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Poetics and Politics of Estrangement: Victor Shklovsky and Hannah Arendt

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Abstract This essay proposes to place the poetics of Russian Formalism within a broader European context of literary, philosophical, and political reflection on modernity. The historical metamorphosis of estrangement from a technique of art to an existential art of survival and a practice of freedom and dissent is traced here through Victor Shklovsky's experimental autobiographical texts of the 1920s and their critical reception. In this analysis, estrangement is not regarded as an escape from the political; instead, it helps us think anew the relationship between aesthetic and political practices in Stalin's time. Shklovsky's writing on estrangement and freedom is read together with Hannah Arendt's reflections on distance, freedom, and the banality of evil.

The last fin de siècle inspired many philosophers, political commentators, and literary scholars to dwell on the euphoric melancholia of an ending. The triumphalist end of history promoted by Francis Fukuyama (1992) was followed by more reflective declarations of the end of art and literary theory (Danto 1997; Tihanov 2004). In the twentieth century, the beginning of a new literary theory was ushered in by Victor Shklovsky's conception of artistic estrangement in the 1917 essay "Art as Technique." By the 1970s, the theory that had once promised to foster a new artistic vision of the world was considered by many to be outmoded, too unsystematic for structuralism, too noncommittal for Marxist or post-structuralist criticism, and inferior to the better-known Brechtian Verfremdung.[1] Yet, at the end of his life, the

1. Written between December 1915 and December 1916 (with the censor's clearance dated December 24, 1916), the essay was first published in 1917. For an English translation of "Art

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ninety-year-old master of estrangement, Victor Shklovsky, challenged nostalgic and teleological visions of history and spoke about "the resonance of beginnings." Looking back at his early work, Shklovsky did not renounce his conception of estrangement; on the contrary, he saw it as a cornerstone of artistic unpredictability and freedom that reflected the transformations of the modern world.[2] I would like to postpone the mourning of literary theory and instead explore the "resonance of new beginnings," revealing the unpredictable connections between artistic and political theory.

"It is in the nature of every new beginning that it breaks into the world as an infinite improbability, yet it is precisely this infinitely improbable which actually constitutes the very texture of everything we call real." Thus Hannah Arendt (1979: 3–4) describes the experience of freedom. For her, freedom is something "fundamentally strange" that pushes us beyond "routinization and automatization of the modern life" (ibid.). A new beginning does not mean a return to a tabula rasa; rather, it is a form of imaginative recovery, an experience that is also an experiment in thinking, acting, and judging. It is in such an experimental fashion that I wish to recover some unexpected connections between aesthetic and political theories and practices in the twentieth century. Hannah Arendt's definition of freedom bears a striking resemblance to the discourses of modernist aesthetic theory, particularly Victor Shklovsky's conception of estrangement. In my view, the poetics of the Russian Formalists should be placed in the broader European context of literary, philosophical, and political reflection on modernity. Estrangement can be read together with Walter Benjamin's (1986b) theories of aura, Aby Warburg's (1997) conceptions of distance and cultural symbolization, Georg Simmel's (1971) theories of cultural play, and the

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as Technique," see Shklovsky 1965 [1917]. For comprehensive discussions of Formalist theory, see Striedter 1989; Steiner 1984; and Hansen-Löve 1978. Bertolt Brecht coined his own term *Verfremdung* to distinguish himself from Marxist and Hegelian notions of *Entfremdung* and *EntäuSerung*, which are usually translated as "alienation." Marxist critics in the Soviet tradition distinguished between the Brechtian concept, translated as *otchuzhdenie*, and that of Shklovsky. In turn, the German translations of Shklovsky's term self-consciously avoided Brechtian connotations. Thus Renate Lachmann (1970) has suggested the term *Seltsammachen* (making strange) to render Shklovsky in German. On the apolitical reading of Formalism, see Jameson 1974. Many scholars have concluded that Bertolt Brecht knew about Shklovsky's conception of estrangement. See Günther 2001 and Ungvári 1979, discussed in Galin Tihanov's article in this issue.

I have revised some aspects of the Shklovskian conception of mimesis and of the spatial and political dimensions of estrangement since the publication of my essay "Estrangement as a Lifestyle: Shklovsky and Brodsky" in *Poetics Today* (see Boym 1996).

2. Shklovsky (1983a: 635) writes: "Art is built on the principle that history is unforeseeable, it is unpredictable because art is not myth." On the "resonance of beginnings" (*sozvuchie nachal*), see ibid.: 40. Translation from the Russian is mine unless otherwise indicated.

reflections on the ordinary marvelous in the works of the surrealists. In this essay, I will focus on the connection between estrangement and freedom by reading Shklovsky together with Hannah Arendt's essays on freedom, judgment, and the banality of evil.

In Western scholarship, Shklovsky's estrangement has often been perceived as estrangement from politics. Thus the Italian intellectual historian Carlo Ginzburg (1996) traced the cultural genealogy of estrangement back to the Stoic conception of inner freedom as a form of withdrawal from politics.[3] While exploring further the connection between artistic practices and conceptions of freedom, I would argue that Ginzburg's interpretation does not take into consideration the historical contexts of the Formalist writings. In fact, Shklovsky's experimental autobiographical texts written in the 1920s indirectly reflect upon the complex and paradoxical relationship between inner freedom and political freedoms that is later illuminated in the works of Hannah Arendt. In Soviet Russia, the theory and practice of estrangement underwent a dramatic transformation, preserving a remarkable political and existential vitality. After the October revolution, Shklovsky's programmatic essay "Art as Technique" began to haunt the theorist himself. The dream of a revolutionary new beginning turned into the uncanny political reality of the Stalin regime. As early as 1923, Shklovsky (1990b: 271) remarked that after the revolution, Russian life had almost turned into art, endangering all aspects of everyday existence. No longer an exclusive property of art, by the late 1920s and early 1930s estrangement had become expropriated by the Soviet state, which assumed "totalitarian authorship"[4] over a new glorious vision of Soviet reality that radically defamiliarized the everyday perceptions and experiences of ordinary citizens. Therefore, many artists had to perform a double estrangement in order to repossess their aesthetic and existential devices or, to use Lenin's phrase, to "expropriate the expropriated." For the strange "state art" transferred into life differed dramatically from their expectations, threatening not only artists' professional practices but also their very existence.

Between 1918 and 1926 Shklovsky wrote three unconventional autobiographical texts in which he connected techniques of estrangement to the practices of freedom and unfreedom. In a letter to Roman Jakobson in-

3. Carlo Ginzburg focuses on the connection between estrangement and the Stoic discourse on inner freedom, particularly in the work of Marcus Aurelius, one of Tolstoy's beloved writers, and criticizes Shklovsky for ignoring his own philosophical heritage and focusing mostly on Russian examples.

4. This concept is based on Hannah Arendt's notion of "totalitarian fiction," which is a form of ideological fiction created by a totalitarian (or "authoritarian" in my preferred usage) state. This concept was recently elaborated by Tolczyk (1999).

cluded in *Tret'ia fabrika* (*Third Factory*), Shklovsky (1977 [1926]: 36) worries about the survival of both estrangement and freedom in postrevolutionary Russia: "Romka, I am exploring the unfreedom of the writer. I am studying unfreedom as though it were a set of gymnastic equipment."[5] Conscientious pursuit of subversive Formalist gymnastics made Shklovsky aware of the changing contexts of estrangement. From a device of art, estrangement became an existential art of everyday survival and a tactic of dissent in Russia and Eastern Europe. The cultural metamorphosis of estrangement and some of its extraliterary adventures in the context of Stalinism and beyond will be explored here through the examination of Shklovsky's lesser-known experimental autobiographical texts.

Hannah Arendt's notions of distance, freedom, and totalitarian fiction help to challenge further the apolitical or antipolitical conception of estrangement. Tracing an alternative path through her texts, I will propose a distinction between estrangement *from* the world and estrangement *for* the world and try to rethink the relationship between aesthetics and politics. No real-life encounter between Shklovsky and Arendt ever took place, although they could have brushed against one another on a Berlin tram sometime in the 1920s. Using Shklovsky's device of parallelism, I will stage a conjectural encounter between the two thinkers that will hopefully be mutually illuminating, revealing the political aspects of the transformation of Shklovskian estrangement and the aesthetic foundations of Arendt's political theory. This can contribute further to the discussion of the relationship between aesthetics and politics in the context of modernity.

