

Art, as Device

Viktor Shklovsky

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Abstract We get used to horrible things and stop fearing them. We get used to beautiful things and stop enjoying them. We get used to people and stop experiencing them as personalities. Art is a means to make things real again. These ideas, expressed by a very young and polemically minded Viktor Shklovsky almost a hundred years ago, are as relevant today as ever: current studies in cognition confirm his insights about the process of automatization and its opposite. While the Romantics only sought to actualize the beauty of the world, Shklovsky sees art also as a way to make its horrors felt.

Keywords *ostranenie*, defamiliarization, estrangement, deautomatization, foregrounding

Translating “Art, as Device”

“There has been no textological work on ‘Art as Device’” (Naiman 1998: 346). This observation still largely holds true, with the exception of several passages in the very article in which it appears.¹ The present translation follows the longest version of the essay—the one published in the 1919 vol-

The present translation will appear in the anthology *Viktor Shklovsky: A Reader* (Berlina, forthcoming), which will also include much previously untranslated material. The translator thanks Bloomsbury for permission to publish this excerpt and the Prokhorov Fund for the translation grant.

1. Shklovsky’s original title is “Iskusstvo, kak priem.” Though the comma does not appear in *Poetika*’s table of contents or the later reprints, the present translation re-creates it. The comma changes the title’s intonation, and Shklovsky being Shklovsky, the possibility of a pun cannot be excluded: *kak priem?* can mean “can you hear [me]?” “how is the reception?”

Poetics Today 36:3 (September 2015) DOI 10.1215/03335372-316709
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ume of *Poetika* (Shklovsky 1919). The first one appeared in an earlier issue of *Poetika* in 1917 without the material on erotic *ostranenie*. Apparently, it was deemed important enough to justify the republication of the whole article in the same venue. As Viktor Shklovsky puts it in regard to another article: “I wanted to make a splash, shock people. As I’ve said, this was the era” (Vitale 2013: 81). Later reprints of “Iskusstvo[,] kak priem,” which formed the sources of the existing English translations (by Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis [Shklovsky 1965] and Benjamin Sher [Shklovsky 1990a]),² differ in minor aspects, such as punctuation, and fail to include a Belorussian fairy tale.³ If a missing example of erotic *ostranenie* were the only shortcoming of the existing versions, a new one would be superfluous. But this is not the case.

Before explaining my reasons for retranslation, I would like to say how much I appreciate Sher’s work. To differentiate my translation from the preceding ones, I felt tempted to use another title (art “as method” or perhaps “as tool”?) or another rendition of the key term (*stranging?*) but soon realized that my alternatives were not so good as Sher’s *device* and *enstrangement*. *Ostranenie* is an unintentional neologism, an orthographic mistake on Shklovsky’s part: derived from *strannyi* (strange), it should feature a double *n*. Sixty-seven years later Shklovsky (1983a: 73) commented, “It went off with one ‘n,’ and is roaming the world like a dog with an ear cut off.” The missing ear draws attention: the word’s incorrectness refreshes language and stimulates associations connected to strangeness. *Defamiliarization* and *estrangement* do not.⁴ Moreover, these terms are associated with Bertolt Brecht’s *Verfremdung* and interpersonal estrangement (as in “she is estranged from her family”). These two concepts suggest decreased emotional connection to people, fictional or real, which is the opposite of the intended effect of *ostranenie*. The ambiguity of *defamiliarization* and *estrangement* is confusing though not entirely out of tune with the original term, as Shklovsky (1983b, 2:327) well realized: “I have many creations, some legitimate, some not; strangely enough, both

2. An excerpt was published in English under the title “Poetic Diction” in 1933 (Reavey and Slonim 1933: 420–22).

3. This fairy tale is included in the German translation (Strieder 1969: 29), where a Kafkaesque transformation takes place. In Russian the wife gets on her hands and knees (*stala rakom*, doggy style, is, literally, crayfish style in Belorussian); in German she “turns into a crayfish” (*wurde ein Krebs*).

4. *Estrangement* is gaining currency. A double issue of *Poetics Today* (26 [4] 2005–27 [1] 2006) dedicated to Shklovsky’s heritage is titled “Estrangement Revisited.” It is not a surprise, then, that every article in it uses *estrangement*, sometimes interchangeably with *ostranenie*, *defamiliarization*, and *making strange*. *Enstrangement* is mentioned only when terminology is discussed, as, for instance, in this statement: “There is estrangement and enstrangement, making it strange, defamiliarization, and de-automatization. . . . The many overlapping, contentious, and complex terms for *ostranenie* suggest that there are many ‘different kinds’ of estrangement” (Vatulescu 2006: 63). It should be added that there are more kinds of estrangement than of *ostranenie*.

