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Introduction. Viktor Shklovsky's Heritage in Literature, Arts, and Philosophy

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ИЗДАТЕЛЬСТВО „ОГОНЕК“
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*Viktor Shklovsky's Heritage
in Literature, Arts,
and Philosophy*

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AND Howard Mancing
INTRODUCTION BY IRINA EVDOKIMOVA

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Introduction

Irina Evdokimova

This volume celebrates 100 years of Viktor Shklovsky's heritage: in 1918 when Shklovsky decided not to participate in politics anymore, he started his life-long career as a literary critic, writer, and screenwriter. At that time no one knew that he would become one of the most original, penetrating, and controversial literary critics of the twentieth century.

This book aims to examine the heritage of Viktor Shklovsky in a variety of disciplines. To achieve this end, we drew upon colleagues from eight different countries across the world—the United States, Canada, Russia, England, Scotland, Germany, Norway, and China—in order to bring the widest variety of points of view on the subject. But we also wanted this book to be more than just another collection of essays of literary criticism: we invited scholars from different disciplines—literature, cinematography, and philosophy—who have dealt with Shklovsky's heritage and saw its practical application in their fields. Therefore, all these essays are written in a variety of humanist academic and scholarly styles, all engaging and dynamic. And that is as it should be.

Perhaps for the first time, Viktor Shklovsky will be discussed from the point of view of such a wide range of approaches and methodologies. A primary objective was to articulate the enduring relevance and heritage of the great and varied works of Shklovsky during more than half a century, from the early 1920s to the mid-1970s. His work in aesthetics, philosophy, linguistics, history, and theory of literature are present here, as understood by a wide variety of distinguished scholars. In our case, we have chosen to minimize the editors' voices; we have imposed no strict definition of what we think Shklovsky's heritage should be on the contributors but have given them complete freedom to discuss the concept in their own terms, in their own style, in their own voice.

Much has been written on Shklovsky, and this book will take another look, from the angle of sixteen different perspectives, at the heritage of one of the most prominent thinkers of the twentieth-century, and perhaps open a new critical discourse that may well contribute to reshaping our current understanding of one of the most original literary figures—the Russian Formalist Viktor Borisovich Shklovsky.

In chapter 1 Michael Eskin aims to accomplish four things: (1) remedy the dearth of research on Shklovsky's dialogue with Yakubinsky, and more specifically, outline the latter's role as the methodological 'brains' that enabled Shklovsky's "Art as Device" to be perceived as the founding document of Russian Formalism; (2) revisit Shklovsky's earliest essays—"The Resurrection of the Word," "Potebnya," and "Art as Device" in light of their debt to and creative appropriation of Yakubinsky's work; (3) reread Shklovsky's polemic against Alexander Potebnya in light of his appropriation of Yakubinsky's work *and* in light of the ubiquitous presence of Husserlian phenomenology in Russia at the time; (4) argue that Shklovsky's entire "formalist" approach can be understood as an extroverted phenomenological reduction premised on the life-enhancing, *emotive* power of *evidence* offered up by the poetic text, which *impacts* the reader, hearer, etc. by way of the dynamic of the classical notion of *enargeia* (rendered into Latin as "evidence" by Cicero).

In chapter 2 Basil Lvoff argues that, having weathered a parade of scholarly movements from Structuralism to Deconstruction and modern trends, Viktor Shklovsky's legacy has remained relevant thanks to its perennial principle of defamiliarization. The author maintains that literary critics tend to underestimate Shklovsky's fifty-year-long odyssey after his public, albeit forced and ostensible, recantation of Formalism. Therefore, the period from 1930 to 1984 is in the limelight of this chapter, which aims to outline the arc of Shklovsky's post-Formalist evolution. At the same time, the chapter compares Shklovsky's major works after 1930 with his earlier ones that share similar theoretical or generic features. For example, the densely theoretical *Theory of Prose* (1925/1929) is juxtaposed with *Bowstring: On the Dissimilarity of the Similar* (1970); the epistolary novel *Zoo, or Letters Not about Love* (1923) is compared to its later, sanitized edition and *Letters to a Grandson* (published in 2002); some parallels are also drawn between Shklovsky's 1929 and 1963 books on Leo Tolstoy.

In chapter 3 Slav Gratchev analyzes a series of interviews with Viktor Shklovsky that were conducted in 1967–1968 by professor Victor Duvakin in Moscow. Many years had to pass before the recording could become a book that truly reflects the spirit of times—when the most dramatic events of the twentieth century were happening in Russia and the USSR. This is a slice of Russian micro-history but even more trustworthy because it relies on the

living voice of that history, the voice of a real participant in events that for the longest time in the USSR could not be openly discussed. Shklovsky, besides being a well-known and brilliant literary theorist, was a friend and interlocutor of many famous people whose lives and deaths, up to these days, remain a mystery to us. Through these informal dialogues that are not constrained by censorship or fear, we will be able to shed some more light on the real characters, instincts, habits, and views of those people. By “listening” to these dialogues, one will see the reflection of history in the eyes of a real witness who, in most cases, was just a good fellow citizen and suffered during those times, like thousands of others. This essay will talk in detail about these dialogues.

