From 'Comrades' to 'Colleagues': Prague Scholars and the 1968 Conference at the Gramsci Institute of Rome*

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This contribution reconstructs the history of the academic seminar 'Lo strutturalismo nella linguistica e nella critica letteraria' [Structuralism in linguistics and literary criticism], celebrated at the Gramsci Institute of Rome on 6 and 7 April 1968, based on letters located in the Gramsci Foundation archives. The meeting between Italian and Czech researchers attracted prominent figures from the structuralist section at the Institute of Czech Literature: Miroslav Červenka, Mojmír Grygar, Milan Jankovič, Zdeněk Pešat, and Julie Štěpánková. These five researchers were joined, at the last minute, by Felix Vodička, who later in 1968 was appointed director of the Institute to replace the Marxist ideologue Ladislav Štoll. The first section is a summary of the content of thirteen letters exchanged between members of the Gramsci Institute and the Institute of Czech Literature over a period of three and a half years. The main actor, on the Italian side, is Rino Dal Sasso, a literary critic who coordinated the aesthetics section of the Gramsci Institute in the 1960s. As the political ecosystem experienced profound transformations, peaking in 1968, Dal Sasso corresponded with several colleagues from the Institute of Czech Literature, beginning with his seminal proposal of a two-site Italian-Czechoslovak conference in November 1966, and ending with the last communication from Prague to Rome in April 1970. The second section contains a transcription of the main details of the letters (date, sender, recipient, number of pages, and language) and contextualizes the exchanges in a rapidly changing political climate, especially after the 1968 Prague Spring. The third and final section analyzes the editorial fate of the texts that the Czech researchers presented in Italy and that the Gramsci Institute, contrary to the original plan, never published. Dal Sasso's sudden death in late 1970 was obviously the main reason that these texts were not published in Italy. Spanish translations were, however, published in Spain in 1970 by Comunicación publishing house, a fact that has largely been forgotten today.

* For Veronika Ambros (1947–2026), in memoriam.

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1. OVERVIEW OF THE CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN THE GRAMSCI INSTITUTE AND INSTITUTE OF CZECH LITERATURE (1966–1970)

The central figure in this exchange of letters was Rino Dal Sasso, a Marxist intellectual who led the Section of Criticism and Aesthetics at the Gramsci Institute throughout the 1960s. In the 1950s Dal Sasso was involved in multiple literary polemics in Italy, notably his critiques of, and ensuing quarrels with, Pier Paolo Pasolini and Alberto Moravia. In the 1960s he became more active in the field of philosophy, presenting himself as the defender of Gramsci's work against the new French Marxist philosophy of Louis Althusser and Alain Badiou. Dal Sasso achieved international notoriety thanks to his dialogue with Althusser in the Italian Marxist journals *Trimestre* and *Rinascita* in late 1967 and early 1968. For years Dal Sasso also worked as a cultural correspondent for *L'Unità*, the newspaper of the Italian Communist Party.

In December 1965, Dal Sasso visited Czechoslovakia leading an Italian cultural delegation with prominent critics and writers. This group participated in a meeting at the Writers' Union headquarters in the Dobříš Castle, about 40 kilometers outside Prague. The Italian delegation also participated in two colloquia organized by the magazines *Literární noviny* and *Plamen*, respectively. In addition to meetings with local writers, filmmakers, and intellectuals, the visit included screenings of Czech films and visits to sites in Prague and Bratislava. Upon his return to Italy, Dal Sasso praised the merits of Czech and Slovak cultures in a celebratory article published in *L'Unità* (Dal Sasso 1965, p. 8). Letter #1, which Dal Sasso sent to the Institute of Czech Literature on 29 November 1966, shows that his initial intention was to organize another Italian-Czechoslovak exchange but this time with a more academic focus.[1] Dal Sasso's original idea was to organize a two-site conference in 1967, first at the Gramsci Institute in Rome and then at the Institute of Czech Literature. In this letter, Dal Sasso proposes a seminar on Franz Kafka in Rome, and a second meeting on literary avant-garde movements in Prague. This first letter in the archives is addressed to Institute members Vladimír Dostál and Václav Kubín, whom Dal Sasso addresses as '*Chers camarades*' [Dear comrades].

Letter #2, dated 22 December 1966, is addressed to Dal Sasso. The sender is not Dostál nor Kubín but Mojmír Grygar, who acts in his capacity as director of the Literary Theory section at the Institute of Czech Literature. Grygar expresses his pleasure at the prospect of meeting Dal Sasso, whether in Prague or in Rome, at one of the forthcoming conferences in January. No further details are available about this exchange of visits aimed at 'clarifying and finalizing the issue of collaboration between the Gramsci Institute and the Institute of Czech Literature'. It is clear, however, that no progress was made on this Italian-Czechoslovak collaboration in the early months of 1967. In June of that year, Dal Sasso travelled to Prague to participate in an international conference on Gramsci. It was there that he learned that the structuralist

1 I am grateful to the Gramsci Foundation for granting access to its collection. The documents studied here are: Item 204, Box 62, 'Strutturalismo e linguistica. Incontro italo-cecoslovacco — April 4, 1967 — April 22, 1970'. I would especially like to thank my student Lidia Benito Vilches for her research work at the Foundation.