Table 1 Translations of Shklovsky's Key Terms

	<i>ostranenie</i>	enstrange- ment	defamili- arization	estrange- ment	making strange
Risk of confusion with divergent concepts ⁵	—	— /high	high	very high	low
Currency in English in connection with Shklovsky's work ⁶	high	very low	high	medium	low
Etymological correspondence to the original	x	x	—	x	x
Decelerating effect re-created: can stop the reader in her or his tracks	x	x	—	—	—
Self-reflexive effect re-created: a "normal" word made strange	—	x	—	—	—
International use	x	—	—	—	—

survive. ‘*Otstranennyi*’ and ‘*ostranennyi*’—both spellings make sense” (my emphasis). *Otstranenie* suggests a withdrawal, a stepping back—an effect closer to Brecht’s than to Shklovsky’s own idea.

Sher (1990: xviii) believes that the original missing letter is a conscious pun on Shklovsky’s part and accordingly does not attempt a solution which treats it as a typo (it is easier to leave out a letter by mistake than to add one). Still, in terms of effect *enstrangement* is close to Shklovsky’s neologism, which is itself enstranging. Unfortunately, this choice of word, which is convincingly explained both in the translator’s foreword and elsewhere (Sher 2012), did not catch on. Even publications directly quoting Sher’s translation often leave out the *n*. Table 1 shows in more detail how the different translations of the key term compare (“foregrounding” is not included, the connotations being somewhat different).

5. *Defamiliarization* has also been applied to Brecht’s *Verfremdung*. *Estrangement* can refer both to *Verfremdung* and to interpersonal estrangement. The entry “-/high” for “enstrangement” means that it is free from the risk of confusion provided that the *n* is registered by the reader—which often fails to happen.

6. According to a survey of Google Scholar and the Modern Language Association database I conducted in February 2015.

Enstrangement is a great solution, but it has not been accepted by the scholarly community and keeps being confused with the problematic *estrangement* without an *n* (witness the need for emphasis in the present publication); coining yet another neologism when there are already so many renderings seems counterproductive. This is why *Viktor Shklovsky: A Reader* (Berlina, forthcoming) will use the transliteration of *ostranenie* alongside verbal and adjectival forms of *enstrange*. *Poetics Today* prefers *enstrangement* to *ostranenie*.⁷

Despite my admiration for many of Sher's solutions, I believe that a new translation is called for. For one thing, Sher's version exhibits some difficulties in handling Shklovsky's examples of erotic *ostranenie*. In one tale the husband fails to recognize his wife, who is dressed up as a warrior and refers to herself using the masculine form. In English she calls her husband "dear" in the very first line, immediately signaling her real sex. In another story a sexual denouement is replaced with a beating as a result of a linguistic misunderstanding.

Moreover, Shklovsky's diction is rendered more academic and less categorical in Sher's translation: for instance, *ostranenie* in an erotic folktale is described as "similar" (not "identical") to Leo Tolstoy's. The essay's key sentence is rendered as "Art is a means of experiencing the process of creativity" (Shklovsky 1990a: 6). A closer translation is, I argue, "Art is the means to live through the making of a thing." By using the most basic words, such as *perezhit* (live through), *delan'e* (making), and *veshchi* (thing), Shklovsky enstranges this very sentence, removing it from academic diction and making the reader sit up and see. Moreover, art exists not "in order to return sensation to our limbs" (*ibid.*) but to return the sensation to life — or, more probably, *of* life (more on this in a moment). Sher's version of this maxim is certainly a vast improvement over the previous translation: "Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object" (Shklovsky 1965: 12). Instead of this apparent tautology, the original speaks of the cognitive act — of things being made by the mind in the process of reading. Even more problematically, a scholar quoting Shklovsky in her own translation renders the same maxim as "Art is a means to experience the creation of things which have been made insignificant in art" (Haber 2003: 51). Shklovsky says the very opposite: things have been made insignificant in automatized life; it is art that creates significance.

The translation by Lemon and Reis, has many troublesome aspects, including difficulties with the verb *uznavat'*, which can mean both "recognize" and "get to know," meanings that are functionally opposed in the context of *ostranenie*. It must be pointed out, though, that Lemon and Reis offer some beautiful solutions for wordplay, such as "butterfingers" (child whose fingers

7. Your thoughts on this are very welcome at alexandra.berlina@uni-due.de.

are covered with butter; clumsy person) for *shlyapa* (“old hat” in the present translation).

Perhaps “Iskusstvo[,] kak priem” is one of those texts that every generation needs to translate again, and I am looking forward to reading a version produced in 2040. As regards my own attempt, I realize how audacious it is to translate into what is not my native language. We already have two versions of Shklovsky’s essay by Anglophone translators, though, and perhaps adding one by a native speaker of the source language might be good for balance. Shklovsky’s Russian is often unidiomatic: should my English sound foreign, I could always claim that this was intentional. More seriously, I feel that, as a Russian speaker, I have fewer qualms about estranging the English target text. With Shklovsky, this is not even a case of foreignizing the translation, merely of re-creating the original effect.

