural whole ... Russians of all branches are indissolubly linked to the other peoples of Eurasia. ... linked to them by the oneness of their historical destiny. Each particular region and all the regions taken together are saturated with energetic currents generated by the bedrock of the past (Logovikov 1931, pp. 54–55).

Savitsky's rejection of simplistic causality links his development locale theory with a line of thought called climate theory which goes back through Montesquieu (1689–1755) and Jean Bodin (1530–1596) to Aristotle and Plato. But Savitsky introduced a new feature. In emphasizing migration phenomena, he brought in historical relations between human beings and their environment. In Bodin's *République* (1576) we find a sort of challenge theory, later developed by Toynbee, that implied assessing the way a people conscious of the advantages and especially the drawbacks of its situation handled the challenge nature had thrown it. Bodin's problem was to determine in advance what institutions a given people should have, i.e., those that would be particularly well adapted to its geographical environment. For Savitsky, on the other hand, the point was not what institutions were to be chosen in response to the given environment but rather the people's "choice" of environment given its particular nature or *essence*, this in turn interacting with the environment in question. The Eurasianist way of thinking was much more Platonic than Bodin's: each people did of course have to be identified with its place and attain that harmonic proportion which was the mark God made on his universe, but a people was not so much called upon to *adapt* as best it could to given environmental conditions as to *recognize* its genuine place on this Earth – e.g., by not trying to detach itself from a great empire whose territory abided by *natural* boundaries.

Here again, comparing similar theories should bring to light the specificities of each. All the linguists who set about studying language contact in the late nineteenth century in reaction to neogrammarian positions looked into the *causes* of borrowing, contagion and mixing phenomena. Dauzat, for example, maintained that "the patois of a place located on a major thoroughfare is much more negatively impacted on than the patois of neighboring communities"[11] and that "it is possible to identify the invasion routes and major trade routes along which language follows civilization and commerce."[12]

It is true that Dauzat also used metaphors from the natural sciences, mainly geology:

> The crucial fact is that linguistic geography – and in this it seems to me a genuine geology of language – reconstitutes as it were the successive layers of words, layers that were in large part buried. Words followed on each other, but seldom was the initial occupant entirely dislodged from its position; seldom did it fail to be maintained in one or another stretch of territory; seldom did it fail to leave a vestige in the language, in the form of derivations or effects on other words. The whole difficulty is to determine the respective ages and successive usage areas of object and idea names which today are merely juxtaposed to one

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11 Dauzat 1922, p. 13.
12 *Ibid*., p. 53

another, just as the geologist reconstitutes Jurassic or Cretaceous seas by inspecting cliffs and quarries (Dauzat 1922, p. 30).

Moreover, Dauzat used the same therapy metaphor as Trubetzkoy:

> Analysis of changes brought about by homonymy has brought to the fore a new idea that once again goes counter to neogrammarian doctrine while rehabilitating ideas dear to ancient grammar. Affected as it is by both phonetic laws and analogical action, language has a tendency to deteriorate. A defensive reaction characteristic to all living organisms leads [language] to seek within itself the remedies required to cure damaged words and functions. But it does not always succeed, and it often needs to request assistance from a superior idiom – a literary language. In fact, this was how classic grammarians saw things. But linguistic geography has entirely renewed their understanding, placing it on a scientific basis and bringing to light a new order of facts of which we were unaware: the pathology and therapy of words and forms (Dauzat 1922, p. 55).

But though Dauzat like Savitsky believed that the *relationship* between a spoken language and its physical environment was not random, in Dauzat's thinking that relationship lent itself to causal explanation; that is, he went beyond simply noting with wonder the existence of *ties* between two series of phenomena.

Likewise for Dauzat, language phenomena could overstep borders. But once again, he did not speak of "internal development tendencies" or ties to the soil and plant life. For Dauzat like Sanfeld, the cause of such phenomena was the *prestige* of the "lending" language:

> Linguistic areas may well exceed the homogenous domain of a given language or of closely related idioms such as Romance languages. In the Roman Empire, peoples confined to the periphery – namely trans-Rhenish Germans, Celts of Great Britain, Vascones – borrowed many words from Latin to designate objects or foodstuffs from the south, new things or ideas – proof that they considered the Romans a superior civilization (Dauzat 1922, p. 36).

We saw in Chapter 4 that after rejecting the neogrammarians' closed model, researchers in linguistic geography turned to investigating extralinguistic causes of language change. For Dauzat as for Gilliéron, communication thoroughfares (routes and rivers) fostered change while mountains and political borders impeded it; for Frings, administrative boundaries were what created dialectal borders; for the neolinguists, urban centers relayed innovations out to the periphery.

Jakobson and Savitsky did not think along these lines at all. For them, a development locale and a set of languages came together to form a whole, and the languages of that whole resembled each other not because they were in contact (through bilingualism, for example) but rather in that they were all parts of a particular "world apart."

2 The "linkage" method

Regarding relations between languages, their territorial distribution, and other kinds of phenomena, it is once again Jakobson's allusions to Savitsky's work that reveal the weight in the Prague Russians' thinking of a system of thought called "the linkage method." Jakobson's intense interest in and use of Savitsky's ideas lead us directly to Savitsky's world of correspondences:

> the isogloss for the diphthongs inherited from *o* and *e* is identical to the one for weak yer dropping[13] before the loss of musical correlations. The area covered by this succession of events encompasses all Ukrainian forms of speech as well as southern White Russian ones. There is reason to believe that weak yer dropping remained confined to this line for a time. P. N. Savitsky has called my attention to the fact that from the western border of the Russian language all the way to the Don this isogloss corresponds quite closely to a fundamental geographic isoline particularly relevant for farming; namely the isoline marking 110 days of snow cover; that is, one of the isolines expressing the gradually increasing severity of the Russian winter. … The overlapping of Russian language isoglosses and winter isotherms is a fact that deserves closer study (Jakobson 1929a [1971a, p. 76]).

We see how close Jakobson's thinking was to Savitsky's in the area of relations between language and territory. His thinking even commingled, as it were, with Savitsky's, since the two authors were constantly citing each other. The geographer discerned in the linguist's material new facts that corroborated his development locale theory; the linguist used that theory to makes sense of the information he had collected. This early practice of transdisciplinarity was justified by the Eurasianists' *synthetic* view of science, as we shall see in Chapter 9.

> It is absolutely necessary to begin studying the locale in which languages and spoken idioms develop. Dialect representatives look for conditions that are appropriate for their future development. Correspondences between language and development locale are not fortuitous. When a language moves to a new place of settlement, this is a sign of upcoming changes, changes that will differ from those that occurred in the former development locale. A language's move to a new development locale amounts to a determined solution and choice (Savitsky 1929, p. 153).

> It would be of great interest to take on the considerable problem of comparing the geography of spoken idioms with data on Russian physical and botanical geography. Certain spoken idioms are "steppe languages," so named for their development locale. The area of southern little-Russian (Ukrainian) idioms corresponds quite closely to the contours of the Ukrainian steppe. And where spoken idioms of this type penetrated deeply into the forest zone, they pro-

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13 *Yers* are unstable, ultrashort vowels; around the twelfth century they were dropped in all Slavic languages, causing considerable change in their phonological systems.

duced an original variant called "Carpathian-Hungarian." Taken together, the Olonets group, White Sea group and eastern group of northern great-Russian idioms fit quite precisely into the boundaries of the taiga situated west of the Urals. They are taiga idioms (*ibid*., p. 155).

Like his historian and linguist colleagues, Savitsky was trying to prove the existence of a whole: the Eurasian world. The demonstration implied empirical and analytic study of distinct series (isotherms, the isolines separating floral, animal and soil zones, linguistic isoglosses, and others), then comparing them. If the lines coincided, then the "structural existence" of the whole had been proved and the synthetic stage of "delimiting an area specific to several features" could be undertaken.[14] The specificity of Savitsky's work was to discover and investigate *correspondences* between phenomena pertaining to the natural sciences (meteorology, botany, pedology) and the social sciences (ethno-anthropology, linguistics, the "cultural" sciences broadly speaking) in order to bring to light "a new world image."[15] In his 1929 article in French, Savitsky suggested comparing Russian dialectal isoglosses with Russian climatic isotherms. Superimposing the two types of maps demonstrated precisely what he expected: an extraordinary *coincidence* or overlap between the two orders of phenomena.

According to Savitsky, a general dividing line running northwest-southeast marked the separation between two areas that differed from each other on several extremely varied points: economic activity (pig farming and winter wheat in the southwest; sheep farming and no winter wheat in the northwest), climate (average January temperatures above – 8°C and frozen waterways that thawed before April 11 in the southwest; situation reversed in the northeast). The ontological existence of the ethno-geographic units he sought to bring to light was proved, as he saw it, by his "observation" that the same line also designated the dialectal boundary between use of the voiced velar fricative in the southwest and the voiced velar occlusive in the northeast. This line was then systematically related to a set of boundaries that "ran in the same direction," all pertaining to the gradually increasing severity of winter: average temperature in January, number of days of snow cover, the same dates for freezing and thawing of waterways, the same (spring and autumn) dates for the year's last and first zero-degree weather, and so on. Savitsky observed "parallelism between the January isotherm map and structural features implicated in the spread of Russian forms of speech."[16] This article made a very strong impression on Jakobson, who cited it several times.[17]

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14 Savitsky 1929, p. 145.
15 *Ibid*., p. 146.
16 *Ibid*., p. 150.
17 See Jakobson 1931a, pp. 147–148; 1939 (1973, p. 301); 1983, p. 89.

Jakobson's contemporaries do not seem to have noticed Savitsky's "linkage method"; they saw the Prague linguists' work as a sophisticated form of geo-linguistics or a variant on the problematic of language mix. However, in Martinet's post-war writings we do find a harsh, sarcastic critique of Jakobson's ideas, though his name is not mentioned:

> The non-linguistic explanation holding that resemblance between languages is due in the last analysis to the fact of living in the same physical milieu and that no sociolinguistic contact is necessary is quite unacceptable except, perhaps, for matters of vocabulary. At any rate, the hypothesis is difficult to prove or refute because two peoples living in the same region of the globe will always ultimately end up establishing contact. In this area as in genetic relations, linguists should look into the linguistic causes of phenomena, the type [of cause] they are well prepared and equipped to study, before worrying about climate, latitude or altitude (Martinet 1959 [1975, p. 26]).

There can be no doubt that this passage alludes to Jakobson. Clearly, notions such as "synthesis of the sciences" or "world harmony" were of no interest to Martinet, who spoke here not of "structural features" but "language change." His argument was that in order to claim that diffusion had taken place, there had to be a homogeneous area of intercomprehension or, at the very least, bilingualism. Obviously having in common the feature of phonological correlation of palatalization had nothing to do with mutual understanding. Martinet's sole concession was that linguists might try to establish the existence of a certain number of delimited synchronic phonetic areas, the aim then being to show that certain isoglosses did *not coincide* with genetic boundaries. Here again, the misunderstanding was total. The most Martinet would allow was the negative feature of non-overlap, whereas Jakobson's fundamental aim was to establish positive correspondences. And Martinet spoke of isoglosses – non-systemic phonetic features – not isophones.[18]

2.1 Language, culture and territory: folk psychology

G. Lepschy[19] stressed the "antipsychologism" of Prague school functionalism, citing Trubetzkoy.[20] In fact, psychology occupies quite an important place in Trubetzkoy's work. He claimed there was a "living bond between culture and the psyche of its bearers."[21] The national character of Ukrainians, for example (whom

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18 Martinet 1959 (1975, p. 26).

19 Lepschy 1976, p. 69.

20 Trubetzkoy 1939b [1986, p. 42]: "We must avoid using psychology to define phenomena."

21 Trubetzkoy 1921a, p. 81 [1991, p. 75]. Jakobson himself took the question of "national character" very seriously. In a 1931 article, "Le mythe de la France en Russie," he acknowledged that

he called "Southern Russians") included a "rhetorical pathos" that "Northern Russians" did not have.[22] The Turkic-speaking peoples of Asia had a "psychological profile" much to Trubetzkoy's liking:

> The typical Turk does not like to bother with subtleties or complicated details. He prefers wielding essential, easily grasped images and grouping them into simple, clear outlines. ... The Turkish imagination is neither poor nor timid; it is bold in scope, but that scope is rudimentary. Turkish imaginative power is focused not on arranging or accumuling a variety of details but rather on developing length and width, as it were; the picture painted by that imagination is not richly colored, with many intermediary shades, but composed instead of the basic colors, to which bold touches and occasionally colossal strokes are added (Trubetzkoy 1925c).

Russians and the people of the steppe shared another character trait: *udal'* (boldness or daring): "a typical virtue of the steppe, understood by Turkic peoples but incomprehensible to Romano-Germans or [western] Slavs."[23]

The set of "psychological traits" typical of Turks was, for Trubetzkoy, perfectly attuned to the very structures of Turkic languages, whose "exceptionless" character he greatly admired.[24] He took up this theme of the *tie* between language and "mentality" several times, as in a letter dated December 22, 1926:

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studying national character was a difficult undertaking but in no way questioned its scientific worth: "Comparative study of foreign myths about France and the representations the French have of themselves and other peoples would give us a good outline for developing scientific characterology of Frenchness" (Jakobson 1931f [1986, p. 158]). It would be tempting to read this text from the perspective of Pierre Bourdieu or Roland Barthes, but it seems to me more enlightening to interpret it in terms of texts of its own time and by the person in fullest intellectual agreement with Jakobson: Trubetzkoy.

22 Trubetzkoy 1927b, p. 76.

23 Trubetzkoy 1921b (1996, p. 111).

24 Here Trubetzkoy himself was in perfect agreement with the *air du temps*. Meillet wrote a highly laudatory review of his *Problème de l'autoconnaissance des Russes* (Trubetzkoy 1927d), a collection of articles that included "L'élément touranien dans la culture russe": "This is a powerful text in ethnic psychology and it suggests many further paths of investigation" (Meillet 1928, p. 51). The following year the minutes of a meeting of the Société de Linguistique of Paris show Meillet returning to Trubetzkoy's idea and connecting it with his own primary preoccupation, the *Indo-European nation*: "Taking off from an observation by Prince N. Trubetzkoy on agreement between Turkish language structure and the general mentality of the Turks, M. A. Meillet suggested that similar agreement could be found between the highly particular structure of Indo-European and the mentality of the Indo-European nation. Indo-European is made up of independent words; it contains as many anomalies as those in Turkish are few; in fact what characterized the conquering Indo-European aristocracy was the perpetual quest for a territory in which each chieftain would enjoy full independence and could genuinely rule. This mentality persisted in the Greeks, and the Greek language exhibits a huge number of anomalous forms. Words in Greek

> Subjectively and intuitively it is perfectly clear to me that this same type of internal relation exists between the general acoustic impression made by the Czech langauge and the psychic (and even psychophysical) image of Czechs (what is called the "national character") (Trubetzkoy, *LN*, 1985, p. 98).

For Trubetzkoy as for Savitsky, Romano-Germanic individualism ran counter to the spirit of the Turanian system and was to be explained in terms of the fragmented, divided geographical nature of Europe (i.e., "western Europe" in the old terminology), qualified as a "set of peninsulas." But once again, this was not a strictly deterministic phenomenon. It was not *because* Europe was geographically composed of peninsulas separated by stretches of sea that Romano-Germans were individualistic; all that could be said for certain was that there was a *correspondence* between the two types of phenomena: mentality corresponded to *Landschaft* structure.

If we now consider the fact that Jakobson and Savitsky both cited Dokuchaev, for whom, it will be recalled, land or soil was a "historical-natural body," we see that Trubetzkoy and Jakobson's "language union" notion amounted to more than a concept in areal linguistics. In reading the texts that provided them with a source for developing that notion, we discern an idea that is entirely different from those of contemporaneous western European geolinguists. For Jakobson and Trubetzkoy, the tie between a language and the territory on which it was spoken was *natural*.

If Jakobson and Trubetzkoy worked to establish this tie between a type of language and the psychology of the people speaking it,[25] this was because for them – as Jean-Claude Milner so clearly saw for Jakobson – "if everything corresponds to everything else in the order of language, that is because everything corresponds

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remained individual. But all these independent language forms could be ranked in precise and precisely defined categories, just as Greek literature and art were characterized by clean, harmonious lines." Further on we find another remark by Meillet: "Baltic and Slav, which preserved the material features of Indo-European, did not evolve in accordance with the individualist type" (Meillet 1929, p. xvii). Meillet reiterated this point in 1928 in The Hague at the First Congress of Linguists in his paper "Caractères généraux de la langue grecque" (*Actes*, pp. 164–165), using the same arguments and citing Trubetzkoy. It is truly striking that Meillet should have drawn on Trubetzkoy's thinking to develop an argument that seems to have directly countered Trubetzkoy's view that the Indo-Europeans had never existed (see Trubetzkoy 1939a) while corroborating Trubetzkoy's view on the "individualism" of "Romano-Germanic" culture. Meillet discerned individualism in Greek grammar while Savitsky discerned it in Europe's fragmented geography.
25 It is useful to recall that they did so at nearly the same moment as the "Sapir/Whorf" hypothesis was being formulated in American ethnolinguistics and Marrist hypotheses on the tie between language and thought were being developed in the Soviet Union.

to everything else in the order of things."[26] But Jakobson, Trubetzkoy and Savitsky went beyond the language-culture correspondence: for them, language and culture were both "covered" by or fit almost perfectly into the boundaries of a given *territory* with its particular climates, soil types and geography.

2.2 Development locale and phonology

Jakobson stressed two types of phenomena: 1) related languages sharing features that did not belong to the common ancestor, and 2) similarities between unrelated languages. Both cases proved that components (*structural* features) had been *acquired* at the same time by two different languages. The question then was *how* and *why* did such a phenomenon take place. We have seen that for many linguists working in the first third of the twentieth century, discrediting the strict neogrammarian model led to a recognition that there could be *borrowings* and *influences* between languages (this understanding was behind the notions of *substrate*, *adstrate* and *superstrate*, for example). For his part Jakobson clearly rejected any approach in terms of influence, stressing instead, like Savitsky, the role of the *land* or *territory* itself; that is, development locale. This of course created tension between the distinct explanatory models he himself was using. For example, he ended up with two distinct foundations for the consonant palatalization phenomenon characterizing the phonological union of Eurasian languages. On one hand, he presented it as a feature that "central languages" possessed genetically and later *diffused* to their neighbors through contact; on the other, he understood palatalization as a feature specific to the given "development locale" and therefore one that could be acquired when languages "settled" in the given territory and lost when they "moved out" of it, as Savitsky had shown for Hungarian. The second claim did not draw on any notion of diffusion.

However, and despite appearances, Savitsky and Jakobson diverged on one major issue. The fact does not seem to have been clear to the two protagonists themselves, yet it is crucial to understanding this delicate moment in the history of structuralism generally and phonology in particular. Savitsky never spoke of consonant palatalization as a feature particular to a *system*, but as a *phonetic* particularity of Eurasian languages, one that facilitated the task of pronouncing Russian for non-Russian Eurasians, for example. Most suprising of all is that Jakobson himself occasionally allowed for this kind of interpretation (as we saw in Chapter 3 with the problem of "substantialized relational elements").

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26 Milner 1982, p. 334.

Like Jakobson and Trubetzkoy,[27] Savitsky had his *idée fixe*: to establish *correspondences* between all things at any cost. The fact that language unions could be discerned at the scale of an entire continent while others were only "local" was for him *analogous* to "political and customs classification of the units that make up the world."[28] At the very start of the 1930s he proposed to Jakobson that they embark on a ten-year research program that would consist in mapping the spatial and hierarchical distribution of language unions across the planet.

What's more, for Savitsky, the internal components of a whole such as Eurasia existed materially; they could be perceived and studied independently of each other. These were not negatively defined relational features as in Saussure's thinking; their relations were not "purely differential." We cannot say that Savitsky thought, as Saussure did, that the most precise characteristic of system components was "to be what the others were not."[29]

So in fact the dialogue between Savitsky and Jakobson was a dialogue of the deaf, a sort of fools' game in which it is difficult to tell who was pretending not to hear what the other said. Both were seeking a global explanation of the world where all the facts they had amassed would work together to confirm the grandiose edifice of the theory. But while Savitsky saw borders that coincided "more or less," Jakobson was hunting for an even more elusive object – the planetary distribution of distinctive phonological features – all the while causing doubt in his reader because of the ambiguous way he had of expressing his thinking and findings:

> In most cases we find extraordinary paralellism between phonological phenomena and geographical ones (Jakobson 1931d, pp. 374–376).

At any rate, both these thinkers' scientific pleasure lay in bringing to light correspondences, points of agreement or coincidence between sets of *related things*:

> In comparing the different isophones marking linguistic affinities with distribution of grammatical structure features, we start to see bundles of isolines. Likewise we are struck by alignments between language association boundaries and some physical and geopolitical boundaries. For example, the area of monotonic palatalizing languages coincides with the geographical whole known as *Eurasia properly speaking*, a whole detached from the European and Asian areas by several particularities of its physical and political geography (Jakobson 1938 [1971a, p. 246]).

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27 For Trubetzkoy the particularities of Eurasian peoples' folk dancing, popular poetry, music (the pentatonic scale), ornament and "mentality" were all linked by *correspondences*; see Trubetzkoy 1925c, 1927b.

