

THE PHYSIOLOGY OF LITERATURE: A.A.UKHTOMSKII AND  
THE PRINCIPLE OF THE DOMINANT

by

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## THESIS ABSTRACT

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Russian physiologist Aleksei Alekseevich Ukhtomskii played exceptional role in the development of Russian humanities in general and Russian literary studies in particular; of special interest is his significant influence on the early works of Mikhail Bakhtin. He discovered and introduced into the scientific circulation *the dominant principle* that has become a point of departure in developing different important concepts such as dominant, chronotope, dialogue and others. This thesis, in a way, is a genealogical recounting of early 20th century Russian literary theory in light of its associations with the work of Ukhtomskii and a demonstration how his ideas can be used in further literary studies.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The works of Alexey Alekseevich Ukhtomskii, Russian scientist-physiologist, are not well known in the West; the existing bibliography consists of hardly a dozen articles devoted to the analysis of his physiological views in the neuroscientific and psychological magazines.

In Russia there is an increasing interest in his legacy; starting in the 1990s there was the discovery of previously unknown archival materials. The introduction into academic circulation of "humanistic" texts of the Russian scientist made it possible to raise awareness of his exceptional role in the development of Russian scientific-philosophical anthropology; of special interest is his significant influence on the early works of Mikhail Bakhtin. Under the conditions of suppression of any non-Marxist trends of thought, Russian natural sciences, just like Russian literature, have always been saturated by world view themes. During this period of time Ukhtomskii had no other ways of reaching public consciousness but through his personal contacts and discussions that followed his public scientific lectures. In the post-Stalinist era some of his views were presented in the publications of his students V.L Merkulov and M.G. Yaroshevskii. Today various academic works in psychology, sociology, linguistics, psycholinguistics, literary and translation studies rarely fail to give credit to his synergistic teaching on *the dominant principle* that has become a point of departure in developing different important concepts such as dominant, chronotope, dialogue and others. Indeed, Ukhtomskii's discovery of the main principle of the functioning of the human brain, behavior and worldview proved to be one of the most valuable contributions in the development of Russian humanities.

“He [Ukhtomskii] helped to see ways for conceiving the relation of mind and world as a dialogic continuum rather than as an unbridgeable gap.”<sup>1</sup>

Different textbooks in humanities and linguistics introduce Ukhtomskii to University education and some even demonstrate how his ideas can push literary criticism forward. For instance, the textbook in literary studies under the title *Systemic View as a Foundation of Philological Thought* (“Системный Взгляд как Основа Филологической мысли”) published in 2016 by the RUDN University, based on Ukhtomskii’s concept of the integral dominant analyses of literary works. Yet another academic monograph written at the junction of linguistics and psychiatry and called *Introduction to Psychiatric Literary Criticism* is profoundly influenced by Ukhtomskii’s teaching on the dominant. Recent textbooks in philosophy and literary studies that feature Bakhtin usually also feature Ukhtomskii and consider the two thinkers’ ideas to be deeply interconnected: “Especially powerful in Soviet times were the scientific and literary approaches <...> to the anthropological philosophy as they are expressed in the work of the physiologist Ukhtomskii and the literary critic Bakhtin” reads a 2012 textbook in philosophy.<sup>2</sup> V. Khalizev, one of the authors of the 2015 Moscow State University edition of “Russian Academic Literary Studies: History and Methodology (1900-1960<sup>th</sup>)” states that “the voices of Ukhtomskii and Bakhtin in Russia sounded in unison in the 1920s...”<sup>3</sup>

It is important to mention that the influence of Ukhtomskii on Bakhtin’s development was not only due to the fact that the natural sciences, especially physiology, were greatly

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<sup>1</sup> Katherine Clark, Michael Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1984), 175.

<sup>2</sup> Vladimir Gorbunov, Grigorii Kuzmenko, Gennadii Otiutskii, and Mikhail Shakhov, *Philosophia* (Moscow: RGSU, 2012), [https://studopedia.su/14\\_169974\\_filosofiya.html](https://studopedia.su/14_169974_filosofiya.html)

<sup>3</sup> Valentin Khalizev, “Uchenie A.A. Ukhtomskogo o Dominante I Rannie raboty Bakhtina,” in *Bakhtinskii sbornik 2*, ed. D. Kuindzhich and V. Makhlin (Moscow: Yazyki Snavianskoi kultury, 1991), 85.

respected among Russian intellectuals since the 1860 and were looked upon as the main sources to provide answers to the “social and ethical questions plaguing Russia.”<sup>4</sup> What was important for Bakhtin is that although Ukhtomskii, as Holquist puts it, “was a workaday scientist whose research was rigorously empirical and highly respected by other scientists, his experiments were all performed in the service of answering the great questions of philosophy. He was able to maintain a balance between physiology and metaphysics that kept both in harmony without doing violence to the seriousness of either.”<sup>5</sup>

This means there can be success for the truly interdisciplinary approach. It is no secret that people in the humanities were quite rightly criticized for having a hazy idea of the sciences they are trying to use as a complementary tool of their research. For instance, modern physicist Alan Sokal criticises the “repeated abuse of concepts and terminology coming from mathematics and physics”<sup>6</sup> by postmodernist thinkers, and he expands his criticism to all the other scientific borrowings of humanities.

In the case of Ukhtomskii we have a unique example of humanistic extrapolation that comes from the scientist himself who, in his notes, letters, diaries and even in public lectures presented the ways by which his scientific findings can be applied to humanities.

This paper is, in a way, a genealogical recounting of early 20th century Russian literary theory in light of its associations with the work of Ukhtomskii and, therefore, a reevaluation of

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<sup>4</sup> Katerine Clark, Michael Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1984), 175.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont, *Intellectual Impostures: Postmodern philosophers' abuse of science* (London: Profile Books, 1998), 4.

the many links between the disciplines of literary theory and other scientific disciplines. It also reviews the usage of the dominant principle in the contemporary Russian literary studies.

## CHAPTER II

### ALEXEI UKHTOMSKII AND THE LAW OF THE DOMINANT

In 1922 the Russian physiologist Aleksei Alekseevich Ukhtomskii (1875-1942) introduced into scientific circulation the notion of *dominant* (a noun in Russian and Latin, it is primarily an adjective in English but has become accepted as a noun due to its use among the Russian Formalists). At its most basic level, the dominant is conceived as a stable focus of cortical excitation and can be defined as the general principle of work for the nerve centers applicable to both to biological life and to the processes of higher nervous activity of man. This principle largely determines the body's interaction with the environment, the process of reflex and cognition and the vector of behavior of the individual. It is not surprising that the concept of dominant turned out to be fruitful not only for physiology, but also for a number of other sciences. In fact, it is hard to name another concept that has found such a broad application between different disciplines.

Ukhtomskii was such an interdisciplinary man himself. He began his way into the natural sciences from a solid humanistic educational platform. He studied philosophy and literature first as a young cadet, then as a student of the philological department of the Moscow Theological Academy. At the time of his studies this religious educational institution was one of the best places in the country to get a great education. For instance, the famous historian O. Kliuchevskii taught his courses there. Ukhtomskii was highly capable and motivated student, he knew all major European languages and also Greek, Latin and Hebrew. His Master's thesis was on Kant's theory of knowledge. After the defense the future scientist became haunted by his dream "to reveal the natural scientific foundations of the moral behavior of people, to find the physiological

mechanisms by which the whole diversity of human personality is formed and developed.”<sup>7</sup> And it was not just an idealistic ambition, he indeed has become a great scientist, whose legacy potential is not exhausted yet. According to contemporary researcher E. Zueva, “Ukhtomskii’s legacy is not researched enough in terms of “positive science” not because of its humanitarian dimension, but because its “positive-scientific” component is rather difficult, and currently there is no worthy successor able and ready to carry this heritage forward.”<sup>8</sup>

There are many reasons why the name of Alexei Ukhtomskii is less known in the world than the name of the Nobel laureate I. Pavlov. First, he was a prince of a noble origin, a descendant of *Rurik* - not a very legitimate figure to make a career under Soviets. His uncle Esper Ukhtomskii, the renowned researcher of the East, was very close to Nicholas II, and his brother Archbishop Andrew Ukhtomskii was shot by the Communists in 1937. Second, Ukhtomskii himself, even being a head of the Physiology Department of Leningrad State University, was a practicing Old Believer. Third, his personal attitude in life was a very humble one, and he couldn't care less about becoming famous. Pavlov, who knew what kind of work and research he did, preferred not to notice it. Nevertheless, in 1935 Ukhtomskii had the possibility to participate in the Congress of Physiologists in Leningrad where he presented his research to his foreign colleagues in brilliant French. Later the great Charles Sherrington, English neurophysiologist and a Nobel laureate, included some of Ukhtomskii’s ideas in his book and gave him credit for them. The interest in his legacy started to dramatically increase in 1990 in Russia when his earlier unpublished works were brought to readers. Now he is recognized as a

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<sup>7</sup> Alexei A. Ukhtomskii, *Dominanta Dushi* (Rybinsk: Rybinskoe Podvorie, 2000), 8.

<sup>8</sup> Elena Y. Zueva, Konstantin Zuev “The Concept of Dominance by A.A. Ukhtomsky and Anticipation,” in *Anticipation: Learning from the past*, ed. Mihai Nadin (Cham: Springer, 2015), 24.

full member of that brilliant galaxy of Russian physiologists that includes I.M. Sechenov, I.P. Pavlov, V.M. Bekhterev and N.E Vedensky, all of them were his contemporaries and predecessors. New textbooks and research papers on psychology, criminology, anthropology, art, etc. published in Russia lately all readily include Ukhtomskii's ideas as basis for developing related fields.

