Šlaisová, Eva

"Aktualisace" in English scholarly literature : interpretation, ignorance, and misunderstanding

<div align="right">Eva Šlaisová</div>

"Aktualisace" in English Scholarly Literature: Interpretation, Ignorance, and Misunderstanding

Since the end of the 19th century, it has been popular to talk about the death of various literary and theatrical theories and phenomena, including the story, novel, author, and character.[1] In his article "Why did Modern Literary Theory Originate in Central and Eastern Europe? (And Why Is It Now Dead?)", Galin Tikhanov argues that the theories of the Russian Formalists and Prague Structuralists are now *passé*. However, as Georges Feydeau argues, "[i]f they were dead, I wonder whether [people] would roar it out in every direction. If something does not exist anymore, do we need to talk about it?" (FEYDEAU in VOŽDOVÁ 2009: 7, translation mine, EŠ).[2] It is the purpose of this collection to show that the thoughts of the Prague Structuralists remain relevant. To this end, I would like to discuss "*aktualisace*", one of the key concepts of the Prague School, and its reception in English scholarly literature. Mukařovský defines "*aktualisace*" as the universal principle of the evolution of art (WINNER 2002: 84), based on constant violation of automatized conventions through the rearrangement of elements within artistic structures (cf. MUKAŘOVSKÝ 1932).

"*Aktualisace*" has received varying levels of attention and appreciation in contemporary English scholarly literature. It has tended to be overshadowed by its more famous 'brothers' "*ostranenie*" and "*Verfremdung*", and

---

1   This theme of death appears, for example, in books and essays by Gordon Craig, Jose Ortega y Gasset, Walter Benjamin, Roland Barthes, Italo Calvino, Tadeusz Kantor and Elinor Fuchs.
2   Feydeau's claim relates to the proclaimed death of vaudeville and melodrama at the end of the 19th century.

some scholars have failed to take notice of it entirely. However, for a growing number of scholars "*aktualisace*" as "foregrounding" has become a popular concept. Its popularity is apparent from entries on "foregrounding" in recently published dictionaries of literary, theatrical, filmic, and semiotic terms;[3] various studies and books published all over the world;[4] and last but not least, Internet blogs, which attempt to provide explanations of the term.[5] Yeshayahu Shen calls it "a central notion […] in literary theory and in related disciplines" (SHEN 2008: 103); and in fact, its influence extends even beyond 'related disciplines'. Since 1932, "*aktualisace*" has moved from its original field of linguistics to the fields of literature, film, theatre, folklore, narratology, pedagogy, and psychology, and from a Czech context to an international one.

However, as Mukařovský's concept of "*aktualisace*" has gained broader appreciation, the way in which it is understood has changed. This paper will focus on problems of misunderstanding and confusion that have arisen with regard to the origin and meaning of "*aktualisace*"; the translation of the term; and its relation to "*ostranenie*" and "*Verfremdung*". Attention will be paid primarily to the most recent publications and studies, which are rooted mainly in theatre and drama.[6]

Neglected Origins

The origins of "*aktualisace*" have often been misunderstood and misrepresented. Willie van Peer, one of the most cited contemporary theoreticians of foregrounding, asserts that the origins of the term

3   Cf. QUINN, Edward. 2006. *A Dictionary of Literary and Thematic Terms*. New York: Facts On File, 2006: 169; CHILDS, Peter, and Roger Fowler. 2006. *Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms*. London/New York: Routledge, 2006: 90; PAVIS, Patrice, and Christine Shantz. 1998. *Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, Concepts, and Analysis*. Toronto/Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1998: 152; BRONWEN, Martin, and Felizitas RINGHAM. 2006. *Key Terms in Semiotics*. London/New York: Continuum, 2006: 89; CHANDLER, Daniel, 2007. *Semiotics: The Basics*. London/New York: Routledge, 2007: 250; HAYWARD, Susan. 2006. *Cinema Studies: The Key Concepts*. London: Routledge, 2006: 140.