To me, the main challenges in translating Shklovsky were not his unidiomatic turns of phrase, or his allusions and puns, or his elliptical, aphoristic style but the seemingly least important English words, namely, articles and prepositions. Russian uses none of the former and fewer of the latter; this makes original ambiguities difficult to re-create. Every Russian noun has the potential of turning into a bifurcating puzzle: should it be preceded with *a* or *the*? I was lucky with the title: “Art, as Device” can do without articles. But is *ostranenie* “a goal of art” or “the goal of art”? Word order and context suggest the stronger claim—this is the translation I chose, losing a grain of ambiguity inherent in the original. The same is true of the essay’s crucial statement: “Art is the means to live through the making of a thing.” Here too the bolder claim seems more probable—but it might be just “a means.”

A similar problem arises with prepositions. Does “art exist in order to return the sensation of life” or “to life”? “*Vernut* [return] *oshchushchenie* [feeling/sensation] *zhizni* [life, genitive or dative case]” can mean either. In context, “of” seems more probable; this impression is shared by most native Russian speakers.⁸ Still, Shklovsky might well have intended a double meaning. If art exists to “return sensation to life,” the *after*-effects of reading become most important: the reader, her senses refreshed, is ready to encounter reality; the ultimate effect of *ostranenie* is extraliterary.

This translation attempts to refrain from smoothing Shklovsky’s stubbly text: if he repeats a word thrice in a line, this is not for the lack of synonyms. If he describes Tolstoy as “replacing the habitual religious terms with the usual meanings of words,” one feels tempted to end the sentence in “with usual

8. In an online poll conducted for the present translation at www.livejournal.com/poll/?id=1993166 in December 2014, forty-eight of fifty-one responders chose “of life” as the more probable solution.

words” instead. But so must have many of Shklovsky’s Russian editors felt: the original sentence sounds strange. The translator can edit tacitly, but should she? I believe not. Still, the temptation to clarify has not been resisted fully; a few long sentences are divided into two in translation. When Shklovsky quotes heavily abbreviated translations of Anglophone texts, Lemon and Reis as well as Sher use the English originals; the present version provides back translations to show in which form non-Russian thinkers came to influence Shklovsky. I have used the Board on Geographic Names and Permanent Committee on Geographical Names (BGN/PCGN) romanization system with the exception of names whose transliterations are established (Shklovsky, not Shklovskiy). I have edited the article in regard to bibliographic data, the information provided by Shklovsky being rather chaotic; his sources are in footnotes. All translations of the texts Shklovsky quotes, unless noted otherwise, are mine.

Many of the texts Shklovsky cites were written by his closest friends, original scholars, and fascinating figures in their own right. Their circle was young and hungry—for bread but even more for ideas. Here are some mini-portraits to flesh out the list of references. Evgeny Polivanov lost a hand as a boy—to imitate a character from the *Brothers Karamazov*, he laid it on the tracks as a train passed over. He also ate opium and went to present his doctoral thesis in his underwear. As a linguist, he was, in Shklovsky’s opinion, a genius (Vitale 2013: 79). About Lev Yakubinsky, Shklovsky (1990b: 423) says: “The best year of my life was the one when I spent an hour, two hours every day talking to Lev Yakubinsky on the phone. We set up little tables by the phones.” Some of the ideas presented in “Art, as Device” were born of notes jotted down on these tables.

Shklovsky was made to retract many of his formalist statements and genuinely reconsidered some of his ideas. But he never stopped fervently believing what he said in two related articles written in his early twenties, “Resurrection of the Word” and “Art[,] as Device”—that art is our *memento vivere*. As he puts it in one of his latest and most candid interviews: “What do we do in art? We resuscitate life. Man is so busy with life that he forgets to live it. He always says: tomorrow, tomorrow. And that’s the real death. So what is art’s great achievement? Life. A life that can be seen, felt, lived tangibly” (Vitale 2013: 53). He continues: “We struggle with the world, but we don’t see it. . . . To touch, see, perceive, this is the strength of art, which looks at the things outside with wonder. Art is continuous astonishment” (ibid.: 91).

—Alexandra Berlina

Art, as Device

“Art is thinking in images.” You can hear this phrase from a schoolboy, and it is also the starting point for a philologist beginning to construct a literary theory. This idea has been planted into many minds; Potebnya must be considered one of its creators.⁹ “Without images, art—including poetry—is impossible,” he writes; and elsewhere: “Poetry, like prose, is first and foremost a certain way of thinking and understanding.”

Poetry is a particular method of thinking, namely, thinking in images; this method creates a certain economy of intellectual energy, “the sensation of relatively easy processing,” with the aesthetic sense being a reflex of this economy. This is how the academy member Ovseyaniko-Kulikovskiy sums it up, and he must be right in his summary—after all, he has certainly read his mentor’s books with attention.¹⁰ Potebnya and his numerous followers consider poetry to be a special kind of thinking, namely, thinking in images; they believe that imagery is intended to bring together heterogeneous acts and objects, explaining the unknown via the known. Or to quote Potebnya: “The image relates to the object of explanation as follows: (a) the image is a constant predicate of variable subjects, a constant means of attracting¹¹ variable objects of perception . . . (b) the image is much simpler and clearer than the object of explanation, i.e., the goal of imagery is to bring the meaning of the image nearer to our understanding, without which imagery would have no sense; therefore, the image must be better known to us than the object of explanation.”¹²