28 Savitsky, letter to Jakobson dated August 9, 1930; published in Toman 1994, p. 134.

29 Saussure 1979, p. 162.

Half a century later, Jakobson put forward the same theory of correspondences in almost identical terms:

> We should also point out that these widespread isoglosses generally coincide with other similarly puzzling lines encountered in the geographical distribution of anthropological traits. These often unexpected connections require a many-sided analysis in accordance with the methodological theses advanced by the ingenious scholar Petr Nikolaevich Savitsky, the precursor of structural geography (Jakobson 1983, p. 89).

As for Savitsky, he sought correspondences in just those places he most expected to find them:

> You suggest in your essay that Russian linguistics should take on the study of Mongolian and Manchu-Tungus languages. If it were found that the border between opposition and non-opposition of consonants by whether or not they are palatalized corresponded to the border between Chinese and Mongolian in the region of the Great Wall, I might just have a heart attack for joy, because the geographical and historical data all point in that direction (Savitsky, letter to Jakobson dated August 9, 1930; published in Toman 1994, p. 131).

> The problem of Yakut is very interesting, as is the problem of the languages of the Enissey basin. It is highly probable that the border between Eurasia and Asia corresponds to the border between Yakut and Yukagir. Is not everything Eurasian linked to the steppes? And we know that the Yakuts cling to isolated areas where steppe phenomena obtain (*ibid*., p. 132).

Moreover, Savitsky's notion of process fit together with the organicist, naturalist understanding at the heart of Eurasianism: relations between languages were relations between organisms; their expansion was a natural phenomenon in harmony with the *development locale*; it had nothing to do with power relations:

> The Eurasian continent has its thousand-year history but it is also *in the process of creating itself* [*tvorimoe*]. The Russian people are creating a *new* Eurasia. [The Russian people's] expansion over the last centuries has unfolded at such a pace that Eurasianization is looking more and more like Russification – not in a violent way, but in the organic sense of the term, that of freedom and choice. And you see what a remarkable overall picture spreads out before us: the Russian language now encompasses almost all Eurasia. As far as I can judge, it is Eurasia's most characteristic language. Meanwhile its western dialects (Ruthenian idioms) stretch all the way to the edges of the Europeanized regions, and its fareastern dialects are being Asianized. Moreover, these changes are symmetrical. How are we to define the place of Russian in Eurasia? It would seem that no other language of the Old continent has such a range of nuances (and across a continuous territory to boot!) (*ibid*., p. 132).

Savitsky's geography was not so much chorography as cosmography: the only reason to describe a development locale was to interpret a preposited whole.

3 Order and harmony

In striking contrast to Saussure, for Jakobson a system was all order and harmony. Although the Prague Russians occasionally used the word *coincidence*, there was nothing random about such a thing as they understood it; it was certainly not a chance encounter between features of diverse origins, but rather a revelation of the *hidden order* governing the way phenomena were arranged.[30] The Prague Russians were fascinated by the idea of a monumental order that ruled the world, a world composed of wholes. They refused to admit of disorder, want or incompletion. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, what they were trying to do was decipher *signs* proffered by nature and culture. Beneath the visible they were looking for the invisible structure of the real. The theory of correspondences was typical of German Romanticism and goes back through Paracelsus and Jakob Böhme to Late Antiquity studies of macrocosm-microcosm correspondences. The Prague Russians' thinking was indeed in line with this "tradition," one clearly not specific to Russia alone but also to "Romano-Germanic science." In fact, Jakobson and Trubetzkoy abandoned the great Whole of *Naturphilosophie* for a plurality of small wholes which they called "cultures": incommensurable, hermetically sealed, impermeable to each other. They invented the idea of several wholes, thereby reproducing the *Naturphilosophie* idea of the world's oneness and unity at a smaller scale. They discarded the idea of hidden *universal* unity: the universe for them was nothing more than an abstract idea. Real boundaries were those that encircled the world's distinct, different peoples – "symphonic persons" (Trubetzkoy 1927d).[31] By rejecting the notion of universal culture, which they equated with western civilization, Jakobson and Trubetzkoy at the turn of the 1930s emphasized instead the notion of *zones*, a flexible variant of Danilevsky's "closed historical-cultural types," within which scientific research modes were culturally determined, thus forming what they claimed were "structural" wholes. Like the Romantics, like Novalis, they sought to decipher the great book of Nature; but like the positivists they sought to identify its laws rather than to discover some great semiological fabric.[32]

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30 Again, this Eurasianist thesis was not at all *new*. The same fascination with correspondences can be found in a linguist for whom Jakobson had only harsh criticism, Schleicher, though Schleicher was not talking about territory but more abstractly about typology. For Schleicher, the rising hierarchy of languages – isolating/agglutinating/inflecting – *corresponded* to the rising mineral/plant/animal hierarchy.

31 Trubetzkoy often used this expression, borrowed from Karsavin. On Karsavin's theory of the symphonic personality see Hauchard 1996.

32 One of Jakobson's keywords in his German texts was *Gleichmässigkeit*: "regularity, symmetry, uniformity, the quality of being level" (Jakobson 1930, p. 384).

They nonetheless belonged to an extremely modern current of thought in which the point was to identify same beneath diversity, unity above and beyond heterogeneity. The advent of phonology was part of this complex movement, a movement that historians of science would do well to resituate in a broader perspective of the history of culture.

The notion of world order in Eurasianist thinking, particularly that of Jakobson and Savitsky, was based on radical rejection of evolutionist claims; it therefore raises the crucial question of time. Nature had a history, and each *development locale* had its own history as well, incommensurable to those of other such locales.

> If the face of the Earth were chaotic, if no rules governed its composition, I could obviously not believe that the concept of *development locale* could one day generate clear, useful results. In reality things are quite different. Geological composition, hydrological particularities, the qualities of the ground or soil and the nature of vegetation are mutually related in a regular way, just as they are linked to climate and the morphological specificities of every particular face of the Earth. ... Every human milieu, however small, is to be found in a one-of-a-kind geographical environment (Savitsky 1927a, pp. 30–31).

But the most interesting point here is that the particular structural science that was coming into being in Prague, where a linguist (Jakobson) was working in close association with a geographer (Savitsky), was based on a Platonic or Pythagorean view of the world as order and harmony, a view heavily present in early twentieth-century Russian thought as it had been in German thought of the early nineteenth.[33] For our Russian thinkers, the notion of "system" or "structure" already corresponded to the notion of *order* understood as rejection of chance occurrence or phenomena. We have seen how Berg's biological model of *nomogenesis* implied a refusal to acknowledge that changes could occur by chance.

There is an apparent contradiction between the idea of an immutable universal order or "cosmos," an eternal, infinite order of Nature (including society) whose fundamental principles have to be identified, and the idea of historical change, which for Trubetzkoy was the most important focus of linguistics research: how could evolution of any sort be explained if the least change would necessarily perturb an existing state of harmony? Jakobson and Trubetzkoy resolved this difficulty by declaring change itself harmonious. Thanks to Trubetzkoy's notion of the logic of evolution, systematicity was maintained *through* change.

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33 On geometric and Pythagorean thinking in German Romantic geography (that of Carl Ritter, for example), see Nicolas 1974.

3.1 A geometric vision of geography[34]

In direct contrast to Kartsevsky, who based much of his reasoning on the concept of assymetry, Jakobson, Trubetzkoy and Savitsky were fascinated by *symmetry*. For them an object existed if – or because – it had a symmetrical structure. But while for Trubetzkoy this symmetry was abstract (for example, as he saw it, all vowel systems were symmetrical),[35] for Jakobson symmetry was located in *space*, on real territory. The following graph represents Jakobson's *symmetrical* spatial lay-out, marked by his *center/periphery* opposition, which brings to light the "centrality" of Eurasian languages and the "peripheral nature" of western European ones, for example, defined exclusively by negative features: neither correlation of palatalization nor polytony:

☐ polytonic languages

▭ monotonic languages with correlation of palatalization

▨ monotonic languages without correlation of palatalization

▭ languages with correlation of palatalization
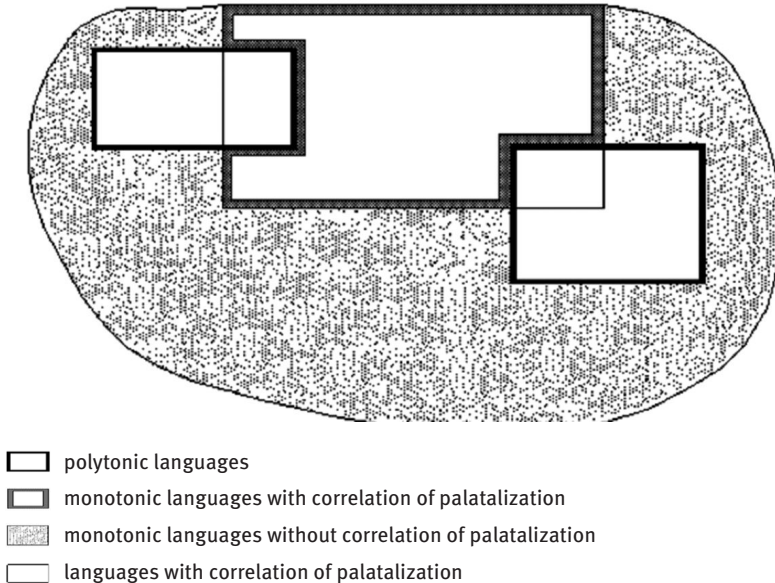
Fig. 11: Jakobson's vision of symmetry

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34 My thanks to G. Nicolas for drawing my attention to these relations between geometry and geography.

35 See Trubetzkoy, *LN*, 1985, p. 117.

3.1.1 Symmetry

The scientific work done by the Prague Russians in the late 1920s and early 1930s aimed to prove that the distribution of languages across the surface of the globe was not contingent but rather reflected a necessary order. They used two types of argument:
- the theory of correspondences between series of objects of different origins (e.g., overlap between isoglosses and isotherms);
- a theory of symmetry according to which a given object existed ontologically because it was symmetrical in structure. The idea here was that the languages of the "old continent" were linked by a symmetrical spatial relation, an axis of symmetry running across Eurasian territory.

There was definitely an esthetic component to the Eurasianists' construction. The symmetry, periodicity, correspondences among all components, ordered arrangement of parts into a Whole that the Eurasianists claimed to have discovered in the territory they were scrutinizing clearly elicited in them a feeling on the order of esthetic pleasure.[36] This is why it would be a serious oversimplification to say that Jakobson's *Sprachbund* theory should be interpreted in terms of language *contact*. The symmetry of the polytonic language zones on either side of Eurasia, for example, is incompatible with any notion of contact. All Jakobson could say about that symmetry was that it was a matter of spatial harmony and "not due to chance." This points to a kind of rationalizing of the notions of adjacency and territory, the understanding that those features reflected an ever-necessary order:

> Phonology and physical geography register the existence of a remarkable symmetry in the nature of Eurasia's borders. The far northeast and the far northwest of the Eurasian linguistic territory border on regions where monotonic languages that do not differentiate consonant pitch are spoken: on one side, the language of the Chukchi, Yukagirs, and others; on the other those of the Suomis and Lapps. In the northwest and all along its eastern border, the Eurasian union touches agglomerations of polytonic languages (those of the Baltic and the Pacific Ocean). Lastly, in the south and southwest, it is once again in contact with monotonic languages that do not differentiate pitch for consonants – these are the main set of European languages, together with Osmanli Turkish, the Kartvelian group and the Indo-European languages of the Near East (Armenian and Indo-Iranian) (Jakobson 1931d, pp. 374–376).

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36 It is therefore particularly surprising that Jakobson was so interested in cubist painting: a 1912 anthology contains an article by Burliuk entitled "Cubism" which lays down an opposition between the "academic canon," characterized by *symmetry* and *harmony*, and the new painting canon, "of displaced, diverted constructions," characterized by "disharmony, disproportion, color dissonance" (quoted in Sola 1990, p. 26).

> Being neighbors favors the rise or persistence of similar phonological phenomena while bringing out certain shared features alongside the particularities of each. In this regard, the association of polytonic languages fits into a greater association of European languages that have a twofold accent form. I have already pointed out that the association of palatalizing languages combines on both west and east with an association of polytonic languages. It is unlikely that this symmetry between the two borders of a single association is due merely to chance (Jakobson 1938 [1971a, pp. 241–246]).

But the greatest amount of material amassed in this quest for symmetry is to be found in Savitsky's work, which on this point too should be thought of as a major source of inspiration for Jakobson and Trubetzkoy. Reviewing a book on the vegetation of the Soviet Union published in Moscow-Leningrad in 1936,[37] Savitsky hailed it as worthy of Eurasianist science[38] in that the author had meticulously noted the symmetrical composition (or "structure") of vegetation zone distribution, thereby demonstrating it to be a "system":

> The question is raised of the nature of the *zonal system* of vegetation and the soil types that cover the space of our country, forming one if not *the* essential particularity (Savitsky 1940, p. 155).

At this point in the review Savitsky points out that Alekhin's study, based entirely as it is on a discovery of the *symmetrical* nature of vegetation zone distribution across the Soviet Union, closely followed principles *already* put forward in Eurasianist studies. Here he was referring to east/west symmetries, "where the far-eastern parts of the system come to resemble the far-western ones with regard to certain features and to differentiate themselves from the central cores of the system by way of those same features," and north/south symmetries, "which appear in places in the northern and southern extremities where a similar mutual encounter ('the meeting of extremes') is manifest." For Alekhin as for Savitsky, it was in the center (or *core*) of Eurasia that zone distribution was densest and most complex. As one moved out toward the periphery the "zonal system" became simpler and even began to disappear:

> At the longitudes between the lower Volga to the west and the Altai to the east, four zones follow on each other across the space of Russia-Eurasia: desert, steppe, forest and tundra. The area further east (the "Mongolian core of the continent" [Savitsky quoting Alekhin here]) is penetrated by the wide latitudinal swath of desert but not by the steppe. Beyond the Altai, the steppe formation starts to look "shredded," island-like. As we approach the Pacific Ocean even these forms disappear, along with the desert. Here only two zones

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37 Alekhin 1936; see Savitsky's review, 1940.
38 He admired its "concision, clarity and scientific beauty" (Savitsky 1940, p. 155).

subsist: tundra and forest. To the west, the desert pushes on into the longitudes of the lower Volga. Still further west we find only three zones: steppe, forest, and tundra. But the steppe disappears as a compact zone as we near the Carpathian mountains. In the longitudes of the Central Carpathians, in the space between them and the Glacial Ocean, the observer finds only two zones – forest and tundra – just like in the far east…. V. Alekhin rightly deduces that "the symmetrical composition of the zonal system thus comes into view: the center is made up of four different components, the flanks of two, and between the flanks and the center we find a three-component composition" (*ibid.*, p. 157).

For Savitsky, the axis of symmetry was not merely a geometrical symbol or representation but the region in which a maximum number of specific positive traits were concentrated. The increase in humidity as one moved from south to north and the rising temperatures as one moved in the opposite direction proved the existence of a zonal swath in which "the averages of the two orders of phenomena meet" – this was the "axial zone" or "median axis." That zone was defined as both the *core* in which phenomenon density was highest – "this is the area of the Russian plains in which we find the greatest wealth and density of organic life" – and the *border* between forest and steppe zones, a border that *coincided* with the great axis of symmetry of the Eurasian system. Savitsky pointed out that this was also the region in which the great historical centers – Kiev, Nizhny Novgorod, Kazan and others – had developed. Once again the reasoning points up what the reasoner considered self-evident: "It is perfectly natural that the historical milieu should have been attracted to this border: it coincides with the area representing the greatest accumulation of productive forces in the forest and steppe zones" (*ibid.*, p. 159). Lastly, Savitsky explained, the theory of correspondences was strengthened by Alekhin's discovery: the axis of the zonal system "almost perfectly coincides" with the "climate axis" (p. 160); that is, a high pressure strip whose effects were particularly powerful in winter and that functioned as "the boundary between the different winds" blowing across the spaces of Russia. North of this strip, northwest and west winds dominated; south of it, north, northeast and east winds dominated.

These criteria taken together formed the basis of a harmonious, esthetic view of the Eurasian world:

The overlap of this high pressure swath with the "latitude axis" greatly enhances the orderly arrangement and visibility of natural phenomena within the "symmetrical system" (*ibid.*, p. 159; Savitsky quotes Alekhin).

Savitsky's reasoning here is indubitably structuralist: what counts is not the material nature of the components but their relations within a system. No two features could be more *different* than the burning desert of Central Asia and the icy wasteland of the tundra near the polar cap. Yet because each is positioned

"laterally" to the axis zone, their *meaning* is the *same*: "To the north and south, the phytocenological composition of plant types gradually becomes simpler." Here again, the geometric view only serves to guide understanding of physical phenomena: characteristics of one zone may "migrate" toward another:

> Wherever phenomena specific to the system's "axial" parts move toward its "lateral" parts we have what may be called an "axiofugal" phenomenon; movement in the opposite direction (that is, of "lateral" parts towards to the axis) may be called "axiopetal." It is these parts of the system that offer the most propitious conditions for human economic activity, in connection with what was said above. From this it follows that "axiofugal" phenomena should be given a plus sign for the economic sphere and "axiopetal" phenomena a minus sign. In other words, the first set facilitate the spread of "progressive" (in the economic sense) natural factors while the second set work to reinforce "regressive" factors. Alekhin has masterfully applied these concepts – already put forward in Eurasianist studies of geographical matters – in analyzing the southward migration of geographical zones observable in the current geological period (the tundra moving toward the forest, the forest toward the steppe and so forth) (*ibid.*, p. 161).

We are now in a position to do what Savitsky did not; that is, represent the "structure" of vegetation zones in the USSR-Russia-Eurasia:

Fig. 12: flag-stripe vegetation zones in Savitsky's vision of Eurasia (The encircled area represents the central *core* or axis zone.)

Clearly zone density and diversity decrease as we move away from the center, here represented by the east/west axis of symmetry. The axis zone is simultaneously a *core* in which a maximum number of features are concentrated.

For Savitsky, then, Russian geographical and soil-type symmetry was of two sorts. First, there was the east/west axis, which determined which zones were favorable to the pursuit of life (the central ones) and which unfavorable (the lateral ones):

lateral part	
west axial part **east**	
lateral part	
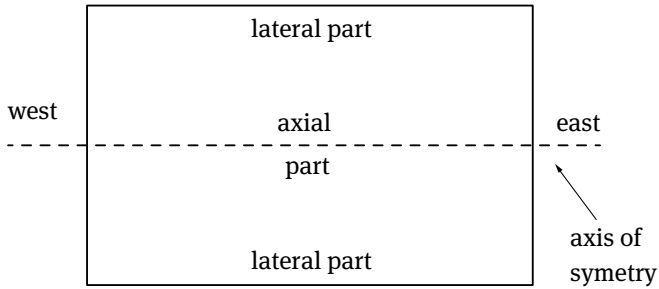
axis of symetry

Fig. 13: North-South axis of symmetry In Savitsky's Eurasia

Second, the north/south axis established an opposition between zones of criteria complexification (central ones) and criteria simplification (lateral ones).

north

simplification   complexification   simplification

south
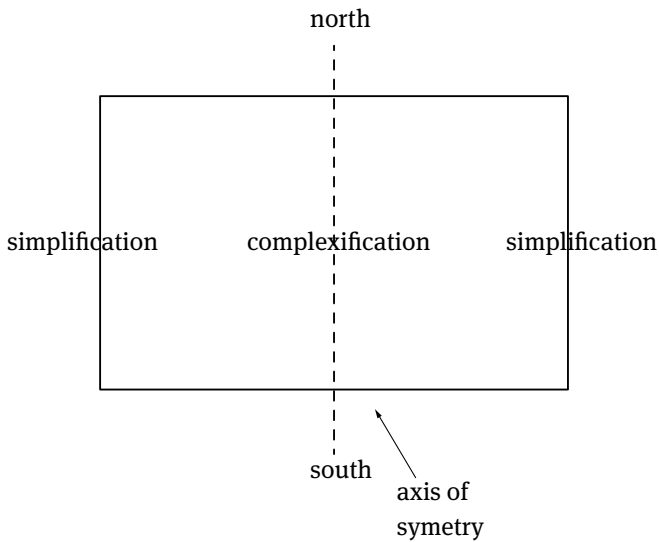
axis of symetry

Fig. 14: East-West axis of symmetry in Savitsky's Eurasia

And even matters such as increasing temperature or humidity that were not cast or understood in terms of their relation to either axis nonetheless involved a mirroring effect that reintroduced order and a kind of symmetry:
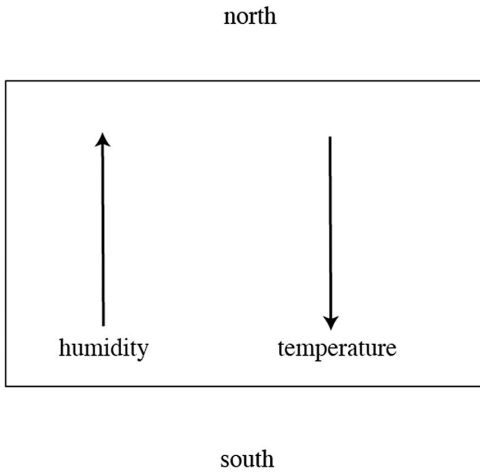
north

Fig. 15: North-Sound mirroring effect in Savitsky's Eurasia

Jakobson went no further than to make this symmetrical organization a bit more complex by adding an axis Savitsky did not use. But the idea of proceeding this way clearly came to him from Savitsky:
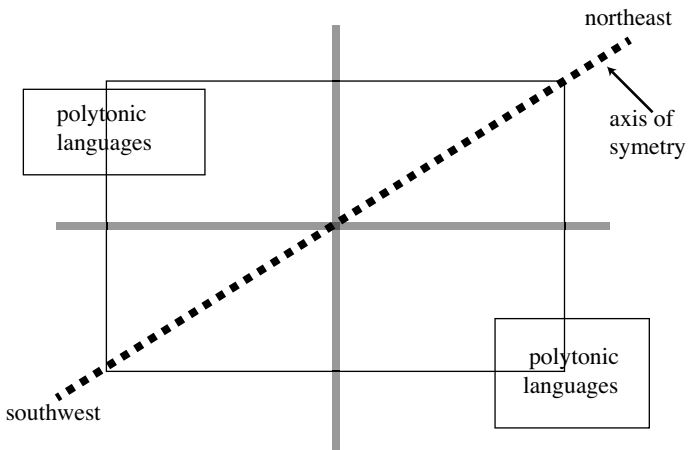
Fig. 16: North-West / South-east symmetry in Jakobson's Eurasia

While Jakobson's reasoning looks very like it belongs to *linguistic geography,* it actually was based on a *geometric* view of space. For him, symmetry lay in the

idea of resemblance between edges or "peripheries." The *center* was a compact, continuous mass defined by a positive category – palatalization – and a negative characteristic: absence of polytony. *Symmetry* was operative on both sides of this whole, each "inhabited" by exclusively polytonic languages. And a thick swath or *zone* of languages that were neither polytonic nor used palatalization to differentiate correlated consonants encircled the center. But Jakobson's geometric symmetry is curious because in contrast to Savitsky's and Alekhin's, he paid no attention to isometry: the Baltic union covered a much smaller area than the Pacific union; at most there is something resembling homomorphy. Moreover, Jakobson had nothing to say about what can be considered the crucial component in thinking on symmetry; i.e., where the *axis* is situated – or even if there is one. Jakobson's geometric representation of space in the 1920s and 1930s can perhaps be traced back to the geographer Carl Ritter (1779–1859) and from there to Pythagoras's and Plato's metaphysics of world harmony and order (see Plato's *Timaeus*). Attempting to use symmetry as a principle for ontologically proving the profound, intrinsic reality of discovered objects amounted to *knowing how to make sense of* geometric relations, *to attribute meaning* to what is hidden.