4   For more information see Bibliography.

5   Discussions on "foregrounding" have appeared, for example, on http://www.enotes.com or http://answers.yahoo.com.

6   By recent publications I mean those published in the last two decades. Despite their central position in introducing Russian Formalism and Prague Structuralism to the English-speaking world, Viktor Erlich's *Russian Formalism: History-Doctrine* (1955), František Galán's *Historic Structures: The Prague School Project, 1928–1946* (1985), and Jurij Striedter's *Literary Structure, Evolution, and Value: Russian Formalism and Czech Structuralism* (1989) did not provide sufficient answers to the proposed problems.

reach into Greek Antiquity, but it is in the last century that it received its full-fledged status as a theory, first in the year 1916–17 with the Russian Formalists, then a second time in the 1960s and 1970s, mainly through the reception of the Formalists' principles and their further development in the West.
(VAN PEER 2007: 99)

Regrettably, Van Peer entirely overlooks the Prague School, which developed Shklovsky's "*ostranenie*" as early as 1932, and did so in Central, as opposed to Western, Europe. In Van Peer's 2005 study, written together with Jèmeljan Hakemulder, the authors do admit the primacy of the Prague Structuralists in coining the term "*aktualisace*/foregrounding"; however, they connect this to the 1960s, when Garvin's English translations of Havránek's and Mukařovský's studies appeared. The reader thus gets the impression that Czech Structuralism did not exist, or that it emerged simultaneously with French Structuralism.

Influenced by Van Peer, other scholars including Viana, Silveira, and Zyngier have mistakenly situated the emergence of Mukařovský's concept in the 1960s–70s (VIANA, SILVEIRA, and ZYNGIER 2008). In addition, some scholars, such as Rob Pope (POPE 2002: 88) and Colin Martindale, position Mukařovský's concept of foregrounding among Formalist theories. Martindale claims, "[…] the Formalists argued that linguistic deformations and estrangements gradually become 'automatized' (Tynjanov 1929). Several Formalist theorists such as Shklovsky (1919) and Mukařovský (1940) derived from this fact the hypothesis that literature must necessarily evolve" (MARTINDALE 2008: 230).

Paradoxically, it is the concept of "*aktualisace*" itself that distinguishes Prague Structuralism from both Russian Formalism and French Structuralism. "*Aktualisace*" emphasizes the relationships between elements within an artistic structure, in contrast to Shklovsky's mechanical conception of art as material and device (GRYGAR 1968: 276; JESTROVIC 2006: 19). In contrast to the French Structuralism of the 1960s, which focused on synchronic or static analysis of an artistic structure, the Prague Structuralists dealt with the dynamic nature of structure (and the structure of structures), the key principle of which was "*aktualisace*".

"Foregrounding", "Actualization", or "Topicalization"?

The term "*aktualisace*" is commonly translated into English as "foregrounding", which was introduced by Paul Garvin in 1964. However, this translation is problematic as it emphasizes the spatial and static character of Mukařovský's

concept. Mukařovský frequently discusses spatial relations in the structure (foreground and background); however, in the original concept temporal relationships are emphasized, i.e. the evolution of a structure. The importance of the temporal aspect of "*aktualisace*" was recently noted by Veronika Ambros (AMBROS 2008) and Van Peer (VAN PEER 2005), but it is also evident in the original work of the Prague Structuralists, as well as in the etymology of the term:

> *[A]ktualisace/aktualizace* – (from Latin root) temporal approximation of something or approximation to new understanding; animation/vivication, *aktualizace*/topicalization: [...] political *aktualisace* of a book; *aktualisace* of a dramatic play [...]
> *[(A)ktualisace/aktualizace* – (z lat. základu) časové přiblížení něčeho n. přiblížení novému chápání; oživení, aktualisování: (...) politická a. knihy; a. divadelní hry (...)]
>
> *to actualize* – to approximate in time; to come to a new understanding; to make topical; to fill with topical, temporal themes [...] to animate [...]: to actualize a folk song with temporal allusions, the style of an old translation and vocabulary [...]
> *[aktualisovati, aktualizovati* – časově (...) přiblížit; přiblížit (...) novému chápání; činit (...) aktuálním; naplnit (...) aktuální, časovou tematikou (...) oživit (...): a. lidovou píseň časovými narážkami; a. sloh starého překladu; a. slovní zásobu (...)]
> (HAVRÁNEK 1960: 19)