1. Victor Shklovsky's "Monument to Liberty": Estrangement as the "Third Way"

It is little known that Victor Shklovsky was the first to describe the Soviet statue of liberty. In his collection *Khod Konia* (*Knight's Move*) (1923), containing essays written in Petrograd, Moscow, and Berlin between 1919 and 1921, Shklovsky offers us a parable about the metamorphoses of historical monuments that functions as a strange alibi for not telling "the whole truth" or even "a quarter of truth" about the situation in postrevolutionary Russia. In 1918, the monument to czar Alexander III in Petrograd was covered up by a cardboard stall with all kinds of slogans on it celebrating liberty, art, and revolution.[6] The "Monument to Liberty" was one of those transient

5. This translation has been slightly modified. For the original, see Shklovsky 1926: 67.
6. The statue was erected by the sculptor Paolo Trubetskoi in 1909 on Znamensky Square near the Nicholas Station, now Vosstaniia Square near the Moscow Railway Station.

nonobjective monuments that exemplified early postrevolutionary "visual propaganda" before the granite megalomania of the Stalinist period. This is how Shklovsky (1923: 196–97) introduces the story:

> No, not the truth. Not the whole truth. Not even a quarter of the truth. I do not dare to speak and awaken my soul. I put it to sleep and covered it with a book, so that it would not hear anything. . . .
>
> There is a tombstone by the Nicholas Station. A clay horse stands with its feet planted apart, supporting the clay backside of a clay boss. . . . They are covered by the wooden stall of the "Monument to Liberty" with four tall masts jutting from the corners. Street kids peddle cigarettes, and when militia men with guns come to catch them and take them away to the juvenile detention home, where their souls can be saved, the boys shout "scram!" and whistle professionally, scatter, run toward the "Monument to Liberty."
>
> Then they take shelter and wait in that strange place—in the emptiness beneath the boards between the Tsar and the revolution.

In Shklovsky's description, the monument to the czar is not yet destroyed, and the monument to liberty is not entirely completed. A dual political *symbol* turns into a lively and ambivalent urban *site* inhabited by insubordinate Petrograd street kids in an unpredictable manner. (Shklovsky calls them "Petrograd Gavroches," making an explicit allusion to the French Revolution and its fictional representations.) In this description, the monument acquires an interior; a public site becomes a hiding place. Identifying his viewpoint with the dangerous game of the street kids hiding "between the tsar and the revolution," Shklovsky is looking for a third way, the transitory and playful architecture of freedom.[7] He performs a double estrangement, defamiliarizing both the authority of the czar and the liberation theology of the revolution. The "third way" here suggests a spatial and temporal paradox. The monument caught in the moment of historical transformation embodies what Walter Benjamin called "dialectic at a standstill." The first Soviet statue of liberty is at once a ruin and a construction site; it occupies the gap between the past and the future, in which various versions of Russian history coexist and clash.

The ambivalent parable betrays the precariousness of the writer's own political situation. The founder of Formalist theory had an adventurous albeit brief political career. He took part in World War I and was awarded

7. This ludic architecture can be compared to the Baroque figure of anamorphosis. As in Hans Holbein's famous painting *The Ambassadors* (1533), it reveals the skulls and "skeletons" in the closet of the revolution, which are represented here by the dangerous games of street kids who are trying to escape from revolutionary reeducation. I am grateful to Tatiana Smoliarova for drawing my attention to the concept of anamorphosis.

the Georgian Cross for outstanding bravery. Severely wounded twice, left with seventeen pieces of shrapnel in his body, Shklovsky was operated on in the military hospital and, while there, according to his own recollection, tried to recite Khlebnikov to the surgeon in order to bear the pain. Although he was a supporter of the February revolution, he did not initially embrace the events of October 1917. In fact, in 1918 Shklovsky joined the right wing of the Socialist Revolutionary Party, which voted against the Bolshevik dispersal of the Constitutional Assembly; later he became one of the organizers of an anti-Bolshevik coup (Sheldon 1977: vii; Chudakov 1990: 17). Shklovsky was an advocate of democratic freedoms (just like Gorky at that time), and in much of his postrevolutionary autobiographical writing the discourse on public freedom is present between the lines of his texts, often through references to the French Revolution and theories of the social contract. This was his own version of "socialism with a human face," if one were to apply an anachronistic definition. Threatened with arrest and possible execution, Shklovsky crossed the Soviet border on the frozen Gulf of Finland and eventually found himself in Berlin. *Knight's Move* was written in Berlin as the writer reflected on whether he should return from exile, back to Russia, where his wife was being held hostage. The parable about the "Monument to Liberty" becomes an allegory of the transformation of the revolution and its many lost opportunities.

Shklovsky's "Monument to Liberty" is a monument to his favorite device of estrangement, which also undergoes some postrevolutionary transformation and "emigrates" from the text into life. Let us remember that Shklovsky coined his neologism *ostranenie* in his early essay "Art as Technique" to suggest both distancing (dislocating, *dépaysement*) and making strange. *Stran* is the root of the Russian word for country, *strana*, and the word for strange, *strannyi*: the Latin and Slavic roots are superimposed upon one another, creating a wealth of poetic associations and false etymologies. It is not by chance that Shklovsky refers to Aristotle's observation that poetic language is always to some degree a foreign language. Foreignness here is of a poetic and productive kind, enticing rather than alienating. From the very beginning, Shklovsky's ostranenie is defined differently than alienation, the latter usually translated by the Russian term *otchuzhdenie*. Shklovsky's theory of estrangement was intended in opposition to the economic and utilitarian discourse of efficiency and useful expenditure. The device of estrangement places emphasis on the process rather than the product of art, on retardation and deferral of denouement, on cognitive ambivalence and play. By making things strange, the artist does not simply displace them from an everyday context into an artistic framework; the artist also helps to "return sensation" to life itself, to reinvent the world, to experience it anew. Estrangement is

what makes art artistic; but by the same token, it makes life lively or worth living.[8]

From the beginning, ostranenie was connected to theatrical experience. In "Art as Technique," Shklovsky examines Tolstoy's descriptions of theater as examples of estrangement; in his later work he speaks of the importance of the trope of "parabasis" that was frequently employed in the German Romantic theater to lay bare and play with theatrical illusions and to dwell on what Denis Diderot called the "paradox of the actor." This ironic model of the theater of estrangement is radically different from the Wagnerian conception of drama as the total work of art, which influenced the creation of mass propaganda art in Hitler's Germany and Stalinist Russia alike. When Walter Benjamin (2003 [1939]) spoke about the fascist "aesthetization of politics," in the essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility," he had in mind this model of a grand, total work of art that destroys the sphere of political action by turning it into state-sponsored spectacle. In his 1920s' review of the theater of Nikolai Evreinov, Shklovsky satirized early Soviet attempts to create a spectacular "total work of art" out of the experience of the October revolution. Seven years before Sergei Eisenstein's famous film *October*, Nikolai Evreinov created a mass spectacle of the "Storming of the Winter Palace," using ten thousand extras, many of whom would later confuse their theatrical memories and their recollections (or lack thereof) of the actual storming of the Winter Palace. Shklovsky (1990a: 118–19) called Evreinov's total work "a vaudeville with a grandiose answer." In his view, estrangement is an exercise of wonder, of thinking of the world as a question, not as a staging of a grand answer. Thus estrangement lays bare the boundaries between art and life but never pretends to abolish or blur them. It does not allow for either a seamless translation of life into art or the wholesale aestheticization of politics. Art is meaningful only when it is *not* entirely in the service of real life or realpolitik and when its strangeness and distinctiveness are preserved. So the device of estrangement can both *define* and *defy* the autonomy of art.[9]

8. To some extent, the theory of estrangement depends on the demonization of *byt*, which is perceived in Russian culture as the monster of everyday routine, opposed to the poetic and spiritual *bytie* (for a discussion of byt, see Boym 1994). Estrangement also relies on a certain uncritical conception of "automatization." Both Striedter (1989) and Steiner (1984) discuss the "mechanistic" aspects of the Shklovskian notion of estrangement. Steiner (1984: 47), however, makes the insightful remark that Shklovsky's concern with technique was pragmatic from a paradoxical point of view: "The Formalist leader did not enter the field of Russian letters as an academic observer or an armchair theoretician, but as an active participant—a creative writer."

9. The technique of estrangement differs from scientific distance and objectification; estrangement does not seek to provide the "Archimedean point" from which to observe hu-

Hence, such an understanding of estrangement is different from both Hegelian and Marxist notions of alienation.[10] Artistic estrangement is not to be cured by incorporation, synthesis, or belonging. In contrast to the Marxist notion of freedom that consists in overcoming alienation, Shklovskian estrangement is in itself a form of limited freedom endangered by all kinds of modern teleologies.