In fact, Jakobson's fundamental argument was that the spatial distribution of phonological features was not random but *corresponded* to other, non-linguistic phenomena.

In this connection, his geometric perspective worked for him only as a position from which to look out over the entire world. He did not use it to perform calculations or measurements; he used it intuitively as both illustration and truth criterion; above all as (pseudo) proof of the object he was looking for: the Eurasian totality. Mirroring is a questionable sort of symmetry: there is no reciprocity. When it came to space, then, Jakobson often put his desire for esthetic satisfaction before his linguistic understanding or reasoning.

The same cannot be said of Trubetzkoy. We know that for him (in contrast to Kartsevsky), *symmetry* was a criterion for establishing the ontological reality of discovered objects. In a letter to Jakobson dated September 19, 1938, he wrote:

> I didn't work much this summer, I did a lot of strolling, the weather was lovely.... I established the phonological vowel system of all the languages I remember by heart (34 all told) and tried to compare them.... The results are quite curious. For example, I have not yet found a single language with an asymmetrical vowel system. All the systems fit into a small number of types and all can be represented by symmetrical shapes (triangles,[39] parallel lines, etc.). It is easy to determine system formation laws (for example, if a given language

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[39] The notion and term "vowel triangle" were not invented by Trubetzkoy but by the German physician Hellwag in the late eighteenth century (1781); see Mounin 1966, p. 23.

has labialized front vowels, their number never exceeds the number of non-labialized front vowels, etc.) (Trubetzkoy, *LN*, 1985, p. 117).

The most interesting feature of this letter is Trubetzkoy's absolute confidence in his ontological reasoning: if a vowel system did not "fit" into a symmetrical shape, this meant it had been poorly described. It was simply inconceivable to him that such a system could be non-symmetrical. Symmetry was an intrinsic property of vowel systems, a specificity; it could not be due to heuristic bias on the researcher's part.

> Given this result, I have set out to revise some of my constructions, and yours too, for they turn out not to be entirely satisfactory. In particular, there is something that doesn't work with the earliest stages of Czech. The three variations on *e (<*e, * ě* and **'*) do not allow for establishing even a moderately adequate symmetrical system. There's something false here, but what? (Trubetzkoy, *LN*, 1985, pp. 117–118).

The question clearly arises as to how much Trubetzkoy's phonological understanding was *influenced* by his representations of Eurasian specificity. In his obituary for Trubetzkoy, Chizhevsky noted a clear affinity between the Eurasianist claims and Trubetzkoy's phonology.[40] Toman makes the same claim: for him Trubetzkoy's notion of vowel system symmetry was a "metamorphosis" of his Eurasianist conceptions;[41] we need only think of Trubetzkoy's particular appreciation of Turkic languages for their "exceptionlessness," languages consistent with simple, logically clear outlines.[42] Clearly, then, the likelihood of Trubetzkoy's ideas being misunderstood by western linguists is particularly great when his Eurasianist orientations are not taken into account. Benveniste, for example, identified an idea in Trubetzkoy's thought that was not there at all: asymmetry.

> [A Bloomfieldian] would reject as marred by teleology the notion of balance and tendency that Trubetzkoy adds to that of structure. And yet that notion has proved productive; it is actually the only principle that enables us to understand language system evolution. A state of language results first and foremost from a certain balance between the parts of its structure, a balance that nonetheless never amounts to full symmetry, probably because dissymmetry is inscribed in the very principle of language due to the asymmetry of our speech organs. Since all the components are held together through a kind of solidarity, an impact on one point calls into question the entire set of relations and sooner or later produces a new arrangement (Benveniste 1966, p. 9).

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40 Chizhevsky 1939, p. 465.
41 Toman 1987, p. 637.
42 Trubetzkoy 1927d, p. 36.

Once again, for Trubetzkoy languages evolved not because of asymmetries but because they had "internal development tendencies" and followed a particular sort of "evolutionary logic."

Lastly, Trubetzkoy's fascination with symmetry could amount at times to an obsession. In "The Turanian Element in Russian Culture," the melody of Turkish songs is said to be "constructed in strictly *symmetrical* fashion"; these songs "are characterized by a particular clarity and by transparent harmony and rhythm."[43] In popular Turkish poetry we find "symmetrically constructed distiches and quatrains characterized by syntactic parallelism so pronounced that it may actually result in tautology" and "long songs, essentially epic chants also organized into strophes, each of which is governed by the parallelism principle; often several strophes are grouped together to create a figure of *symmetry* and parallelism."[44] In the area of religion, the Altaic peoples' belief system was "run through with the idea of dualism, which curiously enough takes the form of a coherent, *symmetrical* system that ultimately becomes rigorist."[45] Lastly, the Turanian national psyche was based entirely on *symmetry*: "Not only the thinking of this people but also its entire perception of reality fit into the simple, *symmetrical* outlines of what can be called its 'unconscious philosophical system.'"[46]

3.1.2 Center and periphery

In a letter to Jakobson dated August 9, 1930,[47] Savitsky formulated a radical "geophonological" interpretation of Jakobson's work in which it became a global geographic and historical worldview. Eurasia, Savitsky explained, was not merely a *place* but also and above all a *process*; this was in keeping with his notion of *development locale*. The opposition between the *central* or *middle world* (Eurasia) and the peripheries that made up the Ancient world – i.e., Europe and Asia – went hand in hand with an opposition between "Eurasianization" and "peripheralization" of language phenomena. In this way Savitsky arrived at a hierarchical ranking of language alliances across the planet: the Eurasian language union was defined by one positive feature (correlation of palatalization) whereas Europe and Asia, made up of differing, scattered *development locales*, contained several

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43 Trubetzkoy 1925c.

44 *Ibid*., p. 135.

45 *Ibid*., p. 136.

46 *Ibid*., p. 142.

47 Published in Toman 1994, p. 128.

different language unions (the Baltic, the Balkanic, and so forth), all of which shared the negative feature of no correlation for palatalization.

Once again, the meaning of center and periphery was completely different for contemporaries of Jakobson and Savitsky who chose to wield those concepts. For them they were *relative* notions, whereas for Jakobson and Savitsky they were *absolute*. For Van Ginneken, for example, whose thinking was close to the neolinguists', anything could be a center – no idea of symmetry for him:

> Affinity or convergence between similar languages may be discerned in ... vocabulary, grammar and syntax. And though the various waves all differ in time and space, there are also many parallels; these reveal to us shared innovations and a variety of radiating centers. This in turn enables us, at least in favorable cases, to reconstitute the successive evolutionary stages of the phonological, lexical, grammatical and syntactic system (Van Ginneken 1935, pp. 41–42).

Likewise for the Italian neolinguists the aim of linguistic geography went beyond simply noting dialect features; the point was to study diffusion of linguistic features over vast territories and discover the *centers* from which *innovations* radiated outwards. In their studies of diffusion, the neolinguists were extremely remote from any notion like development locale. For them a *center* was any region where a linguistic innovation appeared. And once again, since there was no reason for linguistic change always to occur in the same place, no single region could be *the* center from which all linguistic features spread.[48]

So the center/periphery opposition used by the Prague Russians had a very different meaning from that notion in neolinguistic thinking.[49] Our Russian linguists did not think in terms of waves concentrically radiating outward from a given center of innovation (a definition in relative terms: any point could be a center); theirs was a global spatial idea according to which the periphery of Eurasian territory was the Soviet border.[50] When Trubetzkoy spoke of radiation, it

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48 In this connection it is worth recalling an idea formulated in the Middle Ages, used by Nicholas of Cusa and later Giordano Bruno: "The center is everywhere, the circumference nowhere." On this point the neolinguists and Saussure could agree, despite their diametrically opposed views on the issue of boundaries.

49 This despite Ivić's view (1970, p. 96) that the neolinguists and Trubetzkoy thought the same thing, and despite the neolinguists's own claim to have invented the idea of language union (*lega linguistica*); i.e., ahead of the Prague Linguistic Circle.

50 The similarity between post-war Stalinist discourse and 1930s' Eurasianist positions is very striking (though no mention was ever made of Eurasianist theories in the Soviet Union at that time); see a text in *Izvestiya* published May 24, 1950: "The Russian people has created a powerful state by soldering together all Russian lands from the Baltic to the Pacific, from the Black Sea to the Arctic Ocean, into a single block. The Russian people is the powerful core around which all

was in the sense of energy or a superior power radiating out from its own center or *hearth*:

> Thanks to a series of historical circumstances, literary Russian has become the radiating center for literary languages throughout the zone of Eurasia. The spread of literary languages is usually linked to the spread of the given alphabet. The Greek alphabet, which developed from the Phoenician one, gave rise to the Latin alphabet and later to the Gothic alphabet and the two Old Slavonic alphabets, Glagolithic and Cyrillic. As for Latin, it was used as the basis for all European language-writing systems. We see the same phenomenon occurring now for the Russian alphabet. Regarding the cultural role of the Russian alphabet, then, the point is not only to what degree it is adapted to the Russian language but also whether and to what degree it can be used to establish alphabets for the other languages of Eurasia. And it must be admitted that in this case the Russian alphabet offers great advantages and is more fit to play the role than any other alphabet in Europe, Eurasia or Asia (Trubetzkoy 1927b, p. 89).

When Dauzat spoke of *irradiation*, it was always in connection with extra-linguistic causality:

> Words, forms and idiomatic expressions radiate first and foremost from great urban centers that are seats of civilization and to a lesser degree linguistic spread [*irradiation*] (Dauzat 1922, p. 58).

Jakobson and Savitsky both organized their views of space in terms of the center/periphery opposition. Though they used the same terms, their understanding of them was different. It will be recalled that for Savitsky, geographical objects were structured around a central *core* characterized by maximum concentration of the positive features specific to that object, concentration decreasing as one moved outward toward the periphery. For Savitsky, then, all converged toward the center. The periphery was marked by feature weakness and simplification; the center by complexity and maximum concentration of features, while the axis region was a "core." Jakobson's conception of space was more like geometric empiricism, or rather geometric ontology: the center was a *center* in the geometrical sense, defined simply as not on the periphery; indeed, what made it the center was the fact that it was surrounded by symmetrical peripheries. It was the symmetry that "made" the research object, brought it to light, made it visible. And though Jako-

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the country's nations developed and are gathered" (quoted in Laurat 1951, p. 73). It is important to keep in mind that in the USSR, the term "nation" referred to a people, an administratively defined ethnic group administratively identified with a particular territory. This was an ethnicist understanding of human groups inherited from nineteenth-century German science.

bson occasionally used the word *core* in the sense of *center*, his reasoning was not geographer's reasoning:

> The expansion zone of the system of opposed consonant pitches thus covers three plains, the one between the White Sea and the Caucasus, eastern Siberia, and Turkestan; that is, it extends over the core in which the geographic particularities of the Eurasian world are most distinct and clear. The southwestern border region of this phonological union occupies a Eurasian steppe area that extends along the eastern shore of the Black Sea from Odessa to the Balkans. Lastly, to the east, the area of languages with correlation of palatalization extends across the regions that may be defined as the Mongolian core, regions that also belong to Eurasia by way of an entire series of characteristics (Jakobson 1931d, pp. 374–375).

The center/periphery opposition was also of considerable importance in Gilliéron's dialectology or that of the Italian neolinguists Bartoli and Pisani. They used the term center to apply to any region that produced linguistic innovation. But once again, since there was no reason for linguistic changes to all occur in the same place, no region was *central* for all language features. The notions of "center" and "periphery" thus had to be thought of as relative.[51]

In Jakobson's linguistic geography studies, on the other hand, that opposition is absolute: languages are either central or peripheral *in and of themselves*:

> A language may simultaneously exhibit different, non-overlapping phonological affinities, just as a spoken idiom may have particularities that link it to various different dialects. While the core of the afore-mentioned association[52] contains only monotonic languages (it is devoid of polytony), its two peripheries – to the east (Japanese, the Dungan Chinese dialect) and west (Lithuanian and Latvian idioms, Estonian) – belong to two vast polytonic language associations (that is, languages capable of differentiating the meaning of words by means of two contrasting intonations) (Jakobson 1938 [1971a, p. 243]).

> Polytony and all aspects thereof are radically foreign to the languages of Eurasia. Eurasia is symmetrically surrounded on both sides by polytonic language unions: the Baltic union to the northwest, the Pacific union to the southeast. This is another example of the symmetrical structure of the western and eastern edges of the continent to which P. Savitsky has drawn our attention (Jakobson 1931a [1971a, p. 159]).

The features of Jakobson's periphery, meanwhile, were quite odd: they were complex and "reinforced":

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51 On this point see Ivić 1970, p. 95.

52 Reference is to the association – or union – of Eurasian languages. Writing in French here, Jakobson used the term "*association de langues*" to translate the Russian *yazikovoy soyuz*.

> The mountainous region bordering the White Sea-Caucasus plain to the southeast is occupied primarily by languages belonging to the northern Caucasian group. Here we find the phonological particularity of Eurasian languages: differences in consonant pitch play a crucial role. But those differences, a typically peripheral phenomenon, are in part modified and in part reinforced (Jakobson 1931a [1971a, p. 180]).

Moreover, with Jakobson it is not always easy to tell what, exactly, the periphery is. Is it the edge of a territory, like the Caucasus, or what is outside the territory, like European languages, defined as typically "peripheral":

> Comparison of the phonological phenomena studied above with Trubetzkoy's morphological observations allows for establishing that 1) within the limits of the basic continent of the Ancient World there are central phenomena on one hand, peripheral phenomena on the other; 2) all Eurasian languages are characterized by central phenomena (differences in consonant pitch, monotony, declension forms); 3) once we move beyond an intermediate linguistic zone adjacent to Eurasia, those central phenomena are nowhere to be found in non-Eurasian languages; 4) peripheral phenomena strongly characterize the entire Romano-Germanic zone of Europe and all of south and southeast Asia (Jakobson 1931a [1971a,p. 196]).

The only way Romano-Germanic languages could have "peripheral" characteristics is by being positioned in relation to a particular center: Eurasia. If the "periphery" could be found both inside and outside the given whole, then the whole could not be as closed or "separate" as had been claimed. Eurasia, the "Middle world," was *linked* to its two peripheries, Europe and Asia. For Jakobson, the geographical structure itself of these two peripheries (peninsulas and deep gulfs) confirmed their peripheral nature; they were "land's ends" rather than autonomous regions with their own construction logic, and they could only be defined *in relation* to the center. Jakobson and Savitsky shifted the center of the world eastward. They certainly had not freed themselves of the controversial issue of Russia's relationship to the west.

In fact, bent as they were on proving what they wanted to prove, the Prague Russians got caught up in an inextricable net of contradictions, due in part to the incessant slippage back and forth between notions taken in their absolute meaning and the same notions understood as relative. A periphery was at times understood to be dependent on the center and that dependence was defined negatively as absence (of the phonological mark of palatalization) or simplification (a fall in number of vegetation zones); at other times a periphery was a reinforced contour (in Caucasian languages pitch differences were either stronger or modified); at still others it was a territory elsewhere defined as the Other's whole (Europe, Asia).

Meanwhile, a territory occupied by a given phonological zone was not historically immutable. It could either grow or shrink, because central languages could become peripheral and, conversely, languages could either acquire or lose correlation of palatalization. In the case of a contact phenomenon, it is hard to see how a zone could *shrink*. There is something profoundly organicist, rather than diffusionist, in Jakobson's and Savitsky's model.

> The system of differentiating consonants by pitch disappeared at the southeastern edges of the Slavic world.... Shrinkage of the phonological zone of consonant palatalization went together with another phenomenon that was in its way a reaction to the first: the western and eastern outposts of the Eurasian linguistic world reinforced the role played by opposition-between-hard-and-soft-consonant systems, and in the course of the first centuries of our millennium they introduced the system of palatalizing consonants separately as a replacement for the syllable palatalization system (Jakobson 1931d, pp. 377–378).

Above and beyond Jakobson's military-strategic *outpost* metaphor,[53] we see that his spatial understanding was not at all concerned with the social issue of border bilingualism. It was instead a kind of geobiology where languages became animated subjects[54] that "reacted," "reinforced the role" of an opposition, "introduced" a palatalization system. It was a world without language *speakers*.[55]

3.2 A periodic system

The last natural criterion for "systems," one used only by Savitsky (no mention of it is made in either Trubetzkoy's or Jakobson's writings), was the *periodic* nature of zone feature distribution. Savitsky very regularly used this notion, including in his poetry, which, though not exactly of enduring artistic interest, does go some way to revealing a particular worldview and value system:

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53 The "language union" notion was itself a diplomatic-military or state-based metaphor: *iazikovoi soiuz* (language union) follows the same model as *Sovetsky Soiuz* (Soviet Union).

54 In this connection it is instructive to consider the following passage on the neogrammarians in Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics*: "The Neogrammarians, being more down-to-earth than the comparativists, attacked the comparativists' terminology, especially its illogical metaphors. From then on it became unacceptable to say 'the language does this or does that,' to speak of the 'life of the language,' and so on, because a language is not an entity, and exists only in its users" (Saussure 1979, p. 19, n. 1 [trans. Harris 1983, p. 5, n. 1]).

55 For Dauzat, for example, when people living in a village where different patois were spoken got married, this caused "morphological disturbances" (Dauzat 1922, p. 98). For Jakobson, *languages* moved, not language speakers.

Number and measure[56]

As reason approached
Its promised limits
It became imbued, illuminated,
With the holy spirit of number and measure.

Number and measure! They veil the hidden meaning
Of the starry abyss of the universe,
A stimulating thought,
A bounding forward of volition.

Nature lives and moves
In simple, harmonious rhythms.
States and peoples acquire vigor and power
In these same growing, ripening rhythms.

Periodic law –
Life-inspiring idea.
We observe the course of regular waves,
Full of veneration before the mystery.

For Savitsky, the Eurasian world was "the world of the periodic zonal system."[57] It made sense to speak of the "periodic system of the zones of Eurasia" because the intervals delimiting those zones were constant and regular – they exhibited a *rhythmic* structure.[58] Savitsky's persistent interest in the periodic system notion obviously involved a reference to Mendeleev's table, also a source of fascination for Trubetzkoy and Jakobson in their quest for phonological universals.[59]

Plant phenomena in Russia-Eurasia are in harmony with climatic phenomena in a way whose exactitude and precision are not to be found in any other geographic world. With

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[56] Savitsky, n.d., quoted in Gumilev 1993, p. 22, source not indicated. Savitsky's source of inspiration here is clearly the *Book of Wisdom*, XI:20: "thou hast ordered all things in measure and number and weight [*numero, pondere et mensura*]." That verse was repeatedly glossed by the Church Fathers and later in the Middle Ages. An example: "And so, God, who created all things in number, weight and measure, arranged the elements in an admirable order. (Number pertains to arithmetic, weight to music, measure to geometry)" (Nicholas of Cusa, *De Docta Ignorantia*, Bk 2, Ch. 13 [Eng. trans. Jasper Hopkins, jasper-hopkins.info/DI-II-12–2000.pdf]). My thanks to Pierre Causat for these references.

[57] Savitsky 1934, p. 17.

[58] *Ibid*.