Chapter 4 by Victor Fet and Michael Everson problematizes the Russian Formalist concept of defamiliarization, or estrangement, in literature and art—a concept that has been adopted recently as a strategy in literary translation. The authors argue their point by examining the concept of defamiliarization in translations of Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), one of the most translated English literary texts. Fet and Everson suggest that any attempt to translate this famous book that is often referred to as “untranslatable wordplay” has always faced the issue of handling defamiliarization, and they show how two differing approaches were used in two Russian versions translated by Nina Demurova. Therefore, the chapter discusses various approaches in which the translators handle defamiliarization following the tradition established by Lewis Carroll himself.

David Gorman in chapter 5 examines and interrogates Shklovsky’s ideas about narrative with the aim of treating them not only as part of a finished record, but also as having continued potential for narratology. First, his essay delineates a basic corpus of Shklovsky’s work on narrative during the era of Russian Formalism (primarily *Theory of Prose* [1925, 1929]); it also addresses the difficulties of discerning Shklovsky’s ideas about narrative because his style was that of a creative writer rather than an academic critic. Gorman argues that Shklovsky developed a number of general aesthetic concepts, which he applied to literary narrative in his Formalist writings. The second part of this essay deals with topics of this kind, including the history of art as a discontinuous movement “from uncle to nephew” (including such notions as canonization and parody), the distinction between material and form (popularized as *fabula/sujet*), and defamiliarization. The last part of the essay turns our attention to Shklovsky’s engagement with narrative, to his methods of folkloristic as well as literary criticism, including motifs, plot types, and device versus motivation.

In chapter 6 Melissa Garr engages us with Thomas Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49* and Jorge Luis Borges’s “Death and the Compass,” and explores how the authors deliberately defamiliarize the genre itself by using symbols to lure the main characters into fake mysteries that end ambiguously in the

middle of the labyrinth of clues, with no way out. The author argues that the investigators actively create mysteries that are in themselves red herrings, or semiotic subversion of the genre's tropes and expectations.

By applying Shklovsky's critical frameworks to these works, this essay will highlight semiotic subversions in postmodern detective fiction and symbolic representations of law and order.

Chapter 7 by Serguei Oushakine discusses a series of texts in which Shklovsky in the 1930s laid out the basics of the art of writing: *Tekhnika pisatel'skogo remesla* (The Technique of the Writer's Craft, 1930) and *Kak pisat' stsenarii: posobie dlia nachinayushchikh stsenaristov s obraztsami stsenariiev raznogo tipa* (How to write a screenplay: a textbook for beginning screenwriters with templates of various screenplays, 1931). While the first one provided a collection of elemental rules with instructive vignettes, explaining how to produce a reasonable and professional text, the second one offered a crash course on how to produce plays for a quickly expanding cinematic industry. The third essay *Kak my pishem* (How We Write, 1930) proposed a self-reflective observation on fifteen years of his own writing career, emphasizing his montage-like approach to building the narrative. The essay aims to revisit these three didactic texts by reading them through Shklovsky's own "theory of prose." In a sense, his manuals were aimed to operationalize his famous maxim that the ultimate goal of art is "to renew the process of making a thing" by breaking down "the process of making" into manageable stages and operations. Consequently, the essay explores what these basic elements of the writer's craft were; to what extent was Shklovsky capable of instrumentalizing the insights and devices that he discovered during his reading of Tolstoy and alike for a larger audience? Or, to put it simply, did his "theory of prose" have any practical—*prosaic*—application?

Chapter 8 by Norbert Francis turns our attention to Russian Futurism, an avant-garde current that surprised readers and writers alike during the years of social ferment leading up the 1917 revolution. In particular, the participants in the movement themselves had no idea what events would have in store for them. Three among them, Bruno Jasienski, Vladimir Mayakovsky and Viktor Shklovsky, are representative of the literary upheaval and explosion of creativity that we look back to as a turning point in literature. Taken together for comparison, a study of their work also gives us an idea of the confusion of the time, how outcomes often seemed strangely arbitrary, and how events took unexpected turns. On another level, the route taken by each writer, nevertheless, is consistent with the overall direction of art and culture during the Soviet era. Shklovsky, authors argue, perhaps was the writer who most directly challenged the assumptions of early Socialist Realism (more precisely its precursors) who survived to reflect on the history, and precisely on an interesting aspect of this history—the relationship between the Futurists and Russian Formalism. The essay explores in detail. The discussion of

their work will turn on three important historical studies that trace the course of the revolution and the course of parallel literary currents.