Estrangement is more than a gesture and a technique; it delimits a certain kind of utopian architecture that exists in the "emptiness beneath the boards, between the tsar and the revolution." In his first revolutionary exercise in literary criticism, "The Resurrection of the Word" (1914), which he read on the stage of the Stray Dog cabaret, Shklovsky (1990a: 39) describes the ornamental and nonfunctional arches of the nearby historicist eclectic building on Nevsky Avenue, which exemplifies "architectural absurdity" and a habitual disregard for structures and functions. Later, though, Shklovsky's own imagined architecture of freedom came to be represented not by the functionalism of the international style but, rather, by the poetic function shaped by the knight's move and Lobachevskian parallelisms. Like his contemporaries, Shklovsky was fascinated by modernist science, from Einstein's theory of relativity to Nikolai Lobachevsky's non-Euclidian geometry. Throughout the 1920s, Shklovsky developed his own conception of parallelism. Use of the word "parallel" here may be misleading, especially from the conventional Euclidian perspective. To borrow Vladimir Nabokov's (1981: 58) description of the Gogolian version of Loba-

manity. Kafka suggested in one of his parables that humanity found the Archimedean point but used it for its own destruction. Arendt (1977) identified this search for the position outside the human world as the major philosophical problem with many forms of scientific knowledge. In the 1930s, Osip Mandel'shtam (1994 [1932]: 237) explored further the difference between poetic and scientific distance, entering into a dialogue with the founding father of Russian science and poetics, the eighteenth-century polymath Mikhail Lomonosov, who spoke about a peculiar "distance-stance" (*dalekovatost'*) of science. In Mandel'shtam's view, poetic language can never fix this "distance-stance"; the rhymes are pining in exile, caught in a never-ending process of saying goodbye and taking leave. Shklovsky's theory and practice of estrangement are engaged in a similar vertigo of distancing and domestication.

10. In his essays on the phenomenology of art, Hegel also speaks about freedom and alienation as well as art's particular role in mediating between different realms of existence. In a discussion of Dutch paintings, he calls art a "mockery" of reality, a form of irony. These ideas are close to the Formalists, yet Shklovsky by no means embraces the larger frame of the Hegelian system. In his later work, Shklovsky engages directly with Hegelian theories of literature. Speaking of *Don Quixote*, for example, Shklovsky (1983b [1925]: 370) observes that Hegel was not interested in "*Don Quixote* but in Don Quixotism," not paying attention to the particular strangeness of art. "In the words of Hegel there is no movement. Hegel had an impression that he sees from the hindsight of eternity everything, including the imperial police" (ibid.). The Brechtian V-effect can be read as a creative reinterpretation of Hegel. For more on the relationship between Shklovsky and Brecht, see the essays in this issue.

chevsky's geometry: "If the parallel lines do not meet, it is not because meet they cannot, but because they have other things to do." Shklovsky's parallelisms hesitate among irony, analogy, and allegory, all of which are rhetorical figures based on doubleness, double entendre, or speaking otherwise. To describe this device, Shklovsky uses the figure of the chess knight (also one of Nabokov's beloved figures). Shklovsky's collection of sketches and essays about postrevolutionary Russia opens with a kind of baroque emblem—a chess board with the serpentine diagonal of the knight's move across the gridded space:

> There are many reasons for the strangeness of the knight's move, and the most important reason is the conventionality of art. I write about the conventionality of art. The second reason is that the knight is unfree, he moves sideways because the straight road is banned to him. . . .
>
> In Russia everything is so contradictory that we all became witty unwillingly. . . . Our torturous road is the road of the brave, but what else can we do when we have two eyes and see more than honest pawns or dutifully single-minded kings? (Shklovsky 1923: 9–10)

Shklovsky shares with Nabokov and Ferdinand de Saussure an affection for the chess game.[11] Here the knight exemplifies the paradox of artistic play; the conventional "unfreedom of art" offers a certain liberation of thinking and judgment. The knight's serpentine road is the road of the brave that allows the literary thinker to see further than the "honest pawns" and the "dutifully single-minded kings."[12]

11. Nabokov used the figure of the knight in his first English-language novel, *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*. In his *Speak, Memory*, Nabokov tells the story of leaving Russia on a ship called *Hope*; not suspecting the finality of this departure, young Vladimir played chess with his father, moving the knight across the board as the ship zigzagged out of the harbor.

12. The genre of Shklovsky's writing in the early 1920s is also exemplarily modernist. The Formalists and the members of LEF (Left Front of Art) advocated the de-novelization of prose, the estrangement of plot, and the exploration of new everyday genres of the public literary sphere: the newspaper feuilleton, the sketch (*ocherk*), the anecdote, and the document, in order to produce "the literature of facts" (Shklovsky 1929). Yet Shklovsky's own practice of ocherk and *literatura fakta* harks back to Charles Baudelaire's (1995: 12–15) conception of the sketch of the "painter of modern life" who represents the present ("Sometimes such a sketch is closer to a prose poem than to a political feuilleton"). Another curious parallelism: When Walter Benjamin (1986a: 132) traveled to Moscow in the winter of 1926–27, he refused to offer any "theory" about the Soviet experience, claiming enigmatically in a letter to Martin Buber that in Moscow "all factuality is already theory" and the role of the critic is to collect those "facts" of the fleeting present in the land of the future. "Fact" does not refer to a positivistic notion of fact but rather to *literatura fakta*, close to the German tradition of the new objectivity. While capturing the materiality of daily existence, those "facts" in the writings of both Shklovsky and Benjamin always hover on the brink of allegory; the closer to material existence they are, the more "auratic" and aphoristic they become, thus defamiliarizing both the

In the 1920s and 1930s, Shklovsky wrote three autobiographical texts, each unfolding a story of the transformation of estrangement into a poetics of unfreedom through the device of parallelism. The most radical example occurs in *Sentimental'noe puteshestvie* (*A Sentimental Journey*) (1923), an account of the author's journeys through Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and parts of central Asia, from the fronts of World War I to the Civil War. In this text, Shklovsky (1984 [1923]: 60) uses parallelism to estrange the historical legitimacy of the October revolution itself:

> I'll cite a parallel. I'm not a Socialist—I'm a Freudian.
>
> A man is sleeping and he hears the doorbell ring. He knows that he has to get up, but he doesn't want to. And so he invents a dream and puts into it that sound, motivating it in another way—for example, he may dream of church bells.
>
> Russia invented the Bolsheviks as a motivation for desertion and plunder; the Bolsheviks are not guilty of having been dreamed.
>
> But who was ringing?
>
> Perhaps World Revolution.

Shklovsky's *A Sentimental Journey* abounds in descriptions of violence, presented in the most stark and unsentimental fashion. Violence is by no means excused or glorified as a part of the "necessary revolutionary sacrifice" for the sake of the future liberation of humanity. Nor are the numerous descriptions of dismembered bodies presented as examples of modernist aesthetic disfiguration or the "dehumanization of art." The latter term was coined by the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset, who argued that, in contrast to Renaissance art and the nineteenth-century novel, man is no longer at the center of modern art; the new art does not "imitate reality" but operates through inversion, by bringing to life a reality of its own and realizing poetic metaphors. Ortega y Gasset (1968 [1925]: 35) wrote: "The weapon of poetry turns against the natural things and wounds or murders them." Shklovsky too once suggested that blood in poetry is not blood but only a sound pattern. Yet in describing pillage, slaughter, pogroms and the daily cruelty that he witnessed at the front, Shklovsky redirects his estrangement. It no longer "dehumanizes" in Ortega's sense but rather makes real the "fear of war"[13] that has become so habitual for soldiers and for the ideologues of violence. Thus the technique of estrangement lays bare the senseless dehumanization

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notion of the document and the discourse of ideology. The unity of such de-novelized prose is held together by the storyteller, not by the subject matter. One of the émigré reviewers of Shklovsky's collection of sketches in Berlin called it an autobiography; if so, it is an autobiography that recounts the self-estrangement of the theorist-storyteller (Chudakov 1990: 15).

13. In "Art as Technique," Shklovsky (1965 [1917]: 12) argues that art exists in order to combat the "habitualization" that "devours works, clothes, furniture, one's wife, and the fear of war."

of war. Shklovsky describes the estranged psyche of a friend who, awaiting his sentence, suppressed the will to live, repressed the thoughts of his family, and was solely afraid that before his death the executioner would make him take off his boots and that he would get tangled up in the shoelaces. Reporting the practices of war communism, the execution of the poet Nikolai Gumilev, and the death from hunger of another poet, Alexander Blok, Shklovsky (1984 [1923]: 238) appeals to the Soviet citizens:

> Citizens!
>
> Citizens, stop killing! Men are no longer afraid of death! There are already customs and techniques for telling a wife about the death of her husband.
>
> It changes nothing. It just makes everything harder.

Haunted by the brutal materiality of war, Shklovsky (1990b [1923]: 60) sticks to the "literature of facts" and resists the transformation of violence into metaphor or a mere means to a beautiful end: "I wrote [*A Sentimental Journey*] remembering the corpses that I saw myself." Shklovsky's "sentimental journey" might not be sentimental in any conventional way, but it is extremely sensitive; it does not try to domesticate the fear of war; it individualizes the dead and the wounded, humanizing them through art.

Shklovsky (1984 [1923]: 211) writes that his fellow soldiers in the Russian army considered him a "strange man." The writer attributes this strangeness to his conflicting revolutionary and humanistic imperatives as well as to his half-Jewishness. "I . . . am half-Jewish and an imitator" (ibid.: 195), Shklovsky writes about himself, revealing a parallelism between his artistic and existential techniques.