"The Dominant and Ukhtomskii are in the same ratio as Pavlov and the conditioned reflex, Mendeleev and the periodic law, Darwin and the origin of species," wrote the scientific journal of the Russian Academy of Sciences in an article devoted to the anniversary of the physiologist.<sup>9</sup>

#### The Discovery of the Dominant

Becoming a student and, subsequently, an employee of Professor N.E. Vedensky, Ukhtomskii developed the ideas of the latter and on their basis created his own doctrine of the dominant, as a new principle of tbrain functioning. He published his scientific research reports starting from 1923, while the philosophical, psychological and methodological aspects of the conception of the dominant, although voiced in public lectures, remained in his private notes and sketches and were not published before the early 1990s. Despite the fragmentation of his epistolary heritage, it reveals an "internally consistent approach to building a science of the living".<sup>10</sup>

The impetus for the discovery of the dominant (the term is derived from the Latin *Dominare* and borrowed from Richard Avenarius) was a laboratory situation when electrical

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<sup>9</sup> Pavel Simonov, "Dominanta Ukhtomskogo," *Vestnik Rossiiskoi Akademii Nauk* 70, no. 5 (2000): 425.

<sup>10</sup> Elena Zuev and Grigorii Efimov, "Printsip Dominanty Ukhtomskogo kak podkhod k opisaniu zhivogo," *Preprinty IPM im. Keldysha* no. 14 (2015):32, <http://library.keldysh.ru/preprint.asp?id=2010-14>

signals were sent to a dog's brain, precisely to its motor centers, causing involuntary movements in the limbs. These movements, however, ceased as soon as the animal began to prepare for defecation. The current pulses which were still sent to the motor system, produced a completely different effect, in particular, they increased excitation in the center of preparation for the defecation process. As soon as the latter was completed, all the automatic reactions in the limbs began to manifest themselves in the usual mode again.

Further studies have shown that whenever a center of excitation arises in the central nervous system, latent readiness of the organism for a certain activity is created. Outwardly, it is often expressed by the working posture of the organism. In this case, there is a significant inhibition of other reflex acts, and random impulses coming from outside do not have the characteristic impact, but are redirected to an intensification of excitation in the dominant focus. The scope of this paper does not allow us to give a detailed description of the conditions of occurrence and stages, the formation of the dominant, described in the related scientific literature.<sup>11</sup> We note only that, according to Ukhtomskii, there is no "completely non-dominant" state of the living organism, except in brief intervals between sleep and wakefulness. At each moment in the brain there is a center with the most significant influence on the whole human being. This is the dominant that "is not a theory or even a hypothesis, but the principle of a very wide application from experiment, an empirical law like the law of gravity, which, perhaps, itself is not interesting, but which is sufficiently intrusive to be it is possible not to reckon with it."<sup>12</sup> ("Доминанта есть не теория и даже не гипотеза, но преподносимый из опыта принцип

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<sup>11</sup> See for example Valentim Khalizev, "Intuitsia Sovesti: Teoria Dominanty Ukhtomskogo v kontekste filosofii i kulturologii XX veka," *Problemy Istoricheskoi Poetiki* no.6 (2001): 22-44.

<sup>12</sup> Alexey A. Ukhtomskii, *Dominanta. Statii Raznykh let* (Sankt-Peterburg: Piter, 2002), 448.

очень широкого применения, эмпирический закон, вроде закона тяготения, который, может быть, сам по себе и не интересен, но который достаточно назойлив, чтобы было возможно с ним не считаться”).

Ukhtomskii distinguishes four constituents of the dominant. First, it is characterized by increased excitability. Secondly, by the ability of nerve centers under specific conditions sufficiently intensively and long enough to accumulate this excitement. Thirdly, by the ability to maintain excitement in oneself. Fourthly, the peculiarity of the dominant as a nervous process is its inertia, i.e. to continue excitation further, even if the initial stimulus passed. Ukhtomskii said that the dominant goes out the last. Once caused, once experienced, it does not disappear without a trace, but is pushed back to the subconscious area and can persist throughout human life and can recover when adequate stimuli appear.

The most in-depth overview of Ukhtomskii in English can be found in the article “The Concept of Dominance by A.A. Ukhtomsky and Anticipation” by Elena Y. Zueva and Konstantin B. Zuev.<sup>13</sup> In the framework of this paper, it is not possible to highlight the world scientific context in which the concept of Ukhtomskii was created or the influence of the works of other scientists on its development.<sup>14</sup> “Without a doubt,” Uktomskii wrote, ‘hints of the

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<sup>13</sup> Zueva, “The Concept of Dominance,” 13.

<sup>14</sup> Here is how the Zuevs describe the state of adjacent scientific disciplines at the time of the discovery of this law: "There already exists the concept of a brain map that compares the position of the nerve center and its functions. There is a teaching of Freud and the concept of the subconscious. There is a doctrine of homeostasis, where the basis of the interaction of the organism with the environment is the minimization of disturbances caused by this interaction. There is, and is known in Russia, the teaching of Henri Bergson, where the irreversibility of time is essential. Much less known, and not yet fully published, is the teaching of Alfred North Whitehead, in which such concepts as an event, a process, as in Ukhtomsky's philosophy, are fundamental. At this stage, the concept of a mathematical and physical neuron, a neural network, an analogy between the brain and the switching circuit described by Boolean algebra is still ahead. The concept of biorhythm is not introduced into scientific usage. In psychology and philosophy, there is no concept of Gestalt. The general theory of systems of L. Von Bertalanffy is not known. An essential part of psychology is the description of one's own internal states, and this allows us to use

principle of the dominant can be found in the works of V.M. Bekhterev. I find plenty of them in Freud. Finally, Kant also has them.”<sup>15</sup>

### The Dominant in the Higher Nervous Activity

The simplest illustration of the functioning of the dominant in the higher nervous activity of a person might be the situation when a schoolchild cries over his/her bad grade, and the consolations of friends, instead of stopping the tears, make him cry even more. The dominant of suffering, owning his consciousness, only strengthens itself from extraneous impulses. A concept, an idea, a thought, a problem can become a dominant that attracts all external stimuli to itself. Charles Darwin in his *Autobiography* said: “... music generally sets me thinking too energetically on what I'm currently working on, instead of giving me pleasure.”<sup>16</sup>

The reaction of the nerve center to the stimulus depends on the current state of both the given nerve center and its environment. These states are determined by the prehistory, the totality of their past reactions and connections.

“In the higher floors and in the cortex of the hemispheres, [the dominant] is the physiological basis of the act of attention and objective thinking,” (“В высших этажах и в коре полушарий принцип доминанты является физиологической основой акта внимания и пред-метного мышления”) wrote Ukhtomskii.<sup>17</sup> That is the dominant that causes the

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the texts of fiction as a psychological argument, as Ukhtomsky does, because at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries the literature is psychological, and the psychology of the literary”.

<sup>15</sup> Ukhtomskii, *Dominanta*, 62.

<sup>16</sup> *The Works of Charles Darwin*, ed. Ernest Krause, vol.29, *The Autobiography of Charles Darwin*, ed. Nora Barlow (New York: NYU Press, 2010), 158.

<sup>17</sup> Ukhtomskii, *Dominanta*, 46.

individual to focus interest on some parts of the environment and ignore a number of others. “A lot of data from the environment that would have caused corresponding reflexes, if they came to us at another time, now remain without the proper effect, but only strengthen the current dominant,” Ukhtomskii writes in his notebooks. (“Множество данных из среды, которые должны были бы вызвать соответствующие рефлексy, если бы пришли к нам в другое время, остаются теперь без прежнего эффекта, а лишь усиливают текущую доминанту”).<sup>18</sup>

In 1927 Ukhtomskii gave a public lecture on “The Dominant as a Vector of Behavior.” The dominant always affects our worldview and directs our behavior and, at the same time, being in a constant need of strengthening itself, it makes us use our own behavior as a basis for creation our own worldview. Hence it follows that even the world outlook that we have created for ourselves on the basis of personal experience and observations is, indeed, the product of our dominants. “The individual, if not fortunate enough to be set right by some existential shock or the random encounter with the other human face, tends to fall into a very dangerous circle: in its behavior and its dominants, it builds an abstract theory to justify and back up its own dominants and behavior” (“Человеческая индивидуальность, если ее счастливым образом не поправит жизненное потрясение или встреченное другое человеческое лицо, склонна впасть в весьма опасный круг: по своему поведению и своим доминантам строить себе абстрактную теорию, чтобы оправдать и подкрепить ею свои же доминанты и поведение”).<sup>19</sup>

The difference between the dominant of simple reflex actions and the dominant of more complex acts of thinking and behavior is its existence in time. If for the former it can resolve

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>19</sup> Ukhtomskii, *Dominanta.*, 162.

itself, exhaust itself after the anticipated act is completed (like swallowing), then for the latter it proves to be very stable. For them, it is inert, i.e. is inclined to "be maintained and repeated in its entirety, while the external environment has changed, and the previous reasons for reaction have left. ("поддерживаться и повторяться во всей цельности при том, что внешняя среда изменилась, и прежние поводы к реакции ушли.")<sup>20</sup> It is a kind of "behavioral organ," which is, of course, a virtual thing but can be called an "organ" in terms of its ability to produce at all times "the same result," like the activity of any other organ with stable morphological features. (Just as human heart at all times performs its main function to pump the blood in the body, the dominant at all times perform its function – to direct behavior and perception and to gather external stimuli to justify it). Ukhtomskii warned: "You have to possess your dominants, otherwise they will possess you" ("Нужно овладеть своими доминантами, иначе они овладеют вами").<sup>21</sup>

It is not all bad news, however: "The dominant as a general formula still does not promise anything. You need to know its content and the specific conditions for its occurrence. As a general formula, the dominant says only that out of the most intelligent things a fool will derive an excuse for continuing stupidities and from the most unfavorable conditions someone with intelligence will extract the intelligent." ("Доминанта как общая формула еще ничего не обещает. Нужно знать ее содержание и конкретные условия ее возникновения. Как общая формула доминанта говорит лишь то, что и из самых умных вещей глупец, извлечет повод для продолжения глупостей и из самых неблагоприятных условий умный извлечет

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 140.

