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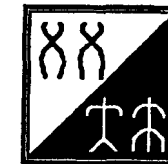
**ISSUES IN SLAVIC LITERARY AND
CULTURAL THEORY**

Studien zur Literatur- und Kulturtheorie in Osteuropa

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The Entrance of a New Model into the System

The Law of Transformation

Zohar Shavit
(Tel Aviv)

In this brief presentation I propose some hypothesis concerning dynamics of cultural mechanism; more specifically, I suggest some hypothesis which discuss from the theoretical point of view the question of entrance of a new model into a given system.

In raising those hypotheses I follow in the footsteps of Jakobson and Tynjanov and the Tel-Aviv school (mainly the works of Even-Zohar). However, I do not wish to go over the ground covered, but rather to use the key ideas as a point of departure for approaching problems of historical nature that had been principally discussed by the Russian Formalists, were further developed by Even-Zohar, but except for that had unfortunately been largely overlooked.

My main interest in the last years was in the question of historical change and transformation. At first I discussed the process of the literary system's stratification as result of the literary life. Here my work concentrated from both theoretical and descriptive aspects (Shavit 1982) on the way in which cultural manipulations and struggles over governing the center of a system determine the structure of both periphery and center of a system and their dynamics.

Later on in the framework of a seminar on semiotics of culture I have dealt with the question of various historical mechanism, concentrating mainly on the question of change in a system and more specifically, on the question of system and new models.

While we were dealing with these questions, it became apparent that traditionally speaking, historiography used to offer two contradictory schemes for describing dynamics of cultural history. The process of change in history of culture was either described in terms of "revolutions" or in terms of "evolutions". In the first case history is described as series of periods that suddenly and unsuspectedly become different

from one another; here one tends to talk about revolutions (the French revolution, the Romantic revolution, Newton's revolution and so on).

In the contrary case, in contrast to the "revolutionary" description, historiography endeavors to find precedences to every incident, to look not for the distinctive and the distinguishing, but for resemblance, and to claim, more often than not, that "Nothing is new under the sun".

When we examine tentatively those contradicting understanding of history, we must admit, that intuitively speaking neither views can be denied, which immediately raises the question of how can such *contradictory* views live together.

I believe that both views can indeed live together and even in harmony, but on one condition only, that is to say, that in spite of their being contradicting they will be accepted concurrently and simultaneously. This is possible with the help of the different understanding of historical processes which developed in semiotics of culture as well as in philosophy of science (for instance Kuhn 1962) which solves this seeming paradox of the coexisting views and bridges the seeming unsolvable gap.

Semiotic understanding of historical problems enables us on the one hand to describe change not as an unexpected revolution, but rather as the most common and semiotically informative procedure, but on the other hand to detect the change that slowly did take place (quite often without being noticed) and made the system distinctively new.

Into such semiotic conceptual frame of reference I would like to bring the theoretical results of my work in semiotics of culture and to suggest the "*law of transformation*".

This law seeks to describe and explain what usually happens when a change occurs in a system and which procedure characterizes this change. Using the notions of system, models and functions as key notions I would like to suggest the following law: *a new model can enter a system only under disguise*.

This law is based upon the following hypothesis:

1. A new model enters the system in a slow process in which the new elements and functions distinguishing between this model and the previous one are only gradually structured.

2. More specifically: when the process of the emergence of a new model into the system begins, the new model *does not* and *can not* enter the system as a global novelty.
3. At first, only some of the new elements are introduced into the system, and in fact only those which fulfill or are able to fulfill previous functions.
4. Those functions are carried by elements that might have been already replaced by new elements or by elements which originally existed in the system.
5. This multi-elements situation results in the systems' tendency to redundancy of functions e.g. the *same* functions are carried by different elements, a state of affairs which is typical of transition periods when hesitation between the best possible carrier of certain functions occurs.
6. In other words, the new elements are "forced" on already existing functions. In such a way, they function under disguise. This disguise makes it difficult for both system and addressee (but not necessarily for producer) to recognize these elements as new. Actually, this is the most decisive factor in this process of emergence into a system, that is to say, that those elements will not be recognized as new.