The son of a Jewish father and a half-German, half-Russian mother, Shklovsky constantly plays a part in a comedy of errors when it comes to his identity. The irony in his conversation with Persian and Turkish Jews resides in the fact that both sides see the other as more Jewish. Thus Shklovsky reports an encounter with an Assyrian man who took him for a typical Ashkenazi Jew and told him apologetically that the Assyrian tribe had destroyed the temple of Solomon that Shklovsky's tribe had built but that the Assyrians promised to restore it. Shklovsky remarks that the man himself was a descendant of ancient Aramaic Jews, while he, Shklovsky, was only half-Jewish. Yet it is not accidental that the writer has so much sympathy for the local culture: "One other characteristic reconciled me to the East: the absence of anti-Semitism" (ibid.: 111). The paradoxes of identity and identification continued in Shklovsky's relationship with his Russian fellow soldiers. In his words, they "forgave" him his Jewishness because of his brave and impulsive behavior, both in military action and in the attempts to protect the local population from pogroms and to limit the "col-

lateral damage." But the same soldiers exhibited "transsensical antisemitism" (*zaumnyi antisemitizm*) toward the other Jews in the army who tried to resist the rampant violence. This is demonstrated in the story of the almost cartoonish character of Brachmann, a Jewish would-be commissar who does everything he can, including humiliating himself, in order not to kill. Even when Brachmann learns to explode a bomb, he gets no respect from the Russian soldiers (ibid.: 211).

At one point during his war adventures, Shklovsky challenged a rich "bourgeois" Jewish man to a duel in a romantic attempt to save a beautiful and talented girl from a marriage of convenience. Nevertheless, Shklovsky speaks honestly about his conflicting motives. He admits "hating the bourgeois" because of not hating them enough and remaining himself "petit bourgeois," in spite of all his revolutionary rhetoric. The duel ends rather bloodlessly. Shklovsky shoots through the identity papers in the man's pocket, and his opponent, luckily, misses his target. The opposition between bourgeois and antibourgeois as well as between traditional Jews and "half-Jews and imitators" is not stable; sometimes it looks more like what Freud called "the narcissism of minor difference." The Jews in Persia think of themselves as ancient Assyrians, while the imitators continue the age-old practices of Talmudic textual interpretation. Evoking Ilya Ehrenburg, Shklovsky (ibid.: 194) writes about his Jewish contemporaries: "The Jews have lost their identity and are now searching for it. For the time being, they make faces." The storyteller of *A Sentimental Journey* also "makes faces" [*grimasnichaet*] and searches for self-expression through multiple self-estrangements. In his view, this is the only honest way to follow the "road of the brave" during the time of confusion and violence that Shklovsky describes in *Knight's Move*.

In Shklovsky's second attempt at an experimental autobiography, *Zoo: ili, Pis'ma ne o l'ubvi* (*Zoo; or, Letters Not about Love*) (1923), written after his escape from postrevolutionary Petrograd to Berlin, estrangement becomes a form of communication and an existential tactic of surviving unrequited love in exile. *Zoo, or Letters Not about Love, or the New Heloise* is an ironic epistolary romance based on the actual correspondence between Shklovsky and Elsa Triolet, sister of Vladimir Mayakovsky's lover, Lily Brik, and future French writer and the wife-to-be of Louis Aragon. These *Letters Not about Love* are, of course, letters about love. Alya, the "new Heloise," declares that she values her freedom most of all, prohibiting her Formalist lover to speak about love and begging him to discuss his literary theory instead (Shklovsky 1990b [1923]: 291); the result is a rare dialogical text about love and freedom. Shklovsky the lover includes (occasionally under erasure) letters by his beloved that completely contradict his own assessment of her. Shklov-

sky the writer places Alya's texts side by side with his own, thus launching the literary career of the future French realist novelist Elsa Triolet. While dialogical, the love remains entirely unrequited. "When you write to me—how, how, how much you love me, on the third 'how' I begin to yawn," writes cruel Alya in one of her last letters (ibid.: 346). The "new Heloise" is a good Formalist disciple: she learns some techniques of literary analysis from her teacher, putting the emphasis on the "how" instead of the "what." Contrary to the classical plot of the pedagogical romance, Shklovsky's letters succeed pedagogically but not erotically. (Later Elsa Triolet would choose a different aesthetic, persuading her future husband Louis Aragon to move from surrealism to Socialist Realism.)

As a twentieth-century love story, Shklovsky's work reflects what Georg Simmel called "modern eros," which is opposed to "Platonic eros" in its conception of individuality. "Modern love," writes Simmel (1971: 245–46), "is the first to recognize that there is something unattainable in the other; that the absoluteness of the individual self erects a wall between the two human beings which even the most passionate willing of both cannot remove and that renders illusory any actual possession." The unattainable in this case is not the transcendental but the human, for it can never be instrumentalized or possessed. Simmel's wall of the modern eros is not merely an enclosure or separation but a boundary where play and eros emerge. It has to do with the same elusive architecture of freedom that needs the support of partitions, anchors, and arches to define the space of play. Read in this light, Shklovsky's epistolary novel tells the story of the lover's pained recognition of the freedom of the other—in this case, her freedom not to love him in return.

After *Zoo*, Shklovsky returned from exile to Soviet Russia only to become "an internal émigré" denounced as a Formalist (as well as a dangerous practitioner of the cosmopolitan discipline of comparative literature). By the mid-1920s the Formalists were under attack on all sides by Marxists and traditionalists, whom Shklovsky called the makers of a "Red Restoration." "Material being conditions consciousness but conscience remains unsettled," wrote Shklovsky in 1926, paraphrasing Karl Marx (Shklovsky 1977 [1926]: 7).[14] His postexilic text *Third Factory* is an autobiography of the

14. This translation has been slightly modified; the original is: "Bytie opredeliaet soznanie, no sovest' ostaetsia neustroennoi." The slogan "material being conditions consciousness" has been attributed in the Soviet sources to Feuerbach, Hegel, Marx, and Lenin. Importantly, in Shklovsky's context, this slogan opened the 1924 declaration of a radical Constructivist group that declared that the writer had to serve the demands of the social and Industrial Revolution (LTsK [Literature section of Constructivists], "Tekhnicheskii Kodeks"; quoted in Goriaeva 2002: 123).

"unsettled conscience" that persists in spite of the determinism of "material being." Shklovsky proposes to speak not about estrangement but about the freedom of art and to attempt a theory of unfreedom. The text opens with an anecdote about Mark Twain, who wrote letters in duplicate: the first letter was destined for his addressee and the second one for the writer's private archive; in the second letter, he recorded what he really thought. This is perhaps the earliest formulation of the Soviet Aesopian language that would become a foundational fiction of the Soviet intelligentsia, a technique of speaking or reading between the lines and understanding one another with half-words. Between the 1930s and the 1980s, this Aesopian language would bind together the imagined community of the Soviet intelligentsia.

Third Factory is one of the first Soviet texts that thinks about censorship as an artistic problem and reflects upon it through literary devices. The text is organized as a collage of the actual text and a draft for a film script that will in the end be shelved. The film script, not coincidentally, deals with sailors who, right after the French Revolution, look for an island utopia called Envy Bay and discuss the social contract. Yet *Third Factory* itself is an example of neither samizdat nor dissident writing; rather, it is an attempt to negotiate some kind of contract between the writer and the state according to which the writer gets to preserve the public space and the limited independence and solidarity of the "writers' guild," *tsekhovaia solidarnost*.[15]

Shklovsky (1977 [1926]: 47–49) writes that the Soviet writer of the 1920s must choose between writing for the desk drawer and writing on state de-

15. The pain of the writer's situation is represented through the repetition of the traumatic scene of making flax, in which the writer makes himself the author-product of the state, not merely an author-producer. This is at once a polemic with the Constructivists and with Tolstoy in which Shklovsky explicitly distances himself from Tolstoy's didactic conception of art.

To describe the current situation of the Formalist "second factory," Shklovsky (1977 [1926]: 45) tells a story about the "Flax Factory" in the chapter "On the Freedom of Art":

> FLAX. This is no advertisement, I'm not employed at the Flax Center these days. At the moment, I'm more interested in pitch. In tapping trees to death. That is how turpentine is obtained.
>
> From the tree's point of view, it is ritual murder.
>
> The same with flax.
>
> Flax, if it had a voice, would shriek as it's being processed. It is taken by the head and jerked from the ground. By the root. It is sown thickly—oppressed, so that it will be not vigorous but puny.
>
> Flax requires oppression. . . .
>
> I want freedom.
>
> But if I get it, I'll go look for unfreedom at the hands of a woman and a publisher.

