THE FUNCTIONS OF FOLK COSTUME
IN MORAVIAN SLOVAKIA

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TO
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THE FUNCTIONS OF
FOLK COSTUME
IN
MORAVIAN SLOVAKIA

by

PETR BOGATYREV

The author dedicates
this book to his mother . . .
in fond memory

PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

This work, which was written many years ago, is not concerned with semiotics, properly speaking, nor was it intended to be. Nevertheless, I think that the introduction of the concepts of structure and function into the analysis of ethnographic data on material and spiritual culture is promising and useful for both the ethnographer and those who work to develop the science of signs. In some respects, therefore, this essay borders upon the now rapidly expanding field of semiotics.

In recent years, I have been working on folk theatre, including the study of the functions of theatrical costume; so, as the latter lies close to the folk costume considered in the monograph, it is evident that I have not abandoned my interests of the '30s.

I shall be very happy if this work will inspire the reader to further research with a view to supplementing and correcting it.

In conclusion, I wish to express my heartfelt indebtedness to Professor Thomas A. Sebeok, who has done so much to have this monograph translated and published, and to all who have assisted him in this task.

<div style="text-align: right;">Petr Bogatyrev</div>

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PETR BOGATYREV AND STRUCTURAL ETHNOGRAPHY [1]

The appearance of the English translation of the monograph on the functions of the Slovak folk costume which was written more than thirty years ago by Professor Petr Grigorijevič Bogatyrev of the Moscow University, during his professorship in Bratislava, impels us to much reflection.

First of all, it is testimony, though somewhat belated, of how immediate and propitious the far-reaching influence of the Prague School structural linguistics was upon the human sciences which are contiguous to it and whose object of study may be connected with language (literary aesthetics and criticism and verbal folklore and its poetics) or not connected with language (functional and structural investigation of popular customs and beliefs). Study of the latter was developed mainly by Bogatyrev, who was one of the most active members of the Prague Linguistic Circle and a co-founder of the Moscow Linguistic Circle in 1915.

This influence was also most productive for the subsequent development of structuralism beyond linguistics, as is shown by the work of C. Lévi-Strauss, especially in those articles in which he vigorously attempts to apply some of the basic ideas of structural linguistics to help solve new and traditional problems of social and cultural anthropology.[2]

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[1] "Structural ethnography" instead of the more recent "structural anthropology" has been intentionally selected: in the '30s Bogatyrev, in accordance with the existing Russian tradition, used to speak of "structural methods in ethnography" (see, for example, his articles in Czech and Slovak, "Příspěvek k strukturální etnografii" [Towards the Structural Ethnography], *Slovenská miscellanea* [Bratislava, 1931] and "Funkčno-štrukturálna metoda a iné metody etnografie a folkloristiky" [Functional and Structural Method and Other Methods in Ethnography and Folklore], *Slovenske pohľady* 51 [1935]). In his use, "ethnography" would correspond to both "social and cultural anthropology", as defined in the '50s by Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (New York-London, 1963), pp. 2-3.

[2] See, for example, chapters 1, 2, 3, and 5 of his *Structural Anthropology*.

Bogatyrev's first essays on structural ethnography were written more than two decades before Lévi-Strauss' "Structural Analysis in Linguistics and Anthropology"; and this monograph, which, the author has said, owes much of its theoretical basis and inspiration to his acquaintance with the linguistic functionalism of the Prague School, was written almost a decade before Lévi-Strauss' essay, which was one of the aforementioned in which he attempted to see how linguistics can be useful to the anthropologist. It cannot be overlooked that both Bogatyrev's and Lévi-Strauss' points of departure are the crucial developments in phonological theory as developed during the interwar period by N. S. Trubetzkoy and R. Jakobson, and later as further refined and elaborated by R. Jakobson alone. Jakobson has always founded his approach on the same basic principles that were announced as early as 1929 in *Thèses présentées au Premier Congrès des philologues slaves.*

Though Bogatyrev has never, either in his early writings or in this monograph, overtly acknowledged which basic ideas in linguistics have been most influential for the elaboration of his functional and structural approach, there is no doubt that it was primarily those which determined the progressive growth of phonology in the '20s and '30s. In turn, the new approach to phonology caused, as is widely known, the entire linguistic theory to undergo considerable changes. It seems that the following points of Prague phonology were material for Bogatyrev in his search for the new functional and structural method in ethnography.

In the opinion of the Prague structuralists, language is to be regarded primarily as a tool of communication in which any element is valid insofar as it performs its purposive task. (Recently this trend was labeled as one aiming at the systematic construction of the means-end model of language.)[3]

Accordingly, the Prague phonologists opposed the previous purely phonetic analysis of the sound matter of language, stating as their goal the elucidation of the functional (that is, differential) role played by the sounds of language identifiable on their acoustic and articulatory basis.

Further, each phonological system would be defined by a particular set of such simple differential articulatory-acoustic 'images' and by the structurally organized scheme of correlations between them.