умное”).<sup>22</sup>

To sum up: the dominant can have a positive beginning, for example in creativity, scientific activity, providing unremitting attention, focus on the subject of interest, and at the same time there is a pathological, stagnant dominant that makes impossible dialogue with current reality.

Ukhtomskii proved the central role of the body in the representation of the world. The reality reveals itself to us just the way our dominants are, in precisely same manner as a painting renders only what the painter was capable of seeing and how he saw it. As a result, “every minute of our activity, huge areas of living and unique reality slip past us only because our dominants are directed in a different direction.” (“...каждую минуту нашей деятельности огромные области живой и неповторимой реальности проскакивают мимо нас только потому, что доминанты наши направлены в другую сторону”).<sup>23</sup> The scientist claimed that his concept was incompatible with the Cartesian notion of the passive, mirror image of the world. “The old idea that we passively capture the reality of what it is completely untrue. Our dominants, our behavior, stand between us and the world, between our thoughts and reality.” (“Старинная мысль, что мы пассивно впечатлеваем на себе реальность, какова она есть, совершенно не соответствует действительности. Наши доминанты, наше поведение стоят между нами и миром, между нашими мыслями и действительностью”).<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ukhtomskii, *Dominanta*, 145.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 142.

<sup>24</sup> Ukhtomskii, *Dominanta*, 56.

The idea that the man can be an objective observer of a similarly objective reality of the external world and to do justice to the representation of it, was questioned by some Russian philosophers even before Ukhtomskii, and the 20th century provided strong scientific evidence that observation cannot be neutral. Werner von Heisenberg made world-famous Einstein's late provocative statement "Only the theory decides what one can observe."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Gerald Holton, "Albert Einstein and Werner von Heisenberg", *Physics today*, July 2000, 40.

## CHAPTER III

### THE DOMINANT IN LITERARY STUDIES

In the 1920s the term “dominant” was simultaneously active in almost all theoretical and esthetic works of the era. Roman Jakobson wrote in 1976 that “the dominant is the most elaborated concept of Russian formalism”<sup>26</sup>; it was present in the writings of Mikhail Bakhtin and in A.A. Ukhtomskii’s public lectures and works, the latter published only partially but “undoubtedly well-known to Bakhtin from word of mouth and from personal communication [with Ukhtomskii]”.<sup>27</sup> The term itself implies pretty broad meaning and existed long before Ukhtomskii borrowed it from German physiologist and philosopher Richard Avenarius. Ukhtomskii’s private records, revealed in the 1990s, show the term appearing in his drafts as early as 1904; he used it in his public lectures in 1911 and officially published scientific works on the dominant in 1923.

At the same time, in 1911 in Russia a book was published by German philosopher Broder Christiansen called *The Philosophy of Art*. The artistic dominant, according to Christiansen, is “any formal or objective element [of a work of art]” that “comes to the fore and takes the leading role,”<sup>28</sup> that is, gives a decisive shape to the work of art. It is necessary, Christiansen owns, for creating an artistic whole out of the different but harmoniously connected with each other

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<sup>26</sup> Roman Jakobson, “The Dominant” in *Twentieth-Century Literary Theory* ed. K.M Newton (London: Palgrave, 1997), 6.

<sup>27</sup>Sergey I. Bocharov, afterword to *Mikhail Bakhtin. Sobranie sochinenii*, vol.2 (Moscow: Russkie Slovarei, 2000), 524.

<sup>28</sup> Carol Joyce Any, *Boris Eikhenbaum: Voices of a Russian Formalist*, (California: Stanford Univ. Press, 1994), 61.

elements of an artistic piece (a dominant, thus, can be thought of as ‘the First among equals,’ almost like the Bishop of Rome in relation to other bishops in the early Christian tradition – S.O). Russian Formalists presumably took the term from Christiansen (according V. Erlich and A. Hansen-Love), while for Bakhtin the source of it was Ukhtomskii (according to V. Ivanov and M. Holquist).

No wonder that the usage of the term, as well as its meaning, is quite different for Ukhtomskii and the Formalists. The physiological concept of dominant, naturally, is first and foremost applicable to a living being and only secondary to artistic creations (still, Boris Korman calls artistic creation a “living organism”). Also, while Ukhtomskii’s scientific research covered physiology, the scientist, according to M. Bakhtin, “touched upon the issues of aesthetics” in his public lectures, for instance in his lecture on chronotope given in Peterhof in the summer of 1925.”<sup>29</sup>

#### Formalists and the Dominant

Formalists developed their own teaching on the dominant which was only in the very basic sense based on Christiansen; for instance, the artistic dominant, according to Christiansen, is “any formal or objective element [of a work of art]” that “comes to the fore and takes the leading role,”<sup>30</sup> that is, gives a decisive shape to the work of art. It is necessary, Christiansen states, for creating an artistic whole out of elements of the artistic piece that are different but harmoniously connected with each other. Eikhenbaum, however, according to Carol Any, “posited tension between unequal elements rather than harmony.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Mikhail M. Bakhtin, “Chronotope in the Novel,” in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by Mikhail Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1981), 81.

<sup>30</sup> Carol Joyce Any, *Eikhenbaum: Voices of a Russian Formalist* (California: Stanford Univ. Press, 1994), 61.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

Catherine Depretto noted that “terminological borrowing does not yet indicate a real transfer of the system of thinking or the conceptual construct.” Russian Formalists, Depretto argues, used many European terms “for greater convenience, because they were best suited to expressing their own thoughts.”<sup>32</sup>

The general definition of the dominant by Jakobson is the following: “The dominant may be defined as the focusing component of a work of art: it rules, determines, and transforms the remaining components. It is the dominant which guarantees the integrity of the structure.”<sup>33</sup> I would say that the Formal school was, primarily, engaged in tracking different manifestations and specificity of the *dominant relations* inside a text than in understanding the deeper cause of these relations. For Erlich “Tynjanov was much less specific as to the nature of the *dominanta* than he was as to its status.”<sup>34</sup> The Formalists, thus, explained that the relations between the elements of the artistic creation are “hierarchical” (Eikhenbaum); they are the relations of subordination which causes “the deformation of the entire system” (for instance, intonation deforming syntax and rhythm in melodic verses). Under these relations one group of factors is promoted “at the expense of the other” (Tynianov).

The functions of these relations are:

- 1) integration: “the dominant guarantees the integrity of the structure”, it is “the organizing source of the composition” (Jakobson).
- 2) specification of the dominant is “a defining moment in the formation of the genre” (Tomashevsky).

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<sup>32</sup> Cathérine Depretto, “The sources of Russian Formalism: Methodological considerations” in *Cahiers du monde russe*, vol. 51, no. 4, (2010), 565-579.

<sup>33</sup> Roman Jakobson, “The Dominant,” in *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views*, ed. L. Matejka and K. Pomorska (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971), p. 82

<sup>34</sup> Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism: History-Doctrine* (The Hague: Mouton, 1955), 200.

There are some characteristics of the dominant created by the Formal school that resonate with Ukhtomskii's descriptions of the principle, for instance, the dominance of one or group of elements that subordinate to itself all the system thus causing it deformation; at Ukhtomskii it is one or group of centers of excitation that is preeminent and causes inhibition in the rest of the nervous system. For Tynianov the dominant "colors" the rest, and Ukhtomskii often says it "colors" the perception of reality; the similarities are more evocative when it comes about the notion of 'literary evolution.' The term itself creates an allusion with natural sciences; the general concept is that "literary evolution brings about shifts in the hierarchy of literary genres as well as in the relationship between literature and other contiguous cultural spheres, e.g., science, philosophy, politics."<sup>35</sup> Compare the related quote from Eikhenbaum (1) and yet another one from Ukhtomskii: "The vanquished line [the genre] is not obliterated, it does not cease to exist. It is only knocked from the crest; it lies dormant and may again arise as a perennial pretender to the throne".<sup>36</sup> Ukhtomskii "the lived-through dominant is never gone; it goes deep down [of consciousness] giving its place to others <...> but may again be called back to the field of attention."<sup>37</sup>

To sum up with the Formalists and Ukhtomskii: it is not possible to state with certainty whether they turned to his formulations. Considering their attempt to place the study of literary theory and history on a scientific basis they might be attracted to the highly empirical descriptions of the dominant made by Ukhtomskii. Theoretically they were contemporaries; many of them (Shklovsky, Eikhenbaum, Tynyanov) lived in Leningrad at the

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<sup>35</sup> Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism: History-Doctrine* (The Hague: Mouton, 1955), 200.

<sup>36</sup> Boris Eikhenbaum, "The Theory of Formal Method" in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch (New York: Norton&Company, 2001).  
<http://uwch-4.humanities.washington.edu/Texts/EICHENBAUM/Theory%20of%20Formal%20Method.rtf>

<sup>37</sup> Ukhtomskii, *Dominanta*, (1966), 12-13.

same time when Bakhtin familiarized himself with the ideas of the physiologist. At the same time the Formalists (and Eikhenbaum in particular) stated the need to found a literary scientific discipline that was based on its own methodology and its own premises that could only uniquely belong to literature. It is not the topic of our research to discuss the flaws of Eikhenbaum's purely positivist faith in the possibility of un-biased observation, systematic collection of facts and their generalization in theory to produce empirical truth for literary studies. We know that Ukhtomskii believed just the opposite: the theory-laden nature of observation, the social construction of facts, paradigmatic constraints and the other concepts today deployed to explain the workings of science.