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section of the Institute of Czech Literature had gained prominence over the official sector led by director Ladislav Štoll, who had replaced Jan Mukařovský in 1962. Letter #3, which Dal Sasso received from the Institute of Czech Literature in August 1967, was sent by Zdeněk Pešat, one of the structuralists, in his role of deputy director. In this letter Pešat, who addresses Dal Sasso as 'colleague' instead of 'comrade', takes advantage of Dal Sasso's invitation to bring to Rome the most recent research of Prague structuralists (Milan Jankovič, Miroslav Červenka, Mojmír Grygar, and Julie Štěpánková), in the favourable intellectual context following the publication of Mukařovský's collection *Studie z estetiky* [Studies in aesthetics] in 1966.

In reaction to the change of plans represented by Pešat's proposal, Dal Sasso contacted Paolo Valesio, at the time a young linguist at the University of Bologna, and assigned him the task of recruiting Italian linguists familiar with French structuralism. Letter #4, dated October 1967, contains the plan that Valesio proposed to Dal Sasso. It includes names and topics that Valesio thought could be a suitable match to the proposal from Prague. Letters #5, #6, #7, #8, and #9 reflect the exchange between the Gramsci Institute and the Institute of Czech Literature during February and March 1968, while finalizing the programme for a meeting that was now supposed to take place in March of that year. In the discussion of the final details, the name of Felix Vodička appears for the first time. Vodička eventually joined the Czech group that travelled to Rome when the meeting took place in April. Letter #7, which Valesio wrote to Dal Sasso in February, is of particular interest. Here Valesio expresses his disappointment at what he interprets as Mukařovský's poor excuse for not travelling to Italy.

The conference '*Lo strutturalismo nella linguistica e nella critica letteraria*' [Structuralism in linguistics and literary criticism] finally took place on 6 and 7 April, 1968. The venue was the Institute for Communist Studies of the Italian Communist Party, in Fratocchie, 20 kilometers from Rome. The researchers already named in Letter #6 travelled from Prague: Vodička, Červenka, Grygar, Jankovič, Pešat, and Štěpánková. Vodička gave a general presentation on structuralism, and the rest of the participants presented on topics related to Mukařovský's lesser known texts (Červenka, Jankovič, and Pešat discussed Mukařovský's idea of 'semantic gesture,' for example). According to the report that Michele Rago published in *L'Unità* on 13 April 1968, the Italian scholars that participated were Emidio De Felice, Tullio de Mauro, Emilio Garroni, Rosa Rossi, and Paolo Valesio. Other Italian participants were Giuseppe Prestipino, of the magazine *Critica Marxista*; Luciano Gruppi, of the cultural section of the Italian Communist Party; and Rino Dal Sasso and Franco Ferri, hosts from the Gramsci Institute (Rago 1968, p. 8).

After the conference at the Gramsci Institute in April 1968, more than a year passed without discussion regarding the second meeting to be held in Prague. The political situation in Czechoslovakia after the Soviet invasion in August 1968 was obviously the reason for this stagnation. The first letter from this new era, dated 8 June 1969, is letter #10, in which Dal Sasso contacted the Institute of Czech Literature, writing directly to Vodička. At that time, Vodička had held the position of director for over a year. From the content of the letter, it is understood that it was Vodička who wrote to the Gramsci Institute in April to inquire about the availability of Italians to travel to Prague. In this letter, Dal Sasso writes that he is 'still' interested in going

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to Prague with a small Italian delegation, but he claims he cannot fully commit due to funding problems at the Gramsci Institute. In letter #11, also from June 1969, Dal Sasso suggests holding the meeting in September. He refers to Garroni and De Felice as fellow travellers, with the caveat that the presentation topics he proposes deal exclusively with Italian literature and have no clear theoretical approach, much less a structuralist one. The Prague conference did not take place in September because the Italians were unable to secure the necessary arrangements. In October, Jaroslav Kolár, scientific secretary of the Institute of Czech Literature, sent an inquiry on this issue to Dal Sasso (letter #12). Kolár proposes that the Italians make up for missing the conference by joining what he describes as an 'internal symposium' that the structuralist section of the Institute of Czech Literature would be holding in December. On a separate note, Kolár regrets to announce that Vodička is hospitalized and will not be able to participate.

Letter #13, the last document studied in this article, is a brief communication from Kolár to Dal Sasso in April 1970. In this letter, Kolár updates Dal Sasso on four essays presented at the Prague conference that Kolár intends to mail to Italy for publication. Sadly, Dal Sasso passed away due to an illness just a few months later, in November, at the age of 47.[2] The publishing project never materialized, and it is likely that, as an organization dependent on the Italian Communist Party, the Gramsci Institute would not feel comfortable publishing anything that drew on an approach in literary theory now banned in its native Czechoslovakia. It was also in 1970 that Vladimír Brett replaced Vodička as director of the Institute of Czech Literature to restore the primacy of official Marxist thought in Czech academia in the immediate context of the suppression of democratic reforms that was the normalization (1969–1971).