9. [Shklovsky’s best-known article begins as a polemic against Potebnya (1835–1891), who proclaimed metaphor to be the basis of literature. Shklovsky convincingly argues against the passages he proceeds to cite, but in many other respects, his work was actually quite close to Potebnya’s. Not only do they both believe that the study of literature equals the study of language and literary devices, but Shklovsky’s *ostranenie* is actually similar to Potebnya’s key term *inoskazanie* (literally, telling differently). It has been suggested that the young Shklovsky was not familiar enough with Potebnya’s work to realize his affinity to this alleged antagonist (Laferrière 1976: 175ff.). Indeed, in a letter to his grandson Shklovsky (2002) writes, “I held my opponents in contempt and usually failed even to read their work.” On the other hand, elsewhere he says, “There was a time when I followed Potebnya so fixedly that I even began to argue with him” (Shklovsky 1983a: 253). Despite the similarities to some of Potebnya’s work, Shklovsky’s concentration on perception is innovative. — Trans.]

10. [Shklovsky (1990b: 160) names Ovseyaniko-Kulikovskiy among those responsible for the degradation of Russian literature: “They were like people who came to look at a flower and, to make themselves comfortable, sat down on it.” — Trans.]

11. [The rare term *atraktsia* usually denotes the absence of grammatical connections between neighboring words; in this case, the missing connections seem to be semantic. — Trans.]

12. Alexandr Potebnya, *Iz zapisk po teorii slovesnosti* (Kharkiv: 1905), 83, 97, 314, 291.

One might wonder how this law applies when Tyutchev compares summer lightning to deaf-mute demons or when Gogol likens the sky to God's chasuble.

"No art is possible without an image." "Art is thinking in images." Monstrous twists have been made in the name of these definitions; people have attempted to analyze music, architecture, lyrical poetry as "thinking in images." After wasting his energy for a quarter of a century, Ovsyaniko-Kulikovsky was finally forced to single out lyric poetry, architecture, and music as special, imageless art forms, to define them as lyrical arts which immediately appeal to emotion. Thus, an enormous sphere of art turned out not to be a method of thinking; one of the arts constituting this sphere, lyrical poetry, is nevertheless very similar to "image-bearing" art: it uses words in the same way; most importantly, image-bearing art flows into imageless art quite imperceptibly, and we experience the two in similar ways.

Still, the definition "art is thinking in images" — and therefore (I'm leaving out the intermediate links of well-known equations), "art is, above all, the creator of symbols" — persists, surviving the collapse of the theory on which it was based. Most of all, it's alive in the symbolist movement. Particularly in the work of its theoreticians.

Thus, many people still believe that thinking in images — "ways and shadows," "furrows and boundaries" — is the main characteristic of poetry.¹³ They should have expected the history of this image-bound art to be a history of changing imagery. But images turn out to be almost immobile; they flow, unchanging, from century to century, from country to country, from poet to poet. Images belong to "nobody," to "God." The better you comprehend an epoch, the better can you see that the images you believed to be created by a particular poet are actually borrowed from others and almost unchanged. The work done by schools of poetry consists in accumulating verbal material and finding new ways of arranging and handling it; it is much more about rearranging images than about creating them. Images are a given, and poetry is not so much thinking in images as remembering them.

In any case, thinking in images is not what unites all arts or even all literature; images are not the thing whose change drives poetry.

We know that expressions not created for artistic contemplation are often nevertheless experienced as poetic; examples would be Annensky's belief in the poetic qualities of Slavonic or Andrey Bely's admiration for the way

13. [These are allusions to symbolist writing. *Furrows and Boundaries* (1916) is a book of essays by Vyacheslav Ivanov. Alexandr Galushkin (quoted in Shklovsky 1990b: 490n135) identifies "ways and shadows" as an ironic montage of Valery Bryusov's collections *Ways and Crossroads* (1908) and *The Mirror of Shadows* (1912). — Trans.]

Russian eighteenth-century poets place adjectives after nouns.¹⁴ Bely admires this as art, or rather as intentional art, though in reality it is merely a particularity of language (the influence of Church Slavonic). Therefore, a thing can be (1) created as prosaic and experienced as poetic; (2) created as poetic and experienced as prosaic. This suggests that a given work depends in its artistry—in whether or not it is poetry—on our perception. In the narrow sense, we shall designate as “works of art” only such works that have been created by special methods intended to have them perceived as artistic.