The flax factory offers an interesting allegory; the author tries to persuade himself that freedom and unfreedom are only a matter of point of view, yet one thing emerges clearly from this painful ironic tour de force: his "conscience remains unsettled" and very aware of the "shrieks and jerks" in the process of social production and the adaptation to "oppression."

mand. "There is no third alternative. Yet that is precisely the one that must be chosen. . . . Writers are not streetcars on the same circuit." One of the central parallelisms Shklovsky explores in *Third Factory* is the unfreedom of the writer caught in the play of literary convention and the unfreedom of the writer working under the dictate of the state, specifically an authoritarian power. The two deaths of the author—one a playful self-constraint and the other the acceptance of the state telos—are not the same. Inner freedom and the space of the writer's creative exploration are shrinking in the context of public unfreedom. Shklovsky speaks about the secret passages in the walls of Parisian houses that are left for cats, an image that seems to refer to the shrunken literary public sphere in the 1920s. The number three in the title of Shklovsky's last experimental autobiographical text is not accidental: using the Soviet productionist metaphor, Shklovsky speaks about his school as the "first factory," his training in the OPOYAZ as the beloved "second factory," and his place of employment, the Third Factory of Cinema, as the factory of Soviet life. Shklovsky promises to surrender to it at the end, yet he asks it to preserve the rights of the writers' guild and their need to breathe the air of a free city.[16]

Thus Shklovsky's own practices of literary estrangement in his autobiographical texts do not merely point to the tradition of inner freedom and stoic withdrawal from public life, as Carlo Ginzburg suggests. Rather, Shklovsky's evolution mirrors a different history suggested in the writings of his contemporary, Hannah Arendt. Exploring the genealogy of the Western idea of freedom, Arendt observed that the Stoic conception of inner freedom, as the "inner polis" or "inner citadel" of a person estranged from public life, came as a response to an earlier conception of public free-

16. Notably, Shklovsky's three autobiographical texts end in "ostensible surrenders" to the Soviet "factory of life"; these are insightfully discussed by Richard Sheldon (1977) in his introduction to *Third Factory*. One should keep in mind both the historical and personal circumstances of these surrenders: Shklovsky's exile after the unfolding of the "Affair of the Socialist Revolutionaries," during which many of them were executed, and the taking of his wife as hostage. Also, each surrender is written as a cruel and ambivalent parable at the end of the text in which the author asks the Soviet authorities not to repeat "the Arzerum story." In this fable of tragic miscommunication during the Persian campaign of World War I, supposedly told to Shklovsky by Zdanevich, the Asker people were found murdered, wounded in the head and in the right arm, "Because when the Askers surrender they raise their right arm" (Shklovsky 1990b [1923]: 347). In the first Soviet publication of *Zoo*, the story was simply eliminated by the censor. In the 1930s, Shklovsky tried to write the new Soviet prose and even contributed to a collective volume by Soviet writers praising the Stalinist construction site and site of forced labor, the White Sea Canal (Belomorkanal); Shklovsky went there to visit his imprisoned brother. His writings, however, were continuously criticized for their "estranged manner." He was accused of writing "in the same style about Dostoevsky, about a movie and about the military campaigns of the Red Army, so we don't see Dostoevsky and we don't see the Red Army. The only thing we see is Shklovsky" (Chudakov 1990: 25).

dom of the Athenian polis. Public freedom meant citizens' rights to take part in the civic activities in the polis, to speak freely, to contribute to the political process, and to perform on the public stage of a city-state. It is in ancient Athens that the word *freedom*, initially merely the negative term *adouleia* (nonslavery), came to acquire positive connotations. The connection between inner freedom and public freedom reveals itself at the level of metaphors. It is not by chance that Stoic philosophers such as Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius spoke about the "inner polis" of one's self or an "inner citadel," internalizing the public architecture of freedom, at the time of the disappearance of the polis. The notion of estrangement from worldly concerns and a focus on inner freedom moves to the center of philosophical attention at the height of the Roman Empire and a time of growing disappointment with democratic ideals. Similarly, the evolution of Shklovsky's theory and practice of estrangement has more to do with the vanishing of the postrevolutionary literary public sphere and the transformation of a public culture of literary debates into a guarded citadel of inner freedom that could only be revealed to a small network of like-minded friends. Such transformation suggests a genealogy of estrangement that is quite different from the one proposed by Carlo Ginzburg. The evolution of an aesthetic practice into an existential and political practice does not escape from the historical situation of the time but lays bare its precarious foundations.

Support for this hypothesis can be found in the testimonies of Shklovsky's contemporaries. Thus fellow OPOYAZ survivor Boris Eikhenbaum (1929: 132) wrote that Shklovsky was a "special type of writer," the free-thinker, adventurist, and revolutionary in the old-fashioned Decembrist style:

> Shklovsky is not merely a writer, but a special type of writer. In this respect, his role and position are exceptional. In another epoch, he would have been a St. Petersburg freethinker, a Decembrist revolutionary, would have wandered around the South with Pushkin and fought duels.

Similarly, in her diary of 1927, Lidiia Ginzburg (1989: 59), the literary critic and younger disciple of Yuri Tynianov and Shklovsky, observed: "The merry times of laying bare the device have passed (leaving us a real writer—Shklovsky). Now is the time when one has to hide the device as far as one can." The practice of aesthetic estrangement had become politically suspect already by the late 1920s; by 1930, it had turned into an intellectual crime. In 1930, Shklovsky renounced Formalism in a public declaration published in *Literaturnaia gazeta* under the title "A Monument to a Scientific Error." The genre of this declaration is a peculiar hybrid of the tame manifesto and the ambiguous parable with foreign novelistic analogies. To explain his scientific error, Shklovsky uses his favorite device of paradoxi-

cal parallelisms. He refers to Jules Romains's novel *Donogoo Tonga*, about a city built by mistake whose residents decide to erect a monument to scientific error. After a tactical display of quotes from Engels, he presents the Formalists not as ideological enemies of the Soviet Marxists, but as absent-minded scientists who built their theory of non-tendentious literary science in error, like that imaginary novelistic city. Shklovsky, a veteran of World War I, manipulates the military metaphors frequently used in Soviet public discourse, only instead of pursuing an ideological civil war between those who are with us and those who are against us, Shklovsky speaks about the "neutralized areas of the front," which he equates with non-tendentious art (*nenapravlennoe iskusstvo*) and criticism. While engaging and estranging militaristic rhetoric of the Soviet literary discourse of the late 1920s, Shklovsky vows to move forward from the "Linnaean" typology of literary science to the Darwinian-Marxist evolutionary dialectics. Yet instead of practicing the Marxist sociological method, he follows Yuri Tynianov's theory of cultural evolution and his own practice of Lobachevskian parallelisms.

Once again, the text of the declaration can be read as an ambivalent parable of a conditional surrender. "A Monument to a Scientific Error" adopts the movement of the knight and presents an oblique apology for the same "third way" of the "non-tendentious" sphere of critical inquiry. "I do not wish to be a monument to my own error," writes the seemingly repentant Formalist critic. One is struck by the fact that the monument to a scientific error is a very Shklovskian monument, strategically positioned on the side roads of history. Is it possible that Shklovsky is actually erecting a monument to Formalism in disguise while covering it up with a few politically correct ready-mades, just as the Soviet "Monument to Liberty" covered up the statue of the czar?

Shklovsky's fellow Formalists Yuri Tynianov and Boris Eikhenbaum treated this "monument to scientific error" not as treason, but as a survival tactic. The textual ambivalences of the declaration did not escape them. Nor did they escape the attention of Shklovsky's Marxist attackers. M. Gelfand published a harsh critique of Shklovsky's supposed apology in his essay "The Declaration of King Midas; or, What Happened to Victor Shklovsky" (1930). In spite of the ominous undertones of Gelfand's critical rage, one cannot deny him some crucial insights. Gelfand challenges Shklovsky's opportunistic defense of Formalism and criticizes the movement as steeped in "Kantian idealism" and lacking in Hegelian-Marxist dialectics. Moreover, Gelfand attacks Shklovsky's "neutralized area of the front," claiming that Shklovsky confused the revolutions and remained an adept of the "bourgeois" February revolution with its interest in civic freedoms and artistic independence. (One can hardly disagree with this statement; indeed the

February revolution and its constitutional program must have remained for Shklovsky a lateral possibility, the road not taken by Russian history.[17])

Parodying Shklovsky's method of parallelism, Gelfand tells the story of King Midas, declaring the "reformed" Shklovsky a disguised Midas with Formalist ears. At the end, Gelfand (1930: 15) raises the stakes by asking: "what happened to Victor Shklovsky?": "One cannot renounce false and reactionary methods. One can either eliminate them or remain enslaved by them. Shklovsky failed to understand this truth. Nothing happened to Victor Shklovsky. His declaration demonstrates that Marxist literary science has to face the most acute and urgent necessity *to eliminate the school of the 'neutralizers,' the school of militant literary reactionaries*" (emphasis in the original). If the year of Gelfand's critique were not 1930 but 1937, this kind of threat of elimination would be taken literally, threatening the writer's life, not only his critical practices.