The temporal aspect inherent in Mukařovský's term is unfortunately eliminated in Garvin's translation to foregrounding. This is apparent when we compare Mukařovský's original definition of "*aktualisace*" with its English translation:

> Aktualizace je opak automatizace, tedy odautomatizování nějakého aktu [...] Objektivně vyjádřeno: automatizací se jev schematizuje, aktualizace znamená porušení schematu [...] Každé dílo je vnímáno na pozadí nějaké tradice, tj. nějakého automatizovaného kánonu, vzhedem k němuž se jeví deformací [...] *Pozadí* [space], *které pociťujeme za básnickým dílem jako dané složkami neaktualizovanými* [temporal aspect] *a které kladou odpor aktualizacím* [temporal aspect], *je* [...] *tradični estetický kánon*.
> (MUKAŘOVSKÝ 1932: 36, 38; emphasis and comments in brackets mine, EŠ)

> Foregrounding is the opposite of automatization, that is, the deautomatization of an act [...] Objectively speaking: automatization schematizes an event, foregrounding means the violation of the schema [...] Every work of poetry is perceived against the background of a certain tradition, that is, of some automatized canon with regard to which it constitutes a distortion [...] *The background* (space) *which we perceive behind the work of poetry as consisting of the unforegrounded* (spatial aspect) *components resisting foregrounding* (spatial aspect) *is* [...] *the traditional aesthetic canon.*
> (MUKAŘOVSKÝ 1932, Garvin's translation 1964: 168, 172; emphasis and comments in brackets mine, EŠ)

Implicit in the term "foregrounding" is a shift of focus from temporal to spatial aspects of "*aktualisace*", which distorts the meaning of the original term. This mistaken emphasis on the spatial character of "*aktualisace*" has led some scholars to the opinion that foregrounding "goes back to the distinction between foreground and background in visual arts," although the concept originated in linguistics (VIANA, SILVEIRA, and ZYNGIER 2008: 272; cf. POPE 2002: 91).

Also based on Garvin's translation, Keir Elam has claimed that "*aktualisace*/foregrounding" is a spatial metaphor and is therefore well adapted to theatre (ELAM 1980: 18). The importance of this term for theatre studies is obvious; however, it is not because "*aktualisace*" is a spatial metaphor, but because theatrical performance is a structure of elements and functions, as analyzed by Bogatyrev, Brušák, Honzl, Mukařovský, and Veltruský. All of these scholars referred to theatre as a complex dynamic structure composed of different sign systems, and in theatre, using various phenomena, they all called attention to the process of "*aktualisace*" (DEÁK 1976: 88–89), though they did not necessarily use this term. Bogatyrev focused on "*aktualisace*" of folk theatre in high-brow theatre (BOGATYREV 1940); Honzl looked at the transformation of conventional (realistic) signs in theatre (HONZL 1940); Veltruský discussed dynamic relations between people and objects on stage (VELTRUSKÝ 1940); and Mukařovský analyzed "*aktualisace*" in language and the acting style of Charlie Chaplin, among other things (MUKAŘOVSKÝ 1931, 1932).