2. SUMMARY OF CONTENTS OF THE LETTERS

LETTER #1

Date: 29 November 1966
From: Rino Dal Sasso
To: Vladimír Dostál and Václav Kubín
Number of pages: 1
Language: French

Dal Sasso writes to Vladimír Dostál and Václav Kubín, who had joined the Institute of Czech Literature in Prague in 1962 when the Marxist critic and ideologue Ladislav Štoll took over as director and Mukařovský was forced to resign, as noted earlier. Dostál and Kubín represented the Marxist orthodoxy that sought to neutralize the structuralist theoretical work done at the Institute of Czech Literature. Dostál was a critic with excellent Marxist credentials, having spent four years in the USSR in the 1950s, and he had been working at the Zdeněk Nejedlý Centre since 1962. Kubín,

2 See obituary, written by Antonio Del Guercio, in the Italian Communist Party newspaper *L'Unità*, 28 November 1970, p. 3.

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on the other hand, felt more comfortable working in the publishing world and had a somewhat less ideological profile, as evidenced by his participation in the founding of the journal *Estetika* in 1964. In addition to their starting date, Dostál and Kubín shared the same departure date from the Institute of Czech Literature. Both left in 1967, during a period of internal renewal that culminated in Štoll's departure and Vodička's appointment as director in 1968.[3] In his letter of 29 November 1966, Dal Sasso addresses them as '*Chers camarades*' [Dear comrades] and refers to a conversation held recently at the Gramsci Institute, although it is impossible to deduce when or why Dostál and Kubín had travelled to Italy. Dal Sasso extends a formal invitation to hold two meetings on Italian literature and Czech literature, in Rome and Prague, respectively, in 1967:

> *Following up on our conversation at the Gramsci Institute, in which we discussed the possibility of organizing two conferences on Italian and Czech literature next year, I am pleased to announce that the Organizing Committee of the Gramsci Institute is very interested in the idea.*[4]

Dal Sasso recapitulates the topics that had been considered for these two conferences: the first, a symposium on Kafka, to be held at the Gramsci Institute, to be followed by another on 'avant-garde and neo-avant-garde movements' ('*les avanguardes and néoavanguardes*' [*sic*]) at the Institute of Czech Literature. Dal Sasso concludes the letter by announcing that he plans to visit Prague at the end of the present year, and asks his interlocutors to respond soon to arrange a meeting.

LETTER #2

Date: 22 December 1966
From: Mojmír Grygar
To: Rino Dal Sasso
Number of pages: 1
Language: French

Grygar discusses the logistics of a telephone call with Dal Sasso to be made on 29 or 30 December. Grygar expresses his happiness at meeting Dal Sasso in person on 2 January in Prague, or on 5 January in Rome. No further information is offered regarding these closely scheduled visits. The tone of the letter is unmistakably jovial: 'I hope

3 Dostál was assigned to the Institute's headquarters in Strahov. Kubín began working on the editorial board of *Svoboda*, a magazine directly managed by the Communist Party, where he had worked in the early 1950s.

4 'En faisant suite à notre conversation à l'Institut Gramsci dans laquelle nous avons parlé de la possibilité d'organiser, dans l'année prochaine, deux meetings sur la littérature italienne et la littérature tchèque, j'ai le plaisir de vous annoncer que le Comité organisateur de l'Institut Gramsci est très intéressé par la proposition'. All English translations are mine.

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that our personal meeting will be very useful in clarifying and finalizing the issue of collaboration between the Gramsci Institute and Institute of Czech Literature.'[5]

LETTER #3

Date: 4 August 1967
From: Zdeněk Pešat
To: Rino Dal Sasso
Number of pages: 2
Language: French

The first letter of 1967 in the Gramsci Institute archives is to Dal Sasso, dated 4 August. Two months before, in June, Dal Sasso had visited Prague to participate in an international conference on Gramsci, where he would have naturally spoken with representatives of the Institute of Czech Literature with the aim of further developing the idea of holding two Italian-Czechoslovak conferences. The sender of the letter, written in French, is Pešat, who signs as deputy director of the Institute of Czech Literature. It is logical to assume that Dostál and Kubín were no longer with the Institute of Czech Literature, or were about to leave.

Pešat, who addresses Dal Sasso as '*Cher collègue*', accepts the invitation to participate in the first of the two conferences, which was to be held in Rome in the fall of that year. An important change with respect to the initial plans that Dal Sasso discussed with Dostál and Kubín is that the Institute of Czech Literature now proposes to dedicate both conferences entirely to structuralist literary theory. Pešat refers to the new project as a '*séminaire commun du strukturalisme*' [*sic*] [joint seminar on structuralism]. Pešat proposes four clearly defined research lines:

1. Problems of structural and historical analysis.
2. Problems of the semantic analysis of the literary work. Presentations will be about:
   a) The idea of literary process according to Russian formalism and Czech structuralism.
   b) The idea of integrity of the work and its evolutionary values according to Czech structuralism.
3. The semantic architecture of the literary work.
4. Categories of the 'semantic gesture'.[6]

5 'J'espère que notre rencontre personelle [*sic*] sera très utile pour éclaircir et concrétiser la question de la collaboration entre Istituto Gramsci et Ústav pro českou literaturu.'