Potebnya’s conclusion, which can be put as “poetry = imagery,” has given rise to the whole theory of “imagery = symbolism,” of the image as the invariable predicate of various subjects (this conclusion forms the basis of the theory of symbolism; leading symbolists—Andrey Bely and Merezhkovsky with his “eternal companions”—fell in love with it because of its similarity to their own ideas). This conclusion partly stems from the fact that Potebnya made no distinction between the language of poetry and the language of prose. This is why he failed to notice that two kinds of images exist: the image as a practical means of thinking, as a means of grouping objects, and the poetic image, as a means of intensifying an impression. Let me clarify with an example. Walking down the street, I see a man wearing an old crumpled hat drop his bag. I call him back: “You, old hat, you’ve dropped your bag!” This is an example of a purely prosaic trope. Another example: “This joke is old hat. I heard it ages ago.”¹⁵ This image is a poetic trope. (In one case, the word *hat* was used metonymically, in the other, metaphorically. But this is not what I want to point out here.) The poetic image is a way to create the strongest impression. It is a device that has the same task as other poetic devices, such as ordinary or negative parallelism, comparison, repetition, symmetry, hyperbole; equal to that which is commonly designated as rhetorical figures, equal to all these methods of increasing the impact of a thing (words and even sounds of the text itself are things, too). But the poetic image bears only superficial resemblance to images-as-fables, to patterns of thought,¹⁶ such as a girl calling a sphere “a little

14. Innokentiy Annensky, *Kniga otrazheniy* (Moscow: 1906); Andrey Bely, *Lug zelenyy* (Moscow: 1910).

15. [To re-create the pun, the translation had to stray from the original, which uses the double meaning of *shlyapa*—hat and clumsy person. The use of metonymy like “[you] hat” or “[you] glasses” as a somewhat rude form of addressing strangers is more usual in Russian than in English. Also the fact that Shklovsky uses a dead metaphor as an example of a poetic image is problematic, as is the citing of clichéd sexual euphemisms as examples of *ostranenie* later in the essay. At other points, however, Shklovsky shows himself aware of the fact that the effect of *ostranenie* can easily evaporate. — Trans.]

16. [*Obraz myslei* (literally, the image of thought) is the Russian for thought patterns or mentality. — Trans.]

watermelon.”¹⁷ The poetic image is a device of poetic language. The prosaic image is a device of abstraction: a watermelon instead of a round lamp shade or a watermelon instead of a head merely abstracts a particular quality of an object. It’s like saying: head = sphere, watermelon = sphere. This is thinking, but it has nothing in common with poetry.

The law of the economy of creative effort is also generally accepted. Spencer wrote:

As the basis of all rules designating the choice and use of words we find one and the same main requirement: economy of attention. . . . Leading the mind to the intended concept by the easiest route is often their only and always their most important goal.¹⁸

And R. Avenarius:

If the soul possessed inexhaustible strength, then, of course, it would be indifferent to how much might be spent from this inexhaustible source; only the expended time would play any role. But since its strength is limited, we can expect that the soul seeks to carry out perceptual processes as purposefully as possible—that is, with, in relative terms, the least expenditure of energy, or, to put the same thing differently, to the greatest effect.¹⁹

With a single reference to the general law of mental economy, Petrazhitzky dismisses James’s theory of the physical basis of affect, a theory which happened to be in his way.²⁰ The principle of the economy of creative effort—a seductive theory, particularly in the study of rhythm—has been affirmed by Alexander Veselovsky, who followed in Spencer’s footsteps: “The merit of style consists precisely in delivering the greatest amount of thoughts in the fewest words.” Andrey Bely, who in his better works gave numerous examples of laborious, stumbling rhythm and (for instance, using the example of Baratynsky)²¹ showed the laboriousness of poetic epithets—even he believes it necessary to speak of the law of the economy in his book, a heroic effort to create a theory of art based on unverified facts from outdated books, on his

17. Dmitry Ovsyaniko-Kulikovskiy, *Iazyk i iskusstvo* (Saint Petersburg: 1895), 16–17.

18. [The ellipses are Shklovsky’s. The translation Shklovsky used departs from the original in various aspects. For instance, it downplays the fact that Spencer (2009: 7) refers to speech as much as to writing: “On seeking for some clue to the law underlying these current maxims, we may see shadowed forth in many of them, the importance of economizing the reader’s or the hearer’s attention. To so present ideas that they may be apprehended with the least possible mental effort, is the desideratum towards which most of the rules above quoted point.”—Trans.]

19. Richard Avenarius, *Filosofia kak myshlenie o mire* (Saint Petersburg: 1899), 8.

20. Lev Petrazhitzky, *Vvedenie v izuchenie prava i npravstvennosti* (Saint Petersburg: 1908), 136.

21. Andrey Bely, *Simvolizm* (Moscow: 1910), 594–95.

vast knowledge of poetic techniques, and on Krayevich's high school physics textbook.

Regarding economy as a law and goal of creation might be right for a particular linguistic case, namely, "practical" language, but ignorance of the differences between the laws of practical and poetic language led to the idea of economy being applied to the latter. When the Japanese poetic language was found to contain sounds never used in practical Japanese, this was one of the first, if not *the* first, factual indication that these two languages are not identical.²² Yakubinsky's article, which states that the law of liquid consonant dissimilation is missing from poetic language and that in poetic language such hard-to-pronounce sound combinations are possible, is one of the first scientifically sound indications of the opposition (in this case, at least) between poetic language and practical language.²³

Therefore, we need to discuss the laws of spending and economy in poetic language based on its own workings, not on prosaic language.