Another possible translation of "*aktualisace*" is "actualization". As Jeremy Hawthorn states, some scholars have chosen this term because of its similarity to the Czech (HAWTHORN 1992: 3). However, the similarity is only between terms, not between concepts, which is one of the reasons Garvin chose the term "foregrounding" instead. Garvin aimed to avoid the meaning of the

adjective "actual," which in English does not mean "topical", but "real" or "genuine". The connotations inherent in the English word "actualization" are not what Mukařovský had in mind. The similarity between the Czech and English words proves to be misleading, as Van Peer's and Hakemulder's interpretation of Mukařovský's "*aktualisace*" shows:

> […] The term [foregrounding] originates with Garvin (1964), who introduced it as a translation of the Czech "*aktualisace*", a term common with the Prague Structuralists, especially Jan Mukařovský, who employs it in the sense of English "actualization". This suggests a temporal category, i.e., to make something actual (rather than virtual).
> (VAN PEER and HAKEMULDER 2005: 547)

They are correct in claiming that "*aktualisace*" is a temporal metaphor rather than a spatial one; however, Mukařovský's concept does not involve making something real rather than imagined.

Lastly, Veronika Ambros suggests the term "topicalization", which emphasizes the temporal aspect of Mukařovský's notion over the spatial, while avoiding the misleading connotations of "actualization" (AMBROS 2008: 58). Like Mukařovský's original term, "topicalization" emphasizes temporality and points to an important aspect that is neglected in the term "foregrounding": to make something topical again. This suggests a reshuffling, movement and dynamism of elements, genres and works of art throughout history. However, even this term is not without difficulties. Silvija Jestrovic claims that to make something topical does not always mean to make something strange, as demonstrated by the "reaffirmation of Shakespeare's work at the beginning of Romanticism against the backdrop of the Classicist tradition" (JESTROVIC 2006: 19). Mukařovský's concept, however, emphasizes the distortion of an aesthetic canon caused by the reappearance of an element (in a dominant position), a work of art, or a past or foreign tradition. For example, Czech Avant-Garde theatre directors such as Burian and Honzl used folkloric forms in order to transform the theatre of their time, which, to use Václavek's expression, "[ran] in fossilized and empty *schemata*" (VÁCLAVEK 1940: 7), or in other words, was automatized. By bringing in the folkloric tradition, they estranged both folklore and contemporary theatrical praxis. In brief, the term topicalization connotes the recurrence of a phenomenon both in conformity with a given canon and in contrast to it; however, only the latter can be considered an example of "*aktualisace*".

In effect, the emphasis on either temporal (diachronic) or spatial (synchronic) aspects, inherent in all three terms, simplifies the complexity and variabil-

ity of changes encompassed by Mukařovský's notion of "*aktualisace*". Both aspects – temporal and spatial – must be taken into consideration; the mutation of structures is, to use Bakhtin's term, chronotopic in nature.[7] However, a plurality of terms makes scholarly communication difficult, and in order to facilitate the understanding of Mukařovský's "*aktualisace*"*,* a single term is preferable. With the term "actualization" connoting reality, "foregrounding" overemphasizing the spatial quality, and "topicalization" potentially excluding the quality of estrangement, the question is which one is most suitable.

"Aktualisace", "Ostranenie", and "Verfremdung"

In their account on foregrounding, Van Peer and Hakemulder state that "terminological vagueness" is a serious problem for foregrounding, and they raise the question of whether terms such as "estrangement", "defamiliarization", "deautomatization", "foregrounding", and "*Verfremdung*" are synonyms, or refer to distinct processes (VAN PEER and HAKEMULDER 2005: 548). Many scholars use these terms interchangeably; however, as Jeremy Hawthorn (HAWTHORN 1992) and Silvija Jestrovic (JESTROVIC 2006) rightly point out, they are not synonyms. What matters more than the affinity among these concepts is, according to Jestrovic, "the divergence among them, the specificity of each concept that distinguishes it from the other variants" (JESTROVIC 2006: 22).

Too often, "*aktualisace*" is overlooked in contemporary theory or remains confused with one or the other term. For example, in their books *Understanding Theatre* (1995) and *Theories of the Theatre* (1993), Jacqueline Martin, Willmar Sauter, and Marvin Carlson point to the importance of "*ostranenie*" and "*Verfremdung*" for theatrical studies; however, they do not relate "*aktualisace*" to them, although they explore the theories of the Prague Structuralists. Carlson indicates similarities between the phenomenon discussed by Veltruský in his study "Man and Object in Theatre" and Shklovsky's "*ostranenie*" (CARLSON 1993: 410), but fails to connect Mukařovský's "*aktualisace*".