[59] Savitsky also cited Mendeleev in connection with his geographical interests, praising him for having taken account of trans-Ural eastern Russia in his 1906 study of Russia's economic geography.

regard to Eurasia this tie is more than an abstract assumption; it is *expressed quantitatively* through periodic rhythm. Historical, economic, archeological and linguistic phenomena should be studied from the perspective of this system and rhythm, as that would be a step toward establishing the periodic system of the world. And this will not be accomplished through hypotheses about the unilateral influence of geography on the above-cited series of facts, but by studying the interactions that link phenomena to each other and describing cases of social milieus *actively choosing a development locale*, cases of the sort we meet up with in history (colonization processes are particularly significant in this regard) (Logovikov [one of Savitsky's pseudonyms] 1931a, p. 56).

Lastly, the periodicity that Savitsky sought and discovered in the space of Eurasia was discerned by the Eurasianist historian George Vernadsky in time: as Vernadsky saw it, historical periods followed each other regularly, at a regular rhythm.[60]

As we shall see in the following chapter, the correspondence notion was applied in the framework of what Russian scholars were wont to call *synthetic science*.

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60 It was in reference to G. Vernadsky that the geographer and historian Lev Gumilev (1912–1992) spoke of "the rhythms of Eurasia." Gumilev, son of the poets Nikolai Gumilev and Anna Akhmatova, set out in the 1960s to develop "neo-Eurasianism" in the Soviet Union, calling himself "the last of the Eurasianists." See his introduction to an anthology of Trubetzkoy's Eurasianist writings (1995).

Fourth part: **Science**

Chapter 9
Personology and synthesizing the sciences

> ... a structure (this word, lately, produced a gritting of teeth:
> it was regarded as the acme of abstraction)
> Roland Barthes *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments* (1978, p. 46)

The Eurasianists proposed, or proclaimed, a new way of making the world intelligible that involved dividing it up into separate worlds, each to be apprehended through "a single act of knowing."[1] Their program was to develop a science they considered *new*: "synthetic" science. The most developed form of this undertaking was Trubetzkoy's *personology*.

1 Synthetic science

1.1 Two opposed worlds, two different types of science

Just as Russian biologist-geographers (Berg, for example) countered Darwinism (the theory of divergence and chance-driven evolution) with a theory of evolution through convergence and "development of embryonic tendencies," so Trubetzkoy worked to counter "Romano-Germanic science," which for him was characterized by positivism and the idea of progress, with a more complex, *totalizing* approach, which he claimed fit the "Eurasian" mentality,[2] an approach characterized by the notion of idiosyncrasy and system-specific logic.[3] Trubetzkoy attributed "the anarchy of French linguistics"[4] and "the well-known French repulsion for the Eurasian-Danubian forms of culture in which current phonology is expressed"[5]

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1 Logovikov (one of Savitsky's pseudonyms) 1931a, p. 53.

2 Trubetzkoy, letter of December 22, 1926, *LN*, 1985, pp. 96–97.

3 In Prague in the same period Mathesius too spoke of "national science," in his case "Czech science." But the meaning was always "science in Czechoslovakia," and the point was always to lament the lack of scientific investment in the country and publications in Czech. He never spoke in ethno-psychological terms (see Mathesius 1925).

4 Trubetzkoy, letter of April 16, 1929, in *LN*, 1985, p. 121, regarding Meillet and Cohen's collection, *Les langues du monde* (1924).

5 Trubetzkoy, letter of May 1934, in *LN*, 1985, p. 300. Milner recognized the existence of a specific "Russian academic tradition" but explained it not in terms of "cultural world" or "mentality" but historical causality (Milner 1982, pp. 334–335).

to these differences between epistemological worlds. His scientific program was also an ideologically combative one:

> We invite our readers to reject for the time being ... the mode of thought characteristic of Romano-Germanic scholarship (Trubetzkoy 1920, p. 15 [1991, p. 14]).

That "mode of thought" was what fueled rationalist, analytic, utilitarian science.[6]

Jakobson himself often asserted the specificity of "Russian science." Of "Turanian psychology" he wrote:

> Trubetzkoy understood that this systematic, totalizing spirit was highly characteristic of all Russian science's first acquisitions and determinant for his own work (Jakobson 1939 [1973, p. 298]).

In his "Remarques sur l'évolution phonologique du russe comparée à celles des autres langues slaves" (1929), Jakobson identified Saussure's diachrony doctrine with "the predominant European ideology of the second half of the nineteenth century," characterized by the image of "mechanical accumulation due to the play of chance or heterogeneous factors."[7] In the same text he explained that "Russian linguistic tradition,"[8] Russian biology and Russian geography[9] were all branches of knowledge that rejected causal explanation and aimed instead to discover internal development laws. It was in the same year that he penned the remarkable assertion quoted in Chapter 7: "the category of mechanical causality is foreign to Russian science."[10]

It is therefore particularly interesting that Jakobson's obituary tribute to Trubetzkoy should have been published in 1966 in Theodore Sebeok's *Portraits of Linguists*, subtitled "A Biographical Source Book of *Western* Linguistics," when in fact Jakobson's text in that book is devoted in large part to Eurasianist concerns.

But though Trubetzkoy was a complete scholar he was also a man. And as early as 1930 he was assailed with doubts not only about his political and ideological commitment to the Eurasianist movement but also – and more to our purpose here – the very possibility of a specifically "Russian" or "Eurasian" science. In a letter to Savitsky that remained unpublished until 1995, he confided his reservations about a scientific "option" that was beginning to disappoint him. (All trace of this doubt disappears from his later writings.)

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6 Trubetzkoy 1923a, pp. 114–115 (English trans. 1991, p. 151).
7 Jakobson 1929a (1971a, p. 110).
8 *Ibid.*, p. 7.
9 *Ibid.*, p. 110.
10 Jakobson 1929b (1988, p. 55).

We are the representatives of Russo-European culture. That culture is moribund at the present time. In the USSR it is being replaced by another culture, also Russian but not Russo-European. We cannot adhere to that new culture without ceasing to be ourselves, but it makes no sense to create for the former, moribund culture because the scale we are aiming at in no way corresponds to its scale. So what are we to do? I don't think there is anything we can do but move beyond the limits of nationally delimited Russo-European culture and (*horribile dictu!*) work for pan-European culture, which claims to be the culture of humanity as a whole. There is nothing else to be done. Of course we must not forget the limitations of European culture; we must not force ourselves to adhere to aspects of it that to us Russians are organically alien. But when it comes to intellectual culture, and science in particular, there is no insurmountable barrier between us and the Europeans, and in this area we need only fall into the ranks of European scholars and scientists. Writing in Russian for Russian scholars who gather at "Congresses for Russian scholars abroad" is as absurd as writing in Slovenian or Latvian. Even if our studies could reach Russia, they are banned there and cannot be cited, whereas works by the same authors published in other languages in foreign journals are fully accessible in Russia and immediately come to the attention of the Europeanized milieu. I know from experience how greatly improved the quality of scientific production is and how much greater one's sense of cultural responsibility when the audience is enlarged in this way. I would never allow myself to write anything in German or French of which I am not absolutely certain because I know that among the hundred or so specialists who read me there are necessarily some who would unmask me in their writings. But I have often written irresponsibly in Russian, on questions about which I have no expertise. You say to yourself, "It doesn't matter, it'll get by!" But overall, when I look at my past writings now, I do not so much regret having written dilettantish pieces as having written good ones in Russian. Consider for example my little book *On the Problem of Russian Self-Awareness*. It's not a bad book. Meillet wrote a flattering review of it; many foreign linguists and Orientalists who know Russian would like to read it (just recently Tesnière asked me in a letter where he might find it). But there you go, it's "out of print" – that is, dispersed in vain; it has passed into the hands of people who can in no way appreciate it or who, even if they do appreciate it, cannot use it creatively. If it had been written in German or French it would have been truly useful. So there you have the thoughts that have led me to concentrate on my scientific specialty and no longer write in Russian but in foreign languages (Trubetzkoy, letter to Savitsky dated December 10, 1930, published by Kaznina in *Slavjanovedenie* 4 [1995], p. 93).

1.2 A new science for a new ideology

For the Eurasianists, ideology came first, science followed. Their discoveries were not of facts that would move science forward but rather a new vision that would make people see facts differently. They thought it was possible to produce *unified knowledge* by way of a single *ideology*.

This calls into question J. C. Pariente's claim in his introduction to an anthology containing a text by Trubetzkoy that "the primary certainty shared by all the authors here is expressed negatively; it bears on the autonomy of language

science and correlatively whether or not its object can be reduced to outside influ-ences. ... Knowledge of linguistic facts must not be sought outside those facts themselves. This means that race and natural sonority are one by one rejected as explanations, as are physiological and psychological givens at the individual level."[11] Each of Pariente's assertions seems invalidated by Trubetzkoy's texts and those of the other Prague Russians.

For Trubetkzoy as for Jakobson in those years, the science of language was not and could not be independent of a set of other human sciences: folk psychol-ogy, geography, history, culturology, and others. To these Savitsky added another segment of the social sciences – economics – as well as applied sciences such as climatology, pedology and so forth.

Eurasianism as a scientific discipline thus consisted in studying the entire set of (material and spiritual) characteristics of a certain object that was assumed to preexist all investigation: Eurasia. Clearly this is quite remote from the idea that "point of view creates the object," and just as remote from any Popperian falsificationist ideology. The fundamental presupposition was that Eurasia *is*. The purpose of studying the object was not, therefore, to verify whether Eurasia existed but to confirm by all possible means the harmonious, organic totality that Eurasia was.

Obviously in an integrated science such as Eurasianism, the science itself was defined by its object: Eurasia. In fact, Eurasia was not an object of science, but an object of discourse presented as an object existing in the world. That exis-tence, which it was Eurasianism's purpose to demonstrate, was in fact assumed to ontologically precede all study.

Proposing to "develop a complete system on the basis of this idea,"[12] Trubetz-koy put forward a particularly explicit program in 1927 in "Pan-Eurasian Nation-alism*"*:

> For Pan-Eurasian nationalism to function effectively as a unifying factor for the Eurasian state, it is necessary to re-educate the self-awareness of the peoples of Eurasia. To be sure, such a re-education is already being carried out by life itself. The mere fact that the Eur-asian peoples (they alone in the whole world) have for a number of years been together living under and overcoming the Communist regime – that fact alone is responsible for a thousand new psychological, cultural, and historical links among them; it compels them to perceive most clearly their common historical destiny. But this is not enough. The individu-als who have already fully recognized the unity of the multiethnic Eurasian nation must spread their conviction – each in the Eurasian nation in which he or she works. And here is an untapped mother lode of work for philosophers, journalists, poets, novelists, artists,

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11 Pariente 1969, p. 13.
12 Trubetzkoy 1920 (French trans. 1996, p. 47).

musicians, scientists, and scholars. It is necessary to re-examine a number of disciplines fron the point of view of the unity of the multiethnic Eurasian nation, and to construct new scientific systems to replace old and antiquated ones. In particular, one needs a new history of the Eurasian peoples including the history of the Russians. (Trubetzkoy 1927a [1991, p. 242–243]).

Like his remote *Naturphilosophen* precursors, Trubetzkoy was trying to found a *total science*, in this case a science subordinate to "personology," the principle that was supposed to bring together and unify all knowledge. The "urgent task" was to verify empirically the Eurasianist theory of the symphonic person.

1.3 Analytic science and synthetic science

The Eurasianists claimed to have developed an entirely original (*samobytnoe*), avant-garde "scientific system": "synthetic" science. They were not against proceeding analytically, i.e., following the characteristic way of Enlightenment philosophy that consisted first in separating components, then putting them back together again. But they suggested doing an initial "immanent" study of each set of phenomena, and their scientific originality lay in the "linkage" method we saw in the last chapter. They did not advocate intuitivism or reject analysis; they were not caught up in the mysticism of *Naturphilosophie*, but they did insist that the *superior phase* of the knowledge process was *synthesis*. The following text presents this new scientific sensibility quite explicitly:

> In order to live in a new way and understand something of the new life, we have to reeducate ourselves; above all we have to adopt a critical, non-biased attitude toward obsolete tradition. ... It is of course absurd to think there is a "bourgeois" science that must be replaced by a "proletarian" one, not only because there is not the least sign of any proletarian science on the horizon but also because everything that is claimed to be such is nothing more than bits of materials naively and inaccurately borrowed from earlier science. However, there can be no doubt that this earlier science is in crisis. The crisis of science and the scientific view of the world, a crisis currently masked by the brilliant successes of technology, actually began long ago, with the decadence of the great nineteenth-century philosophical systems, when European culture "lost its soul." We are referring here to the disappearance of synthetic, organic ideas, the replacement of organic units by external, mechanical ones, this being manifested on one hand by specialization and skeptical relativism, on the other by hopeless attempts to explain all phenomena by mechanical, material connections. It is natural that at the very moment the scientific view of the world is starting to get the better of naive materialism, ... scientific popularization should be enthusiastically palming off as science everything that has already been denounced as anti-scientific; namely, materialism, Darwinism and socialism (*Evraziistvo* 1926, p. 355).

Reading the Eurasianist thinkers' scientific texts and manifestos, especially in an attempt to see how they relate to the history of structuralism, one cannot but think that what they called *structure* was in fact synonymous with *synthesis*:

> For scientists who adhere to the Eurasianist movement, the main object to be descriptively studied is the collective person that Eurasianists call "Eurasia," understood to constitute a whole, with its own physical environment, its territory. Scientific study of this person should be conducted as indicated above; i.e., this person should be at the center of the preoccupations of every researcher studying a part or aspect of it, and the studies of all such specialists should be coordinated. The shared work of specialists in all the different fields must therefore be organized in structured fashion. The aim of this work is to arrive at a philosophical and scientific synthesis, to take shape as the work advances and thanks to that work. This synthesis will determine not only the meaning but also the direction of the collective undertaking and each particular study (Trubetzkoy 1927d [1996, pp. 178–179]).

The following text by Savitsky (writing under his pseudonym Logovikov) is a striking example of this type of thought. Of itself it suffices to show just how important Savitsky was to the genesis of the Prague Russians' structuralist ideas:

> We have only just begun to compare information on general and economic geography with material collected in history, economics, ethnography, archeology, and linguistics, and yet that work is already giving us a hitherto utterly unknown *synthetic* image of Russia-Eurasia, both its regions and itself as a whole. It is here that we must find the oriented viewpoint that will encompass extremely varied phenomena from the perspective of a single legality, thus enabling us to reduce the multiplicity to paucity. ... Alongside geopolitical study, we can and must create geoeconomic, geoethnographic, geoarcheological, and geolinguistic study of Russia-Eurasia. And all these approaches must be gathered together into a single "image-system." This is one aspect of the historical-geographical synthesis that our age is called upon to accomplish.

> The organized, "planned" coming together of representatives of extremely diverse special-ties around the project of studying a single object is a characteristic feature of scientific labor in our age. The Eurasianists come together in just this way in their own scientific work. Each Eurasianist publication is the result of cooperation between representatives of various fields to resolve a single problem. ... Nowhere in the world does an object more propitious for synthetic, systematic study exist than the historical and geographical milieu of that par-ticular world, Russia-Eurasia.

> I cite geography and history merely as examples. In fact, the question covers much greater ground. Every branch of Russian studies (*rossievedenie*) can find a place for itself at the Eurasian level. The specificity of the Eurasianist method for approaching Russia is to situate Russian material from every field within a specific, autonomous system. In this way we gain access to the *internal structure* of phenomena and to the unity that encompasses them all. But this *autonomous* system is not a self-enclosed entity; it is accessible to the influence of other systems and itself exerts influence on them. Here lies the path Eurasianists take to

get from study of Russia to study of the world. Every phenomenon within the boundaries of Russia-Eurasia must be included in a general system of Eurasian phenomena, but we must not stop there. Russian science must attain an *international* horizon. The complete set of Eurasian phenomena is to the world totality as a single particular Eurasian phenomenon is to the whole of Eurasia (Logovikov [Savitsky] 1931a, pp. 56–59; Savitsky's italics).

One leitmotiv in Eurasianist epistemology was that the synthetic whole lay in the facts themselves, not in the method of learning them, which should only repeat or duplicate that whole:

The theory of Russia-Eurasia as a singular geographic world was not produced by the Eurasianists but by the internal logic of Russian development.... Not we but Russian scientific evolution itself is what accounts for the fact that Russian world space can be embraced by a single synthetic formula, that the icebound coasts of New Zemble like the mountains of Tibet, the beech tree forests of Podolia like the mountain ridges near the Great Wall of China are all apprehended by a generalizing experience and in a single act of knowing (Logovikov [Savitsky] 1931a, p. 53).

In "Introduction to the history of Old Russian literature," in which he stresses the difference between "analytic" and "synthetic" cultures,[13] Trubetzkoy provides still other points for an epistemological comparison of the "worlds" of Europe and Eurasia. In analytic Europe, cultural fields are likely to be autonomous, whereas in synthesizing Eurasia those fields are constantly interacting and intermingling with each other. One glorified example of the latter type of culture was Byzantine civilization, and Muscovite Russia:

Modern European civilization is distinguished by the marked autonomy of its features and branches considered individually. Religion, ethics, law, science, philosophy and art all tend to be entirely independent of one another. Each of those parts has its own separate existence and develops on its own, without being connected to the other components. This explains why there are such things as pure art, pure science, pure philosophy – all mutually independent of each other. Law, ethics and religion, likewise disconnected, are decidedly independent of art, philosophy and science. The detachment of individual components of culture from their overall context is deeply rooted in the nature of modern European civilization.... For the last five centuries this particularity has been characteristic only of European civilization. All the other great civilizations of the world – as long as they were not influenced by European culture – developed or develop very differently. Each is a unified whole, a harmonious system, all of whose components reinforce and modify each other, being mutually dependent and intertwined.... In Byzantium, philosophy and religion were inseparably linked.... The natural sciences, geography and astronomy were incorporated into the general philosophical system and scrupulously harmonized with the spirit and dogma of religion.... all fields of knowledge, the natural and human sciences alike, were

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13 Trubetzkoy 1973.

thought of not only as means to broaden one's mental horizon but also as a source of moral instruction consistent with the spirit of religion and the corresponding religious philosophy. In this way, all branches of knowledge and thought formed a homogeneous unit, a harmonious system (Trubetzkoy 1973, pp. 8–10).

What Jakobson and Trubetzkoy thought of as a new, geographically different science perhaps represented epistemological progress but it was in any case profoundly rooted in the episteme of German *Naturphilosophie* of the first third of the nineteenth century, which promoted synthesis and organicism against analysis and mechanism. We recall that Goethe, deeply interested in biology and strongly attracted to this type of thinking, called for adopting the following objective:

> that all dissociation be eliminated, that that which is separate no longer be thought of as such and that the whole be encompassed in the unity of a single origin and a single concept (Goethe 1973, p. 80; quoted in Gusdorf 1993, vol. 2, p. 415).

The second source of inspiration for the Prague Russians, then, was Schelling and German *Naturphilosophie*. In contrast to France, the Russian cultural world had never cut its direct ties with this particular feature of German culture, which in France was soon disqualified in the light of positivism.

One example should suffice to illustrate this major philosophical current. A central theme of *Naturphilosophie* was that synthetic science was superior to analytic science. The understanding was that for scientific inquiry to be successful it had to demonstrate the *unity* and *wholeness* of the phenomena being described.[14]

> The specialist of Russian used to study Russian in the context of Slavic languages, not at all in the context of the languages of Russia. The problems of convergent development and multiform reciprocal action among the languages of Russia – that is, the set of questions which it is the task of linguistics to integrate into the synthetic disciplines that study Russia – have never been explored before now (Jakobson 1931a [1971a, p. 148]).

Naturphilosophie apprehended the universe as a totality, rejecting the fragmenting or shattering of knowledge characteristic of Enlightenment empiricism. Its ontological orientation could not be reconciled with the mechanical revolution, which imposed a regime of knowledge dissociation and dispersion. In reaction to the analytic spirit of the eighteenth century, the *Naturphilosophen* sought to restore the world's lost unity, to rediscover a means of globally comprehending it (in the 1920s the term used to describe this kind of thinking was "holistic").

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14 Reference is to an expression coined and diffused by Lessing: the Alpha and the Omega (the One and the All).

Lastly, it was by means of *Naturphilosophie* that the great holistic theses related to the study of organic wholes were formulated. The mechanistic analytic method perfectly embodied by physics and chemistry was criticized as inapplicable to the study of wholes such as biological organisms. And the culmination of this critique was the idea that a whole was more than the sum of its parts (a classic example being how a melody cannot be reduced to the sum of its notes).