Considering the laws of perception, we see that routine actions become automatic. All our skills retreat into the unconscious-automatic domain; you will agree with this if you remember the feeling you had when holding a quill in your hand for the first time or speaking a foreign language for the first time and compare it to the feeling you have when doing it for the ten thousandth time. It is the automatization process which explains the laws of our prosaic speech, its understructured phrases and its half-pronounced words. This process is ideally expressed in algebra, which replaces things with symbols. In quick practical speech, words are not spoken fully; only their initial sounds are registered by the mind. Pogodin gives the example of a boy imagining the phrase "Les montagnes de la Suisse sont belles" as a series of letters: L, m, d, l, S, s, b.²⁴

This property of thinking suggests not only the path of algebra but even the particular choice of symbols (letters, and especially initial letters). This algebraic way of thinking takes in things by counting and spatializing them;²⁵ we do not *see* them but recognize them by their initial features. A thing passes us as if packaged; we know of its existence by the space it takes up, but we only see its surface. Perceived in this way, the thing dries up, first in experience, and then its very making suffers;²⁶ because of this perception, prosaic speech is

22. Evgeny Polivanov, *Poetika: Sbornik po teorii poeticheskogo iazyka* (I) (Petrograd: 1916), 38.

23. Lev Yakubinsky, *Poetika: Sbornik po teorii poeticheskogo iazyka* (II) (Petrograd: 1917), 13–21.

24. Alexandr Pogodin, *Iazyk kak tvorchestvo* (Kharkiv: 1913), 42.

25. [The original phrase *berusia schetom i prostranstvom* (literally, taken by counting and space) is highly unidiomatic in Russian. It appears to mean "we recognize the object by its quantity and position in space" (without really seeing it), but other readings are possible. — Trans.]

26. [While this phrase is puzzling to a Russian reader, "the making of a thing" seems to refer to artistic creation and perhaps also to artistic perception. — Trans.]

not fully heard (cf. Yakubinsky's article) and therefore not fully spoken (this is the reason for slips of the tongue). Algebraizing, automatizing a thing, we save the greatest amount of perceptual effort: things are either given as a single feature, for instance, a number, or else they follow a formula of sorts without ever reaching consciousness. "I was dusting in the room; having come full circle, I approached the sofa and could not remember if I had dusted it off or not. I couldn't because these movements are routine and not conscious, and I felt I never could remember it. So if I had dusted the sofa but forgotten it, that is, if this was really unconscious, it is as if this never happened. If somebody had watched consciously, reconstruction would have been possible. But if nobody watched, if nobody watched consciously, if the whole life of many people is lived unconsciously, it is as if this life had never been" (from Lev Tolstoy's diary, February 29, 1897).²⁷

This is how life becomes nothing and disappears. Automatization eats things, clothes, furniture, your wife, and the fear of war.

"If the whole complex life of many people is lived unconsciously, it is as if this life had never been."

And so this thing we call art exists in order to restore the sensation of life, in order to make us feel things, in order to make a stone stony. The goal of art is to create the sensation of seeing, and not merely recognizing, things; the device of art is the "enstrangement" of things and the complication of the form, which increases the duration and complexity of perception, as the process of perception is, in art, an end in itself and must be prolonged. Art is the means to live through the making of a thing; what has been made does not matter in art.²⁸

The life of a poetic (artistic) text proceeds from seeing to recognizing, from poetry to prose, from the concrete to the general, from Don Quixote—a scholar and poor aristocrat, half-consciously suffering humiliation at a duke's court—to Turgenev's generalized and hollow Don Quixote, from Charles the Great to the mere name of "king."²⁹ Art and its works expand when dying: a fable is more symbolic than a poem, a saying more symbolic than a

27. Lev Tolstoy, "Dnevnik," *Letopis* 12 (1916): 354. [Actually, March 1, not February 29. Lev Tolstoy, *Polnoe sobranie sochineniy*, vol. 53 (Moscow: Gosizdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoy literatury, 1953). — Trans.]

28. [This sentence (italicized in all later publications) seems to echo the words of a poet: "Khlebnikov told me that the making matters, and not what has been made; what has been made are but wood shavings" (Shklovsky 1990b: 469). Khlebnikov was talking about the process of writing; but while the completed text might not matter to the writer, it certainly does to the reader. Alternatively, "what has been made" could refer to the images we create in the reading process. — Trans.]

29. [Shklovsky is referring to the essay "Hamlet and Don Quixote" (Turgenev 1965); the Russian word for *king* (*korol*) derives from *Karl*. — Trans.]

fable. This is why Potebnya's theory is least self-contradictory when discussing the fable, a genre which he was, in his own view, able to analyze in full. His theory did not fit "thingish" artistic texts, and thus Potebnya's book could not be finished.³⁰ As we know, *Notes on Literary Theory* [*Iz zapisok po teorii slovesnosti*] was published in 1905, 13 years after the death of the author. Potebnya himself could only complete the chapter on the fable.³¹

Things that have been experienced several times begin to be experienced in terms of recognition: a thing is in front of us, we know this, but we do not see it.³² This is why we cannot say anything about it. Art has different ways of deautomatizing things; in this article I would like to show one of the methods very frequently used by L. Tolstoy—the writer who, in Merezhkovsky's judgment, presents things the way he sees them, who sees things fully but does not change them.