In any case, as P. Medvedev noticed "our Formalists do not base themselves on anyone and do not relate to anyone except themselves."<sup>38</sup> And even admitting that ideas and concepts flowed between disciplines, Jakobson explains how one should deal with it in his letter to Shklovsky: "The roll call with the methods of innovators of all scientific fields <...> shows that the path [of the formal method] was correct, fully responding to the pathos of all the sciences today."<sup>39</sup>

### Bakhtin and The Dominant

Caryl Emerson, the translator of Bakhtin's *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, suggests that "by dominant Bakhtin has in mind the Formalist concept of the *dominanta*, the 'leading

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<sup>38</sup> Pavel Medvedev, *Formalizm I Formalisty* (Leningrad: Izdatelstvo Pisatelei, 1934), 40.

<sup>39</sup> *Roman Jakobson: Teksty, Documenty, Issledovania* ed. Kh. Baran, S.I.Gindin, (Moscow:RGGU, 1999), 121-124.

value' in the hierarchical system of values inherent in any work of art."<sup>40</sup> Vyacheslav Ivanov, however, states it differently: "At least two big concepts entered Bakhtin's field of interests thanks to Ukhtomskii: the dominant and the chronotope. The first [the dominant] is described by Ukhtomskii in his recently re-published works <...>Bakhtin widely uses this concept when talking about a formalistic understanding of writing."<sup>41</sup> This point of view is also shared by Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, authors of the book *Michael Bakhtin* (1984).

The latest academically annotated full edition of Bakhtin's works in Russian (2000-2008) suggests that Bakhtin doesn't use the concept in the formalistic sense only. "Despite the usage of the term [of the dominant] was very different for the Formalists and for Ukhtomskii," the volume reads, "the way the term sounds in the *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* combines them both."<sup>42</sup> ("Функционирование термина у формалистов и у Ухтомского было весьма различным, но то и другое объединяется в звучании термина в "Проблемах творчества Достоевского").

There are two reasons to justify such a combination. First, as much as Bakhtin appreciated the Formalists's elaboration of the dominant concept, literary work for him is not limited by the text, for it "includes both its external materiality and its text, and the world depicted in it, and the author-creator, and listener-reader. We perceive this completeness in its integrity and inseparability, but at the same time we understand the entire difference of its

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<sup>40</sup> "The Dominant", in *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views*, ed. L. Matejka and K. Pomorska (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971), 82.

<sup>41</sup> Vyacheslav Ivanov, *Izbrannye Trudy po Semiotike I Istorii Kultury*, vol. 6, *Istoria Nauki: Nedavnee Proshloe* (Moscow: Yazyki Slavianskoi Kultury, 2007), 42.

<sup>42</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Sobranie Sochinenii v semi tomakh*, vol. 2, ed. Sergey Bocharov and Ludmila Melikhova (Moscow: Russkie Slovari, 2000), 524.

components."<sup>43</sup> Second, Bakhtin was interested in the techniques and ideas of positive knowledge in a broad sense and, thanks to his friend-scientist Kanaev and to Ukhtomskii, got himself familiarized with the methodology of natural sciences. The synergism of scientific and philosophical approach that he found at Ukhtomskii, was “fascinating” for him, according to Clark and Holquist. “Although Bakhtin was at times rather casual about indicating the precise links in the dialogic chain of his ideas, this particular essay [*Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel*] opens with two footnotes that indicate the twin source of his inspiration. One is Kant <...> and the other is Ukhtomskii, to whom Bakhtin owes his insistence on the immediacy of space and time in human experience.<sup>44</sup> And further: “Ukhtomsky’s vision of the body led Bakhtin to emphasize its central role in the representation of the world. When Ukhtomsky stated, “our dominants stand *between* us and reality,” he was using the term “dominant” in the sense of total integration of neurological and psychological forces into a characteristic pattern that shapes our perception of the world. Analogously, according to Bakhtin, our particular totally integrated sense of space and time shapes our sense of reality. We are constantly engaged in the activity of re-presenting the signals we get from our exterior environment, shaping these signals into a pattern by means of particular chronotopes. Bakhtin argues that particular chronotopes are the defining or dominant features of persons, periods and works of art. “Within the limits of a single work and within the total output of a single author we may notice a number of different chronotopes and complex interactions among them, specific to the given work of author; it is common, moreover, for one of these chronotopes to envelope or dominate others.”<sup>45</sup> For

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<sup>43</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, “Formy Vremeni I Khronotopa v Romane. Zakluchitelnye Zamechaniya” in *Voprosy Literaturny I Estetiki. Issledovania Raznykh Let* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia Literatura, 1975), 404.

<sup>44</sup> Clark and Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 279.

<sup>45</sup> Clark and Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 279.

Ukhtomskii the chronotope and the dominant is inseparably interconnected. Everything is “predetermined by previous events, but require some maturation and conditions from outside to open itself in current action, to come to light - that's the chronotope in being and the dominant in us.”<sup>46</sup> (“Предрешенное прежними событиями, но требующее созревания и условий извне, чтобы сейчас открыться в действии и для всех выявиться, - вот хронотоп в бытии и доминанта в нас”).

This broader, compared to the Formalists, understanding of the dominant enabled Bakhtin to analyze the main difference between Dostoevsky and Gogol in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, and to reveal the action of the dominant on both formal and “Ukhtomian” levels: this not only shows Bakhtin how the dominant governs the artistic structure but also introduces the deeper cause for these textual relationships. This cause is the “artistic dominant” of the author himself that is the representation of consciousness. As a true dominant, it involves a vector of activity modeling (deforming) the worldview. With Dostoevsky “the dominant governing the entire act of artistic visualization and construction had been **shifted**, and the whole world took on a new look—although in essence almost no new non-Gogolian material had been introduced by Dostoevsky.”<sup>47</sup>

Further in “Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics” Bakhtin is also interested in how the personal dominants of Dostoevsky's characters affect the artistic dominants of their images. He quotes B. Engelgart that «the dominant of the artistic representation of the hero is the set of the ideas and powers that rule over him.» We again see the hierarchical relations but this time they

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<sup>46</sup> Igor Kuzmichov, *A.A. Ukhtomskii i V.A. Platomova. Epistolyarnaya Khronika* (S.Peterbourg: Zvezda, 2000), 184.

<sup>47</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and transl. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: Minnesota Univ. Press, 1984), 49.

start beyond the form and, in fact, predetermine it. “Self-consciousness, as the artistic dominant governing the construction of a character, cannot lie alongside other features of his image; it absorbs these other features into itself as its own material and deprives them of any power to define and finalize the hero.”<sup>48</sup> Here we again see Uktomskii’s concept of the dominant attracting all the stimuli to itself (absorbing all the features) and making them of no effect in terms of their original purpose (deprives them of any power) and accumulating them to serve its [the dominant’s] current task instead. The literary distortion, or deformation that will follow and that the Formalists described in such great detail, for Bakhtin starts at the level of consciousness: “An idea becomes for him an idea-force, omnipotently defining and distorting his consciousness and his life.”<sup>49</sup> The specifics of the idea that owns the hero become “the dominant of the formation of his artistic image.”<sup>50</sup> Precisely, this image is formed not by means of his biographical data, or by description of his appearance, mannerisms (as can be the case with Tolstoy or Turgenev, Bakhtin explains) but by means of revealing his thoughts.

According to G. Bocharov the tendency to combine the Formalists’ and Ukhtomian usage of the dominant is especially distinct in Bakhtin’s following statement: “The consciousness of a dreamer or an underground man - who are not personified, and cannot be personified - is most favorable soil for Dostoevsky’s creative purposes, for it allows him to *fuse* the artistic dominant of the representation with the real-life and characterological dominant of the represented person.”<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, 55.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

The same principle reveals itself on a greater level of the representation of reality in general: “The dominant of the representation of the environment is in the hero’s vision of it. Each character is given his world in its specific aspect, and in accordance with this aspect its image is constructed. Just as the complex of idea-forces ruling the hero serves as the dominant in an artistic representation of him, so the point of view from which the hero observes the world serves as the dominant in the representation of surrounding reality. The world is present to each character in a particular aspect - and in keeping with that aspect its representation is constructed. It is impossible to find in Dostoevsky a so-called objective description of the external world.”<sup>52</sup> Thus, Bakhtin comes to Ukhtomskii’s original idea of our dominants shaping our reality. “There is no such thing as ‘neutral truth.’ The truth can be only a truth of one’s own consciousness.” reference? Compare to Bakhtin’s “the ‘truth’ at which the hero must and indeed ultimately does arrive through clarifying the events to himself, can essentially be for Dostoevsky only the truth of the hero's own consciousness.”<sup>53</sup>

According to Clark and Holquist, for Bakhtin Ukhtomskii’s doctrine of “the body’s relation to its physical environment provided a powerful conceptual metaphor for modeling the relation of individual persons to their social environment.”<sup>54</sup>

The best example of the artistic embodiment of this relation is *The Double* of Dostoevsky. Interestingly, according to G. Bocharov “The analysis of the ‘real-life characterological dominant’ of the heroes of the *Double* and *Notes from the Underground* (two

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<sup>52</sup> Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, 23.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>54</sup> Clark and Holquist, *Bakhtin*, 174.

works of Dostoevsky, the most fully, “monographically” analyzed in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*) is very close to the philosophical development in the same years of the theme of the Double by Ukhtomskii, mainly in his epistolary texts (unknown, of course, then to Bakhtin).”<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Bocharov, *Bakhtin. Sobranie Sochinenii*, 22.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE CONCEPT OF THE DOUBLE

“The doctrine of the dominant is mainly devoted to the problems of the orientation of a person in his/her immediate reality. Ukhtomskii's judgments can be called (we use the formula of V. Soloviev, picked up by M. Bakhtin) “he experiments in the sphere of moral philosophy,’ focused mainly on human practice. “Aesthetics and ethics,” the scientist claimed, "are practical disciplines and at the same time they are guiding; precisely because they are practical.”<sup>56</sup>