In chapter 9 Rachel Schmidt proposes that in his *Theory of Prose* (1990), Viktor Shklovsky demonstrated how Miguel de Cervantes structured his novel *Don Quixote de la Mancha* part 1 through a combination of framing and threading. Framing allowed the author to inset stories that at first glance do not share an obvious connection with the journey of the main characters, Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, whereas threading assimilated the motif of the interpolated stories to the frame. Shklovsky noted, that without these techniques, Don Quixote's speech on the Golden Age (book 1, chap 11) is "essentially out of place." This essay argues that in *Don Quixote* book 2 threading and framing allowed Cervantes to incorporate important non-literary genres of his period that govern masculinity and politics into the literary plot; that Cervantes structured his book 2 (chapters 1–24) around the nonliterary discourses of the *ars moriendi* (the art of the good death), *verdadera honra* (true honor), the political *arbitrio* (a form of reform-minded treatise) with its emphasis on *razón de estado* (reason of state), and even the art of swordsmanship.

In chapter 10 Grant Hamilton turns our attention to the influence that Shklovsky's work has had on the field of world literature. Working from the proposition that the sense of defamiliarization that attends the experience of reading world literature is not so much a matter of writerly technique as it is a constitutive feature of the literature itself, Hamilton begins by stressing the significance of Shklovsky's notion of *ostranenie* to discussions of world literature. Following this, he moves into a discussion of the way in which Shklovsky's thought sits at the core of one of the major ways in which contemporary literary critics have attempted to "do" world literature in the twenty-first century—the quantitative analysis of literary texts spearheaded by Franco Moretti and his methodology of "distant reading." Described by Jonathan Arac as a "formalism without close reading," Moretti's methodology of distant reading is shown to rest on the Shklovskian belief that plot is the fundamental unit of literary analysis, and that such analysis has the potential to create "models" of literary texts that have the potential to allow one to see the underlying structures of complex objects like literary texts. The chapter concludes by stating that because of such visionary work in the quantitative analysis of world literature conducted by critics such as Franco Moretti, the legacy of Shklovsky's work is likely to be felt in the field of world literature for many more decades to come.

In chapter 11 Steven Mills considers how Viktor Shklovsky altered the direction and substance of literary theory by arguing that art casts a vision of the mundane in new contexts and perspectives. This paradox forces the spectator to behold an object as if for the first time and compels her to appreciate and engage the object with renewed value. His essay, focusing on Rosa

Montero's novel *Tears in the Rain*, proposes a new vision for Shklovsky's theory of *defamiliarization*: novels that make social issues strange intend the reader to face these problems afresh, and the works shift away from literary art and become social art. As conversations toward social change continually address the topics of racism and bigotry, they also face the danger of weakening by over discussion. *Tears*, suggests Mills, distances the individual from the social comfort zone to effect change as it forces the reader to see anew problems that were once hidden. The essay suggests that *defamiliarization* and *shklovskian* thought have shifted from literary theory to social actions as kindling to reignite the discussion of equality.

Chapter 12 written by Eric Naiman explores the influence of Shklovsky's most famous article, "Art as Device," on the writing of Laura Mulvey's extremely influential "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." Essentially, this article's methodology is one of comparative deconstruction; and as the author considers the meaning of the term "feminist formalism," he uses each article to explore the way in which dynamics of gender trouble the argument in the other. Naiman suggests that Shklovsky's article has a misogynistic tenor that has rarely been explored, while Mulvey's approach to gender is internally inconsistent: a manifesto for feminist filmmaking and film-watching unfolds by attacking the image of woman. Is this because Mulvey's article founders as a result of its reliance on Shklovsky's canonical critical text? In responding to this question, the author considers the textology of both articles: the changes in the works in the course of their publication and republication reveal the way in which potentially disruptive forces were repressed and smoothed over. Naiman notes that there has been very little attention to Shklovsky's article as a single work; likewise, Mulvey's manifesto has been considered for its ideas, but not for the rhetoric of their expression.

In chapter 13 Annie van den Oever brings to our attention an essay by Maxim Gorky "In the Kingdom of Shadows" that suggested that the Lumière's cinematograph proved to be a machine that created distortions and disproportions in the representation of people and things, making them *look strange* if not *grotesque*. The author argues that for Gorky, the images created by the new cinema machine had an abundant and often hilarious expressive potential—the potential that soon was unleashed to the fullest by the Futurist performances adding to the already existing "craze" of the early film shows.