6 '1. Problèmes d'une analyse structurelle et historique.
2. Problèmes d'une analyse sémantique de l'œuvre littéraire. Il s'agirait des communications:
   a) Conception du processus littéraire vu par la méthode formaliste russe et le structuralisme tchèque.
   b) Conception de l'intégrité de l'œuvre et des valeurs d'évolution adoptée par le structuralisme tchèque.

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The contrast between Dal Sasso's initial ideas and the structuralist proposal now put forward by Pešat is more than evident.

In this letter, Pešat proposes to hold the Rome conference in November. He also agrees to send Italian translations of the Czech papers in advance. Finally, Pešat asks Dal Sasso to send the formal invitation in September so that the Czech scholars can process their passports in time.

LETTER #4

Date: 14 October 1967
From: Paolo Valesio
To: Rino Dal Sasso
Number of pages: 2
Language: Italian

Valesio provides a list of seven Italian professors in response to a previous request from Dal Sasso. The first five names that Valesio proposes belong to the field of glottology (a field roughly comparable to 'comparative philology' or 'comparative linguistics' today). Valesio defines these five professors as '*glottologi veri e propri*' [bona fide glottologists]. They are Luigi Heilmann (University of Bologna), Tullio De Mauro (University of Roma), Gian Luigi Beccaria (University of Torino), Emidio De Felice (University of Genova), and Luigi Rosiello (University of Bologna). Regarding their political orientation, Valesio writes:

> *The last two scholars from the list* [De Felice, Rosiello] *are, as you know, of Marxist orientation: I cannot say anything specific on this issue about Beccaria and De Mauro; the director of my Institute, Heilmann, has no interest in this discussion.*[7]

After stating that Heilmann's scholarship has no Marxist orientation, Valesio defends the need to invite him because, in his view, Heilmann is the '*introduttore dello strutturalismo in Italia*' [introducer of structuralism to Italy].[8] In addition to Heilmann, Valesio also considers it essential to invite De Felice on the grounds of the forthcoming publication of De Felice's article on historicism and structuralism in *Lingua e Stile*, a journal co-founded by Heilmann the previous year.

3. Architecture sémantique de l'œuvre littéraire.
4. Catégories du soitdisant [*sic*] geste sémantique.'

7 'Gli ultimi due studiosi elencati [De Felice, Rosiello] sono, como lei sa, di orientamento marxista: non saprei dire qualcosa di preciso, a questo riguardo, su Beccaria e De Mauro; alieno da questa problematica è invece il direttore del mio Istituto, Heilmann'.

8 Heilmann introduced the work of Roman Jakobson to Italy in 1966, in his edition and translation (with Letizia Grassi) of the *Saggi di linguistica generale* (Milano, Feltrinelli 1966). A year later, Heilmann published *Lo strutturalismo linguistico* (Milano, Feltrinelli 1967). Heilmann had been drawing on concepts from the structuralism of Saussure and Trubetzkoy since at least 1955. On this issue, see Gobber 2023.

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Although Valesio does not mention it in the letter, De Mauro was also a key figure in Italian structuralism, having just published the Italian translation and critical edition of Saussure's *Corso de linguistica generale*. To the five names mentioned above, Valesio finally adds two more possibilities, both of them professors in Bologna: Gualtiero Calboli, professor of Classical Philology; and Gianni Scalia, a professor with interdisciplinary interests in psychoanalysis, Marxism, and anthropology.

LETTER #5

Date: 9 February 1968
From: Rino Dal Sasso and Franco Ferri
To: Zdeněk Pešat
Number of pages: 1
Language: Italian

Dal Sasso and Ferri sent Pešat the official invitation to visit the Gramsci Institute. It can be inferred from the letter that this invitation came after several letters and telephone conversations with Grygar and Pešat. In this letter, Dal Sasso and Ferri propose a three-day seminar, ideally to be held in March, announcing a roster of Italian scholars who will approach structuralism from two points of view:

— Two presentations '*dal punto di vista generale*' [from a general point of view]: Nicola Badaloni, on the relationship between Marxism and structuralism; and Emidio De Felice, on the relationship between structuralism and historicism.
— Three presentations '*da punti di vista specifici*' [from specific points of view]: Garroni, on the aesthetic object as a heterogeneous semiotic object; Paolo Valesio, on iconic structures and schemata; and De Mauro, on the value and meaning of the literary message.

Dal Sasso and Ferri add that linguists [Luigi] Rossiello and Heilmann are also working on presentations along these thematic lines.

