**Mukařovský, Jan (1891-1975)**

Czech linguist and literary theorist Jan Mukařovský was a leading member of the Prague Linguistic Circle and a prominent contributor to the project of structuralist poetics. Building on ideas first developed by the Russian formalist school, Mukařovský set out to analyse the characteristic features – or devices – that typified literary (especially poetic) language, as opposed to prosaic or quotidian discourse. Like his colleague Roman Jakobson (1896-1982) he sought to specify just how it was that poetry and art required or encouraged the reader/viewer to focus on just those distinctive traits that marked the aesthetic function in its various manifestations. Early structuralists were much preoccupied with this quest for the criterion of ‘literarity’ or ‘literariness’, although it later came under fire from post-structuralists as a throwback to ‘essentialist’ habits of thought. However, Mukařovský was also a historian of Czech literature and hence alert to such charges. Indeed his theory of literary language as a ‘secondary modelling system’ in relation to everyday-communicative language was in part designed to justify his claim that literature did not passively reflect the dominant ideological structures of its time but took up a critical distance from them. In this respect Mukařovský’s thinking took a lead from the Russian formalist Viktor Shklovski (1893-1984) and his concept of poetic ‘defamiliarization’.

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**List of works**

Mukařovský, J. (1977) *The World and Verbal Art:* *Selected Essays by Jan* Mukarovsky

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**References and further reading**

van Dijk, T. A. (ed.) (1972) *To Honour the Eightieth Birthday of Jan Mukarovsky*, special issue *Poetics: international review for the theory of literature*, The Hague: Mouton.

Yashtremski, S. I. (2010) ‘Mukarovsky, Jan’ in Michael Payne (ed.) *A Dictionary of Cultural and Critical Theory*, New York: Wiley: 461-2.