In addition to being overlooked, the concept of "*aktualisace*" is often confused with "*ostranenie*" and "*Verfremdung*". For example, in their book *Theatre as a Sign System* (1991), Aston and Savona state that Brecht's notion of "*Verfremdung*" is "directly derived from the Formalist notion of foregrounding or 'making familiar strange'" (ASTON and SAVONA 1991: 7). That is,

---

7   I would like to thank Manfred Pfister for his comment that the chronotopical nature of "*aktualisace*" is embraced in the term "topicalization", which refers to making something current, i.e. refers to temporal relations, but, being a derivative of the Greek *topos* (place), it also includes a spatial aspect.

they associate the term "foregrounding" with Shklovsky's notion of "making familiar strange" (*ostranenie*). Shklovsky's concept is commonly translated into English as "defamiliarization", "estrangement", or "distancing", but hardly ever as "foregrounding". In other cases, Brecht's "*Verfremdung*" is perceived as a translation of "*ostranenie*", as claimed by John Willet (WILLET 1964: 99), but not of "foregrounding". "Foregrounding", as rightly observed by Hakemulder (HAKEMULDER 2004), was not used by the Russian Formalists, but by the Prague Structuralists. Aston and Savona work with the terms as synonyms, which is confusing. What then is the difference between these notions?

The most obvious difference is the areas in which the concepts were created: Shklovsky's "*ostranenie*" (1917) in literature, Mukařovský's "*aktualisace*" (1932) in linguistics, and Brecht's "*Verfremdung*" (1936) in theatre. While they have proven to be applicable in other disciplines as well, their original fields are distinct.

In addition, a crucial difference between Shklovsky's and Brecht's concepts, on the one hand, and "*aktualisace*" on the other, is that Shklovsky and Brecht refer to specific estrangement devices, while in "*aktualisace*" the emphasis is on the position of deautomatized elements within the structure of a work of art. This notion of the structure is not present in the theories of Shklovsky and Brecht. Many contemporary scholars, including Aston, Savona and others, place Shklovsky's and Brecht's concepts into a semio-structuralist framework. Indeed, semiotic language can be used to describe Brecht's and Shklovsky's goals; however, it is important to bear in mind that neither Shklovsky nor Brecht ever spoke about the semiotics of theatre.

Furthermore, Shklovsky (in *Theory of Prose*, 1925) and Brecht (in "Alienation Effect in Chinese Theatre", 1936) discuss estrangement devices without taking into consideration the context in which they were created. Brecht's interpretation of the acting style in Chinese theatre as a distancing technique was based on Mei-Lan-Fang's conventional technique of Chinese theatre. Similarly, Shklovsky describes metaphors used in folklore as an estrangement device; however, from the perspective of folklore, such poetics were automatized. Mukařovský warns against evaluating techniques apart from their context, claiming that the yardstick for whether the position an element is automatized or actualized "is given by the context of a given structure and does not apply to any other context" (MUKAŘOVSKÝ 1932: 179). In other words, any element has the potential to be actualized depending on the context in which it appears or reappears; there is no universal set of devices.

In some contemporary theories of foregrounding, the importance of contextualization for "*aktualisace*" is overlooked. For example, Patrick Colm Hogan

(1997) searches for universal estrangement devices, while Van Peer and Hake-
mulder distinguish between two basic devices of foregrounding: parallelism
and deviation, i.e. figures and tropes (VAN PEER and HAKEMULDER 2005:
547). Their rather narrow concept was adopted by Viana, Silveira, and Zyn-
gier, who claim: "In the process of foregrounding, the defamiliarized object
is called to the foreground, or 'highlighted,' by means of two types of mecha-
nism: deviation and parallelism" (VIANA, SILVEIRA, and ZYNGIER 2008:
272). However, as shown by Mukařovský, these are only possible means of
foregrounding rather than universal ones. To limit theories of foregrounding to
merely a set of devices would be a step backwards from the developments of
the Prague Structuralists towards the beginning of Shklovsky's Formalism.