In his diary, the famous children's writer and critic Kornei Chukovskii recounts a curious discussion that took place several years after the official suppression of Formalism. In 1934, Maxim Gorky and Lev Kamenev proposed to Tynianov, Tomashevsky, Shklovsky, and Eikhenbaum that they compose a technical book, "a guide to the technology of creativity," which would contain all the "techniques of art" to educate new Soviet writers. Tynianov and his fellow critics cautiously declined such a "formalist" offer from the newly baptized "founding father of Socialist Realism," Maxim Gorky, saying that they did not wish to do this because it was not their "way of thinking about technique" and that it would amount to "hackwork" (*khaltura*) (Chukovskii 1994: 108). The Formalist conception of technique that consisted of laying bare the device, revealing the mechanisms of manipulation, and renewing the habitual worldview was the opposite of the utilitarian technology of popular literature or propaganda that aimed at mass reproduction of the devices of manipulation with maximum efficiency. In his essay "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," Clement Greenberg (1971 [1939]) distinguishes between avant-garde artistic devices that develop reflective consciousness and strategies of kitsch that reproduce the effects of manipulation. The former Formalist critics implicitly made a similar distinction in their rejection of this invitation to put Formalist methods to the use of Socialist Realism. While interested in the craft aspects of art, they never wished to substitute craft for art. At the end of the discussion of the "guide to the technology of creativity," Gorky and Kamenev (who initially thought of helping out the demoted critics) "understood the situation." "Well, I see

17. Similarly, in his *Literatura i revoliutsiia* (*Literature and Revolution*), Leon Trotsky (1991 [1923]: 131) criticized "the Formal school" for its anti-Marxist bourgeois tendencies, calling it an "aborted fetus" of idealism.

the point. I cannot put all you guys into a concentration camp [to compose the guide]," Kamenev remarked, not without a certain grim sense of black humor (Chukovskii 1994).

Reflecting upon his theory of estrangement sixty-five years later, Shklovsky (1983a: 188) attempted to dispel historical misconceptions about the Formal method and the relationship between art and the world:

> There is an old term, *ostranenie*, that was often written with one "n" even though the word comes from *strannyi*. *Ostranenie* entered life in such a spelling in 1917. When discussed orally, it is often confused with *otstranenie,* which means "distancing of the world."
>
> *Ostranenie* is a form of world wonder, of an acute and heightened perception of the world. This term presupposes the existence of so-called "content" (*soderzhanie*) if we understand by "content" deferred, slowed-down, attentive examination of the world.

Thus ostranenie was never an estrangement from the world, but estrangement for the sake of the world's renewal. In the end, the Formalist critic is not practicing literary science but narrating the end of the Soviet literary public sphere. In spite of continuous attacks on his work and the official demands for narrative and ideological coherence, the devices of Shklovsky's texts remained almost unchanged as he continued to speak the Aesopian language of the nearly extinct "Formalist guild." Miraculously surviving various campaigns against him, Shklovsky remained a great theorist-storyteller like Walter Benjamin, one who speaks in elaborate parables, full of self-contradiction, in a unique style of Formalist baroque.

2. Hannah Arendt: Estrangement from the World and Estrangement for the World

Had Hannah Arendt and Victor Shklovsky crossed paths in Berlin or Marburg in the 1920s, they might have found that their ideas of distance and estrangement had a lot in common. For Arendt, as for Shklovsky, the theory of distance and freedom is linked to the aesthetic experience, to unhappy love and life under a totalitarian regime. Arendt said that she came to political thinking through German philosophy, aesthetics, and poetry. The concepts of estrangement, distance, and remoteness play a crucial role in her early poems and in her self-portrait, "Shadows," which she sent to Martin Heidegger in 1925 at the beginning of their love affair. Arendt develops two concepts that she uses mostly to describe herself: *Fremdheit* (strangeness) and *Absonderlichkeit* (separateness); neither Hegelian nor Brechtian, her estrangement is closer to that of the German Romantic poets. Heidegger in his letters called Arendt "the maiden from afar" and "the homeless

one," using Friedrich Schiller's image that Arendt appropriated for herself (Young-Bruehl 1982: 53–55). In "Shadows," estrangement is slightly eroticized; it becomes a play of concealment and intimacy. "She saw something remarkable in even the most matter-of-fact and banal things," Arendt wrote about herself in the third person (ibid.: 53). The everyday for the young Arendt is not a realm of inauthenticity, the way it appears in Heideggerian philosophy, but a reservoir of estrangement and surprise. Rethinking the everyday, the public and political realms, and what Arendt would call, after Moses Mendelsohn and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, "worldliness" would lead Arendt away from Heidegger's philosophy.[18]

At the end of her secret relationship, Arendt distances herself from her own romantic introspection and rediscovers the public sphere. In her first book, *Rahel Varnhagen: The Life of a Jewish Woman*, Arendt (1974: 10) presents the most unsentimental portrayal of romantic sentiment and introspection. Introspection is necessary for "liberation," but it then posits a "limitless freedom" that "no longer collides with anything outside the self, leaving the 'world' behind." Later, in *The Human Condition* (1958: 242), she would say, "Love by its very nature is unworldly . . . and it's not only apolitical but antipolitical, perhaps the most powerful of all antipolitical human forces." That kind of passionate love for a "single one," a devotion to one lover, is a "totalitarianism for two."

What Arendt took from that love was "passionate thinking"; what she disavowed was love's worldlessness, the totality of two who strive to become one at the expense of the world or even the totalizing solipsism of one who feigns multiplicity through the exuberances of the lover's discourse: "Love by reason of its passion destroys the in-between which relates us to and separates us from the others" (ibid.). In her thinking on human freedom, she would develop instead the idea of *amor socialis*, the love for the neighbor and friend based on respect without intimacy, "a regard for the person from the distance which the space of the world puts between us." This "distance" allows one to reinvent the world, to estrange one's routine, to distance oneself from both self-absorption and ready-made public opinions. Arendt, like Shklovsky, develops a conception of distance that is opposed to both Marxist world alienation and romantic introspection. Distance becomes "the ground for plurality" that is a fundamental feature of humanity: "We are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives or will live" (ibid.: 8).[19]

18. On the detailed relationship between Heidegger's philosophy and Arendt's political thought, their interconnection and difference, see Villa 1996.

19. Arendt's *plurality* is neither particularism nor identity politics nor even the politics of the other. It thrives on distinctiveness and multiplicity, not on the predictable Manichean mar-

After her double escape, from Nazi Germany and from a French camp for enemy aliens, Arendt reflected upon the other dimension of self-distancing which constitutes the precarious freedom of the outcasts and their unique weapons of independent thinking (*selbstdenken*). In her texts written right after her emigration to the United States, "We, Refugees" and "The Jew as a Pariah" (1944), she speaks about the hidden tradition of secularized Jews, the tradition of pariahs and parvenus that in a time of catastrophe end up in the same boat (Arendt 1978 [1944]: 90). Pariahs (Jews and non-Jews alike) do not try to pass but, rather, like Heinrich Heine, Rahel Varnhagen, Charlie Chaplin, Salomon Maimon, and Franz Kafka, use their double estrangement from both religious Judaism and European culture to preserve disinterested intelligence and humor. In her pariah theater, she offers several types: Heine's *schlemihl*, the "lord of dreams" with a liberating humor and irreverent joie de vivre; Charlie Chaplin, the little man perpetually suspect for his potential crimes; Bernard Lazare's conscious pariah; and Kafka's "man of goodwill" who uses independent thinking as his main tool in the struggle against society. Like Shklovsky, Arendt speaks about multiple estrangements of secularized Jews who have conflicting identifications. In the postwar years, Arendt herself exchanged one estranged persona for another: the "maiden from afar" and the philosophical lover becomes a self-conscious pariah and political thinker. However, Arendt rarely indulged in explicit self-description and never glamorized her own marginalization. She thought that the intimacy of the pariah people and the pariah's contemplative freedom might come at the expense of worldliness, *amor mundi*, and political rights.

Public freedom for Arendt is not a dialogue with oneself but a collective action on the public stage.[20] Freedom, unlike liberation, cannot exist without public space and democratic institutions, contracts, promises, anchors of common historical memory, yet the experience of freedom is not limited to procedural democracy. Freedom for Arendt is akin to a performance on a public stage that requires a common language but also a degree of incalculability, luck, chance, hope, surprise, and wonder. Similar to Shklovskian estrangement, which focuses on the process rather than on the prod-

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riage of the self and the other. Only in interaction with other people and self-distancing do we reveal *who* (not *what*) we are (Arendt 1977: 179–93). This represents an explicit reversal of the Rousseauistic conception of authenticity; one is in fact "authentically" human and free only on the stage of the world theater.