According to Ukhtomskii's interpretation, Golyadkin, a self-enclosed person, sees in the world and in people what is predetermined by his dominants, that is, in one way or another, himself. In this sense, he is not much different from an ordinary individual. This extremely widespread “catastrophe of disconnected consciousness,” according to Ukhtomskii, is what Dostoevsky depicted. In Dostoevsky's piece this problem is, of course, brought to its extreme manifestation: “wherever the self-focused individual goes, he, just as Mr. Golyadkin does, encounters no one else but himself, ie. his Double” and whoever he talks to, he basically “talks and raves with himself” because he can't face a real dialogue. («...Пока человек не освободился еще от своего Двойника, он, собственно, и не имеет еще Собеседника, а говорит и бредит сам с собою»).<sup>57</sup>

Bakhtin brilliantly reveals the artistic way by which Dostoevsky shows the whole process through the discourse of the narration: how Golyadkin constructs his thoughts and how they

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<sup>56</sup> Valentin Khalizev, “Intuitsia Sovesti (Teoriia Dominanty A.A. Ukhtomskogo v Kontekste Filosofii I Kulturologii XX veka” in *Problemy Istoricheskoi Poetiki*, no. 6 (2001), 29. <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/intuitsiya-sovesti-teoriya-dominanty-a-a-ukhtomskogo-v-kontekste-filosofii-i-kulturologii-xx-veka>

<sup>57</sup> Alexei Ukhtomskii, *Intuitsia Sovesti* (S.Peterbourg: Peterburgskii Pisatel, 1996), 252.

construct reality for him; the dialogue with the implied Other is constructed in the mind of Golyadkin and is substituted by his utterances in the part of his Interlocutor. “But Golyadkin's internal voice was itself only a substitute, a specific surrogate for the actual voice of another person <...>. The other's (the double's) response could not avoid touching Golyadkin's sore spots, for it was nothing other than his own word in someone else's mouth - but it was, so to speak, his own word turned inside out, with a shifted and maliciously distorted accent.”<sup>58</sup>

For Ukhtomskii, the only way to get rid of one's Double is to have one's dominant shifted on the Other. He calls it “the dominant on the Face of the Other.” Bakhtin, actually, states the same in basically the same words when saying that this kind of formula “shifts the dominant to someone else's personality and in addition corresponds more closely to Dostoevsky's approach to the represented consciousness of a character.”<sup>59</sup>

The shift of the dominant on the Other is the beginning of real dialogue for Ukhtomskii as well. Once a conscious and fully determined effort is done and the intention to see and hear the Other becomes our dominant, he states, then, for the first time, we receive a real Interlocutor (Ukhtomskii called it the Law of the Deserved [Worthy] Interlocutor). The philosophy of Ukhtomskii appealed to actions, committed initiative, free and creative effort. Here it's obvious roll call with the early works of M. Bakhtin, especially with “The Philosophy of The Act” and his philosophy of dialogism.

It is important to mention that the shift of one's dominant on the Other, according Ukhtomskii, does not imply dissolving oneself in the Other but rather overcoming one's personal limitations in seeing the Interlocutor. This understanding eliminates the perceived difference

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<sup>58</sup> Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 254.

<sup>59</sup> Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 14.

between Ukhtomskii and Bakhtin when he talks of the “outsidedness.” When the hero is seen by the Author as the Other it means that the hero is not the author's projection or result of his *idea* of such a person. And the author, in his turn, also acts as the Other in relation to his hero because he performs the functions that, according to Bakhtin, only the Other can perform: sees the Hero from the outside and can comprehend and complete his life, destiny and body aesthetically.

According to Khalizev: Uktomskii's theory of communication resembles the provisions of H.G. Gadamer's and M. Bakhtin's hermeneutics. Let us note that the concept of dialogical relations [of Bakhtin] was formed after the appearance of the concepts of the Double and the Interlocutor in Ukhtomskii's manuscripts.<sup>60</sup>

When Bakhtin says that dialogic relations emerge whenever human consciousness manifests itself, he, actually addresses not only interpersonal communication but also the general relations of an individual with reality. These, in their turn, are subject to projection. Ukhtomskii: “By constructing thought, I construct reality - I state how it must be by necessity... I think and reflexively act because there exists before me a concrete reality, and I transform it into another, just as concrete reality. In my thinking, even in my most abstract thinking (as ‘scientific,’ for example, as mathematical one), I always construct projections of reality. I project a concrete existence, constructed according to my motives!”<sup>61</sup> Thus, the human consciousness responds to the external world “by authoring it.”<sup>62</sup>

But what was important for Ukhtomskii is that the gap between the “given” and the “perceived” is not unbridgeable. Clark and Holquist summarize his views as the following:

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<sup>60</sup> Khalizev, *Intuitsia Sovesti*, 26.

<sup>61</sup> Arkhiv Akademii Nauk SSSR, fond 749, op. 1, No. 90, § 9.

<sup>62</sup> Ukhtomskii, *Intuitsia Sovesti*, 136.

“However forcefully the real and represented world resist fusion...they are nevertheless indissolubly tied up with each other and find themselves in continual mutual interaction; uninterrupted exchange goes on between them, similar to uninterrupted exchange of matter between living organisms and the environment that surrounds them.”<sup>63</sup> This exchange is, again, a dialogue and reality itself occupies the place “of that ancient debater, who Plato sparred with,” as it unceasingly confines the projections of one’s thought. “The theory constantly tries to expand itself into universal teaching, and the facts of reality again and again confront it as new boundaries and new teachings.”<sup>64</sup> In simple words, this dialogue sounds like “I say: ‘here is how it should be’ and reality answers: ‘here is how it is.’”<sup>65</sup>

Some contemporary scholars, like Susan Petrilli and Augusto Ponzio, say that Ukhtomskii provided the biological basis of Bakhtinian dialogue, saying that the thinker “owes his dialogic view of the relation between body and world to the biological research of his time (such as Ukhtomskii’s). According to this view, the body and world are related dialogically such that the body responds to its environment modeling its world.”<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Clark and Holquist, *Bakhtin*,

<sup>64</sup> Alexey Ukhtomskii, *Zasluzhennyi Sobesednik* (Rybinsk: Rybinskoe Podvorie, 1997), 194.

<sup>65</sup> Ukhtomskii, *Zasluzhennyi Sobesednik*, 195.

<sup>66</sup> Susan Petrilli and Augusto Ponzio, *Semiotics Today: From Global Semiotics to Semioethics, a Dialogic Response*. (New York: Legas, 2007), 53. <https://catalog.princeton.edu/catalog/5410650>

## CHAPTER V

### THE INFLUENCE OF UKHTOMSKII IN MODERN RUSSIAN LITERARY STUDIES

Ukhtomskii's concept of the dominant turned out to be very fruitful for literary studies on different levels, because, as the scientist noted, it is "a law of very broad application."

A recent Russian textbook for Universities, *The Systemic View as the Basis of Philological Thought* (Moscow, 2016) introduces the idea of "the dominant analyses" of the literary work and uses Ukhtomskii's ideas as a premise for the practice.<sup>67</sup>

The authors of the textbook stay on Bakhtin's ground for understanding the literary work as including both textual and extra-textual elements (see Bakhtinian definition above). Russian word "произведение" doesn't have an exact equivalent in English (suggested words are "work," "piece," "creation," "composition," often the French "oeuvre" is a better choice). The dominant analyses, thus, consists of the pre-textual, textual, and post-textual dominants.

#### The Pre-textual Dominant

The pre-textual is all about that element of the system that Bakhtin calls "the author-creator."

"The dominant," Ukhtomskii wrote, "is like the 'ailment of the profession' '<...> it also serves as an instrument for seeing better within the profession.'<sup>68</sup> Thus, being essentially a conservative element, the dominant becomes that progressive power that puts everything at work

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<sup>67</sup> Olga I. Valentinova, V.N. Denisenko, S.Yu. Preobrazhenskii and M.A. Rybakov, *Sistemnyi Vzgliad kak Osnova Fililogicheskoi mysli* (Moscow: YASK, 2016).

<sup>68</sup> Ukhtomskii, *Dominanta*, (1966), 251.

for the purpose of creation. It is, as it has been defined earlier, capable of strengthening itself by *any* external impulse. Ukhtomskii wrote: "The mind, pregnant with the idea, like a dark cloud with the rain, suddenly finds a mechanism for its resolution in the midst of 'beside the point' impressions like climbing mountains on a sunny day (Helmholtz), or walking in the midst of a street crowd (Poincare), or contemplating monkeys in zoological garden (Kekule). Avenarius, exhausted by his work, was taken to Italy for some distraction on the advice of doctors. As it turned out later, he did not see anything in Italy, but with aggravated energy he collected materials for his work."<sup>69</sup>

The pre-textual dominant can be traced in diaries, drafts, letters, and in the selection of facts. The *Systematic View* textbook quotes Alexander Skaftymov: "An artist from a multitude of imaginative possibilities chooses one or the other only because he feels that it vaguely corresponds to something that he instinctively knows and seeks to give a form to."<sup>70</sup> This tendency "reveals itself in that inner principle according to which the Creator out of all the vast material of life selects for the artistic transformation certain particular facts, and not any others."<sup>71</sup>

Dostoevsky himself unambiguously refers to it in his novel *Demons*. There is conversation between Shatov and Liza, when they discuss the idea of writing a book. (Dostoevsky liked to use his heroes for voicing some ideas about literature, as we see in Devushkin's feedback about Gogol's writings)

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<sup>69</sup> Alexey Ukhtomskii, *Uchenie o Dominante* (Moscow: Yurait, 2017), 69.