Consequently, her essay argues that Viktor Shklovsky's modern art theory of the 1910s, revolving around the famous key term *ostranenie* ("making strange" or estrangement) and focusing on the *estranging* techniques used in the arts and their evident effects, must be understood in relation to the ways the new cinema machine made humans and things *look strange* if not *grotesque*, as Gorky had aptly argued in 1896. The *strangeness* of the early film

shows as understood by Gorky and the *craze* celebrated in the avant-garde performances by Shklovsky and his Futurist friends form the basis of this key text founding Russian Formalism. In essence, this chapter presents a radical critique on the dominant readings of this modern art theory and the foundational text by Shklovsky as “Russian Formalist,” and to support its claim, the essay revisits the “Art as a Technique” within the historical context of the effects of the new cinema machine and what it really “did” to make Maxim Gorky label it as a “grotesque creation.”

Chapter 14 presents us an essay written by Alexander Markov who talks about how the leaders of Russian formalism distanced themselves from philosophical discussions, considering their radical criticism of the preceding aesthetic as sufficient solution of philosophical problems. He argues that the case of Shklovsky, who introduced philosophical modes of argumentation not only for polemical purposes, but for better interdisciplinary studies of art, is the most important. Therefore, he aims to reconstruct this positive argumentation, often unclear due to the declarative style of Shklovsky’s writings. The author proves that deep inspection of art as a psychological fact among facts and acts of consciousness allowed Shklovsky to reintroduce the most influential philosophical traditions, not as an intellectual fashion, but as a framework for reassembling art criticism as both subjective and objective. In conclusion, Markov suggests that the appeal to the semiotic project of Leibniz that tends to explain odd transitions between grammar, rhetoric, and poetics in Russian formalism, as well as Nietzsche’s doctrine of subjective risks of the progress, and Buecher’s explanation of the origin of art from rhythmic work—are all relevant for the formalist notion of device. Shklovsky’s uniqueness is in combining all three philosophies in his cinema theory: the frame was understood in Leibniz’s mood, the cinema plot came closer to Nietzsche’s doctrine of tragedy, and film reception was arranged according Buecher’s naturalistic approach to art. The essay suggests that the major achievements of Shklovsky’s analysis were an integral part of Russian philosophy, seminal for discussions on the social mission of philosophers and writers and on poetics as program of rational argumentation in the world of creative decisions.

Chapter 15 by Ilya Kalinin explores one particular and unexpected intellectual substrate of Shklovsky’s ideas by referring to the figure of Nikolay Fyodorov (1829–1903) and his radical, controversial and utopian “Philosophy of Common Task.” Having influenced many figures of the Russian avant-garde, including Vladimir Mayakovsky and Velimir Khlebnikov, Pavel Filonov and Andrey Platonov, the teachings of Fyodorov were suppressed in the 1930s, along with the utopianism of early revolutionary culture. The author asserts that Viktor Shklovsky, who had assumed the status of one of the most prominent literary critics in the USSR from the 1930s and had emerged most forcefully at the center of cultural life in the Khrushchev era of

the “Thaw” (1953–1959), still had his roots in the avant-garde origins of Soviet culture that endowed him with additional symbolic weight. Thus, the author tries to demonstrate that practically all early works of Shklovsky were rooted in the avant-garde culture where the name of Fyodorov was completely absent. However, as Kalinin argues in the essay, in today’s revealed *fedorovian* stratum one may find the echo of Russian cosmism in Shklovsky’s early works that deal with the poetic language.

In chapter 16 Holger Pötzsch highlights a certain ambivalence in the thinking of Viktor Shklovsky that seems to oscillate between an arguably reductive art-for-art’s-sake position where attention to literariness and estrangement merely reveals a play of form apparently without connections to an extra-literary or extra-artistic reality, and a deeply contextualizing approach that perceives art’s main function as challenging and renewing a reader’s or onlooker’s view onto, and therefore, being in the world. In this chapter, the author will argue that this *doubleness* is not something emerging at a late stage of Shklovsky’s career but has been a decisive feature in his thinking from the very beginning. Consequently, this chapter traces this ambiguity with reference to the mixed origins and legacies of Shklovsky’s key term of *ostranenie*. Then, through a comparison with Brecht’s V-effect, it will highlight important differences between the two thinkers and point to political implications of these. The essay will argue in favor of a contextual understanding of *ostranenie* as directed toward the world, yet as still different from Brecht’s dialectical understanding. Finally, the chapter will present illustrative examples from applications of the concept of *ostranenie* in the study of computer games and highlight a senso-motoric understanding of the concept that is specific for this “new” medium.

This is the book that we are pleased to offer to your attention.