"*Ostranenie*", "*Verfremdung*", and "*aktualisace*" also differ in that they
place different aspects of an artistic artefact into the foreground. As Jestro-
vic asserts, "Structuralists view the notion of *aktualisace* […] in relation to
the canon. Shklovsky [and Brecht], on the other hand, [focus] on artistic strat-
egies for establishing a certain text quality that would have an impact on the
receiver's perception" (JESTROVIC 2006: 59).[8] In other words, Shklovsky
and Brecht stressed the logic of perception, while Mukařovský and the Prague
Structuralists called attention to the logic of artistic creation. Of course, per-
ception and tradition are present in both concepts, but they emphasize differ-
ent aspects.

In Van Peer's recent theory of foregrounding, introduced in 1986, this dif-
ference is being eliminated. This is obvious from his definition: "First […]
[foregrounding] is a theory about the form of literature, about language, the
raw material out of which literature is made […] Second, […] it also refers to
readers' reaction to such a text" (VAN PEER 2007: 99). The second aspect is
more popular of late, linked to the change of focus initiated by Jauss in the late
1960s, when the centre of attention moved from textual analysis to the reader
(here the contribution of Vodička is also overlooked). Both readers and, more
recently, film viewers have been exposed to texts and films "high in fore-
grounding," and scholars have found that readers/viewers require more time
and effort to process and understand foregrounded passages (MIALL 2008:
89). This is consistent with what Shklovsky proposed, but the perception of
the reader/viewer was on the margins of Mukařovský's attention.[9]

---

8   There is, of course, a difference between "*ostranenie*" and "*Verfremdung*" in their targeted effect
on perception. In brief, Shklovsky emphasizes the aesthetic side of perception, which was made "long
and laborious" through various artistic devices (SHKLOVSKY 1917: 6). Brecht, on the other hand,
focuses upon the ideological goals and attempts to influence the cognitive faculty of spectators. For
more information, cf. (JESTROVIC 2006).
9   Cf. e.g. studies by (MIALL and KUIKEN 1994, 2001), and (HAKEMULDER 2007).

Last but not least, while Shklovsky's and Brecht's theories aimed at being provocative, Mukařovský's did not. Rather, he attempted to lucidly present the principle of artistic creation: the constant reshuffling or rearrangement of elements in artistic structures.

In 2002, Tomáš Winner published "Prague Structuralism in the Anglophone and Francophone World: Ignorance and Misunderstanding". His title is echoed in the title of this presentation, asserting that the key terms of the Prague School, including "*aktualisace*", are still confused and misunderstood. Sadly, little has changed in ten years; the same inaccuracies, based on ignorance, misunderstanding and imprecise interpretations, continue to appear in English scholarly literature. We must be aware of the original meaning of the concept of "*aktualisace*", especially in order to refer to it and explain it. Greater understanding would be possible through more of the original texts. The varying interpretations of the term are due in a large part to the fact that a significant body of text has not been translated. In the case of those studies that have been translated, such as Mukařovský's, omissions and imprecisions in translation have also led to problems. Moving into the future, perhaps more accurate and extensive translation and analysis of these works can help us to achieve a more faithful understanding of this important concept.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

AMBROS, Veronika. 2008. Prague's Experimental Stage: Laboratory of Theatre and Semiotics. *Semiotica* 168 (2008): 1–4: 45–65.

ASTON, Elaine, and George SAVONA. 1991. *Theatre as Sign-System: A Semiotics of Text and Performance*. London: Routledge, 1991.

BOGATYREV, Petr. 1940. *Lidové divadlo české a slovenské* [Czech and Slovak Folk Theatre]. Prague: Fr. Borovský a Národopisná společnost československá, 1940.