<sup>70</sup> Olga Valentinova, "Vozmozhnosti Sistemnogo Podkhoda v Issledovanii Khudozhestvennogo Teksta," in *Sistemnyi Vzgliad kak Osnova Fililogicheskoi mysli* (Moscow: YASK, 2016), 279.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

“So it would amount to something with a political tendency, a selection of facts with a special tendency,” he [Shatov]muttered, still not raising his head.

“Not at all, we must not select with a particular bias, and we ought not to have any political tendency in it. Nothing but impartiality—that will be the only tendency.”

“But a tendency would be no harm,” said Shatov, with a slight movement, ‘and one can hardly avoid it if there is any selection at all. *The very selection of facts will suggest how they are to be understood.*”<sup>72</sup>

Thus, the pre-textual dominant can be seen as a departing point in the process of understanding of the text. Ukhtomskii found his first “hint” for the interpretation of the *Double* in Dostoevsky’s “The Diary of a Writer” of 1877. Dostoevsky expresses some regret that the *Double* didn’t turn out to be what he wanted and mentions that “there was nothing more important than this idea that I carried out in literature.”<sup>73</sup> (“<...>серьезнее этой идеи я ничего в литературе не проводил”). These words caused Ukhtomskii to look deeper into this narration in which many of Dostoevsky’s contemporaries and democratic criticism saw the story of madness of a “small person” neglected by the cruel society, and modern readers often read the story of “social anxiety.” There literary creation permits different interpretations; the pre-textual dominant, however, is the way to see the original authorial design. Indeed, the motif of the relations of the society and individual has never been Dostoevsky’s “most serious” concern. Rather, as A. Bem puts it “the main theme of Dostoevsky’s anthropology is the assertion that man exists on the border of two worlds, two spheres of being” (“Основная тема антропологии Достоевского – утверждение, что человек находится на границе двух миров, двух сфер

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<sup>72</sup> Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Demons* (Ware, UK: Wordsworth Editions, 2005), 125.

<sup>73</sup> Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Diary of a Writer*, trans. Kenneth Lantz (Northwestern University Press: 1993-1994), 1184.

бытия”).<sup>74</sup> This justifies the searches of the dominant in *the Double* in some other direction which both Ukhtomskii and Bakhtin followed.

The dominant of the “author-creator” is very pronounced in Tolstoy’s novels. According to Lidia Ginzburg “With enormous freedom he created whole worlds simultaneously introducing into them his own personality and his own experience <...> transforming that private experience into the structural principle of his fiction.”<sup>75</sup>

It should be mentioned, however, that for Bakhtin “the dominant of the author-creator” is not so much the personal dominant of a writer as it is the artistic dominant, for he states in *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*: “The artistic task resolved by the novel is in essence independent of that secondhand ideological refraction which perhaps occasionally accompanied it in Dostoevsky’s consciousness.”<sup>76</sup>

This statement can be to a certain degree reframed in a sense that the dominant of the text is not necessarily equal to the pre-textual dominant (indeed, as V. Soloviov said “The poet is not in control in his creation”/”поэт не властен в своем творчестве”) but I wouldn’t call even the polyphonic novel of Dostoevsky totally a “democratic” one in terms of its independence from the authorial personal dominant. In any case ‘the creation of the text marks the beginning of an independent life of the dominant, which now doesn’t depend on the artist and no longer subjected to him.’<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Alfred Bem, *Vokrug Dostoevskogo*, vol.1. O Dostoevskom (Moscow: Puskii Put, 2007), 576.

<sup>75</sup> Lidia Ginzburg, *On The Psychological Prose* (Princeton University Press, 1991), 245. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.libproxy.uoregon.edu/lib/uoregon/detail.action?docID=668945>.

<sup>76</sup> Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, 27.

<sup>77</sup> Valentinova, “Vozmozhnosti Sistemnogo Podkhoda,” 279.

## The Textual Dominant

The second part of the dominant analyses of the literary creation is the search of its dominant on the level of form. Here we seemingly have something tangible and constant to work with, i.e. “form”; the Formalists have done a great job in revealing the devices it uses and principles of its organization. Form constitutes the material for empirical research. Ukhtomskii, a researcher by nature, made a transition from theology to physiology precisely because the latter offered something tangible to research. But the same Ukhtomskii formulated an important principle for the research: “The science is a coherent world view in its core. Thus, it is a violation against the core principle of science when we want to understand life one sidedly.” (“Наука — это принципиально связанное миропонимание <...>. Поэтому — проступок против основного принципа науки, когда хотят понимать жизнь с ее какой-нибудь одной стороны”).<sup>78</sup>

When we read an account of the creative process by Andrei Bely, it looks like the pre-textual dominant predetermines the form. He calls it “the apparent content” that consists of a “vague emotional state,” but “the form of creative vision, that is the image that arises in our mind, depend son it. Moreover, the very choice of spatial and temporal elements, that is, the choice of rhythm and the means of representation are predetermined.”<sup>79</sup>

Thus, the pre-textual dominant is responsible for “rigid determination and certainty” in “the perceived randomness and absence of a motif.”<sup>80</sup> Ukhtomskii: “In the higher spheres of life, the dominant is expressed in the fact that all motives and works of thought and creativity are imbued

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<sup>78</sup> Ukhtomskii, *Iz Zapisnykh Knizhek*, 83. *Из Записных книжек. 1896–1911 // Ухтомский А. А. Заслуженный собеседник: этика, религия, наука. Рыбинск, 1997. С. 83.*

<sup>79</sup> Andrey Bely, *Selected Essays of Andrew Bely*, ed. Steven Cassedy (Univ. of California Press, 1985), 190.

<sup>80</sup> Valentinova, “Vozmozhnosti Sistemnogo Podkhoda,” 286.

with one hidden tendency, *penetrating into all the details*; in this trend - the key to understanding the details and to mastering them!" ("В высших областях жизни доминанта выражается в том, что все побуждения и произведения мысли и творчества оказываются проникнуты одною скрытою тенденциею, проникающею во все детали; в этой тенденции - ключ к пониманию деталей и к овладению ими!")<sup>81</sup>

We can call the dominant of the literary work *a key to understanding the details*. But what it is anyway? As noted by N. I. Zhinkin, in the end, the meaning of any text can always be reduced to a single utterance. The difficulty with the artistic text, however, is that when it is presented in the form of a denotative chain, it turns either into a journalistic text, or simply into a boring sequence of lexical elements. Often the author's view of reality is lost due to the multidimensionality and various implications of the semantic aspect of the literary text. This is especially true with poetry, as Gustav Shpet rightly noted: "the more one thinks about the idea of the poetic piece, the less of it remains. As a result, there is always some dry lump that does not deserve the name of the idea."<sup>82</sup>

V. Ivanov says that Bakhtin discovered a new and important philosophical premise about Dostoevsky: the writer never studied ideas as such but their *life* inside people and functions in relations between them. Here is how the author himself puts it in *A Raw Youth*:

"You like to use the words: "higher thought," "great thought," "binding idea," and so on," says Prince Sokolsky, "I would like to know what you actually mean by the word "great thought"?" "I really do not know how to answer this, my dear prince," Versilov smiled subtly. "If I confess to you that I myself do not know how to respond, it will be more accurate. A great thought is most often a feeling that too often remains without a definition for a long time. I only know that this has always been what life has flowed from, that is, not mental and not composed, but, on the

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<sup>81</sup> Ukhtomskii, *Dominanta*, 258.

<sup>82</sup> Gustav Shpet, "Esteticheskie fragmenty" in *Shpet G.G. Sochinenia* (Moscow: Pravda, 1989). 345

contrary, not boring and cheerful; so that the highest idea from which it expires is decisively necessary, to the general annoyance, of course.”<sup>83</sup>

At the same time Bakhtin insists on the inherent value of the form: “the artistic form, correctly understood, does not formulate the content that has already been found, but for the first time allows it to be found and seen.”<sup>84</sup> Dostoevsky, according Bakhtin, “posed and solved purely artistic tasks” in his works. This statement doesn't imply that Dostoevsky, as an author, was interested only in aesthetics; rather it implies that the dominant of the literary piece has no other means of self-expression in its disposal but artistic.

This bring us to some expanding of Jakobson’s definition of the dominant function of the literary piece as the aesthetic one. The following definition was suggested by V. Kukharenko: “The dominant of an artwork is its idea and/or the aesthetic function performed by it, in the search for which it is necessary to proceed from the language of the work.”<sup>85</sup>

It comes from the premise that dominant uses its every possibility to preserve (to confirm) itself at every level of the literary work. We can very conditionally call these levels “higher” and “lower” levels in the hierarchy, because the dominant is always a hierarchy.

If we consider the dominant of “the idea-aesthetic” level to be the “highest,” the second level, again, conditionally, can be defined as the level of composition and imagery. The dominant’s biological quality is to actively attract all the stimuli for its reinforcement; likewise, the dominant of the text will use all the means of artistic expression to reinforce itself. It will affect the composition, the chronotope, the arrangement of heroes, the main character (the bearer of the basic idea), and the unfolding of the structure of the plot, Valentinova suggests. It will be

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<sup>83</sup> Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Raw Youth*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volkonsky (New York: Vintage Classics, 2004), 218.

<sup>84</sup> Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, 43.

<sup>85</sup> Valeria Kukharenko, *Praktikum po Interpretatsii Teksta* (Moscow: Prosveshenie, 1988), 112.

present in the system of images in general and in every image in particular; that was discovered by Bakhtin in “the dominant of building the artistic image.” The very concept of the “artistic” serves this purpose, Dostoevsky believed: “Artistry, for example, let's say, in the novelist, is the ability to make it so clear in the *faces* and *images* of the novel that the reader, reading the novel, understands the *writer's idea* in exactly the same way as the writer himself understood it, creating his work” (“Художественность, например, хоть бы в романисте, есть способность до того ясно выразить *в лицах и образах* романа *свою мысль*, что читатель, прочтя роман, совершенно так же понимает мысль писателя, как сам писатель понимал ее, создавая свое произведение”).<sup>86</sup> Sometimes the images will even be “upgraded” to symbols (created by the author) or there will appear some universal symbols.