LETTER #6

Date: 24 February 1968
From: Mojmír Grygar
To: Rino Dal Sasso
Number of pages: 3
Language: French

Grygar writes to Dal Sasso to acknowledge receipt of the official invitation. Grygar announces the names and titles of the presentations of the Czech delegation, in the following order:

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— Miroslav Červenka, 'L'œuvre littéraire comme le signe' [The literary work as a sign]
— Zdeněk Pešat, 'L'évolution de la littérature et la totalité de l'œuvre' [The evolution of literature and the totality of the work]
— Mojmír Grygar, 'La conception de l'évolution littéraire chez le Formalisme russe et chez le Structuralisme tchèque' [The concept of literary evolution in Russian formalism and Czech structuralism]
— Milan Jankovič, 'La contribution du Structuralisme tchèque à l'interprétation de l'œuvre littéraire' [The contribution of Czech structuralism to the interpretation of the literary work]
— Julie Štěpánková, 'La notion du *sens* chez le Structuralisme tchèque et chez la Nouvelle critique en France' [The notion of *meaning* in Czech structuralism and the 'Nouvelle critique' in France]

Grygar proposes that the conference be held on 26–28 March. He also proposes inviting Vodička due to his importance in the history of Czech structuralism and Vodička's own interest in travelling to Italy. In Grygar's words,

> *We would be very pleased if comrade Prof. Dr. Felix Vodička (Corresponding Member of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences) who was Mukařovský's closest disciple and collaborator during the 1940s, could also participate in the seminar in Rome.* [...] *He himself is very interested in structuralist issues and he has expressed his deep interest in the conference in Rome.*[9]

Grygar notes that Vodička does not work at the Institute of Czech Literature, and therefore the general invitation cannot be extended to him. It is necessary to invite him as a professor at Charles University. Grygar ends the letter with these words: 'The situation in our country is changing, and I hope that the conditions for collaboration between our institutes will be favourable.'[10]

LETTER #7

Date: 25 February 1968
From: Paolo Valesio
To: Rino Dal Sasso
Number of pages: 1
Language: Italian

9 'Nous serions très heureux qu'au séminaire à Roma pourrait participer aussi camarade Prof. Dr. Felix Vodička /le Membre correspondant de l'Académie Tchècoslovaque des Sciences/ qui était le disciple et le collaborateur le plus proche de Mukařovský pendant les années quarante [...] Lui-même s'intéresse beaucoup aux problèmes du structuralisme et il m'a exprimé son intérêt profond au séminaire à Roma'.

10 'La situation chez nous change et j'espère que les conditions de collaboration entre nos instituts seront favorables'.

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In this letter, written in Italian, Valesio informs Dal Sasso of '*un paio di notizie piuttosto deludenti*' [two pieces of very disappointing news]. The first is that Heilmann will not participate in the conference; the second Mukařovský's absence. This is the first time Mukařovský is discussed in the letters and, although it is only possible to speculate about the motive for this last-minute consideration, we might logically conclude that after Vodička's late addition, the prospect of bringing Mukařovský to Rome had begun to look realistic. When things do not pan out, Valesio does not hide his disapproval of Mukařovský's excuses:

> *As for Mukařovský, I would invite him under normal circumstances, but in this busy school period he thinks it would be complicated to invite him, at the risk of not finding classrooms and things like that (note well that I am reporting this last sentence as it was told to me, without endorsing it in any way).*[11]

Valesio concludes the letter by stating that because he is running short on time he will contribute with a simple presentation, which he hopes to have ready by 5 or 6 March.

LETTER #8

Date: 27 February 1968
From: Zdeněk Pešat
To: Gramsci Institute
Number of pages: 2
Language: French

Pešat addresses the '*Chers collègues*' [Dear colleagues] of the Gramsci Institute in French. He reports that the Czech group prefers 27–29 March as the dates for their visit to Italy, in order to have enough time to process their travel visas. Pešat confirms the five previously announced presentations by Červenka, Grygar, Jankovič, Štěpánková, and himself, with superficial changes to the titles of the presentations. He hopes to be able to send the presentations, translated into French, no later than 15 March.

LETTER #9

Date: 20 March 1968
From: Franco Ferri
To: Institute of Czech Literature
Number of pages: 1
Language: Italian

11 'Quanto a Mukařovský, in circostanze normali lo inviterebe, ma in questo periodo di occupazioni pensa che sarebe complicato invitarlo, rischiando di non trovare le aule libere e simili (note bene che io ti riferisco quest'ultimo discorso così come mi è stato fatto, senza sottoscriverlo in alcun modo).'

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Ferri, from the Institute Gramsci, addresses the Institute of Czech Literature in Italian to announce the final title of the meeting, 'Lo strutturalismo nella linguistica e nella critica letteraria' [Structuralism in linguistics and literary criticism] as well as the revised date, 5–7 April. He confirms that the Czech delegation will be housed at the Gramsci Institute itself.