20. The experience of freedom defies the conventional historical and scientific narrative, which looks for causes for every occurrence. It is our forgotten heritage that cannot be commemorated in any statue of liberty or monument to a liberator. In Arendt's view, many wars of liberation and revolutions were fought in the name of freedom, including the Russian and French revolutions, but then freedom became their first victim.

uct, freedom has value both in itself and as an experience that leads to self-distancing and independent judgment. In other words, Arendt's conception of freedom combines aesthetic, existential, and political dimensions. It is described in language uncannily reminiscent of Shklovsky with its emphasis on performance, wonder, renewal and "de-habituation" of routine. Arendt's models are the French resistance and the Hungarian revolt of 1956—and perhaps 1989 Prague would have been another example. Hers is not merely a nostalgic image of the Athenian polis or republican freedom but a radical vision of the participatory democracy of thinking individuals that at this point in time seems, unfortunately, just as utopian as the Marxist model of a classless society where one herds sheep in the morning, fishes and hunts in the afternoon, and philosophizes in the evening.

In my view, it is possible to distinguish in Arendt's work two kinds of estrangement, which I would call estrangement *from* the world and estrangement *for* the world. Estrangement *from* the world has its origins in the Stoic concept of inner freedom and in the Christian conception of freedom and salvation as well as in romantic subjectivity and introspection. It suggests a distancing from political and worldly affairs. On the other hand, estrangement *for* the world is an acknowledgment of the integral human plurality that we must recognize within us and within others. This is a way of seeing the world anew, a possibility of a new beginning that is fundamental for aesthetic experience, critical judgment, and political action.

A striking connection between Arendt and Shklovsky resides in the way they discuss the experience of totalitarianism (without naming it, in the case of Shklovsky) through artistic and spatial categories. Arendt believes that it is necessary to defamiliarize one's concepts in order to think through the "uncommon newness" of the brutal regimes of Nazi Germany and Stalinism that made "everything possible." The disappearance of the nongovernmental public sphere that Shklovsky observed in the Soviet Union of the 1920s becomes crucial for Arendt's later theory of totalitarianism. Totalitarianism, in Arendt's (1969 [1958]: 466) view, begins by abolishing the space of public freedom with all its little walls, partitions of civil society, and multiple channels of communication: "To abolish the fences of laws between men—as tyranny does—means to take away man's liberties and destroy freedom as a living political reality."[21] Totalitarianism, in Arendt's (ibid.: 465–66) description, "substitutes for the boundaries and channels of communication between individual men a band of iron which holds them

21. Similarly, Walter Benjamin, in his essay "Moscow" (1927), made a striking observation about the collapse of the distinction between the public and private spheres in Soviet Russia. He noted that Bolsheviks had abolished private life and closed the cafés where prerevolutionary artistic life had flourished (Benjamin 1986b: 124–36).

so tightly together that it is as though their plurality had disappeared into One Man of gigantic dimension." This results in a peculiar *intimacy with terror*. Sadly, there is a revealing topos in the Soviet culture of the 1930s: the conversation with Stalin, which worked its seductive power even on such independent minds as Boris Pasternak and Mikhail Bulgakov.

In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt distinguishes between loneliness and solitude. In solitude, one is not lonely but, rather, in dialogue with oneself. Solitude might be conducive to the practice of critical estrangement and inner freedom that allows one to preserve dignity under the worst circumstances. Unlike solitude, loneliness is a result of the "isolation of the masses" from the political process, a combination of cynicism and gullibility that drives the masses to support a totalitarian regime. Loneliness in this sense is the opposite of estrangement; it is a type of isolation that feeds the extreme forms of modern conformism. The collapse of the public realm results in a combination of extreme scientism and mysticism or conspiratorial thinking. Totalitarianism pushes further Raskolnikov's maxim that everything is permitted; in the totalitarian state, everything becomes possible. The strangest and most defamiliarized vision of the world can come true; hence, artistic and critical estrangement becomes a double estrangement that challenges the very logic of the totalitarian remaking of the world.

Since *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and specifically in *Eichmann in Jerusalem: Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963), Arendt begins to connect the experience of freedom to responsibility and judgment. In her controversial account of Eichmann's trial, Arendt proposes to judge him as an individual, neither as a devil nor as a mere cog in the Nazi bureaucratic machine. Eichmann, who is described by the Israeli psychiatrist as absolutely normal, is the ultimate organization man who speaks in clichés from the beginning to the very end.[22] His speech and behavior reveal a complete lack of imagination and minimal critical estrangement. Arendt's judgment of Eichmann is based on an aesthetic critique of the "thought and word-defying" banality of the Nazi executioner, the lack of responsible critical estrangement that leads to a colossal error of judgment. The concept of the banality of evil is reminiscent of Nabokov's (1981: 309) critique of *poshlost'*, defined as both an ethical and an aesthetic ruse, as well as of Hermann Broch's critique of kitsch. It is ironic that while in prison Eichmann was offered Nabokov's *Lolita* to read, a book which he rejected as "inappropriate and immoral"; this is perhaps the best defense that Humbert Humbert could have hoped for. Remarkably, in the afterword to *Lolita*, Nabokov claims that true ob-

22. For a philosophical account of the Heidegger/Eichmann parallelism in Arendt's thought, see Villa 2001. On the controversies surrounding this text, see Aschheim 2001.

scenity lies in the copulation of clichés, not in erotic subject matter. So, in judging Eichmann, Arendt finds a new use for aesthetic estrangement.[23]

In her last, unfinished project, *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt directly connects the question of ethics and responsibility to the issue of thoughtlessness. There is a form of thoughtlessness, as that exhibited by Eichmann, that is not mere shallowness or stupidity but an ethical problem and a key to understanding war crimes from the point of view of the perpetrators: "Might the problem of good and evil, our faculty for telling right from wrong, be connected to our faculty of thought?" (Arendt 1977: 5). We can observe another important connection between Shklovsky and Arendt: both remained haunted by the specter of Immanuel Kant and were among the philosopher's most imaginative twentieth-century readers. Shklovsky was accused in the 1930s of being a "neo-Kantian" idealist who never embraced Hegelian-Marxist-Leninist dialectics. Indeed, the explicit anti-utilitarianism of Shklovskian estrangement, its emphasis on wonder and distance, are reminiscent of Kantian aesthetic categories. As for Arendt (1977: 193), she uses the Kantian conception of aesthetic judgment as a foundation for her theory of ethical judgment, which constitutes an experimental creative misreading of Kant's theory: "The manifestation of the wind of thought is not (necessarily) knowledge; it is the ability to tell right from wrong, beautiful from ugly. And this, at the rare moments when the stakes are on the table, may indeed prevent catastrophes, at least, for the self" (cf. also ibid.: 149–77).

Thus in their exploration of estrangement, Shklovsky and Arendt arrived at the same crossroads of consciousness and conscience. In Shklovsky's *Third Factory*, conscience was supposed to be determined by material being and Marxist ideology, but conscience "remained unsettled." For Arendt too, the life of the mind is shaped by the encounter between consciousness and conscience. Conscience, according to Arendt (1977: 185), means thinking with oneself and others and reflects "a primordial indebtedness, the tie with the sheer facts of human existence." Conscience is described in a dramatic manner as a dialogue with one's own inner strangers: "Conscience is the anticipation of that fellow who awaits you if and when you come home" (ibid.: 191). This kind of homecoming to conscience remains forever unsettled.

My imagined dialogue between Arendt and Shklovsky reveals deep connections between the aesthetic, political, and existential dimensions of

23. Judgment and critical storytelling are two ways of recapturing the experience of freedom in speech. Unlike the French existentialists, Arendt does not think we are doomed to live in freedom; rather, that freedom is a gift and a pleasure by means of which human beings immortalize themselves through deeds and stories and begin again.

estrangement and freedom. Neither Arendt nor Shklovsky wished to overcome estrangement; both regarded it as constitutive of the modern condition, of "worldliness" and human freedom. In this respect, the two writers are equally opposed to the Hegelian-Marxist philosophy of history as well as to any kind of systematic philosophy that seeks scientific objectivity. At the same time, neither of them flirts with the theological, messianic, or utopian abyss of freedom.

The second feature shared by Arendt and Shklovsky is that they practiced the genre of the critical essay, as well as more scholarly writing, and remained uncanonical thinkers. Shklovsky never became a systematic literary scientist, and Arendt never even strived to present herself as a systematic philosopher. They belong to the side roads of modern thought, what I call "off-modern," and contribute to the other eccentric and lateral lines of twentieth-century writing.[24] In fact, Arendt developed a philosophical and ethical justification for passionate "nonspecialized" thinking, which she distinguished from "professional thinking." Nonspecialized thinking searches for meaning based on reason's "concern with the unknowable," while "professional thinking" looks for the truth based on the intellect's concern with cognition and logic. Passionate thinking has its root in free-floating wonder; it does not attempt to escape the world of appearances, forever mourning the transcendental homelessness of modern humans. As an alternative to philosophical homesickness in the tradition of Novalis, Arendt (1977: 185) quotes Osip Mandel'shtam's poem of 1918: "We will remember in Lethe's cold waters / That earth for us has been worth a thousand heavens." Passionate thinking balances thinking and thanking, reflection and gratefulness for being—in this world.