The level of the language is the third level of the dominant analysis. The authors of the textbook *The Linguistic Analysis of the Artistic Text* (Moscow, 2005) suggest that “preliminary consideration of the text from the point of view of idea and composition helps to reveal the specificity of its language structure determined by the dominant and to “prompt” the main direction, the leading line for the analysis of the language structure of the work. What is more important here is not the analysis of all the language, which can distract from the essential, but the selective analysis of narrative dominants, which outlines the main ideological and aesthetic contours of the text and its image structure.”<sup>87</sup> Sometimes the images will even be “upgraded” to symbols (created by the author) or there will appear some universal symbols.

It is interesting, that among the shortcomings of *The Double* Belinsky identified was the fact that almost all the characters speak a similar language. Bakhtin explained that the reader

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<sup>86</sup> Fyodor Dostoevsky, “Introduction” in *Zapiski o Russkoi Literature*, 5. <http://www.croquis.ru/2334.html>

<sup>87</sup> Liudmila Babenko and Yuri Kazarin, *Lingvisticheskii Analiz Khudozhestvennogo Teksta. Teoriia I Praktika* (Moscow: Flinta, 2005), 213.

sees all the heroes through the eyes of Golyadkin; through the prism of his consciousness, their appearance, actions and speech are refracted and transformed. But if one follows Ukhtomskii's understanding of the Dostoevsky's "most serious idea," the depersonalization of heroes, their indistinct speeches resembling Golyadkin's utterances, can be the way to render the feeling that in every person there is a part of Golyadkin's consciousness. There is yet another linguistic marker for the authorial dominant: at the very end of the story the German doctor Khristian Ivanovich, who spoke perfect Russian throughout the whole course of *The Double*, suddenly begins to speak broken Russian. This doesn't allow the reader to believe in the conspiracy of cruel society or malevolent foreigners and the mysterious Doubles against the main hero. Instead, it makes the reader "accept a psychological interpretation, where the Double is the dark side of Golyadkin's soul, replacing communication with the Other." <sup>88</sup>

The dominant can be looked for in the title, subtitle, epigraph, "key words," repetitions, names. For instance, the dedication of the *Karamazov Brothers* to Anna Dostoevskaya made T. Kasatkina interpret the dominant of the work as a novel about the happy marriage. <sup>89</sup> In my view it is an interesting and well-argued interpretation; we can't follow it in its details here, of course.

T. Kasatkina also studied repetitions in Dostoevsky's pieces and it seems to be a justified task: just as the repeated dreams are important in understanding one's subconscious, the repetitive phrases (and allusions) can reveal to us the subconscious of the author, for creativity is a subconscious process for the most part.

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<sup>88</sup>Sergey Fokin, ed., *Po, Bodler, Dostoevsky: Blesk i Nishcheta Natsional'nogo Geniia* (Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe obozrenie, 2017), 15.

<sup>89</sup> Tatiana Kasatkina, "Novye Slova Veschei," *Novy Mir*, no 10. (2011), accessed May 4, 2018, [http://magazines.russ.ru/novyi\\_mi/2011/10/ka14.html](http://magazines.russ.ru/novyi_mi/2011/10/ka14.html)

For example, in *Notes from a Dead House* the phrases like “it is not clear for what reason” or “I don’t know why” are the markers of an important allusion. The scene of the death of the inmate Mikhailov, evoking a scene of crucifixion, is preceded by the statement “I don’t know why I remember this death so vividly.” Or regarding the Christmas tradition of bringing hay to the barracks and strewing it about on the floor – “I do not know why, but hay was always strewed on the ground at Christmas time.” According to Kasatkina, “It is precisely in these moments that seem to be unnecessary for the outward story’s development that the inward storyline emerges, comes through. Usually it only shimmers under the surface of the outward story.”<sup>90</sup>

The dominant analyses of the artistic piece on different levels of its existence can form a special task for future research. It can help to follow how the various artistic means serve one purpose: to set the vector and to direct the reader’s consciousness, for, as Ukhtomskii said, “The task of the dominant to alert you in a certain direction.”<sup>91</sup> It also “pulls everything to itself” and organize everything into stiff hierarchy where “the more significant” governs “the less significant” and it is the dominant that define these roles. Reference?

There is nothing extra in the text, all elements have their meaning and to decode this meaning is “to materialize the subconscious of the author.”<sup>92</sup> Grigory Gukovskii, a prominent philologist associated with the Formalists, says, “To understand the idea of the literary piece means to understand the idea of all its components in their synthesis, their systemic wholeness, and, at the same time, of any of these elements in particular. If we failed to understand what

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<sup>90</sup> Tatiana Kasatkina, “Avtorskaia Pozitsiia v Proizvedeniakh Dostoevskogo,” *Voprosy Literatury* no.1 (2008), accessed May 4, 2018, <http://magazines.russ.ru/voplit/2008/1/ka9.html>

<sup>91</sup> Alexey Ukhtomskii, *Dominanta* (Moscow-Leningrad: Nauka, 1966), 254.

<sup>92</sup> Valentinova, “Vozmozhnosti Sistemnogo Podkhoda,” 299.

every particular element means, we failed to fully comprehend what all the literary piece means as a system.”<sup>93</sup>

The *meaning of the element* is what the dominant analysis is interested in; thanks to the Formalists we already know how the elements are arranged in the system: the group of them comes to the foreground (Tynianov) which makes the text unique. It was about *how* the dominant creates an *invariant of the aesthetically significant*. The concept of the dominant based on Ukhtomskii is about why the dominant functions the way it does. While Jakobson stresses the aesthetic function as the major one, Tynianov also states that “a work enters into literature and takes on its own literary function by this dominant.”<sup>94</sup>

With this statement he declares that the dominant has an extra function outside the text. The dominant function of a poetic utterance was defined by Jakobson as the aesthetic one.

Indeed, a literary piece gives us aesthetic pleasure and on that grounds alone its existence is justified. But do artists create only for the pleasure of mimesis? They do, but they also want to preserve their creation in eternity. A. Pushkin expressed this desire in a poetic form in his *Exegi Momentum*:

Not all of me is dust. Within my song,  
safe from the worm, my spirit will survive,  
and my sublunar fame will dwell as long  
as there is one last bard alive.<sup>95</sup>

Valery Bryusov in his *Sonnet to Form* expressed the same thought:

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<sup>93</sup> Grigory Gukovskii, *Izuchenie Literaturnogo Proizvedenia v Shkole* (Moscow-Leningrad: Prosveschenie, 1966), 101.

<sup>94</sup> Yurii Tynianov, “On Literary Evolution” in *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views* ed. Ladislav Matejka and Krystyna Pomorska (Ann Arbor, Mich. : Michigan Slavic Publications), 72-3.

<sup>95</sup> Alexander Pushkin, “Exegi monumentum,” trans. Vladimir Nabokov in *Portable 19th Century Reader*, ed. George Gibian, (New: Penguin Books, 1993), 21-22.

...So are the images of ever changing fancies,  
That, like the clouds, in the heavens race,  
Turned into stone, they exist for centuries  
In a fulfilled, exactly chiselled phrase.

And I believe, that all my dear dreams,  
That have attained the world of word and light,  
May find for them the long-awaited brims...<sup>96</sup>

The dominant, according to Ukhtomskii, is always active and directional, it has a *vector* as the underlying motif for the transformation of the rest of the system. “Integration and specification, which are the regular activity of the dominant, by the end of the day turn out to go in the direction of the pragmatic goal.”<sup>97</sup>

This pragmatic goal is always about the future life of the dominant: it seeks to preserve itself in eternity and re-produce itself in the minds of future readers as entirely as possible.

### The Post-Textual Dominant

As far back as 1953, Boris Pasternak wrote to N. Aseev about the tasks of art: “The difference between modern Soviet literature and the whole preceding one seems to me most of all in that the former rests on sure grounds regardless of whether it is read or not read.”<sup>98</sup> For Pasternak, on the contrary, writing should be aimed at a reader and that it exists for a reader.

We have already mentioned that according to the dominance principle, when meeting someone we mainly see *what this meeting arouses in ourselves*, but not who that person really is. Taking this as a premise, should we see the literary piece as a causative agent of certain emotions

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<sup>96</sup> Valery Bryusov, *The Sonnet to Form*, trans. Yevgeny Bonver, assessed May 4 [https://www.poetryloverspage.com/yevgeny/bryusov/sonnet\\_to\\_form.html](https://www.poetryloverspage.com/yevgeny/bryusov/sonnet_to_form.html)

<sup>97</sup> Valentinova, “Vozmozhnosti Sistemnogo Podkhoda,” 284.

<sup>98</sup> Boris Pasternak, foreword to *Doktor Zhivago* (Moscow: AST, 2010), 8.

rather than a transmitter of information? Simply due to the fact that every reader possesses a physical body, the encounter of a reader and a literary text is a subject of some objective physiological regularities.