LETTER #10

Date: 8 June 1969
From: Rino Dal Sasso
To: Felix Vodička
Number of pages: 1
Language: French

This letter from Dal Sasso to Vodička is the first held in the Gramsci Institute archives to postdate the conference in Rome. Fourteen months had passed since the congress of April 1968 and ten months since Russian troops entered Prague in August of that year. Dal Sasso responds to a letter from Vodička dated 29 April 1969 (not available in the Gramsci Archive), which arrived weeks late in Rome due to a strike by the Italian postal service. Dal Sasso writes that, despite the circumstances, he maintains his willingness to travel to Prague together with Aurelio Roncaglia, De Mauro, and Garroni for the celebration of the second part of the conference on structuralism: 'We are still very interested in holding the seminar on linguistics and literary criticism next autumn in Prague.'[12]

Dal Sasso proposes the last week of September or the first week of October. He is also uncertain whether he will be able to pay for the return trip due to financial difficulties at the Gramsci Institute: 'The Institute, like all Party organizations, has been in serious financial difficulties for the last few months.'[13]

LETTER #11

Date: 23 June 1969
From: Rino Dal Sasso
To: Felix Vodička
Number of pages: 1
Language: French

Dal Sasso writes to Vodička proposing the week of 14 to 21 September as the ideal time to hold the conference in Prague. He confirms that Garroni will give a lecture on the visual arts and European literary avant-garde (Apollinaire, Marinetti, etc.), and De

12 'Nous sommes toujours très intéressés à [*sic*] la réalisation du séminaire sur la linguistique et la critique littéraire pour l'automne prochain à Prague'.

13 'L'Institut, comme toutes les organisations du Parti, depuis quelques mois se trouve en grandes difficultés au point de vue du budget'.

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Mauro on Italian poetry from Leopardi to his contemporaries Montale and Pavese. Professor Roncaglia will also travel to Prague to participate in the discussions.

Additionally, Dal Sasso reports that Grygar, having recently been appointed to a visiting professorship in Amsterdam, will coordinate the Czech researchers' presentations from his new post.

LETTER #12

Date: 9 October 1969
From: Jaroslav Kolár
To: Rino Dal Sasso
Number of pages: 2
Language: French

Kolár, in his capacity as scientific secretary of the Institute of Czech Literature, writes in response to Dal Sasso's [unplaced] letter of 18 September, in which Dal Sasso had communicated that the Italian delegation could not attend the meeting in Prague. In response to this unexpected circumstance, Kolár proposes to create an independent section to be added to an 'internal symposium' on literary theory, to be held in December: 'A section of our Institute, which works on the methodological problems of scientific literary interpretation, is organizing an internal symposium in December 1969. The symposium is devoted to the problems of interpretation.'[14]

Kolár explains that 16 and 17 December will be used for the internal theory seminar, and Italians are welcome to participate in the discussions, while 18 and 19 December could be used for the Italian-Czechoslovak seminar. Kolár also concedes that Gramscian scholar Angela Stevani and semiotician Cesare Segre will cover the absences of Garroni and De Mauro (this change was supposed to be communicated in the letter of 18 September). The three Czech scholars to participate in this new seminar are:

— Zdeněk Pešat, 'The semantics of the composition of poems by Cendrars and Apollinaire'
— Julie Štěpánková, 'The type of poetic structure in Baudelaire'
— Miroslav Červenka, 'Presentation of the works of literary theoretician J. Levý'[15]

Kolár asks his Italian colleagues to send summaries of their presentations, and offers to translate these summaries into Czech. He also announces the finalized programme of the internal theory seminar:

14 'Une section de notre Institut, qui élabore les problèmes méthodologiques de l'interprétation littéraire scientifique, organise au mois de décembre 1969 un symposium interne, consacré aux problèmes de l'interprétation'.

15 '— Zdeněk Pešat, "La sémantique de la composition des poèmes de Cendrars et d'Apollinaire"
— Julie Štěpánková, "Le type de la structure poétique chez Baudelaire"
— Miroslav Červenka, "La présentation des travaux du théoricien J. Levý"'

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1. The text of the literary work and its interpretation
   — Milan Jankovič, 'The semantic gesture and the methodological problems of interpretation'
   — Zdeněk Pešat, 'The interpretation of the text and the external context'

2. The work and its author
   — Radko Pytlík, 'The methodological processes of biography and semantic interpretation'
   — Aleš Haman, 'The analysis of the work as a sign referring to the author'

3. The evaluation of the literary work
   — Přemysl Blažíček, 'The distinction between different approaches to the poetic text (researcher, reader, and critic in relation to a poem by V. Holan)'[16]

Finally, Kolár regrets to inform that Vodička is hospitalized and will not be able to attend the seminar.

LETTER #13

Date: 22 April 1970
From: Jaroslav Kolár
To: Rino Dal Sasso
Number of pages: 1
Language: English

Kolár sends Dal Sasso written versions of the presentations of Jankovič and Miroslav Kačer (the latter was not mentioned in previous letters). Moreover, he writes that he understands that Dal Sasso already brought a copy of Pešat's text from Prague with him. He also informs Dal Sasso that Štěpánková is supposed to have sent her text from Paris, where she is now.