Obviously we must be careful to steer clear of overly schematic comparisons. Neither Jakobson nor Trubetzkoy was a *Naturphilosoph*. Moreover, it is important to take into account how each of these thinkers evolved. In 1930, when Eurasianism was in crisis, Trubetzkoy expressed quite clearmindedly in the aforementioned letter to Savitsky his doubts about whether synthetic science was possible:

> There is a whole set of questions that I used to take on with determination and self-assurance; now they only elicit cold skepticism in me. One question in which my "ripe old age" makes itself strongly felt is specialization of scientific knowledge. I used to comment readily and with conviction on any subject. This way of proceeding was heartily approved in the Eurasianist milieu – who among us did any differently?! Now, however, rereading my writings and those of the Eurasianists, I have the feeling that all of that was mere puerile improvisation. This applies to many of my theological writings (for example "Temptations of union" or my letter to Bulgakov), also my historical studies and studies on the structure of the state, published or not. I reread all that with horror now because I've learned to appreciate real specialization. I see that in my own specialty I have not done much of what I could have (I can no longer compensate for this), and it makes me sad to realize that I've lost so much time handling things that were absolutely secondary in scientific fields that were foreign to me and in which I could not produce anything of value. One aspect of being young is doing too many things at once and not conserving one's strength. Maturity necessarily implies self-limitation, and this in turn goes with intense concentration. This pertains not only to choice of field but also how one works in each. The sweeping, often hasty generalizations so characteristic of Eurasianists, particularly of my own Eurasianist writings, only disgust me now. I have learned to appreciate and to love serious things. Or to put it better, I have learned to see how precarious, how illusory are sweeping generalizations. It is more important to me to have a solid construction than a grand one. This is also the symptom of another mental age than the one Eurasianism has experienced and which it is trying to preserve (Trubetzkoy, letter to Savitsky of December 10, 1930, published by Kaznina in *Slavianovedenie* 4 [1995], p. 92).

Savitsky alone did not surrender; he remained loyal to synthetic science. In his August 7, 1930, letter to Jakobson he was still speaking of Russian studies (*rossievedenie*)[15] in terms of system and *inherent legality* (*samozakonnost'*). As he put it, "Synthesis is indispensable. We must know how to encompass from a

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[15] Term translated by Jakobson as *Russlandkunde* (1929b).

single perspective both the socio-historical milieu and the territory it occupies" (Savitsky 1927a, pp. 29–30).

In fact, Trubetzkoy and Jakobson ultimately came to the conclusion that if Eurasia did exist, if it was an organic whole, it could only be defined and studied by means of a *synthetic, non-structural method*. For Jakobson and Trubetzkoy in contrast to Saussure, what mattered was not really the de-substantializing of the content of linguistic science but the harmoniousness of the whole. Their concerns, preoccupations, center of interest were simply different, and this directly affected how they studied their object. Where Saussure separated, Jakobson united. In the 1920s and 1930s, these were two different ideas about what linguistics was supposed to study, two discourses that did not speak about the same things. The fact that both used approximately the same words – system, structure, whole – obviously intensifies the risk of misunderstanding and points up the need for a close reading of more general contemporaneous texts, as this will give us an idea of the epistemological foundations of the *other* discourse.

> For N. S. Trubetzkoy, ideocracy was a particular form of selecting the ruling elite, a phenomenon specific to that elite. But as a phenomenon particular to *all that is* [*vsego sushchego*], this form reflects a greater order of phenomena. In the political field, people manage through conscious effort to attain what dominates in the world of history and nature and to turn it into a stable order. The periodic system of all that is goes back to the system of organizing ideas. And its periodicity is defined by the rhythm of the distribution of organized components. This characterizes both the periodic system of chemical elements, as contemporary physical chemistry is discovering, and the climatic aspect; also the periodic system toward which contemporary biology is inclined. By examining a set of socioeconomic formations from a single perspective and comparing the fundamental aspects of production, we can establish a periodic system of economic regimes. Bringing to light the organizing ideas that constitute the foundation of all that is, greatly facilitates the ordering and organizing of our knowledge. We can even say that the path toward higher forms of knowledge can be reached only if we determine the system of organizing ideas at work in each order of phenomena. In identifying such systems and then comparing them, Eurasianism is working to discover a single philosophy of all that is (Logovikov [Savitsky], 1931b, p. 134).

The goal of the Eurasianists' synthetic science was to attain this viewpoint of all viewpoints, the perspective from which one could discover both Eurasia and the world in their totality, the One behind the Multiple – with the firm understanding that the One was composed of different Multiples.

1.4 Teaching a way of seeing

In Eurasianist geography as in all branches of Eurasianist knowledge, each part expressed something more general than itself, referring back, as it were, to the whole encompassing it. The researcher's task was to perceive the ideal form of the whole through the imperfect realization of it in its parts. This recalls the neo-Platonic esthetic ideal, a doctrine that credited artists with the gift of perceiving essential forms through their material gangue and assigned them the task of bringing form and Idea closer by studying geometric ratios:

> We must ensure that each geographic description, however partial it may be, allows for seeing the given space in all directions from the sector being described, as if through a "magic crystal"; that each of these descriptions introduces the concrete and detailed into phenomenon seen as a *set* or *whole*. The periodic and simultaneously symmetrical system of the zones of Russia-Eurasia … opens immense perspectives for this way of proceeding. Indeed, each of these concepts determines the part as it relates to the whole (Logovikov [Savitsky] 1931a, pp. 53–54).

Scientific activity therefore implied having – and making – revelations about what one could not help but see. Anyone who was willing to *see differently* had only to look at a map and the scales would fall from his eyes:

> The new age presupposes a new orientation for consciousness; it presupposes the ability to see what was once hidden in shadow ("Evraziistvo" 1926, p. 355).

> The information you have collected sets before our eyes a new and rich field of life. If only you could imagine with what exactitude each of the details you have contributed fits into the geographic and historical background with which I am so familiar! From this perspective, what a wonder is the spoken language of Kolyma! (Savitsky to Jakobson, letter of August 9, 1930 [MIT archives]; published in Toman 1994, p. 134).

> The need to distinguish in the earth mass of the Old World not, as we have until now, two continents but three is not a discovery of the Eurasianists but rather follows from ideas that geographers, particularly Russian geographers (for example, Professor V. I. Lamansky in his study of 1892), expounded well before them. All that the Eurasianists have done is to define that idea more precisely, and to give a name to this newly "seen" continent, the very name that used to be applied to the earth mass of the Old World as a whole; that is, to Europe and Asia together (Savitsky, "Evrajistvo" [Eurasianism], 1923, TsGAOR Archives, Moscow; published in Ponomareva, ed. 1992, p. 165).

Given its presupposition that the facts were there before the research – there to be discovered – Jakobson's method of investigation can be called learning by looking, and teaching how to see that way, the aim in Jakobson's case being to render per-

ceptible the blinding reality that some objects were *naturally* central and others *naturally* peripheral, and that the relationship between center and periphery was symmetrical. There was even something beyond the periphery; namely, a vast space of non-being inhabited by languages characterized by *neither* correlation of palatalization *nor* polytony – a strictly negative way of defining most European languages.

The goal, then, was to bring to light a hidden entity of higher ontological status, inaccessible to blind, narrow-minded positivists. The Eurasianist scientific program consisted in seeking the hidden meaning of things, meaning which the eye, blinded by genetic and mechanistic bias, could only perceive an imperfect image of. This explains the importance for Eurasianists of the *perspective* or *gaze* capable of embracing the totality of facts. If facts were seen only individually and in their infinite multiplicity, they could not be invested with *meaning*. The meaning in question was historical; it was history unfolding in both time and space. But let there be no mistake: this was not so much geographic determinism (i.e., "Russian thought" was shaped by its immense geographical spaces) as neo-Platonic thinking of the sort that urges the thinker on to discovering – *seeing* – ever-truer or more accurate wholes. The "delight through symmetry" that Milner noted (1982) regarding Jakobson thus amounts to feeling wonder at symmetrical structure: the sense of illumination procured by an accumulation of series. But that transparency – the sense of having immediate access to a structure that one need only know how to *see* – was not restricted to the method for bringing facts to light. It also inhered in the Eurasia object itself: "The Russian world has the most transparent geographical structure imaginable."[16]

Likewise Trubetzkoy's *Legacy of Genghis Khan* opens with a theme that would become a leitmotiv of Eurasianist doctrine; namely, the "reversing of perspectives" or *conversion of the observer's gaze*. Thinking differently amounted to knowing how to open one's eyes, how to bring to light what remained hidden for those using the wrong method:[17]

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16 Savitsky 1934. The emphasis on *vision* in the Russian original (predel'no *prozrachnoi* geographicheskoi structuroi) (transparent) is lost in the German translation: "eine denkbar *deutliche* geographische Struktur" (clear, precise). The original may be found in Ponomareva 1992, pp. 110–118.

17 For the Eurasianists, converting the observer's gaze implied a terminological shake up: a renewed vision had always to be accompanied by new words: "The new age presupposes a new state of consciousness, a vision that was once in shadow, a reassessment of the old and, depending on what all this gives rise to, a new terminology" (passage in a Eurasianist manifesto of 1926, *Evraziistvo* [1992, p. 355]). Savitsky invented many terms, among them *mestorazvitie* (development locale) and *evraziatsiia* (Eurasianization).

A glance at a historical map reveals that at one time almost all the territory of the present-day U.S.S.R. constituted a part of the Mongolian empire founded by the great Genghis Khan (Trubetzkoy 1925a, p. 4 [1991, p. 163]).

For Plato, perceptible images are ontologically dependent on the model that makes them intelligible. This implies not resemblance between the two but the understanding that the images are deficient in some way. That Form is present to the thing makes the thing intelligible, but this presupposes mediation by a gaze capable of seeing the thing in light of Form. To be a geographer or a linguist of language unions, to read a map, to interpret a *Landschaft* was to be able to project the gaze which brought to light the single essence of all things beneath the contingency of their multiplicity. That gaze was revealing in both the photographic sense of the word and in the sense of "truth-revealing." The *existence* of Eurasia was supposed to jump out at the viewer thanks to mere contemplation of maps. Yet despite appearances this was not simple empiricism, where facts were facts, but rather *vision*: the perception of a greater, more global reality behind the contingency of scattered empirical facts. Again, the method used was *linkage*. For Jakobson, Trubetzkoy and Savitsky, isotherms, isoglosses, boundaries *existed; they were there*. Their creative scientific work began as soon as they could establish coincidences, correspondences linking facts to each other. Claiming to have found coincidences or overlaps was what proved the existence of the sought-after-object. The fundamental importance of the theory of correspondences, itself the basis of synthetic science, does not seem to have been sufficiently noted or studied in the history of structuralism. That theory was a *totalizing worldview*, as if the totality of viewpoints were exhaustible, as if it were licit and thinkable to "cover" or account for the entire real object by superimposing all those different perspectives, thereby demonstrating they were all one.

2 "Personology" *(personologija)*

Textbooks and encyclopedias are likely to state that the work of the Prague Circle was based on the idea of "the supremacy of the order of the signifier" and sought to "account for language in purely combinatory terms." Neither of those descriptions applies to the texts discussed here.

Just as Saussure understood linguistics as merely one part of a vast semiological undertaking, so Trubetzkoy subordinated his entire system of scientific disciplines to "personology"; it was this science that was to coordinate all the

others.[18] This view resulted in a dual system of sciences; alongside the descriptive sciences ran a series of interpretative ones: history/historiosophy, ethnography/ethnosophy, geography/geosophie (*ibid.*).[19] Only the interpretative sciences allowed for *understanding* the factual material under study, revealing its deep meaning rather than merely describing manifestations of it. And only on the basis of all these sciences *taken together* could an "exhaustive theory of the person" be born.

The only way the sciences could be synthesized, then, was through a new scientific discipline called "personology"; it alone could bring the sciences into agreement and harmony with each other. Without personology there could be only an "encyclopedia" of sciences – an anarchic conglomeratation of more or less scientific ideas. As Trubetzkoy saw it, the absence of "personology" was the most serious flaw in western thinking (*ibid.*).

2.1 The philosophy of the person

Trubetzkoy's introduction to his 1927 anthology of articles, *On the Problem of Russian Self-Awareness,* is a fundamental text.[20] The primary thesis of Trubetzkoy's "personology" was that like the individual, every human group was to be thought of as a *person* (*lichnost'*). The difference between the two scales was only one of degree, and all the aspects of the collective person were related to each other and formed an organic whole that, in the best of cases, was also harmonious:

> An individual is not different from an organic collective entity; the difference lies in degree of complexity (Trubetzkoy 1937, p. 10).

Conceiving the individual and collective in connection with the notion of person was perfectly consistent with the interwar European *air du temps*, and there were many similarities – but also several differences – between Trubetzkoy's thinking on the matter and the French personalism of Emmanuel Mounier (1905–1950) and Gabriel Marcel (1889–1973).

"Communitarian personalism" was expounded in France in the journal *Esprit*, founded by Mounier in 1932. Its proponents explicitly acknowledged the

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18 Trubetzkoy 1927d, introduction.

19 These neologisms were contemporaneous with "anthroposophy," coined by the Austrian Rudolph Steiner (1861–1925).

20 Trubetzkoy 1927d.

influence of Berdyaev and Russian idealism. Conscious that the western world was undergoing a spiritual, philosophical and moral crisis, these thinkers set out to radically revise European values and principles by critiquing the bourgeois world, debased, as they saw it, by materialism and the isolation of the individual.

In fact, these very themes were being discussed throughout Europe at the time. The German philosopher Max Scheler (1873–1928), for example, recognized the value not only of individual persons but also collective ones (*Gesamtpersonen*) such as the nation and the cultural totality. This was surely no different than Trubetzkoy's "collective person" or "person made up of several individuals" (*mnogo chelovecheskaja lichnost'*).

Trubetzkoy was convinced that European society's ills were due first and foremost to a culture in which man was an abstract individual cut off from his group. He did not think of the person as a legal entity to be defended against the group. In direct contrast to the *individual*, who was an isolated being, a pure abstraction, the *person* was embedded from birth in a community. Consequently the state should not be the abstract, arithmetic precipitate of dispersed, isolated electoral wills but rather a union of "symphonic" groups organized into higher unity by their common Faith.

The "person" was also an important category in the relativist culturalism of American anthropology. Abram Kardiner (1891–1981), another of Trubetzkoy's contemporaries, stressed the concept of "basic personality." For Kardiner, individuals living in a given society and subject to the same set of institutions all had the same type of personality. The basic personality concept aimed to account for the impact of social existence on the individual psyche. However, there was a major difference between Kardiner and Trubetzkoy: determinism by the milieu. Kardiner rejected all unequivocal determination of the individual subject by the external environment, whereas Trubetzkoy defined the person as a "psychophysical whole united with a given physical environment"[21] and set out to study "the collective person in its physical environment."[22] In fact, this definition shows the similarity between his thinking and German geographical thinking at the time of Ratzel, the other great opponent of evolutionism.

A tension thus becomes visible in Trubetzkoy's thinking between his assertion of the plenitude of the person and his philosophical impersonalism, based on his sense of historical-cultural determinism. His program to save the irreducible originality of every consciousness was undermined by the idea that the individual and the group formed several "stories" or were "intertwined," i.e., the non-distinction between individual and group. In fact, in Trubetzkoy's definition

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21 *Ibid.*
22 *Ibid.*, p. 6.

the group's originality was maintained to the detriment of the individual. Trubetzkoy did fit with the personalist current of thought of his time, but the paradoxical result was that he gave priority to the impersonal side.

One source of Trubetzkoy's "personology" is to be found in Orthodox Christian speculations on the Trinity (a divine nature in the form of three hypostases) and the Incarnation (a person assuming two natures: divine and human). This non-individualist, "symphonic" conception of the person obviously has nothing to do with Kierkegaard's affirmation of absolute individual freedom, for example.

While personalism as such declined rapidly after the Second World War under the influence of structuralist or collectivist-inspired systems of thought, Trubetzkoy's philosophy contained the germ of both types.

Lastly, the *collective person* notion fit perfectly with a theme of the interwar *air du temps*: folk psychology. The fascination with the idea of an authentic people itself raised the issue of hybridization, also a major preoccupation of the time. Trubetzkoy's solution was both complex and paradoxical. Genetically unrelated entities could converge (this covered the *affinities* between the Eurasian peoples) while separate entities – Europe, Eurasia – were hermetically sealed and so impenetrable to each other. Each of these different ethnic entities had a "national character," a "national psychism."

2.2 The individual and the group

D. Sviatopolk-Mirsky had already noted in 1927[23] that the Eurasianists' anti-individualism was rooted in their metaphysical perspective. They thought of the individual as indissolubly linked to the group, and the "amorphous state" in which liberal individualism and the bourgeois economy had reduced European man was in their view an absolute evil. Man was indissolubly linked to his group; his personality was *organically* tied to that higher "symphonic" person of which he was a part, a "person" that belonged to a different order of reality than individuals. Collective, "symphonic" persons could exist at different scales; the most typical were the tribe and the nation; the highest was the Church, that part of the Cosmos most perfectly informed by the divine Logos. L. P. Karsavin (1882–1952) was a Eurasianist theorist who, like Trubetzkoy, wrote a great deal on this idea of the symphonic, collective person. For Karsavin the theory had certain affinities with socialism, but its foundation was entirely different. At least historically, socialism was a product of the Latin West's minutely analytic individualism; its

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23 Mirsky 1927, p. 316.

point of departure was the individual's *right* to be part of the universe. Eurasianist doctrine, on the contrary, took off from the metaphysical fact of the essential unity between man and his group and their ultimate unity with the Absolute, thereby attaining an original synthesis of Hegelianism and neo-Platonism.

Another source of the doctrine should be mentioned: the Romantic tradition and Romantic opposition to the philosophy of the social contract. The fundamental Romantic approach was to present irrational phenomena – traditions, customs, instincts, myths – as the truly positive, creative forces in history. The individual was caught up in a whole infinitely greater than himself, a whole to which he felt tied by innumerable physical and moral cords rooted in both the past and the particular milieu. Without explicitly identifying it as such, the Eurasianists adopted this Romantic notion of natural, unconscious evolution, which implied opposition to all arbitrary, purely rational or intentional intervention (in the form of treaties, political constitutions, diplomatic arrangements) on the grounds that they violated or upset the aforementioned natural development or original history by imposing alien administrative mechanisms or an alien political system. The point was to identify the living individuality of every such whole, to be understood in terms of the soil it had "grown" in, the particular blood coursing through its veins, its own growth laws.

In the 1920s and 1930s, disappointment in parliamentary democracy – seen as the ultimate variant of atomizing, amorphous individualism that recognized no intermediary between isolated man and the abstract state – was being expressed with increasing vehemence throughout Europe. Western European communism and, to some degree, fascism were on a quest for a more organic, coherent society in which the state would no longer be the abstract, mathematical precipitate of dispersed electoral wills but a union of "symphonic" groups organized into a higher unity of common faith.

It would be interesting to compare this attitude with the Slavophile notion of *sobornost'* in the thinking of Kireevsky and Khomyakov (see Chapter 2), and it is paradoxical that French sociologists who know enough about the Indian cultural world to propose conceiving of the opposition between Orient and Occident on the basis of the individual/collective opposition should be entirely ignorant of Trubetzkoy and the Russian Slavophile tradition.[24]

Trubetzkoy's understanding of the individual/collective opposition should enable us to revise many *idées reçues*. The idea of the primacy of society over the individual is not necessarily confined to the "left." Contemporary Western readers are unaccustomed to encountering anything other than socialist critique

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24 See Dumont 1985.

of bourgeois society. Nonetheless, it is worthwhile noting that an entire swath of French thought – the *counter-Revolutionary traditionalism* of Joseph de Maistre and Louis de Bonald – was introduced into Russian by Chaadaiev. These "ultra" thinkers cursed individualist Enlightenment anthropology. For them, as Koyré noted, Enlightenment philosophy's errors "were all due to one and the same fundamental primary error, which was to think of man as capable of existing outside of and prior to society.... The first given was society; outside society, man as man was impossible and even inconceivable."[25] It is worth recalling this little known source of Eurasianist thought, as it goes some way toward explaining the ambiguities of "sociologism" in Soviet linguistics of the 1920s and 1930s, whose convulsions we might do well to study in this light.

2.3 Consciousness and the subject

For Trubetzkoy, the collective subject was not unconscious but rather amounted to a large group of subjects who all thought the same way, endowed with a collective consciousness rather than a collective unconscious:

> Toward the end of the Indo-European era, ... the Slavs were confronted with the need to make choices among these ties to the East, the South, and the West (Trubetzkoy 1921b [1991, p. 87]).

Trubetskoy's ideal of full consciousness capable of achieving full knowledge seemed untouched by Freud's thinking, though the two were contemporaries living in the same city. The absence of critical thought on the notion of the subject, whether individual or collective, is an extremely dated aspect of Trubetzkoy's theory. His was an essentialist view of groups:

> If one views a people simply as a psychological entity, a collective individuality, one must admit that some form of self-awareness is both possible and necessary to it (Trubetzkoy 1921a [1991, p. 69]).

> An individual can remain unique, never falling into internal contradictions and never deceiving himself and others only after he has come to understand his own nature clearly and completely. And it is in the achievement of this harmonious personal wholeness, based upon upon a clear and full understanding of one's own nature, that the great earthly happiness is attained (*ibid*., p. 67).

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25 Koyré 1971, p. 138.

Once again, such collective consciousness could only be attained through an intense labor of reeducation:

> The brotherhood of the peoples of Eurasia must become a significant fact of their consciousness. Each people of Eurasia must be conscious of itself first and foremost as a member of that brotherhood (1927a, p. 29 [1991, p. 241]).

> For Pan-Eurasian nationalism to function effectively as a unifying factor for the Eurasian state, it is necessary to re-educate the self-awareness of the peoples of Eurasia (*ibid*., p. 242).

> The first prerequisite for the existence of a state is its citizen's consciousness of their membership within a single whole, within an organic unity (*ibid*., p. 244).