BRECHT, Bertolt. 1936. Alienation Effect in Chinese Theatre. *Brecht on Theatre; the Devolpment of an Aesthetic*. London: Methuen, 1964: 91–99.

ELAM, Keir. 1980. *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama.* New York: Methuen, 1980.

CARLSON, Marvin. 1993. *Theories of the Theatre: A Historical and Critical Survey, from the Greeks to the Present.* Expanded ed. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993.

DEÁK, František. 1976. Structuralism in Theatre: The Prague School Contribution. *Drama Review* 20 (1976): 4: 83–94.

GRYGAR, Mojmír. 1968. Pojetí literárního vývoje v ruské formální metodě a v českém strukturalismu [Concept of Literary Evolution in the Russian Formal Method and Czech Structuralism]. *Česká literatura* 16 (1968): 3: 270–289.

HAKEMULDER, Jèmeljan. 2004. Foregrounding and its Effects on Readers' Perception. *Discourse Processes* 38 (2004): 2: 193–218.

HAKEMULDER, Jèmeljan. 2007. Tracing Foregrounding in Responses to Film. *Language and Literature*: *Journal of the Poetics and Linguistics Association* 16 (2007): 2: 125–139.

HAVRÁNEK, Bohumil (ed.). 1960. Aktualisace. *Slovník spisovného jazyka českého* [Dictionary of Standard Czech]. Prague: Nakladatelství české Akademie věd, 1960: 19.

HAWTHORN, Jeremy. 1992. *Glossary of Contemporary literary theory*. London: Edward Arnold, 1992.

HOGAN, Parick Colm. 1997. Literary universals. *Poetics Today* 18 (1997): 2: 223–249.

HONZL, Jindřich. 1940. Dynamics of Sign in the Theatre. In Ladislav Matějka, and I. R. Titunik (eds.). *Semiotics of Art: Prague School Contributions*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1976: 75–94.

JESTROVIC, Silvija. 2006. *The Theatre of Estrangement.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006.

MARTIN, Jacqueline. 1995. *Understanding theatre.* Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1995.

MARTINDALE, Colin. 2008. The Laws Governing the History of Poetry. In Sonia Zyngier, Marisa Bortolussi, Anna Chesnokova, and Jan Auracher (eds.). *Directions in Empirical Literary Studies.* Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2008: 229–242.

MIALL, David S. 2008. Foregroundinding and Feeling in Response to Narrative. In Sonia Zyngier, Marisa Bortolussi, Anna Chesnokova, and Jan Auracher

(eds.). *Directions in Empirical Literary studies*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2008: 89–102.

MIALL, David S., and Don KUIKEN. 1994. Foregrounding, Defamiliarization, and Affect: Response to Literary Stories. *Poetics* 22 (1994): 5: 389–407.

MIALL, David S., and Don KUIKEN. 2001. Shifting Perspectives: Readers' Feelings and Literary Response. In Willie Van Peer, and Seymour Chatman (eds.). *New Perspectives on Narrative Perspective*. Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 2001: 289–301.

MUKAŘOVSKÝ, Jan. 1931. An Attempt at a Structural Analysis of a Dramatic Figure. In P. Steiner (ed.). *The Prague School: Selected Writings, 1929–1946*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982: 171–77.

MUKAŘOVSKÝ, Jan. 1932. Jazyk spisovný a jazyk básnický [Standard Language and Poetic Language]. *Studie z poetiky* [Essays on Poetics]. Prague: Odeon, 1982: 34–54.

MUKAŘOVSKÝ, Jan. 1932. Standard Language and Poetic Language. In Paul L. Garvin (ed. and trans.). *A Prague School Reader on Esthetics, Literary Structure, and Style*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1964: 17–30.

POPE, Rob. 2002. *The English Studies Book: An Introduction to Language, Literature and Culture*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2002.

SHEN, Yeshayahu. 2008. Two Levels of Foregrounding in Literary Narratives. In Sonia Zyngier, Marisa Bortolussi, Anna Chesnokova, and Jan Auracher

(eds.). *Directions in Empirical Literary Studies.* Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2008: 103–111.