As in the case of a new organ transplanted in a body, which will be rejected if identified as new and unknown, so is the case with unknown elements which invade a sign-system. As in the case of a new transplanted organ, the organ needs to be regarded as already part of the system, to be covered by an already known entity so that it will not be rejected. If the system identifies a new organ as new, it tends to reject it and get rid of it. It tends to do so even at the cost of committing a suicide. This is perhaps one of the most interesting paradoxes of historical dynamics.

As has been often described and discussed (see for instance Even-Zohar 1979), any system in culture needs change and renewal in order to survive. However, when renewal involves a noticeable change of functions and elements, the system will reject it in order to protect what already exists, even when this means condemning a death sentence upon itself.

7. It is then the disguise of functions that enable new elements enter a system which already exists in culture. However, later on those new elements will fulfill new functions, and additional new elements which carry new functions will replace the existing ones.
8. This is the stage which Tynjanov describes (Tynjanov [1929] 1971) as characterizing historical change, that is to say, the stage in which a distinctive body of functions and elements is distinguished as new in a certain model. It is only then one can speak of a new model which entered the system.
9. Tynjanov's view is valid if one examines the stage in which a change is recognized in the system. Furthermore, from the point of view of the literary life this is usually the stage in which the model will be recognized as new, and also the stage in which the bitter struggle for the new model begins.
10. However, if we look at the process not from the point of view of recognition but rather from that of tactics, that is to say, if we examine not the stage of recognition, but that in which the new model begins to be traceable, then we can argue that this process starts much earlier, that is to say, when the new functions begin to creep into the system.

In passing I would like to remark that the struggle over a new model does not involve anymore the question of the very existence of the model, but rather the fight for its status, namely its attempt to reach the center and take it over. To this attempt reacts the center in a contra move which tries, sometimes hopelessly, to push the new model back to the periphery. This by the way explains why is it so difficult to avoid a change or even a revolution, and why is it so difficult to detect the point in which the turn of a period indeed took place: The stage in which a new model is recognized as such is the stage in which it managed already to become part of the system and it is usually almost too late to try to push it away, without causing upheaval in the system.

Now, we can come back to the opening question of this presentation, the question of coexistence of contradicting approaches to history. I believe that this law can explain this coexistence and justify it. The answer to this seeming contradiction into a very simple: both views

are valid. Each however is valid from a different point of time, because each approaches the system from a different perspective of time.

If one analyzes the structure of the center and the periphery of the system at close range, then one is inclined to claim that nothing much has changed. This claim is not only justified but also accountable due to the tactics of the emergence of a new model. This tactics demands that the new model be identified with existing models or at least be familiar enough. In this respect this approach seems effective and warranted.

On the other hand, when the center and the periphery of the same system are analyzed from a long range, then one is inclined to claim that a drastic change indeed took place.

This is the case because normally between two extended points of time an almost total change takes place (though it should be emphasized that the discrepancy in time depends on the prevailing norms of each period).

This change, described by Russian Formalists as change in functions can be more accurately be described in terms of models governing the center and the periphery of the system, namely, the structure of the models and their function in the system. As a rule it can be said that when models and their functioning in the system change, then indeed "a new generation emerges", "a new period begins".

The advantage of this "law of transformation" lies in its simplicity and globally. Its globally is discerned not only in its capacity to grasp historical processes in at least two perspectives, but also it encompasses the most important factors that take part in historical transformations: It is not limited to one component of the literary system, but rather enables us to deal with the three major parameters of the literary system, namely, the producer, the texts and the receiver.

I will only briefly mention that

1. from the receiver's point of view it supported by the assumption (Hrushovski 1979, Perry 1979) that realization of a text is possible only if the receiver is already familiar with most of the components of the text. It is also supported by the transfer theory (Even-Zohar 1981) which contends that as a rule a new and unknown text will be translated by its perceiver into a familiar set of notions.

2. from the producer's point of view it accounts for the manner in which a writer handles models which already exist. As we know, any writer has basically two options: either to work in the frame of existing models or to manipulate them to such an extent that the text produced will be later accepted in the framework of a new model. This law helps to understand the process in which a writer takes part in the creation of a new model.
3. And last, but not least, from the textual point of view this law accounts for the relatively low percentage of new elements and functions required for a text or even a model to be accepted as new.

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