2.4 Language and the person

The language that Trubetzkoy the linguist spoke of in his culturological and ethnosophic texts was only one of several phenomena reflecting the soul of a people, the collective person:

> The Russian people is linked to the Turanian world in essential ways through certain features of its psychic profile; language alone links it to the Slavic world. Indeed, the "Turanian" world as it is presented in the third article of this collection is neither a racial nor a linguistic unit properly speaking, but an ethnopsychological unit. The Slavic world, in contrast, is nothing other than a linguistic notion. It is through the intermediary of language that the person reveals its internal world; language is the fundamental means of communication between individuals, and it is through the process of communication that collective persons are created. This in itself is enough to indicate the importance of studying the life of language from the perspective of personology. History and the properties specific to normative Russian are extremely important for characterizing the Russian national person; equally important is Russian's position among languages (Trubetzkoy 1927d, pp. 8–9).

For Saussure, without *langue, parole* would be a series of isolated, meaningless utterances, while without *parole*, *langue* would be an empty abstract system. It has often been noted that in the introduction to *Principles of Phonology* Trubetzkoy used the *langue/parole* opposition (while explicitly citing Saussure to establish the phonology/phonetics opposition). But this is the *only* place he used that dichotomy. Nowhere else does he theorize it; it played no role in his thinking. Language as he understood it was not a system of signs; rather it was what revealed a cultural type.

Chapter 10
Holism: What is a whole?

> In truth the power and majesty of Nature at every turn lack credibility if one views these aspects piecemeal and does not embrace them as a whole
>
> (Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, Bk. XII, pt. 1)
> the epigraph to Alexander von Humboldt's *Cosmos* (1844)

1 Through the looking glass

It is during – and thanks to – periods of polemical debate that theories get constructed and revealed, through contrast or opposition with each other. In the 1920s and 1930s, Jakobson and Trubetzkoy devoted a considerable amount of time to marking out where they stood in relation to other approaches that they rightly or wrongly considered adverse to their own. By studying the major themes comprising what Viel called the "Jakobsonian demonology,"[1] we can attempt to reconstitute what they were trying to establish in distinguishing their own thinking from competing theories.

Jakobson quite explicitly identified his thinking as breaking with what had come before, proclaiming he belonged to the new spirit of a new time. Once again, this "break" does not seem to correspond to what Gaston Bachelard at nearly the same moment was calling an "epistemological break." I shall try to give an overview of the "demonology" in question, to shed light on this "contemporary science" as it was being developed.[2]

Jakobson's post-war attitude was much more internationalist and conciliatory. But in the 1920s and 1930s he understood the epistemological break he was advocating not only in terms of time (old science/new science) but also space (Western science/Russian science) – that break was geocultural. The "space factor" (*prostranstvennyi faktor*), a leitmotiv for Jakobson throughout his life, amounted at that time to his scientific paradigm. According to this "theory of two sciences," Russia – both Soviet Russia and the country as represented by its émigrés – was opposed to, and ahead of, the West.

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1 Viel 1984, p. 39
2 Jakobson 1929c.

Jakobson and Trubetzkoy's demons bore the names "positivism" and "naturalism." They constructed their theory of the whole – their holism – by taking out after these pet peeves.

2 Positivism and holism

Jakobson misrepresented his adversaries' positivist ideas. Clearly he had never read Auguste Comte; he never cited him. He stubbornly confused positivism with empiricism – what he called the "cult of facts," pure factography. The following excerpt conveys the tone of his criticism of the Czech linguist Jan Gebauer, whom he accused of "obstinately refusing to engage in any debate" and refusing to create a chair in general linguistics in Prague. Jakobson's concluding remarks here are perfectly consistent with his own "dialectic" philosophy of history:

> Extreme positivism and the fanatic cult of isolated facts have quite naturally elicited radical reaction. Prague, the bullring of erudite micrology at the turn of the century, is now the center of penetrating theoretical thinking (Jakobson 1933 [1971b, p. 540]).

But this philosophy of history was constantly counterbalanced by his idea that epistemes were spatially distributed:

> Russian theoretical thought has always been characterized by certain specific tendencies. There is of course no monopolistic Russian scientific methodology to counterbalance the methodology that dominates unhindered in the West; there are of course international leitmotivs that characterize not the development locale but the moment in time. Yet however international a current of thought may be, we must always take into account the milieu and whether it is favorable or unfavorable. And the Russian milieu could be described as hostile towards positivism. We need only recall the merely moderate quality of its flowering there, whereas the lateral lines of opposition concomitant with the evolution of the sciences, primarily in the field of Russian philosophy, produced marvelous fruits: Danilevsky, Dostoevsky, Fedorov, Leontiev and Soloviev. All vital manifestations of Russian thought are characterized by an aversion to positivism as intense as Dostoevsky's to Russian Marxism. Russian science's traditional teleological stance and its structuralism have always been mixed with a more or less heavy dose of fundamentally incompatible principles. However, the methodological tendencies of contemporary Russian science have already been purified of eclectic additions and now stand apart quite clearly. Today those tendencies are also appearing in Western science, and they are reflected in the spirit of the time. In Western science of the second half of the nineteenth century these aspirations had become virtually inaudible harmonics, episodic attempts at opposition, immediately repressed by the dominant doctrine. On the other side, a world of ideas that form a whole is being shaped, and it is on the basis of that whole that Russian structuralist science, a totalizing scientific view of the world, hostile and opposed to [contemporary Western science], is developing (Jakobson 1929b, p. 46).

What Jakobson and Trubetzkoy rejected in positivism was surely the optimistic notion of progress. But without acknowledging it they adopted its globalist worldview, the idea present in the thinking of both Comte and Durkheim that society was a whole that could not be reduced to the sum of its parts. In fact, Jakobson and Trubetzkoy's chosen adversaries, the ones who did not know how to see the forest from their position behind the tree – i.e., the Neogrammarians, were just as ignorant of Comte's thought as they themselves. Hostile to all philosophical speculation, neogrammarian linguists were only interested in *facts* accessible to any observer – *observable materials*, whatever they might be – and they were intensely wary of abstractions. Their thinking was actually a form of phenomenalism, implying radical rejection of anything that did not lend itself to empirical verification; their motto was never to go beyond experience.

But linguistics should not be entirely descriptive; it also needs to be able to explain language change, to find the *causes* of each fact. Causal explanation is therefore the surest criterion of the positivist scientific approach. The Neogrammarians were fundamentally hostile to all finalist explanations. The aim of scientific work was to establish *absolute* phonetic *laws*, just as all relations of causality between two phenomenon were assumed to be absolute.

Moreover, the Neogrammarians were hostile to all psychologizing and metaphysical arguments. Though language was their research object, that object was composed of a set of facts that they thought of as a substance. The Neogrammarians Brugmann and Delbrück, for example, went explicitly against their immediate predecessor, Schleicher, whom they criticized for speculating and so abandoning the steady ground of observable facts; also for his analogy between language and the living organism.[3]

However, for the Neogrammarians the only verifiable causes were to be looked for in the activity of speaking subjects, who, in using language, changed it. The only thing Jakobson and Trubetzkoy could reject here was the non-systematicity of neogrammarian linguistics, its non-holistic treatment of the object. In the early twentieth century in Italy and Germany, perspectives and priorities were overturned: "idealist" linguist groups accused comparative historical linguistics of "positivism," materialism, soul-lessness. Emphasis shifted to the role of cul-

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3 Nonetheless, Schleicher's naturalism has sometimes been likened to positivism: Camproux (1979, p. 26) wrote of the influence in linguistics of "the positivist theories propounded by Auguste Comte, understood to have been confirmed by Darwin's biological evolution theory. Under Darwin's influence, the German linguist Schleicher, who was also a botanist, invented the so-called genealogical tree theory. ... This led Schleicher to deny that linguistics could possibly be a historical discipline studying the free activity of the human spirit."

tural phenomena, national identity, the spirit of a given people as reflected in its language.[4]

The German linguist Walter Porzig offered one of the few contemporary definitions of positivism:

> By positivism we understand that scientific attitude which, taking the isolated fact as a starting point, considers the function of science to be the exact co-ordination of all such facts. Idealism, on the other hand, looks upon the world as a system made up of perceptible forms, whose nature is solely determined by their function within the whole which they compose. Single phenomena have their value in the positivist's eyes because they exist; for the idealist, because they have a meaning" (quoted in Iordan & Orr 1970, p. 87).

Several times (including after the 1920s and 1930s), Jakobson claimed that the new science stood opposed to both positivism and naturalism, usually lumping the two together in the same category.

The question was a delicate one because in France, at least, critics of structuralism ranked *it* with positivism, signaling "the positivism of structural linguistics"[5] and claiming that Jakobson's notion of communication had been formulated "under the auspices of positivist science."[6]

What did the Prague Russians mean when they spoke of positivism?

First and foremost they were attacking the "atomism" and "mechanicism" of the Neogrammarians. In fact, they seldom used the term positivism. Once again, Jakobson and Trubetzkoy never spoke of Comte. They did not analyze positivism as a philosophy but rather used it as a negative sign of the doctrine they abhorred – Neogrammarian doctrine.

Koerner was right to say that in the nineteenth century "no linguist would seriously have claimed that language is not in some way organized but a chaotic conglomerate of isolated terms of verbal expression."[7] He adds: "I have not heard of anyone reflecting upon the nature of language during the past two or three millenia of western civilization who denied that language constitutes a systematic entity of some kind. "[8]

But in accusing the Neogrammarians of "atomism" and "mechanism" what Jakobson was criticizing was in fact the absence in their thinking of a sense of system.

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4 See Koerner 1982a, b, c.

5 Maldidier et al. 1972, p. 117.

6 Flahault 1984a, p. 36.

7 Koerner 1975, p. 724.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 805.

In *Remarques sur l'évolution phonologique du Russe* (1929), Jakobson claimed that Saussure's diachronic linguistics had not gotten out of the "neogrammarian rut":

> For him [Saussure] ... some elements are negatively affected without regard for the solidarity linking them to the whole. Consequently, they can only be studied outside the system. A system is displaced only by events that are not only foreign to it but isolated and do not themselves form a system (Jakobson 1929a [*SW-I*, 1971, p. 17]).

> We must abandon the notion that a phonological system is an fortuitous agglomeration (*ibid.*, p. 22).

> The neogrammarian idea of language history amounted to no theory. We can only have a theory of a historical process if the entity that undergoes change is conceived of as a structure governed by internal laws, not a fortuitous agglomeration (*ibid.*, p. 109).

> In Saussure's doctrine ... diachrony is viewed as an agglomeration of accidental changes (*ibid.*, pp. 109–110).

Jakobson's judgments could be harsh and unbending. Those that were give us the clearest picture of the opposition he maintained between atomism and systematism (or holism):

> Traditional historical phonetics was characterized by how it handled phonic changes in isolation; that is, without taking into account the system undergoing those changes. This way of preceding was taken for granted as part of the reigning worldview of the time: for the rampant empiricism of the Neogrammarians, a system, particularly a linguistic one, was a mechanical *sum* (*Un-Verbindung*) and in no way a formal unit (*Gestalteinheit*) – to use terms of modern psychology. Phonology offers an *integral method* in place of the Neogrammarians' isolating method. Each phonological fact is handled as a partial whole that fits together with other partial sets of various higher degrees. And the primary principle of historical phonology is, *all changes should be handled as a function of the system within which they take place*. A phonic change can only be understood if we elucidate its role in the language system (Jakobson 1931c [1971a, pp. 202–203]).

3 The question of naturalism

Naturalism in linguistics is associated primarily with Schleicher[9] and may be defined as the view that languages and language families are evolving species like

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9 As far as I know, Schleicher himself never used the word *naturalism* to describe his theory; only later was the term used to peg the author – and it stuck. It would be interesting to see who

animals and plants. Schleicher thought of languages as natural, living organisms that were born, grew and developed according to their own strict laws entirely inaccessible to human will, then aged and died. His was the most elaborate version of the "genealogical tree" theory, and he transposed what was a descriptive typology (the three morphological categories of language) into an evolutionary one: inflecting languages represented a later evolutionary stage than agglutinating ones, which in turn represented a later one than isolating ones.

Here linguistics was understood to be a natural science whose research object was the laws of language evolution and whose methods could be as rigorous as those of chemistry or biology. This was a particular reading of Hegelian tradition, according to which the natural sciences – the world of necessity – stood opposed to the social sciences, the world of freedom. The ideal of the natural sciences was to seek and discover *objective laws.*

Jakobson may actually have been more vehemently opposed to Schleicher's naturalism than to Neogrammarian positivism. He constantly returned to this theme without really defining what he meant by naturalism, persistently concerned to flush out traces of this way of thinking:

> However – and this often happens in the history of science – even though a superannuated theory has been abolished, many residues of it subsist, having escaped the vigilance of critical thinking (Jakobson 1938 [1971a, p. 234]).[10]

In fact, Jakobson's reasons for taking out after Schleicher and naturalism seem to me considerably different from his contemporaries'.

First, there were Schleicher's naturalist themes – e.g., the birth, life and death of languages, and his insistence on strict *laws.* As far as I know, Jakobson never mentioned them. Some of his criticisms, especially the ones concerning empiricism, are quite standard:

> But in synchronic linguistics too, applied research is still rife with vestiges of the old naturalism. The most notable example is analysis of language sounds. Linguists conceived of

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used it for the first time. Moreover, it should be noted that linguistic naturalism is quite remote from naturalism in philosophy, where it refers to a particular type of pantheism or materialism that denies the existence of any transcendent creative or organizing cause of nature, or in esthetics, where it refers to reproducing reality in perfectly objective fashion and in all its forms).

10 With this in mind it becomes difficult to understand the opening of Jakobson's extremely flattering article on Kruszewski (Jakobson 1967 [1973, p. 238]): "It is no coincidence that in his 1881 thesis Kruszewski declared first that it was not the principle task of linguistics 'to reconstruct the table of a language's past but to discover the laws of linguistic phenomena,' implying that linguistics by the very nature of its method comes close not to the 'historic' sciences but to the 'natural' ones." The word "natural" here seems to be used in the sense "law-governed."

> language as a foreign, incomprehensible idiom, as if it were nothing more than a meaning-
> less chain of acoustic perceptions (Jakobson 1933 [1971b, p. 545]).

> Schleicher's doctrine – the doctrine of a great naturalist in linguistics – was discredited
> long ago, but there are many survivals of it. His claim that sound physiology is the basis for
> all grammar won a place of honor in language science for this auxiliary and, strictly speak-
> ing, extrinsic discipline (Jakobson 1938 [1971a, p. 234]).

But Jakobson here was clearly confusing naturalism with what can be called
Schleicher's physicalism (Jakobson did not use that word). This in turn enabled
him to identify neogrammarian doctrine with naturalism:

> Phonological analysis of a given language's sounds is radically different from the natu-
> ralistic analysis done in phonetics. Phonology does not exclude phonetics, but whereas
> the former studies phonemes as fundamental components of a given language, the latter
> naturalistically describes the sound matter which that language uses (Jakobson 1933 [1971b,
> p. 546]).

Naturalism (a term which he occasionally used in its esthetic sense) was for Jako-
bson fundamentally non-systematic:

> We need only compare the discontinuous, episodic impression of a naturalist painting to a
> painting by Cezanne, an integral system of volume ratios (Jakobson 1929a [1971a, p. 110]).

The mystery deepens when we discover that Schleicher is described in several
texts and anthologies as particularly systematic. Saussure wrote of him:

> He [Schleicher] had a long enough perspective to attain a general overview. Today that view
> is no longer satisfactory, but he did make an attempt to be general and systematic. It is more
> interesting to have a system than a mass of confused notions (Saussure, *CLG*, critical edition
> ed. Robert Engler, p. 8; quoted in Koerner 1975, p. 804).

In this connection it is also interesting to cite the entry on the "naturalist current"
in the *Linguistic Encyclopedia*[11] of the Soviet Academy of Sciences:

> Schleicher's scientific ideas and studies are of great importance: in the field of historical
> linguistics he contributed to the development of the systematicity principle (*sistemnost'*)
> and the method of reconstructing the parent language.

Jakobson's second target, in connection with which he lumped together natural-
ism and neogrammarian doctrine, was atomism and causal explanation. This

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11 *Lingvisticheskii enciklopedicheskii slovar'*, Moscow, 1990.

part of the attack enabled him to put forward his own structural-teleological explanation, which he believed consistent with the major philosophical orientations of cultural life in his time, particularly in the USSR and Czechoslovakia.

> The spirit of the book by the structuralist Fišer works to demonstrate the failure of the philosophical idea of naturalism, which reduces reality to atomized powder[12] and sees only quantitative relations and mechanical causality. Engliš's book teaches that studying human behavior causally fails, that instead of a cause-effect relation we have a means-to-end relation, and that this relation should be interpreted in accordance with the teleological method (Jakobson 1933 [1971b, p. 544]).

> Problems of causality continue to predominate, without any awareness that what comes to the listener's mind as the most immediate, natural reaction is not the causes of speech but the question of its end [goal] (*ibid*. p. 545).

It is on the issue of genetic explanation that Jakobson's critique begins to differ significantly from the usual comments on naturalism made in his time:

> Surely the most stable feature of the doctrine in question is its tendency to explain phonic and grammatical resemblances between two languages by their descending from a common parent language, and to take into account only those resemblances likely to be explained this way. Even in the thinking of those who no longer take seriously the simplistic genealogy of languages, the image of the *Stammbau* or genealogical tree remains alive and well, to quote Schuchardt's excellent remark. The problem of shared inheritance due to a single origin persists as the essential preoccupation of comparative language study (Jakobson 1938 [1971a, p. 234]).

The "doctrine in question," characterized as "simplistic genealogy," stood opposed to "the sociological orientation of modern linguistics":[13]

> Exploring resemblances inherited from a shared prehistoric state – through the study of art, mores or customs, for example – is only one thing to be done in comparative social sciences, and the problem of the development of innovative trends should be given precedence here over residues (*ibid.*, pp. 234–235).

Jakobsonian sociology was founded on a *law*:

> Convergent development, encompassing immense masses of individuals over a vast territory, should be considered a predominant law (*ibid.*, p. 235).

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12 Surely if we can characterize Schleicher at all, it is not as a thinker who reduced reality to "atomized powder." This reproach would much better apply to the Neogrammarians, who were opposed to Schleicher's naturalism.
13 *Ibid.*, p. 234.

To support my thesis that Jakobson and Trubetzkoy were situated at a point of extreme tension between two different paradigms – on the one hand a theory of complex systems accessible by way of the *immaterial*, on the other a theory of the One and the Whole (ἑν καί πᾶν) inherited from *Naturphilosophie* and Byzantine Neo-Platonism, I hope to show that the theory of convergences and coincidence they constructed was actually based on a *naturalist* model.

The *word* naturalism was systematically denigrated by our Russian structuralists. In his 1939 obituary tribute to Trubetzkoy, for example, Jakobson wrote:

> Trubetzkoy's thinking, firmly directed against all naturalist conceptions of the spiritual world, either biological or evolutionist, and all deliberate egocentrism, was of course rooted in Russian ideological tradition, but it also contributed many personal, original features and is extremely valuable for its depth and critical acuity, due above all to the author's rich scientific experience and his collaboration with the great geographer and historian of civilizations, P. N. Savitsky. The doctrine of these two thinkers on the specificity of the Russian (Eurasian) geographical and historical world in relation to Europe and Asia is the source of what has been called the Eurasian ideological current of thought (Jakobson 1939).

In fact, as we saw in Chapter 7, Jakobson's model of convergence was drawn from a highly specific, anti-Darwinian biological approach and a likewise specific philosophy, that of the whole.

Consider, for example, his frequent use of biological metaphors:

> We need to find centers where the graft [*Einimpfung*] of Russian scientific tradition, the *intersection* with Russian cultural values, will produce useful results. We must not forget what the great peoples of the west have long understood: cultural expansion of the language outside the country is not indifferent for the interests of that culture's *growth* [*Wachstum*] (Jakobson 1929b [1988, p. 60].

But what was the meaning of the alliance between "Russian ideological tradition" and "the Eurasian ideological current of thought"? Once again, Jakobson's main source here was the anti-Darwinian biologist Berg, whose *Nomogenesis* he quotes in the following passage:

> Whereas orthodox evolutionism taught that "we should consider structural similarities between organs only if they denote that the animals in question descend from the same ancestor," today's research brings to light the importance of acquired secondary similarities, in either organisms related to each other but with no common ancestor or organisms of entirely different origins that have undergone convergent development. "Resemblances between two forms at the level of organization may correspond to recently acquired secondary characteristics, whereas differences may correspond to inherited primary traits." Under these conditions, the distinction between related and unrelated organisms is no longer decisive. Convergent development, encompassing immense masses of individuals over a vast territory, should be considered a predominant law (Jakobson 1938 [1971a, p. 235]).

Jakobson's interest in phenomena such as contact and "the space factor" in geolinguistics certainly seem to suggest an interest in diffusion. In this sense he was a full-fledged participant in the *air du temps* of Schuchardt and the Italian neolinguists. The *Dialogues* (1980) are particularly interesting in this respect. In this text Jakobson returned for the first time since his arrival in the United States to the theme of space:

> [In Oslo in 1939] the questions of phonological geography that had so vividly interested workers of the Prague Circle during the thirties might find their concrete application. We knew that the diffusion of phonological phenomena extended far beyond the limits of a given language or family of languages, and that similarities were to be found between the phonological systems of neighboring peoples, even in cases of a complete absence of a common genetic ancestry of their languages (Jakobson 1983, p. 38).

> In the present century, the science of language has seriously faced for the first time the problem that the features characteristic of a linguistic family can extend beyond the limits of that family. Such an extension often turns out to affect languages that are distant in structure and origin, although some times these effects are limited to only one part of a given geographic area (*ibid.*, p. 84).