Tolstoy's method of estrangement consists in not calling a thing or event by its name but describing it as if seen for the first time, as if happening for the first time. While doing so, he also avoids calling parts of this thing by their usual appellations; instead, he names corresponding parts of other things. Here is an example. In the article "Ashamed," L. Tolstoy enstranges the concept of flogging: "People who have broken the law are denuded, thrown down on the floor, and beaten on their behinds with sticks," and a couple of lines later: "lashed across their bare buttocks." There is a postscript: "And why this particular stupid, barbaric way of inflicting pain and not some other: pricking the shoulder or some other body part with needles, squeezing arms or legs in a vice, or something else of this sort."

I apologize for this disturbing example, but it is typical of Tolstoy's way to reach our conscience. The customary act of flogging is enstranged both by the description and by the proposal to change its form without changing its essence. Tolstoy used the method of enstrangement constantly. In one case, "Strider,"³³ the narrator is a horse, and things are enstranged not by

30. [The word *veshchnyy* (material, concrete, literally, thingish) appears to be a neologism to most Russian readers. However, Shklovsky was probably familiar with its use by Russian philosophers and above all the existentialist Nikolay Berdyaev. Shklovsky and Berdyaev were part of the tight-knit Russian community in Berlin, and Shklovsky attended at least one of his lectures (Gul 1927: 223). — Trans.]

31. Alexandr Potebnya, *Iz lektsiy po teorii slovesnosti* (Kharkiv: 1894).

32. Viktor Shklovsky, *Voskreshenie slova* (Saint Petersburg: 1914).

33. [The short story was also published in English under its original title, "Kholstomer." — Trans.]

our own perception but by that of a horse. Here is what the horse made of the institution of property:

What they were saying about flogging and Christianity, I understood well, but I was quite in the dark about the words “his own,” “his colt,” which made me realize that people saw some kind of connection between me and the equerry. What this connection was, I just couldn’t understand back then. Only much later, separated from the other horses, did I begin to understand. But back then I simply could not understand what it meant when they called *me* someone’s property. The words “my horse” described me, a living horse, and seemed as strange to me as the words “my land,” “my air,” “my water.”

However, these words had a strong effect on me. Thinking about this all the time, and only after the most diverse experiences with people, did I finally understand what meaning they ascribe to these strange words. Their meaning is this: in life, people are ruled not by acts but by words. They love not so much the possibility of doing or not doing something as the possibility of talking about different things using certain words, on which they agree beforehand. Such are the words “my” and “mine,” which they use to talk about different things, creatures, topics, and even about land, about people, and about horses. They agree that only one person may say “mine” about any particular thing. And the one who says “mine” about the greatest number of things, in this game whose rules they’ve made up among themselves, is considered the happiest. Why this should be so, I don’t know, but this is how it is. For a long time, I’ve been trying to explain it to myself in terms of some direct benefit, but this turned out to be wrong.

For instance, many of those who called me their horse never rode me, while completely different people did. Neither did they feed me, but yet others did. The ones who were good to me were not those who called me their horse either but the coachman, the horse doctor, and people who didn’t know me at all. Later, having widened the scope of my observations, I realized that, not only in relation to us horses, the notion of *mine* had no basis apart from a low animal instinct people have, which they call sense of property or property right. A man says “my house” and never lives in it but only worries about its building and upkeep. A merchant says “my shop,” “my cloth shop,” for instance, and does not have any clothes made from the best cloth in his own shop.

There are people who call a piece of land their own, but they have never seen this piece of land and never walked upon it. There are people who call other people their own, though they have never seen these others, and all they do to these other people is harm them. There are people who call women their women or their wives, but these women live with other men. And people do not strive to do what they consider good but to call as many things as possible their own. I am convinced now that this is the essential difference between people and us. This alone, not to mention other things in which we are better than people, is reason enough, is reason enough to say that we are higher up in the chain of being than people: their doings — at least to judge by those I knew — are guided by words, ours by deeds.

Toward the end of the story, the horse is killed, but the narrative method, the technique, does not change:

Much later, Serpukhovskiy's body, which had been walking about in the world, eating and drinking, was put into the ground. His skin, his meat, and his bones were of no use.

Just as his dead body, while it was still walking about, had been a great burden to everyone for 20 years, so the putting away of this body into the ground was nothing but trouble. No one had cared about him for a long time, all this time he had been a burden to everyone; and yet the dead who bury their dead found it necessary to dress this bulky body, which had begun to rot so quickly, in a good uniform and good boots, to lay it in a new, good coffin with new tassels at all 4 corners, then to put this new coffin in another, leaden one, and to ship it to Moscow, and there to dig out old human bones and then use this particular place to hide this body, putrefying, swarming with maggots, in its new uniform and polished boots, and strew earth all over it.