The body's experience accumulates itself in the form of traces of once experienced dominants. They 'leave behind a solid, sometimes irreversible trace in the central nervous system.' ("...оставляет за собою в центральной нервной системе прочный, иногда неизгладимый след").<sup>99</sup> These traces can, under certain conditions, be animated. Reading is one such condition, that is, it affects our current or past dominants and either facilitates or resists the assimilation of information. This problem is very closely connected with the problem of understanding. "The experience of what was read falls into the realm of our personal experience. This introduction into oneself of what one has read we call *understanding* of the book."<sup>100</sup> According to Ukhtomskii, our understanding is based on the experience we have encoded in the form of dominants that are ready to work. In the works of Russian psycholinguists the dominant is one of the basic principles of the formation of meaning in the process of transposition in the perception of the text.<sup>101</sup>

One can rightly ask what is the point in literary studies if, due to our psycho-physiological limitations (not even mentioning other aspects as cultural, religious etc., see "context-oriented approaches") we don't actually encounter the artistic composition but rather our experiences related to it? At first sight, it seems that the dominant principle, to a greater or lesser degree, simply contributes to so called reader-response theories. Unlike the text-oriented approaches that

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<sup>99</sup> Ukhtomskii, *Dominanta*,(1966), 13.

<sup>100</sup> Valentinova, "Vozmozhnosti Sistemnogo Podkhoda," 276.

<sup>101</sup> Andrei Novikov, *Semantika Teksta i Ego Formalizatsiia*, (Moscow: Nauka, 1983), 215.

study the internal mechanism of texts and search for meaning only inside of it, the reader-oriented approaches consider the active participation of the reader in the realization of the literary work. In a very basic description, these theories maintain that the reader is not a *tabula rasa* on which there is inscription of new information, but already has information encoded into memory and that there are 'memory traces' (engrams), or after-effects of external stimulation. Richard Semon (1859 -1918) introduced to science the *mnemic principle* according to which our mind is a kind of a matrix of images, of engrams left by previous sensations.<sup>102</sup> This implies that what has been read is never coincides with what was written. The various interpretation of the Bible are the most obvious example.

According to Ukhtomskii, although our dominants, both current and lived-through, do affect perception, there is always the possibility of getting new knowledge on the basis of them. The illustration of the process is the experience when, after a time of separation, you meet an old friend. All previous worries are experienced again, new impressions are eagerly selected, and when the old friend leaves, you are surprised at how his image was reintegrated for you. This is exactly what Ukhtomskii means when he says that “The old dominant is always revived either in order to handle new data with past experience, or to re-integrate the old experience according to the new data.” (“Старая доминанта возобновляется или для того, чтобы при новых данных обойтись при помощи старого опыта, или для того, чтобы по новым данным переинтегрировать старый опыт”).<sup>103</sup>

Respectively, in the context of the dominant principle, there is always a revival of past experience that is reenacted in ourselves through the perceived literary creation. However, the

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<sup>102</sup> Richard Semon, *Mnemic Psychology*, trans. Bella Duffy, London: Allen and Unwin, 1923).

<sup>103</sup> Ukhtomskii, *Uchenie o Dominante*, 41.

ultimate effect of the reading, the understanding of what we have read, is not entirely predetermined, even though it is physiologically conditioned. Reading *War and Peace* can result in different outcomes for the same person when sixteen and, say, forty five years old. Boris Pasternak sees the reader's response "as an integral element, which the artist's construction can not do without, as the ray needs a reflective surface or in a refractive medium to play and light up."<sup>104</sup>

"The artist, as it were, is ready to give the reader some part (sometimes the biggest one) of his work for free interpretation in order to provide a stable understanding of the *certain* aesthetic information."<sup>105</sup>

This certain information is the most important about the text, it is its dominant. The last, fourth property of the dominant, as it is described by Uktomskii, makes it possible: "The dominant is characterized by inertia, i.e., by its tendency to maintain and repeat itself entirely when this is possible—even if the environment has changed and previous grounds for the reaction are gone." (Доминанта характеризуется своей инертностью, т.е. склонностью поддерживаться и повторяться ...при всем том, что внешняя среда изменилась, и прежние поводы к реакции ушли").<sup>106</sup> The dominant of the literary piece, thus, can reproduce itself in any particular context – cultural, historical, personal. Had it not been so there would be no such thing as world literature and our reading experiences would be limited by works of national authors. Indeed, translated works would render us the dominant of the translator, not of the original text. Most Russian contemporary works on the theory of translation consider the

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<sup>104</sup> Pasternak, foreword to *Doktor Zhivago*, 8.

<sup>105</sup> Valentinova, "Vozmozhnosti Sistemnogo Podkhoda," 282.

<sup>106</sup> Uktomskii, *Dominanta*,(1966), 13.

identification of the dominant of the text as a departure point of an adequate translation, and they build on Ukhtomskii. The dominant, while not cancelling the subjectivity of a particular reader, “resists it as an opposite pole” by the virtue of its inertia, i.e. the ability of self-preserving and self-renewal regardless of the current context. Of course, once read, the text is never equal to itself but the function of the dominant is not to preserve *everything* about the text but to preserve *itself* which is, again, a proof of its existence.

In his article “Literary Work: The Theory of the Artistic Wholeness” M. Girshman, discussing Leon Garfield’s statement that “Every new reader of Hamlet is, as it were, his new author” says that this can be true “only to the extent that this new reader has found not only and not so much oneself in Shakespeare as *Shakespeare in oneself*.”<sup>107</sup>

This *Shakespeare in himself* part is what the dominant analysis is really interested in. It implies, that regardless of the physiologically conditioned limitations of the reader the text itself possess a preserving mechanism that ensures the unity of its perception and understanding in eternity. It also implies that this mechanism, i.e. textual dominant, reveals the deeper causality of the text’s existence and can be found through the study of all the levels of the literary piece as system. And, finally, the dominant exists both in the form of the “foregrounding” in the “inactivated” state of the text, and as an activity of the representation of its essence once the text encounters its reader.

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<sup>107</sup> Mikhail Girshman, *Literaturnoe Proizvedenie: Teoria Khudozhestvennoi Tselostnosti* (Moscow: YASK, 2002), 99.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

“He sought in physiology the key to the solution of the basic problems of human existence, the key to an understanding of the mechanisms of behavior of the individual and his interrelationships with others,” says Ukhtomskii’s student and the author of his biography L. Merkulov. The law of the dominant discovered by Ukhtomskii provided answers to these and other essential questions regarding the relations of the individual with the environment. To respond to the world coherently, “the body must model its environment, track and map it, and translate its data into biological representation of it.”<sup>108</sup> The activity of the dominant, thus, affects perception and observation. “While it lasts, a dominant provides the integrity of perception—an “integral image.” Perception is not passive; it is subordinated to the current task through a dominant. We only notice things we currently need, everything else is ignored (and sometimes subjected to prejudiced interpretation). An integral image is stored in the organism and can later be reintegrated under different circumstances.”<sup>109</sup>

Ukhtomskii, however, stressed that the “given” and the “perceived” are not two worlds apart and saw the relation of mind and environment “as a dialogic continuum rather than as an unbridgeable gap.”<sup>110</sup> Ukhtomskii’s scientific works “provided an empirical ground for the

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<sup>108</sup> Clark and Holquist, *Bakhtin*, 175.

<sup>109</sup> Elena Y. Zueva and Konstantin B. Zuev, “The Concept of Dominance by A.A. Ukhtomsky and Anticipation” in *Anticipation: Learning from the Past: The Russian/Soviet Contributions to the Science of Anticipation*, ed. Mikhail Nadin (Cham: Springer, 2015), 20.

<sup>110</sup> Clark and Holquist, *Bakhtin*, 175.

idea of this ever-present, even if not realized, interaction of the observer and the observed, in the course of which neither can remain unaltered.”<sup>111</sup>

The dominant principle became the scientific basis for the most important philosophical concepts emerging in the field of the humanities in the 20th century and continuing to emerge today. One of the leaders here may be the philosophy of dialogism and the theme of the Other (A. Ukhtomskii, M. Bakhtin, V. Frankl, E. Levinas, M. Buber, E. Fromm).

The attitude of dialogism, according to Ukhtomskii, is the only realistic attitude an artist and a scientist can maintain, and it is “an ability not to linger in your abstractions and at all times be ready to choose a living reality instead.”<sup>112</sup>

Ukhtomskii called the dominant principle “a law of very broad application” and it really allows one to study not only physiological but also psychological, sociological, anthropological and many other processes; it turned to be essential for the studies of language on its different levels and currently is being developed in functional linguistics, translation studies and psycholinguistics in interrelation with the other relevant concepts.

In terms of application of the concept of the dominant for the literary studies, there is no direct evidence that the Russian Formalists based their work on Ukhtomskii, given their desire to use their own “original” concepts for literary studies. Still, the way that they applied this “happy term” of Christiansen, as Bakhtin calls it, creates certain allusions with Ukhtomskii: the dominant deforms, colors, makes temporarily insensitive; it never dies completely but waits for its opportunity to be restored. Bakhtin, on the other hand, never claimed for literary criticism complete disciplinary autonomy – he always seemed to welcome influences from a wide range of

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<sup>111</sup> Zueva, “The Concept of Dominance”, 14.

<sup>112</sup> Zueva, “The Concept of Dominance”, 22.

disciplines and studied the ideas of Ukhtomskii with great interest. This interdisciplinary approach was also distinctive for Ukhtomskii who believed that the creative work of a man is also a part of the artistic cognition of the world. “Artistic work can be called a research <...>, it is the continuation of scientific work, that is, the study of the laws of existence in the field of the human spirit.”<sup>113</sup> Unlike other kinds of cognition, it leads to the formation of the intellectual-emotive unity or the “objective-subjective” truth – in other words, to the formation of an authorial artistic conception that actualizes itself in the system of artistic images.

The importance of Ukhtomskii’s concept of the dominant for today’s literary studies is first and foremost due to the specificity of the process of the generation of the artistic piece: it is generated by the artistic activity of a human being and thus, the physiological properties of the dominant manifest themselves in an artistic creation. They manifest themselves in that inner principle that gives meaning to every element of the artistic form and ensures the unity of its authorial design and reader’s perception in every particular context of any time of history.

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<sup>113</sup> Ukhtomskii, *Intuitsia Sovesti*, 469.

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