However, we must be cautious about the text of the *Dialogues*. To my knowledge, Jakobson did not use the term "diffusionism," for example, at any time in the 1930s. Do the *Dialogues* present a reinterpretation of his ideas of half a century before in terms more readily accessible to Western readers? The effect in any case is to efface the most salient aspects of "the Eurasian ideological current of thought."

But it seems to me that the term "diffusionism" is misleading. Jakobson and Trubetzkoy's 1930s convergence theory lacked two fundamental features of diffusionism as understood at the time of Graebner's and Schmidt's anthropological studies; namely, the idea that human nature was not inventive – i.e., inventions cannot occur twice in two different places; they can only be *borrowed* – and the atomized aspect of diffusion phenomena. Those two features went directly counter to Trubetzkoy's idea of the totality of cultural wholes and Jakobson's of shared acquired features.

But the fundamental difference between their thinking and diffusionist theories was undoubtedly what they held to be the geographical, non-random nature of the spatial distribution of typological facts (independent of genetic origins):

> Given that isophones that exceed language boundaries are frequently and even almost always to be found in linguistic geography, and that the phonological typology of languages is clearly not unrelated to their distribution in space, it is important ... to draw up an *atlas of phonological isolines* for the entire linguistic world (Jakobson 1938 [1971a, p. 245]).

The astounding idea behind this set of remarks on spatial ties between languages is that system features need not and indeed should not be studied exclusively *within* the given system. Once again we find ourselves confronted with an epistemological world extremely different from Saussure's.[14]

What the Prague Russians were actually presenting in the 1930s was *trans-systemic* phonology. The hidden claim was that relations between language types were not due to chance. But what might explain this "attraction" of some language types for others? No explanation is given. The impression is that the discovery of phonological affinities among languages – primarily those of "Eurasia"-USSR – was enough to support the underlying claim of this research: *Eurasia is a natural object, an organic whole.*

Criticizing Schleicher's biological model for its inconsistencies, Jakobson put forward a counter-model whose key words were *convergence, teleology* and *spatial determinism*, a model which he founded on a particular biological and geographical understanding without realizing (or indicating) that his thinking was actually *another type of naturalism* – a curious conception of the "social" sciences in which they were understood to study societies perceived as organisms subject to natural determinism.

The Prague Russians' theory of the influence of *milieu* and the hereditary nature of what were initially acquired characteristics exerted strong influence in Russia in the 1930s; we need only think of Lysenko. But it went against Lysenko's "mechanical Lamarckism" in that organisms were understood to have a kind of *predisposition* to resemble each other and therefore to come together (see Chapter 7).

However this may be, it seems important to me to highlight the implicit power of the naturalist model in 1930s Prague Russian thinking. Moreover, that thinking in no way corresponded to Jakobson's statement "It is a truism that linguistics is a social, not a natural, science."

In fact, there need not be a contradiction between the social character of language and the idea that linguistics is a natural science. Consider, for example, Paul Lafargue's *La langue française avant et après la Révolution* (1894).

Lafargue was a Marxist with a social theory of language: "Language is the most spontaneous and characteristic production of human societies."[15] For him

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14 See Saussure: "What brings about these differences? If anyone believes it is just the distance between 1 and 2, he is the victim of an illusion. ... Geographical diversity has to be translated into temporal diversity *(CLG*, trans. Baskin, 1959, p. 197). The entire fourth part of the *Course* seems to have been written to refute Jakobson's theses in advance.
15 Lafargue 1894; see Calvet 1977, p. 80.

language did indeed depend on *social milieu*, but the milieu itself was conceived biologically:

> A language cannot be isolated from its social milieu any more than a plant can be transplanted from its meteorological one (*ibid.*, p. 81).

And it was this biological-type reasoning that enabled Lafargue to reject the thinking of linguists of his time who wanted to make linguistics an independent science. For example, he criticized what he considered the overblown role of etymology in studying word meaning: language should be linked to its *milieu*. But what is most significant for our purposes is that Lafargue applied biological-type reasoning precisely *because* language was a social fact (that is, historical and dependent on *milieu*):

> A language, like a living organism, is born, grows, and dies. In the course of its existence it goes through a series of changes and revolutions, assimilating and de-assimilating words, familiar expressions and grammatical forms. The words of a language, like the cells of a plant or animal, live their own lives: their phonetics and spelling are constantly changing (*ibid.*, p. 79).

To return to the theme of *milieu* in Jakobson's thinking, we see that an additional phase in the reasoning (the series of affirmations, rather) was to introduce *correspondences* between facts belonging to different orders (see Chapter 8). It seems to me that here we really can speak of a *naturalist* understanding, though Jakobson's naturalism was of a different sort and considerably more complex than Schleicher's.

What Jakobson presented as new, as the result of an epistemological break, was that correspondences could not be explained by external causality. But in that case what made isolines coincide? The only possible answer, as I see it, is *nature,* understood as a teleological factor. In any case, no other explanation is given. Above all, there seems no reason to think that Jakobson's assertion that linguistics is a social rather than natural science could provide any access to an explanation.

It is worthwhile to return here to the principle of a "system in which everything holds together." What does it mean for "everything to hold together"? What held together according to the Prague Russians was "facts," facts in *waiting*:

> And yet linguistics, while glimpsing the disturbing question of phonological affinities, wrongly left that question at the periphery of its research. The facts are waiting to be identified, sorted and clarified (Jakobson 1938 [1971a, p. 237]).

It is interesting to note how Jakobson set about proving his arguments; he always does so by declaring "The facts are too convincing/too numerous to be due to chance." Not being due to chance was considered proof. But this of course was circular reasoning, as the "proof" was precisely what he was trying to prove.

Again, no explanation is ever offered: the miracle of discovering the correlation is understood to suffice.

The other master of the Prague Circle had the same strong tendency to conceive of complex objects as organisms, this time non-metaphorically. It is true that this idea is much more present in Trubetzkoy's "culturological" works than his linguistic ones, but it is important to stress how this mode of reasoning was considered adequate proof. The underlying assumption was, That which is not organic does not operate as a system and therefore does not deserve to be taken into account.

For Trubetzkoy the nation was an organism:

> The cohabitation of popular and normative languages in the milieu (*sreda*) of a single national organism is determined by a complex network of intersecting lines of communication between people (Trubetzkoy 1927b, p. 55).

An "ethnic entity" was an "organic unit":

> All nationalism is based on an intense feeling of the personal nature (*lichnostnaia*) of the ethnic entity; this is why it is a means of affirming the organic unity and originality of this entity (a people, a group of peoples, a part of a people) (Trubetzkoy 1927a, p. 28).

> As representatives of the abstract westernist tendencies characteristic of the older generations of the Russian intelligentsia, these people[16] do not wish to understand that in order for a state to exist, its citizens have to be conscious that they belong to a whole, an organic unity that can only be one of ethnicity or class, and that under the current circumstances there are only two possible solutions: either dictatorship of the proletariat or consciousness of the unity and originality of the Eurasian multi-peopled nation and Eurasian nationalism (*ibid.*, p. 31).

For Trubetzkoy society was a "social organism," this in turn likened each time to a "national organism":

> The dialectical division of language and culture is so organically linked with the existence of the social organism that any attempt to abolish national diversity would lead to cultural impoverishment and extinction (Trubetzkoy 1923, p. 108 [1991, pp. 147–148]).

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16 Trubetzkoy was alluding here to Russian émigrés who dreamed of implanting the principles of "European democracy" in Russia.

Once again, there were no individuals in Trubetzkoy's thinking but rather "members" of a "social organism," a "sociocultural organism," a "national organism" – the three expressions were entirely synonymous.[17] This was why the labor of Catholic missionaries trying to convert individuals was a sterile one: religion was a matter of national psyche; it had to be organically assimilated by the people as a whole.[18]

Trubetzkoy never spoke of collective entities as societies but rather as peoples, nations, ethnic groups (*plemia*). The fundamental category was the *whole*. A people was "a psychological whole, a collective personality,"[19] a "social organism,"[20] a "social whole,"[21] a "sociocultural organism."[22] In this set of texts "whole" and "organism" were interchangeable, synonymous, and occasionally supplemented by the adjective "natural" ("natural organic unit").[23] The whole was often viewed as a "unity"; the "national whole" was also a "national unit."[24] But he did offer an important clarification on this point: Eurasia was a "nation" made up of smaller entities, peoples or "ethnic units,"[25] each in turn subdivided. An individual thus belonged to several collective entities at once; likewise, a single people belonged to a set of peoples and cultures.

But regardless of the level at which one collective entity was embedded in another, there was always a *multiplicity of "full" units*. There was always juxtaposition or nesting, never interpenetration or partial overlap. Within each of these "full" cultures or linguistic systems communication was perfect, knew no desire or want, no polyphony or conflict. In Trubetzkoy's thinking humanity was divided, of course,[26] but each unit produced by that division was full and *harmonious*. In contrast to Bakhtin's world, otherness in Trubetzkoy's world was only

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17 Trubetzkoy 1923a.

18 *Ibid.*

19 Trubetzkoy 1921a, p. 74.

20 Trubetzkoy 1923b, p. 108.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 110.

22 *Ibid.*

23 *Ibid.*, p. 119.

24 Trubetzkoy 1925c, pp. 72, 73.

25 Trubetzkoy 1927d, p. 28.

26 Trubetzkoy is not alone in interpreting Babel as the *law* conditioning the possibility of any and all societies. Milner sees the Babel myth as "linking the possibility of language to that of infinite, non-summable division" (Milner 1978, p. 29). François Flahault recalls that "it was not the incompletion of the Tower of Babel that degraded the human condition. On the contrary, that was the founding law of speech" (Flahault 1984b, p. 150). Lastly, for A. Jacob, "man's cultural pluralism requires us to interpret Babel not as a fall but as an essential determination" (Jacob 1976, p. 86). However, we would be mistaken to hear an echo of Trubetzkoy's interpretation in these readings.

to be found beyond boundaries, not within them. No osmosis or interpenetration was possible, no hybridity or heterogeneity. The other had no place in the organic whole – except as violent intrusion, cultural "imperialism" – because man's main task was to discover and know his "true nature" *within his own culture.* For Trubetzkoy, a fully realized subject was a full subject, whereas a divided subject could be nothing more than an individual who had not yet discovered his true personality within his group.

Once again it is crucial to identify the reasoning and demonstration mode: Trubetzkoy's proof was by *nature.* An organism such as a language or nation had *natural* boundaries: if it were too small or too big, it was not viable. Only Eurasia (that is, the former Russian Empire, become the USSR) was an organism of *natural* size.

For Trubetzkoy, then, the fact that Greeks and Romanians had a "false" idea of their deep national being – Romanians liked to think of themselves as a Latin people on the grounds that a long time ago a small group of Roman soldiers had come through their territory, while modern-day Greeks, a mix of different ethnic groups with a Balkan cultural history, liked to think of themselves as descendants of the Ancient Greeks – was to be explained by the fact that "self-awareness has not been achieved organically."[27]

But the supreme argument was metaphysical. In the last analysis, the transcendent principle governing the destinies of languages and cultures, the laws of life and nature, was God's law:

> As with everything natural, proceeding from the laws of life and development established by God, this picture is majestic in its incomprehensible and inexhaustible complexity and in its complex harmoniousness. The effort to destroy it by human hands, to replace the organic unity of living, dissimilar cultures with the mecanical unity of one impersonal culture[28] that leaves no room for the manifestation of individuality and is miserably abstract – such an effort is unnatural and blasphemous (Trubetzkoy 1923, p. 119 [1991, p. 156]).

I am now in a position to further develop my hypothesis of the *naturalist* origin of the Prague Russians' structuralism. The pairs of opposed terms they were constantly using, e.g., "mechanical/organic" and "individual/member of the national organism," readily bring to mind Counter-Enlightenment discourse,[29] particularly the social conservatism characteristic of French Catholic counter-

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27 Trubetzkoy 1921a, p. 82 (1991, p. 76).

28 This 1923 text by Trubetzkoy was directed not against the Bolsheviks' national policy but the "Romano-Germans," who were trying to impose their cultural values on the entire world, especially Russia.

29 See Berlin 1977.

revolutionary legitimism. Once again we can cite Joseph de Maistre's *Soirées de Saint-Petersbourg* and Louis de Bonald's *Recherches philosophiques*; also Lammenais' *Essai sur l'indifférence en matière de religion*. What unites these texts is their opposition to a conventionalist view of language (that is, the view developed by Locke and Condillac) and to any and all mediation by a social pact or contract.[30]

The "ultras" Bonald and Maistre insisted on the *organic unity* of the social body; an ill done to any part of it could cause the entire society to collapse; this was why they defended traditional hierarchies and values against the heritage of the Enlightenment, liberal individualism and contract philosophy.

There is nothing to prove that Jakobson read the whole of *Les Soirées de Saint Petersbourg*. He quoted one sentence only: "Let us therefore never speak of chance or arbitrary signs." But he quoted it constantly (regularly in the 1930s, and again at the end of his life in the *Dialogues*, p. 87). His own thinking brought together two important features of this type of thought. His critique of Saussure's assertion of the arbitrary nature of the sign can be likened to de Maistre's criticism of Condillac on this same point, and his refusal to accept chance, his unswervingly loyal belief in historical determinism, resembles de Maistre's.

For his part, Trubetzkoy almost never cited his sources. Perhaps he never really read the texts in question. But it is permissible to refer to a *current of thought* with a precise history. In Russia, as we have seen, that current encompassed Slavophile thinking and a "rightist" reading of Hegel. It is paradoxical to discover that Trubetzkoy, who considered Catholicism and Orthodoxy utterly irreconcilable, partook of a current of thought that resembled anti-revolutionary Catholic thinking in France. But "currents of thought" care little for borders. We are not dealing here with national cultures, nor are we concerned with superficial differences at the level of names or declarations. The point is that there were strong similarities between what they thought about, the kinds of arguments they used and the way they arranged their sets of positive and negative arguments.

By describing their similarities this way we can avoid the issue of X's "influence" on Y. Even if Jakobson and Trubetzkoy never read Bonald, they necessarily read people who had, or who were steeped in the same current of ideas or who had reconstructed the same ideas in different and in some cases indirect ways.

Lastly and once again paradoxically, all their assertions of the naturalness of the Eurasian world, the necessary (if only approximate) correspondence between its different isolines, do not seem to have been aimed at delimiting Eurasia as such. Our Eurasianists attached the highest stakes – territorial and cultural

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30 On this point see Eco 1994, pp. 136–137; Koyré 1971; Berlin 1992.

ones – infinitely higher than any others, to one symbolic border: Russia's western frontier.

Trubetzkoy's relativist discourse actually seems to have been *ad hoc*, the real point being to justify the colonization of Siberia and Central Asia and to underline and amplify the break between "Russia" and Europe," a break made that much more *imaginary* by the fact that the Eurasianists were trying to ground it in *nature* by way of the *Landschaft* theory.

4 Given object *versus* constructed object

The gradual, difficult shift from Platonic ideas of archetype, the *eidos,* hidden yet revealed in its earthly, perceptible avatars, to the non-substantialist idea of structure is one of the most interesting moments of twentieth-century intellectual history. But to account for that moment, we need to make a radical distinction between *real object* and *object of knowledge*.

An object of science or knowledge does not exist empirically before investigation, before being appropriated by a theory; it is not like iron ore that exists in the subsoil before being extracted and freed of the soil clinging to it. Saussure's definition of the specific object of linguistics implied choosing a resolutely theoretical option: "Viewpoint creates the object." The object in question does not in and of itself preexist investigation; rather it is *constructed* by the theory. *Sounds* do not need linguistics in order to exist, to be emitted and perceived by speakers. But *phonemes* only have meaning within a theoretical approach that defines their relevance. A phoneme inventory can only make sense as a function of the criteria laid down by the theory. The fact that several theories compete to account for the same phenomena should not to be thought of as a flaw, but as the coexistence of several perspectives, several ways of shedding light on the same empirical object, several *models* of a reality too complex and multifarious to be known directly.

Many misunderstandings could be avoided if in each case the model were clearly distinguished from the empirical object to be investigated. Though this may not always be clear in Saussure's own writings, language is not a thing, but a model. And no matter how hard Jakobson strove to "get beyond" Saussurian antinomies such as *langue/parole*, he only got himself embroiled in an ontological quest without ever perceiving the epistemological revolution represented by the theory of *viewpoint* (and hence of *value*).

Are the order and harmony of the world in the world or in Eurasianist fantasies of the world? Is totality *in* things themselves or in the method of approaching them? Jakobson, Trubetzkoy and Savitsky did not at all distinguish between real

object and object of investigation and knowledge; at any rate, the two objects remained thoroughly confused in their thinking. For example, they presented *development locale* not as an object constructed as part of a theory – a concept – but as a real object, preexisting investigation, that simply needed to be *named*.

Eurasianist scholars repeatedly proclaimed they were breaking with existing science: theirs was a new discourse; they were speaking a new scientific language. However, in contrast to Saussure, they never critically inquired into their own way of constructing concepts; they just kept hammering home that theirs was a new science while actually taking up the old organicist vocabulary and sliding toward holism. They did not work by way of hypothesis and deduction but rather sought to make the facts line up with their speculations on the harmony of the universe. Their cultural studies of Eurasia as an object of knowledge were based on perfectly tautological reasoning because they defined their whole by its observable effects. For them the components of the whole were superimposed on each other; they "coincided" and corroborated each other. But we can reasonably say they were very different from the components of a structure, for they were understood to empirically preexist all investigation. They had ontological existence.

Jakobson and Trubetzkoy's structuralism was a means of conceiving ties not in the sense of relations that create objects, as in Saussure's thinking, where the components of the theory only exist through their relations to each other, but in the sense of relating seemingly unrelated features, features that seemed to exist independently of each other, each investigatable in and of itself, the underlying fantasy seeming to have been that those features were *waiting* to be linked through the *linkage method*, which would bring to light inextricable ties among them. The fundamental difference appears quite clearly here between a *model* – that is, an object constructed through an investigation procedure – and a *type,* a Platonic idea, an essence posited as *hidden* behind empirical reality. Likewise we can now understand the interchangeability of levels, fields, areas in the thinking of the Prague Russians: in the order of things, all things corresponded; the search for ties could be endless.

The Prague Russians were carried away by the whirlwind of their own parallelisms, symmetries, ties, relations, resemblances, *Zussamenhänge* and *sootnoshenija*. This was because their object was always-already given: Eurasia, an object not to be produced through scientific practice as an object of knowledge but on the contrary one that seemed to call upon the various scientific fields to amass reiterated proofs of its existence, like a litany. Eurasianist science was one long ontological quest. Yet it was not empiricism in the classic sense of that term. The point was not to disengage a preexisting reality from inessential material, but rather to produce a total, cumulative, *synthetic* vision, to provide ontological

proof of the existence of their object by accumulating features that *corresponded to each other.* The theory of correspondences, a theory of *types*, transplanted the model into the real. By denying or rather ignoring the notion of *viewpoint*, these theorists confused their model with the real. The different series of phenomena that entered into a relation of ties and connections were assumed to exhaust the real because the real object was already there and the object of knowledge only served to confirm and reinforce that real one.

5 Structure or whole?

To conclude let me formulate the following thesis: Despite appearances and declarations, there is a profoundly *ontological* component in Jakobson and Trubetzkoy's structuralism.

Consider, for example, a text that may be considered a manifesto of structuralism:

> If we wanted to characterize briefly the kind of thinking currently governing science in its most varied manifestations, we could not find a more fitting expression than *structuralism*. Each set of phenomena handled by today's science is thought of not as a mechanical assemblage but rather a structural unit, a system; and the fundamental task is to discover its intrinsic laws, both static and dynamic. What is at the center of scientific concerns today is not any external impulse or influence but rather the internal conditions for evolution; not genesis as a mechanical operation but function (Jakobson 1929c, p. 10).

The expression "each set of phenomena" is of particular interest. "Sets of phenomena" were the *givens*, and the point was to study the "intrinsic laws" or "internal conditions for [the] evolution" of those givens. Here there is no question of *viewpoint*, no inquiry into how a scientific object is constructed.

In another example, taken from Jakobson's tribute to Trubetzkoy, the real is presented as a structured Whole:

> Trubetzkoy understood that this systematic, totalizing spirit was highly characteristic of the first acquisitions of Russian science and determinant for his own body of work. He had that rare faculty essential to him of discovering the systematic in everything he perceived. ... Moreover, he always focused his astounding memory on the systematic: facts were amassed into schemas that were then organized into soundly constituted categories. Nothing was more foreign to him nor seemed more unacceptable than a mechanical catalogue or list. The feeling of an internal, organic tie between the features to be distributed never left him, and system never remained suspended in the air, torn away from other givens or facts. On the contrary, reality as a whole seemed to him a system of systems, a great, hierarchically ordered unit with multiple chords whose construction occupied his thought to the end of

his days. He was internally predisposed to have a totalizing conception of the world, and he only fully discovered himself in structural science (Jakobson 1939).

Clearly, holistic thought can be interpreted in two ways. Either 1) entities can only be discovered by the relations obtaining between them, and in this case they "exist" as scientific but not empirical objects; or 2) the components of a whole are linked to each like the organs of an organism: they "exist" physically but can only be understood in terms of their role in the economy of the organism's life.