16 '1. Le texte de l'œuvre littéraire et son interprétation.
   — Milan Jankovič, "Le geste sémantique et les problèmes méthodologique [*sic*] de l'interprétation".
   — Zdeněk Pešat, "L'interprétation du texte et le contexte extérieur".
   2. L'œuvre et son auteur.
   — Radko Pytlík, "Les procédés méthodologiques de la biographie et l'interprétation sémantique".
   — A. Haman, "L'analyse de l'œuvre comme signe référant à l'auteur".
   3. Evaluation de l'œuvre littéraire.
   — Přemysl Blažíček, "La distinction de différentes approches au texte poétique (chercheur, lecteur et critique devant le poème de V. Holan)"'.

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3. A FORTUNATE ACCIDENT: THE PUBLICATION OF PRAGUE STRUCTURALIST TEXTS IN SPAIN IN 1970

In 1969, the Spanish government decreed the administrative closure of Ciencia Nueva publishing house, which had been publishing the works of Spanish Communist Party intellectuals since 1965. When Ciencia Nueva was shut down, Alberto Corazón, a graphic designer and member of this predominantly Marxist and anti-Francoist group, requested permission to launch his own publishing house, Comunicación. In the ten years (1969–79) after obtaining permission, Comunicación published over a hundred books on art theory, sociology of art, and literary theory. As Paula Barreiro López and Juan Albarrán Diego (2025, p. 291) have recently pointed out, Comunicación 'was highly responsible for widening the methodological debate on Marxist analysis of culture and praxis in Spain, nourishing the demands of a growing anti-Francoist Left, to which the founders belonged'. Comunicación, Barreiro and Albarrán further explain,

> *was not only a publishing house, but also an intellectual group. Called 'Equipo Comunicación'* [Communication Team], *it gathered leftist artists, scholars, and thinkers acting in the cultural arena as art critics, curators, philosophers, and writers* [...] *Alberto Corazón's and Comunicación's activities and production became crucial for the debate on modern art and the development of the Humanities and Social Sciences during late Francoism (1959–1975) and the subsequent transition to democracy (1975–1982)* (ibid., p. 291).

The central figures of the Comunicación project were the art critics Valeriano Bozal and Simón Marchán. They developed a new critical language that was to surpass both mechanistic Marxist criticism and what they considered the 'formalist' excesses of linguistically oriented criticism imported from France into Spain. Right from the outset, Comunicación published several works by Russian artists and critics, such as Kazimir Malévich, Vladímir Mayakovsky, and Vsévolod Meyerhold, to name a few. These editions often reproduced French and Italian works previously translated into Spanish. In 1969, Comunicación published *Formalismo y vanguardia*, an anthology of four texts by Viktor Shklovsky, Yuri Tynjanov, and Boris Eikhenbaum. One year later, in 1970, Comunicación released the Prague Circle's 1929 Theses, closely following the 1966 Italian translation. Also in 1970, Comunicación published *Arte y semiología*, a volume containing two essays by Mukařovský (the translation of the French original 'L'art comme fait sémiologique' from 1936; and the encyclopaedic entry 'El estructuralismo en la estética y en la ciencia literaria' [Structuralism in Aesthetics and Literary Studies], allegedly translated from the Czech, specifically from its 1940 version). Along with the 29 Theses and texts by Mukařovský, Comunicación published a collective volume during the same year entitled *Lingüística formal y crítica literaria* [Formal Linguistics and Literary Criticism]. This volume contained a selection of papers presented at the 1968 Gramsci Institute symposium. Comunicación was very interested in Antonio Gramsci's philosophy, and they were in direct contact with the Gramsci Institute of Rome's cultural section. It was because of this convergence of interests that the essays written by members of the Institute of Czech Literature ended up in

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Madrid. Of the six papers originally presented by Czech researchers, five were selected for publication:

— Červenka, '*La obra literaria como símbolo*' [The literary work as a symbol]
— Vodička, '*Historia de la repercusión de la obra literaria*' [History of the impact of the literary work][17]
— Pešat, '*Totalidad de la obra y evolución de la literatura*' [The totality of the work and evolution of literature][18]
— Jankovič, '*La obra como realización de un sentido*' [The work as the realization of meaning]
— Štěpánková, '*La categoría del sentido en la 'nueva crítica' francesa y en el estructuralismo checo*' [The category of meaning in French 'New Criticism' and Czech structuralism]

Grygar's text was not included in this volume for reasons unknown. This collection also includes Spanish translations of three texts by Italian scholars:

— Emilio Garroni, '*La heterogeneidad del objeto estético y los problemas de la crítica de arte*' [The heterogeneity of the aesthetic object and the problems of art criticism]
— Tullio de Mauro, '*Lingüística formal e interpretación crítica de los documentos literarios. Apuntes y tesis*' [Formal linguistics and critical interpretation of literary documents: Notes and theses]
— Paolo Valesio, '*La lengua como acriticidad*' [Language as uncriticality]

The *Formal Linguistics and Literary Criticism* collection contains a 2-page prologue collectively signed 'Comunicación' which comments on De Felice's participation in the conference and notes that his presentation was not selected for the volume. The prologue also indicates that Vodička and De Mauro provided general overviews of current theories in Czechoslovakia and Italy, respectively, which were also left out of the anthology (Comunicación 1970b, p. 7). There is also mention of the Prague conference in December 1969, and it is announced that a selection of texts from both the Rome and Prague conferences will soon appear in Italy (ibid., p. 8). Due to circumstances already discussed, however, this Italian volume was never published. Therefore, the publication of these texts in Spain, still under Franco's regime, was a historical accident with few precedents in the history of the reception of Prague School structuralism.