SHKLOVSKY, Viktor. 1925. *Theory of Prose*. Ed. by Benjamin Sher. Elmwood Park, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1990.

SHKLOVSKY, Viktor. 1917. Art as Device. *Theory of Prose*. In Benjamin Sher (ed.). Elmwood Park, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1990: 1–14.

TIKHANOV, Galin. 2004. Why Did Modern Literary Theory Originate in Central and Eastern Europe? (And Why Is It Now Dead?). *Common Knowledge* 10 (2004): 1: 61–81.

VÁCLAVEK, Bedřich. 1940. *Lidová slovesnost v českém vývoji literárním* [Folk Literature in Czech Literary Evolution]. Prague: Nakladatel Václav Petr, 1940.

VAN PEER, Willie, and Jèmeljan HAKEMULDER. 2005. Foregrounding. In K. Brown (ed.). *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics*. Vol. 4. Oxford: Elsevier, 2005: 546–551.

VAN PEER, Willie. 2007. Introduction to Foregrounding: A State of the Art. *Language and Literature* 16 (2007): 2: 99–104.

VELTRUSKÝ, Jiří. 1940. Man and Object in the Theatre. In Paul L. Garvin (ed. and trans.). *A Prague School Reader on Esthetics, Literary Structure, and Style*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1964: 17–30.

VIANA, Vander, Natalia SILVEIRA, and Sonia ZYNGIER. 2008. Empirical Evaluation: Towards an Automatized Index of Lexical Variety. In Sonia Zyngier,

Marisa Bortolussi, Anna Chesnokova, and Jan Auracher (eds.). *Directions in Empirical Literary Studies.* Amsterdam/ Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2008: 271–282.

VOŽDOVÁ, Marie. 2009. *Francouzský vaudeville: geneze a proměny žánru* [French Vaudeville: Genesis and Metamorphosis of the Genre]. Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci, 2009.

WILLET, John. 1964. Note to Alienation Effect in Chinese Theatre. In John Willett (ed. and trans.). *Brecht on Theatre; the Devolpment of an Aesthetic*. London: Methuen, 1964: 99.

WINNER, Tomáš G. 2002. Český strukturalismus v anglofonním a frankofonním světě: ignorování a nepochopení [Prague Structuralism in the Anglophone and Francophone World: Ignorance and Misunderstanding]. *Česká literatura* 50 (2002): 1: 80–88.

Eva Šlaisová
Photograph © Patrice Pavis

Mgr. Eva Šlaisová is a doctoral student in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures at the University of Toronto, with a minor in comparative literature. She received her Master's degree in Czech Language and Literature and Ethnography from Masaryk University in Brno in 2005. Her research focuses on the theatre of Jiří Voskovec and Jan Werich as a special form of anti-illusionist theatre, and the theories of the Prague Structuralists. Her interests also include the relations between folk theatre and European Avant-Garde theatre.

Summary

Eva Šlaisová: "Aktualisace" in English Scholarly Literature: Interpretation, Ignorance, and Misunderstanding

This paper explores the term "*aktualisace*", one of the key concepts of the Prague Structuralists, and its reception in English scholarly literature. "*Aktualisace*" (translated to English as "foregrounding", "topicalization" or "actualization") has received varying levels of attention and appreciation in contemporary English scholarly literature. It has tended to be overshadowed by more famous concepts, such as Shklovsky's "*ostranenie*" and Brecht's "*Verfremdung*", and some scholars have failed to take notice of it entirely. Nonetheless, "*aktualisace*" has become a popular concept, and a growing number of scholars consider it a central idea in contemporary literary theory and related disciplines. However, common understanding of the original concept has changed. The goal of my contribution is to investigate problems which have resulted from the shift of "*aktualisace*" from a Czech context to an international one, in terms of its origin and meaning, translation of the term, and its relation to "*ostranenie*" and "*Verfremdung*".