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[3]   Roman Jakobson, "Efforts towards a Means-End Model of Language in Interwar Continental Linguistics", *Trends in Modern Linguistics* (Utrecht-Antwerp, 1963), p. 105.

Finally, it was postulated that language possesses diverse functions of which the communication function and the poetic function are of peculiar interest in that they are mutually opposed, since the former is implemented when the language (as stated in the *Thèses* of 1929) is directed toward the *signifié*, while the latter is directed toward the sign itself,[4] or *signifiant*.

These, then, are the beginnings of theory that seems to play such an important role in Bogatyrev's elaboration of his approach to various kinds of oral and material folklore.

In the same year, 1929, Bogatyrev's essay on the structural study of folklore, written jointly with R. Jakobson, appeared. That work, programmatic for Bogatyrev himself and for many generations of folklorists, had an undeserved and unhappy fate;[5] in it the fundamental role of the socialization of the non-folkloristic facts is ingeniously stressed. By means of this socialization only those facts which display the peculiar structural properties and whose intrinsic elements function equally in their peculiar way are integrated into the totality of the folkloristic patterns. The first important analogy introduced by the authors is that in folklore, as well as in language, *langue* as opposed to *parole* should be clearly delimited. The second is that the folklore system accepts and retains only those newly created elements whose functions and structural properties are in accordance with those of the elements of the system. This is also the case in language, for out of the large quantity of possibly articulated sounds, a language retains only those whose features fit into the system of oppositions that underlies the phonemic pattern of the language. This point had an overall significance for Bogatyrev later on, and the present monograph also makes use of it.

The same point proved to be fascinating to Lévi-Strauss, as far as one can see from the influence exerted on him by Prague phonology, not

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4   See, in the order of listing of the main points, "Thèses présentées au Premier Congrès des philologues slaves" reprinted in J. Vachek (ed.), *A Prague School Reader in Linguistics* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1964), pp. 33, 37, 41-42.

5   "Die Folklore als eine besondere Form des Schaffens" reprinted in R. Jakobson, *Selected Writings*, IV (The Hague, 1966). Despite its importance for folklore studies, this essay figures only in the bibliography of a course on the structural study of folklore given in 1962 by Professor T. A. Sebeok, and in a textbook on general ethnography by a late pupil of Bogatyrev, A. Melicherčík, *Teória národopisu* [*The Theory of Ethnography*] (Liptovský sv. Mikuláš, 1945) (in Slovak). Fortunately it will soon appear in Russian and is now available in Italian: "Il folclore come forma di creazione autonoma", *Strumenti critici* 3 (1967).

only in its early developments, but also in the later works of individual members of the Prague Linguistic Circle. Thus, while searching for a solution to the much discussed anthropological problem, that of the avunculate in primitive societies, he grasps at certain essential points in phonological theory. It was precisely these points which had some years earlier proved their validity for Bogatyrev. In this sense, Bogatyrev could be called a precursor of the trend consisting, as Lévi-Strauss expresses it, of a "formal transposition of the method of structural linguistics" in order "to shed new light . . . on the problem".[6] Some of these points refer to the general requirements of the structural method ("structural linguistics shifts from the study of conscious linguistic phenomena to the study of their unconscious infrastructure; . . . it does not treat terms as independent entities, taking instead as its basis of analysis the relations between terms; . . . it introduces the concept of system" and "it aims at discovering general laws").[7] Others refer to what Lévi-Strauss subsequently called 'the opposition of culture and nature'. This opposition, present in an implicit form in the preliminary remarks of Trubetzkoy on the distinction between phonetics and phonology,[8] and recalled in a refined form by R. Jakobson in his writings from the war and postwar periods, was most conclusive for Lévi-Strauss, as can be precisely seen in his discussion of the problem of the avunculate. Thus, Jakobson's findings that a given language would retain only a definite number[9] of the variety of sounds which can be articulated by the vocal apparatus and which are actually produced by an infant, combined with the findings of Trubetzkoy on phonetics and phonology, suggested to Lévi-Strauss in the first place the novel approach of searching for the relations between terms and formulating a structural law according to which some four types of relations are organically linked. In the second place, it suggested the inference which provided a new solution to the old puzzles of the sociology of the human family and which asserts

[6]   C. Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, p. 39.
[7]   C. Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, p. 33, quoting from N. Trubetzkoy, "La phonologie actuelle", *Psychologie du langage* (Paris, 1933). Cf. also pp. 34, 37, 46.
[8]   For the first time in his "Zur allgemeinen Theorie der phonologischen Vokalsysteme", *Travaux du Cercle Linguistique de Prague* I (1929).
[9]   R. Jakobson, *Kindersprache, Aphasie und allgemeine Lautgesetze* (Uppsala, 1941), cited by Lévi-Strauss on p. 40, *Structural Anthropology*. Cf. also p. 83, where Lévi-Strauss refers to R. Jakobson and M. Halle, *Fundamentals of Language* (The Hague, 1956), p. 17 ("Like music scales, phonemic patterning is an intervention of culture in nature, an artifact imposing logical rules upon the sound continuum").