17 The Gramsci Foundation archives contain Italian translations of these texts by Vodička and Pešat. It is safe to assume that these Italian versions were then translated into Spanish.

18 In a footnote to the Spanish version of this text (1970b, p. 116) Pešat indicates that the essay is a modified version of a paper he delivered at the 6th International Congress of Slavists, held in Prague on 7–13 August 1968, four months after his presentation at the Gramsci Institute Rome. This means he had continued to work on the topic. The 6th International Congress of Slavists was attended by 1,800 participants from 27 countries. The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia took place barely one week after the conference, on 20 August.

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There are two aspects of this brief prologue that merit our attention. First, Comunicación describes the anthology as a dialogue between Italians and Czechs based on the shared premise of 'minimizing the cost of formal analysis' (ibid., p. 8)[19] and partly correcting what they define, after Galvano della Volpe, as 'a formalist and linguistic boom' (ibid., p. 8) in the preceding years. However, when it comes to rebutting French structuralism, Italian Marxists and Czech structuralists (although officially Marxist) are very different in their arguments. On the Italian side, Garroni begins his essay by referring to Mukařovský's 'L'art comme fait sémiologique' but immediately raises the issue of the 'heterogeneity of the artistic object' according to the linguistic theories of Ferdinand de Saussure and Louis Hjelmslev. De Mauro writes a text that solely focuses on questions of general linguistics, following Saussure primarily, without addressing any aspect of the work of art. Finally, Valesio, the third Italian scholar in the anthology, moves even further away from the supposed topic of general discussion and contributes a difficult-to-understand essay that basically combines a long list of terms from Marx and Engels (*das Privateigentum*, *Eigentum*, *Eigenschaft*, *Recht*, *des Schachers*, etc.) with Emil Benveniste's contemporary linguistic theories.

What follows now is a short summary of essays authored by the Czech scholars. Červenka's essay initially discusses 'L'art comme fait sémiologique', and then proceeds to argue, to get beyond this impasse, that the critic must position himself against 'understanding the integral meaning of the work only as a constant of various individually realized aesthetic objects' (Červenka 1970, p. 32–33). Červenka invokes the concepts of 'personality' and 'semantic gesture' that Mukařovský developed in the 1940s and which only became truly accessible after the publication of Mukařovský's *Studie* in 1966. Vodička's piece stands out from the rest because it is not so much a discussion of Mukařovský's post-1966 theories as a condensed version of the literary history model that Vodička himself developed in the 1940s. As is well known, Vodička is the first 20th-century scholar to consistently apply Roman Ingarden's phenomenology to literary history, anticipating by three decades the postulates of Hans-Robert Jauss' aesthetics of reception.

After Červenka and Vodička, Pešat's essay exhibits an astonishing capacity for synthesis, raising questions about literary theory and history from the Russian Formalists (Tynianov, in particular, and his approach to extra-literary series), through the different phases of Mukařovský's thought, and to the contemporary readings by younger researchers of Mukařovský's *Studie*. Pešat analyzes Mukařovský's concept of the semantic gesture in detail. Pešat also defends the application of this concept to an author throughout his or her career, and even considers it applicable as a defining characteristic of an entire literary genre (Pešat 1970, p. 114–115).

Jankovič's text continues the dialogue with Červenka and Pešat. His essay is, above all, a very detailed discussion of the evolution of the concept of semantic gesture or 'unifying semantic intention', in Mukařovský's own words, which Jankovič adopts (Jankovič 1970, p. 132). Jankovič defines it as an 'inner tension realized through a special activity of the form, which values the aesthetic function in the semantic con-

19 My English translations of texts published in Spanish do not cite the Spanish texts since these translations rely on French and/or Italian texts that I am not able to identify or compare.

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struction of the work' (ibid., p. 133), while fully subscribing to the phenomenological turn that Mukařovský proposed in his 1943 essay 'Intentionality and Non-intentionality in Art', reproduced in his 1966 *Studie*. The observer of the work of art is thus recognized as a central element of the work since, in Jankovič's words, 'the unifying semantic intention is thus always directed forward [...] [It is] a project that cannot be executed solely as an intention, but as the existence of the work; a project that finds its fulfilment only after a long series of encounters with the perceiving individual' (ibid., p. 132). The fifth and final essay by a Czech author, Štěpánková's text, situates the tradition of Czech structuralism in relation to both French structuralism (Barthes in particular) and the branch of Italian semiotics led by Umberto Eco. Štěpánková's essay is an appropriate conclusion to the anthology for it brings to a close several of the issues specifically raised by Červenka.

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