The first understanding was Saussure's: systems are constructions constructed from a particular viewpoint. The second was that of the Prague Circle: for Jakobson and Trubetzkoy, reality itself was systematic – the world was systematic. I therefore propose to call their scientific practice *ontological structuralism* – not physicalist, of course, but ontological.

Jean-Claude Milner has shown how, in direct contrast to the scientificity criteria of "our tradition" (to discard, exclude, distinguish), Jakobson was willing to "take everything": "For him, abundance and inclusion, incessantly pursued, should govern thought."[31]

This is because in Jakobson and Trubetzkoy's world everything was linked to everything else; in fact, there was no system independence. The various systems were horizontally separated – Eurasian languages were of a completely different structure than those of western Europe – but "vertically" linked: soils, climate, culture, mentality, languages and religion corresponded to each other and "converged."

Saussure was fundamentally anti-substantialist; his notion of value and his negative definition of units led to what would later become the notion of *model*. Language (*Langue)* in Saussurian thought is an abstraction, potential, a virtual object made up of oppositive relations. For Trubetzkoy and Jakobson, on the other hand, phenomena *existed*; once again, they preexisted all investigation of them. The idea that all things were linked to each other is more relevant to One-and-the-Whole thinking than to the idea of *value*.

Consider, for example, the Prague linguists' constant indictment of Saussure for rigorously separating synchrony and diachrony. Their fundamental argument was, "synchrony does not exist."

But as De Mauro pointed out quite clearly regarding attempts to "get beyond" this opposition, any *ontological* thinking on Saussure's concept of *langue* is strictly off-topic:

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31 Milner 1982, p. 334.

> It has been widely assumed that the distinction for Saussure is located in *reality*, that the object "langue" has synchrony and diachrony just as Monsieur Durand has a hat and a pair of gloves (De Mauro 1979, p. 452).

For Saussure *langue* was a constructed object, a *viewpoint*. For the Prague Russians it was a sort of collective norm wherein conservative *tendencies* and innovations alike were "contained" through the cohabiting of several generations of speakers; it was a structured "set of phenomena" – that is, phenomena all linked to each other – and the set itself was linked to other entities. The misunderstanding could not have been greater: Saussure and Saussurians, the Prague Russians, were simply not talking about the same thing. We could say that the latter group had a *realist* attitude toward language whereas Saussure's was *nominalist*: viewpoint creates the object. For Jakobson and Trubetzkoy structure was immanent in the order of things; for Saussure, it belonged to the constructed object alone: *langue*. It becomes clear why the *langue/parole* opposition had no meaning for the Prague Circle (with the exception of one sentence in Trubetzkoy's *Principles of Phonology*).

For Saussure, language was a system *constructed* by the linguist (empirical reality could not be grasped as a whole), whereas for Jakobson and Trubetzkoy, language was an ontologically structured object that formed a whole and was waiting to be *discovered* by the linguist. Benveniste's thinking was thoroughly Saussurian when he wrote:

> We believe we can reach a linguistic phenomenon as an objective reality. Actually we can grasp it only from a certain point of view, which it is first necessary to define. Let us cease to believe that in a language we have to do with a simple object, existing by itself and capable of being grasped in its totality. The first task is to show the linguist "what he is doing," what preliminary operations he performs unconsciously when he approaches linguistic data (Benveniste, 1971, p. 34).

The philosophical dispute here looks very much like a dialogue of the deaf. For the Prague Russians synchrony did not *exist*, but Saussure never said it did; instead he posited synchrony as a necessary analytic concept which then enabled him to formulate the theory of *value*:[32] "For a language is a system of pure values which are determined by nothing except the momentary arrangement of its terms" (*CLG*, English trans., 1959, p. 80).

Clearly what determines an object of knowledge is viewpoint. The question "How many phonemes are there in Russian?" makes no sense from an ontologi-

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[32] On this debate see Fontaine 1974, pp. 63–67.

cal perspective. We can debate forever whether there are 36 or 37, depending on whether we *think* that what is noted "щ" in Cyrillic represents one phoneme or two. It is not the point to *observe* ever more painstakingly, as one observes stars through an ever-improved telescope. The answer does not lie in discovering something in empirical reality but rather in a model's ability to account for what is observed.

The emergence of European structuralism in the interwar period thus seems to have been a case of painful "labor and delivery." There were different lineages and lines of force. It is highly regrettable that most history of linguistics text-books present Jakobson and Trubetzkoy as spiritual sons of Saussurian thought. Indeed, the notion of *the whole* that they incessantly used – a whole made up of facts that had to be extracted from the real and then piled up to create a set whose ontological reality could be assumed to jump out at the observer – seems to me fundamentally different from Saussure's idea of *system*, which on the contrary, meticulously makes – constructs – its object from a certain point of view.[33] It is in this respect that neither phonemes nor syntax have anything to do with questions of ontology – they are *constructed models. Viewpoint* is what makes it possible to select from the continuum of the real a certain number of discrete features whose *relevance* is determined by the object the theory is concerned with. But the Prague linguists – Jakobson and Trubetzkoy at any rate – were not empiricists either. For them facts were of course *already there*, in the real, but they answered to a tran-scendental logic; they revealed a hidden order.

It was this astounding attitude, simultaneously empiricist and essentialist (a fact that in no way reduces the extreme sophistication of the methods they used to bring their objects to light), that led these proponents of the *Sprachbund* theory to think that systemic components could "spread like an oil stain" beyond the limits of the given system. Since a language union was not, itself, a system, phonemes in Trubetzkoy' thinking and distinctive features in Jakobson's 1930s thinking were still substantial rather than strictly relational in their texts on the spatial distribution of "structural features." They were part of a *holistic* vision of accumulation and globality rather than a *systemic* view of structure where any

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33 Here again, merely "listing" the terms used is not much help. Saussure too used the word "whole," but in the sense of a set of solidarity relations leading to the notion of value, not of a network of correspondences among preexisting things. I would refrain from quoting such a well-known text were it not for the necessity of recalling exactly how it is formulated: "In addition, the idea of *value*, as defined, shows that to consider a term as simply the union of a certain sound with a certain concept is grossly misleading. To define it in this way would isolate the term from its system; it would mean assuming that one can start from the terms and construct the system by adding them together when, on the contrary, it is from the *interdependent whole* that one must start and through analysis obtain its elements (*CLG* English trans., 1959, p. 113; my italics).

local change changes the whole. *For Jakobson and Trubetzkoy, a language union was not a structure but a whole.*

It is not the least of paradoxes that it was precisely Prague Russian phonology, not Saussurian general linguistics, that proved the more fruitful, providing impetus to empirical studies, descriptions of languages, transfers of structural models to sciences other than linguistics – an impact still being felt to this day.

Conclusion

Over the course of this book we have encountered quite a number of paradoxes, including essentialist structuralism, idealist positivism and languages without speakers. This is because the Prague Russians' notion of system did not have the homogeneity and unity we have a right to expect from a fully developed, thought-out concept. Instead we have a labile set of meanings that oscillate around the terms *synthesis, whole*, *structure*, *essence* and *nature*, lending themselves to variations.

Likewise their understanding of how system parts are related to system whole has been obstructed by the impossibility of deciding where the boundaries determining what makes a system a system lie: our thinkers did not not identify any stable relevance criteria.

Throughout this work I have tried to maintain the following tension: on the one hand, nothing Russian (at least as it relates to scientific knowlege) was *essentially different* from what was being thought in Europe; on the other, Russian discourse on the singularity of Russian science has made it possible to call into question our pretentions to universality – what Louis Dumont called our "sociocentrism."[1]

Some of the East/West differences that the Prague Russians identified (identifying *themselves* of course as "Eastern") refer to differing assessments of the importance of particular research avenues, concepts, types of reasoning ; they reflect different hierarchies of value. The Russian position can be seen as a refusal to accept modernity; it is also related to simultaneous or delayed reception of "Western" knowledge. Such discrepancies were what made possible the shift to something that was indeed *new* yet not *specific* to Russian scientific culture: the notion of structure. Russian scientific culture is one component of scientific culture in Europe; it should be granted its rightful place in that culture, where it goes undeservedly unknown. There are not two sciences – "Russian" and "Western." Rather there are socially dominant discourses that are also value systems, discourses that make use of one or the other "pole" in the spiral that may be designated Enlightenment/Romanticism or Popper/Kuhn.

As for the *air du lieu* idea, it is important first of all to avoid the pitfall of thinking in terms of "national science." But we can reasonably say that the specifically Russian contribution to structuralism seems to have been geographical interpretation of language history, as in the explicitly anti-Darwinian current in biology that influenced Trubetzkoy's and Jakobson's notion of "convergence" in

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1 Dumont 1983, p. 221.

language unions. The fact is that most of the Eurasianists' cultural and geopolitical theories came from Western Europe, specifically Germany, whence also came the theory of territorial naturalness (Ratzel).

Thus, despite their opposition on principle to "Romano-Germanic" science, the Eurasianists actually prolonged a line of thinking that had developed in German philosophy in the first third of the nineteenth century, in which every group was understood to be a whole that transcended its individuals. Eurasianism can thus be thought of as an avatar of nineteenth-century organicism, which returned to Europe by way of geoculturally-oriented areal linguistics. The coherence of this thinking lay in the great metaphor "A people is like a person."

Lastly, rather than asking whether Russian thought or Eurasian science "exists" (which would be to pay tribute to the Romantic idea of the *unique* metaphysical destiny of each people), it is more legitimate to study the conditions in which a discourse affirming that Russian thought and Eurasian science exist was produced. It is less important to ask whether the Russians constitute a "world apart" than to try to explain why so many Russians believe this to be true.

What Jakobson thought of as an opposition between East and West was in fact a conflict between two consecutive epistemes: Enlightenment rationalism and analyticism; Romantic synthetic science. Gusdorf viewed this as an implacable conflict between two incompatible options, a "radical overturning of the intellectual tables."[2] However, the shift from German Romanticism's organism metaphor to the notion of totality or whole (Russian *celostnost'*, German *Ganzheit)*, then to that of structure as conceived by Jakobson and Trubetzkoy, teaches that paradigm shifts, "epistemological breaks," in linguistics (and more broadly in the humanities and social sciences) should be handled with caution. What actually occurs is slow transformation, with backward moves, shifts in the way terms are used, recenterings, diffuse changes in centers of interest and the models to be followed or imitated.

Here we have witnessed the birth of a theory: the notion of *structure* slowly becoming disengaged from the dominant discourse of the *whole*. Though Russian (and Soviet) linguistics does not amount to a "different" science, it is still not entirely identical to Western European linguistics. Same and different can in fact be thought of in this connection as two tangentially reached poles: between the two there is room for multiple gradations of the sort that binary thinking cannot see or can only mask.

We have also seen that while the Prague Russians' structuralism fully belonged to the *air du temps*, it was not indifferent to a Russian *air du lieu*.

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2 Gusdorf 1993, vol. 1, p. 198.

The extremely vague notion of *air du lieu* – in this case a place both inside and outside Europe – has enabled us to probe the parts-to-whole relations of science in Europe. For Prague structuralism was not situated at the margins of European science but at the very center of it.

Lastly, we have verified that Kuhn's "paradigms" cannot comfortably or convincingly be applied to this type of object, as such objects are dependent on both time and space. Prague Russian structuralism was a movement that went back and forth, using a notion that preceded the Neogrammarians – organicism – as a springboard for attaining the modern notion of structure, all the while denying its own use of organicism with the assertion that "linguistics is a social science."

Not only does structuralism have a complex prehistory (the break was infinitely less clean than the movement's protagonists claimed) but certain variants of structuralism itself – namely those represented by the Prague Russians – show vestiges of an ancient episteme. We need only think of one of Jakobson's comments on Trubetzkoy in his tribute: "He had the soul of a historian." It is surprising that so few "Western" researchers have taken this kind of declaration seriously.

The paradigm theory is not well adapted to the history of linguistic ideas. On the one hand, there may be a long period of coexistence between sharply divergent paradigms, none of which really manages to render the other obsolete, and there may be mutual ignorance rather than "overturning." On the other, paradigms, schools or movements – intellectual trends – can integrate parts of others, reinterpreting them or using them in a different way.

In my opinion this is what happened with Prague structuralism. For its critique of an earlier paradigm, it needed an even older one, *Naturphilosophie* and even neo-Platonism (the philosophy of the Whole), to advance toward the idea of structure. Jakobson and Trubetzkoy used a naturalist way of proceeding to found a "social" science, all the while lambasting naturalism and so claiming to be doing the opposite.

Jakobson and Trubetzkoy were not *Naturphilosophen* any more than they were Catholic legitimists. But they thought in a way related to those philosophical and ideological currents – currents whose history is marked by sharp opposition to the spirit of the Enlightenment and by a certain type of interpretation in biology – thereby determining their own way of participating in the structuralist movement, at the (occasionally deliberate) risk of creating misunderstandings, false unanimity, false alliances. The important point is that this series of painful misunderstandings brought about the invention of phonology, which was able to operate despite the fact that its origins were run through with contradiction, and which came to be shared by researchers of extremely varied "ideological" orientations.

While it is clear that the prehistory, the "incubation" period, of Prague structuralism lies in the history of early nineteenth-century ideas, we cannot settle for a totally continuist explanation either.[3] However, a strictly discontinuous model of the "epistemological break" sort, with a "before and after," cannot allow for the return to an earlier state and is therefore not really tenable. We must look for a model closer to that of René Thom's *catastrophe* theory or Antoine Culioli's "cam" model. I would offer the model of a pendulum whose base is itself mobile: after each swing, the pendulum returns to the point of departure but at the next-higher level:
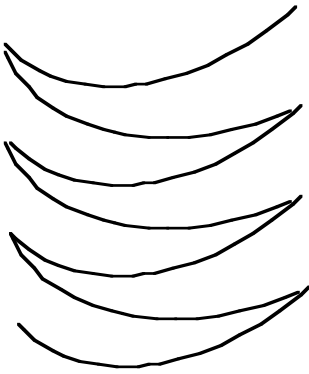
Fig. 17: the pendulum model in the history of scientific ideas

Rather than a clean break, we should speak of backward and forward moves, zigzags, and above all incessant reconfiguration. This does not seem to me to go against Bachelardian epistemology but rather to complexify it, repositioning the field of study in the long term, observing it from that perspective.

And from that perspective Jakobson and Trubetzkoy, each in his own way, should be thought of as an intermediary link in the slow reconfiguration by which the organicist paradigm became the structuralist one, in their case through a mix of brilliant, lightning-speed intuitions and sluggish thinking that if not substantialist was at least naturalist and biologistic. Their vision of global systems was a contradictory, toddler stage in the development of what Edgar Morin sixty years later would call "complex thinking." Their fascination for closure precluded them from thinking of complexity as an open system; for them it referred to a self-enclosed whole. The fact is that complexity is not the whole. They glimpsed

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3 Percival's position (1969).

the complexity of the real ("everything is linked to everything else") but the idea was still so new and bold that they could only use existing yet discredited ideas (*Naturphilosophie*) to move forward, this in turn leading to the non-methodological notion of the ontological simplicity (harmony and balance) of systems. Scientific rationality was intertwined with traditional beliefs and metaphysical representations in their thinking; research into immaterial entities intermingled with an ontological quest. Two paradigms cohabited and coexisted in their thought: the immaterial (with the idea of relative, oppositive value) and the ontological or natural (with the notions of premeditation, teleology, internal logic). For Jakobson and Trubetzkoy, *language itself was a subject* – we need only recall the expression "subject of evolution." They were simultaneously behind the thought of their time (organicism) and ahead of it (phonology as a science of the immaterial). Their definition of units was marked by constant tension between substantialism and immaterialism. But they never thought of language as the researcher's construction in the way Saussure understood *langue*; it was never for them a viewpoint; never did they apprehend it in opposition to *parole* as an object of knowledge stands in opposition to a real object.

Jakobson's claim that the new science should be called "structuralism" should not be understood to correspond to Saussure's idea for he reached the word by quite a different path, which I have suggested calling *ontological structuralism*. However, we must be careful not to create hermetic definitions in turn. These two sharply different notions of structure – the Prague and Geneva notions – had enough in common to enable André Martinet, for example, to fruitfully synthesize them.

The notion of structure took off from the Romantic critique of atomism, analysis, juxtaposition, separation. It then moved through a necessary stage that we can designate the notion of the whole. But what differentiates it from the organicist notion of the whole is that the structural element is abstract – the phoneme as a bundle of distinctive features – rather than conceived as an organ in an organism. The whole was an epistemological obstacle (in Bachelard's sense) that Prague Linguistic Circle thinking never entirely overcame. The biological metaphor, even and especially when it was not put forward as such but instead coursed through the thinking despite the thinkers' denials, was another epistemological obstacle, one eradicated with difficulty in the 1920s and '30s in ways that varied by scientific community, movement, school. But the shift was opacified by the fact that the same words could have different meanings depending on the school using them. The word "organic," for example, might amount to no more than a metaphor, a convenient expression, one that did not really disrupt the thinking. Where the metaphor went off the rails was with the idea of language as a „*subject* of evolution." There it was literalized and so became an obstacle.

That obstacle was overcome little by little, slowly, but not without obscurity and misunderstandings.

Of the whole there is nothing to be said except that it was a whole – pure tautological incantation. The notion only became a discovery procedure when it shifted from object to the knowledge one has of one's object, from the notion of a "pile" of heterogeneous elements to the ascetic notion of viewpoint and the negative definition of components.

The same is true of the naturalist vision. In the linguistic ecology of Eurasianist science, things moved of their own volition (as it were) in predefined spaces. In fact, autarky is not natural; no region is predisposed to it; the "definition" of a self-sufficient zone is necessarily indeterminate and therefore arbitrary for it varies with the needs of the people living or wishing to live there.

The notion of organic whole was *both* an epistemological obstacle *and* a necessary means of acceding to the concept of structure by way of the notion of system.

In fact, what was in crisis was the organicist model, undermined by the new, rising model of system, followed by that of structure. The real "epistemological obstacle" was the substantialist approach of holism – not the structuralism of oppositions and negative definition of units.

What actually happened in linguistics sharply differed from what Jakobson and Trubetzkoy had initially intended to accomplish. What they presented as an epistemological advance was founded on a refusal to accept modernity. However, the advance itself was real – and it was made in spite of them, as it were. Searching for India, they discovered America.

Appendix

The Sixth of the "Theses presented to the First Congress of Slavic Philologists in Prague, 1929"[1]

The topic of sections a) and b) differs from that of sections c) and d): the first two sections focus on connections between isoglosses and the second two on correspondences between linguistic and anthropo-geographic phenomena. According to N. P. Savický, sections c) and d) were written by his father, P.N. Savitsky.[2] Moreover, in his bibliography of Jakobson's work Rudy deems questionable the attribution of this text to Jakobson.[3]

VI. Principles of Linguistic Geography, their Application and their Relation to Ethnographic Geography in Slavic Regions (in Steiner, ed., 1982, pp. 21–21).

a) The *establishment of spatial* (or temporal) *boundaries* of particular linguistic phenomena is a necessary *methodological device of linguistic geography* (or history) but one must not make this device the self-sufficient goal of theory.
    The spatial expansion of linguistic phenomena cannot be conceived as the anarchy of individual isoglosses. A comparison of isoglosses shows that it is possible to join *several isoglosses into a unity*, thus establishing the center of expansion of a group of linguistic innovations and the peripheral zones of this expansion.
    The study of contiguous isoglosses shows which linguistic phenomena are of necessity *regularly connected*.
    Finally, a comparison of isoglosses is a precondition for the basic problem of linguistic geography, that is, *the scientific apportionment of a language*, i.e., the breaking down of a language according tot he most fruitful principles of division.
b) If one limits onself to the phenomena of a system of language, one can state that isolated isoglosses are in fact fictions, for apparently identical phenomena belonging to two different systems can be functionally heterogeneous (e.g., an apparently identical *i* has a different phonological value in different Ukrainian dialects: wherever consonants soften before *i* < *o*, *i* and *ï* are vari-

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[1] *Travaux du Cercle Linguistique de Prague* 1 (1929); original in French.
[2] Savicky 1991, p. 197.
[3] Rudy 1990, p. 12.

ants of one and the same phenomenon, whenever they do not soften there are two different phonemes).

c) Just as comparison with heterogeneous developmental phenomena is allowed in the history of language, *the spatial expansion of linguistic phenomena can fruitfully be compared to other geographical isograms,* especially to anthropo-geographic isograms (the boundaries of facts pertaining to economic and political geography, the boundaries of the expanding phenomena pertaining to material and spiritual culture), but also to isograms of physical geography (soil, flora, moisture, temperature, and geomorphology).

In doing so, one should not neglect the special conditions of geographical entities. For example, the comparison of linguistic geography with geomorphology, which is very fruitful in European conditions, plays a considerably less important role in the Eastern Slavic world than the comparison with climatic isograms. The comparison of isoglosses to anthropo-geographic isograms (date of historical geography, archeology, etc.) is possible from both a synchronic and diachronic viewpoint but the two perspectives should not be confused.

The comparison of heterogeneous systems can be fruitful only if one adheres to the principle that the compared systems are equal. Inserting between them the category of mechanical causality, in order to deduce one system from the other, distorts the synthetic grouping of these systems and substitutes a leveling unilateral evaluation for a scientific synthesis.

d) In mapping linguistic or ethnographic facts, one must remember that the *expansion* of these facts *does not coincide with a genetic linguistic or ethnic affinity* but that it often occupies a broader territory.

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1 The Czech diacritical sign principle was used to establish alphabetical order: Š after S, Č after C, etc.

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