3. Deideologization and Its Discontents: A Post-Soviet Perspective

Estrangement per se, however, is not a guarantee of passionate and responsible thinking; it can function as both a poison and a cure for the political evils of the age. Arendt has been criticized for presenting an archetype of totalitarian society, not always accounting for the specificities of history. Repeating the dictum of Aristotle, she claims that there is little space for friendship under totalitarian regimes (Arendt 1969 [1958]: 471).[25]

24. In my book *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001), I develop the concept of "off-modern," referring to unexplored side roads of modern thought. Both Arendt and Shklovsky belonged to the off-modern line of the best twentieth-century writers and thinkers.

25. Arendt (1969 [1958]: 471) writes that in the conspiratorial phantasmatic reality of totalitarian domination "real enmity or real friendship is no longer experienced and understood in its own terms but is automatically assumed to signify something else."

Yet, under Soviet conditions friendships did survive, and the former Formalist circle is one example of such survival. In fact, only within the network of friendships in the emerging private space could one manage to carve out a phantom public sphere. After the official "end of Formalism" in 1930, the former "literary scientists" and their disciples, Boris Eikhenbaum, Yuri Tynianov, Lidiia Ginzburg, Victor Zhirmunskii, and others, remained friends and interlocutors who continued to gather informally in each other's (often communal) apartments and to share ideas. In extreme circumstances, the affirmation of inner freedom might be the most honorable position of an intellectual. This kind of estrangement from the world, however, can easily flip-flop, so that dissent becomes an acquiescence to the existing regime. This might result in an inability to build new political institutions when such an opportunity presents itself. Without the institutionalization of public freedom, critical estrangement for the world might end up as estrangement from the world and acceptance of the status quo.

Fifty years after Shklovsky's statement about unsettled conscience, Joseph Brodsky (1986: 3) paraphrased both Marx and Shklovsky: "Marx's dictum that 'existence conditions consciousness' is true only for as long as it takes consciousness to acquire the art of estrangement; thereafter, consciousness is on its own and can both condition and ignore the existence." The "art of estrangement" in Brodsky's quote is no longer an aesthetic device but a tactic of dissent, a form of alternative self-fashioning, a survival strategy. During the post-Stalinist period, there emerged a peculiar gray zone of unofficial culture characterized by "deideologization," that is, estrangement from the official political discourse and Aesopian language recorded by Shklovsky in his *Third Factory*. Brodsky describes it as a form of ethics based on literature and on the defamiliarization of Soviet everyday life. Thus a literary theoretical model became a part of urban everyday subculture, known in Leningrad in the late 1960s and early 1970s as the culture of *sistema*, a system of everyday behavior that imagined itself to be parallel, "lateral" to the official state system. The sistema did not produce a manifesto or a political party. Rather, it played itself out through the unwritten practices of everyday life in a form of Soviet dandyism; only unlike its predecessor, sistema was more about aestheticized ugliness and the anti-aesthetic of daily life (see Boym 2001). In Eastern Europe, estrangement became more explicitly a form of political protest, or antipolitics. In Russia, the practices of estrangement and deideologization were twofold: initially a form of protest, they were later mimicked by the mainstream culture and became a form of political noninvolvement.

Anthropologist Alexei Yurchak (1997) has made an interesting study of the culture of the anecdote. Interviewing mid-range Komsomol *nomenkla-*

tura and analyzing their diaries and written reports from the 1970s, he came to the conclusion that a certain jokey attitude and the sharing of anecdotes were quite common in their everyday lives. In this context, the language of the subversive and exclusive sistema turned into the popular and mass-reproduced *stiob*. Stiob is jocular, politically incorrect discourse made up of quotations, obscenities, informalities, seemingly free of any taboos except on high seriousness, yet never free of the Russian-Soviet cultural context. *Stiob* is a suggestive slang term that is associatively linked to many verbs, including to whip, to chatter, to have sexual intercourse; its adjectival form, *stiobnyi*, means strange or stupid. Instead of defamiliarizing, stiob familiarizes everything, turning any crisis into a pretext for a joke. Stiob is the ultimate creation of *homo sovieticus* and *post-sovieticus*, which allows one to domesticate cultural myths. Stiob style uses shocking language to avoid a confrontation with shocking issues, perpetually appeasing the authorities. There is no world outside stiob; there is virtually nothing that cannot be recycled and familiarized through it. Stiob does not question the existing order but confirms its inevitability.[26] Stiob depended on the unwritten social contract with the state nomenklatura, as reflected in the recent research on the Komsomol intelligentsia. If Shklovsky wrote that revolution in Soviet Russia estranged life more than did literature, by the 1970s this strange Soviet life had become the norm. Its cruelties and absurdities were domesticated, and a slang term had appeared to characterize it: *sovok*—a term of deprecation and tenderness at once. (*Sovok*, a noun derived from the adjective *sovetskii* [Soviet], means literally a dustpan for domestic trash.)

By the mid-1990s, the concept of deideologization or estrangement from politics came full circle, and after 2000, it became the main slogan of Vladimir Putin's government. If in the oppositional discourse of the 1970s and the 1980s deideologization meant liberation from the Soviet state ideology, in the Putin era deideologization came to signify liberation from the critical democratic discourse of the 1980s and early 1990s. In the 1970 and 1980s, the object of deideologization was Soviet discourse; in the 2000s, the state PR and the new deideologization are aimed at the old deideologiza-

26. Stiob employs sexual allusions and underworld jargon as well as Soviet and Russian clichés. Stiob, then, was not an Aesopian language or a sign of double consciousness; it was a defense mechanism based on the domestication of the official culture, which distinguished it from its rhetorical cousins: estrangement, romantic irony, and parody. Romantic irony, in Friedrich Schlegel's definition, presupposes open-endedness, a vertigo of self-questioning, and a possibility of self-transcendence; it questions the foundations of the act of speech and of the speaker. Stiob, on the contrary, protects from self-questioning and ardently defends the status quo. In stiob, there is no dialogue of languages, no linguistic pluralism; there is only stiob and straight talk. Stiob eliminated the need to be anti-Soviet: one could just be a-Soviet or pretend that one was.

tion, that is, at the democratic critique of both the Soviet past and of post-Soviet state capitalism. In fact, the democratic discourse acquired a deprecatory stiob name: *demshiza*, meaning democratic schizophrenia, a term previously reserved for the hysterical *babushki* who embraced perestroika in the 1980s a little too vehemently. By the late 1990s, public discourse in Russia became so deideologized and estranged from responsible politics that nowadays a double estrangement is once again required. What has been poorly developed in the Russian context is a new discourse on freedom and responsibility as well as on critical judgment, estrangement for the world.

To commemorate Shklovsky's favorite device of parallelism, I would like to end the way I began, with the Monument to Liberty. Its fate in Russia has been quite paradoxical. The monument described by Shklovsky was transient and did not survive long, but a more permanent Monument to Liberty in early Soviet neoclassical style was built in Moscow in the late 1920s—only to be supplanted after World War II by a less "cosmopolitan" monument to the medieval Muscovite prince Yuri Dolgoruky, which was deemed a better symbol of the Stalinist state. Yuri Dolgoruky remains the favorite monument of the present-day mayor of Moscow, the prince's namesake, Yuri Luzhkov. It might not be accidental that in 2002 the mayor advocated the return of another abandoned monument, that of Felix Dzerzhinsky, the head of the Cheka (KGB), demolished after the Russian "Velvet Revolution" of August 1991. As if paraphrasing Shklovsky's statement about the advent of the "red restoration" in the late 1920s, contemporary writer Viktor Pelevin (1999: 11) observed that the late 1990s witnessed the "victory of red over red"; in Pelevin's novel, red acquires many new shades—from ancient Egyptian imagery to Coca-Cola ads. The new form of alienation reflected in the novels of this hero of post-Soviet youth culture moves toward conspiratorial thinking and meta-stiob.

Yet one should not read history as a vicious circle and end on the sour note that estrangement, just like nostalgia, is not what it used to be. A new beginning posits an alternative conjectural history that uncovers the genealogy of ideas which for a long time remained on the side roads of the prevailing versions of twentieth-century cultural history. They should be treated as unrealized possibilities, roads not taken, unruined "monuments to scientific errors." Instead of seeing history as something inevitable and predetermined, Arendt projects the idea of freedom into our conception of the past. Looking back at twentieth-century history, Arendt proposes to estrange the immanency of disaster. To do so, one has to "look for the unforseeable and unpredictable," for "the more heavily the scales are weighted in favor of the disaster, the more miraculous will the deed done in freedom appear; for it

is disaster, not salvation, that always happens automatically and therefore always must appear to be irresistible" (Arendt 1977: 170).

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