Thus we see that at the end of the story, the method is liberated from the accidental motivation for its use.

Tolstoy also applies this method to all battles in *War and Peace*. They are all presented as, first and foremost, strange. I will not quote these long descriptions—this would mean copying out quite a considerable part of a four-volume novel. Tolstoy also uses this method in describing salons and the theater.³⁴

Most of the stage was covered with flat boards; by the sides stood painted pictures showing trees, and at the back, a cloth was stretched on boards. Girls in red bodices and white skirts were sitting in the middle of the stage. A very fat one in a white silk dress was sitting separately on a narrow bench, which had some green cardboard glued behind. They were all singing something. When they had finished their song, the girl in white approached the prompter's box, and a man in silken pants stretched tightly over his fat legs, with a plume, approached her and began singing and spreading his arms. The man in the tight pants sang first, and then the girl sang. After that both stopped, music boomed out, and the man began to finger the hand of the girl in the white dress, apparently waiting, as before, to begin singing his part with her. Then they sang together, and everyone in the theater began to clap and shout, and the men and women onstage, who had been pretending to be lovers, were bowing, smiling, and spreading their arms.

34. [None of the existing translations of *War and Peace* fully re-creates the *ostranenie* of such intentionally clumsy expressions as “painted pictures.” The quotation below follows Shklovsky's text, which makes several omissions and differs from Tolstoy's in using figures instead of words in reference to numbers. However, I did take the liberty to correct the most obvious typos, such as *ranke* (frame) instead of *rampe* (footlights). (*Frame* appears in the translations by Lemon and Reis and by Sher.)—Trans.]

In the second act, there were paintings pretending to be monuments, and there were holes in the cloth pretending to be the moon, and the shades on the footlights were raised, and trumpets and basses were playing, and from right and left came many people wearing black gowns. The people started waving their arms, and they were holding daggers of sorts; then still more people came running out and proceeded to drag away the girl who had been wearing a white dress but now had on a blue one. They did not do so at once, though, but first sang with her for a long while, and only then dragged her away, and then something metallic was struck three times backstage, and everybody got down on their knees chanting a prayer. Several times, these activities were interrupted by exultant shouts from the spectators.

Same in the third act:

But suddenly there was a storm, chromatic scales and diminished seventh chords resounded from the orchestra, and everybody ran off, again dragging one of the people present backstage, and the curtain came down.³⁵

In the fourth act, “there was some devil who sang, waving his arms, until boards were pulled out from under him and he descended down there.”

This is also how Tolstoy described the city and the court of law in “Resurrection.” This is how he describes marriage in “The Kreutzer Sonata”: “Why, if people are soul mates, are they meant to sleep together.” But he did not use enstrangement only in order to let his readers see things he disapproved of.

Pierre rose and walked away from his new comrades, between the fires onto the other side of the street where, he was told, the captive soldiers were staying. He wished to talk to them. But on the way a French sentinel stopped him and ordered him to return. Pierre returned, but not to the fire and his comrades but to an unharnessed carriage with no people near it. He sat down on the cold earth by the wheel of the carriage, his legs tucked under and his head bowed, and sat there immobile for a long time, thinking. More than an hour passed. Nobody disturbed Pierre. Suddenly he broke out in his thick good-natured laugh, so loudly, that the evident strangeness of this laughter made people turn and look from all directions.

Ha, ha, ha, Pierre laughed. And he began to say to himself: the soldier didn’t let me through. I’m caught, I’m shut in. I. Me — my immortal soul. Ha, ha, ha, he laughed while tears came to his eyes. . . .

Pierre looked up at the sky, at the depth of receding sparkling stars. “All this is mine, all this is in me, all this is me,” thought Pierre, “and all this, they caught and

35. [One might wonder how the sophisticated discussion of music and the correct use of such concepts as “orchestra,” “prompter’s box,” and “theater curtains” accord with *ostranenie*. — Trans.]

put into a barracoon, shut off with boards.” He smiled and started walking toward his comrades, ready for sleep.

Anybody who knows Tolstoy well can find many hundreds of such examples in his work. This method of seeing things outside their context led Tolstoy to the enstrangement of rites and dogmas in his late works, replacing the habitual religious terms with their usual meanings—the result was strange, monstrous; many sincerely regarded it as sacrilegious and were deeply offended. But it was the same method that Tolstoy used elsewhere to experience and show his surroundings. Tolstoy’s perception unraveled his own faith, driving him toward things he had been long unwilling to approach.

The device of enstrangement is not particular to Tolstoy. I described it using material from Tolstoy for purely practical reasons, because this material is familiar to everyone.

And now, having elucidated the essence of this device, let us try to delineate the limits of its use. I personally believe that enstrangement is present almost wherever there is an image.

Accordingly, we can formulate the difference between Potebnya’s perspective and our own as follows: The image is not a constant subject with changing predicates. The goal of an image is not to bring its meaning nearer to our understanding but to create a special way of experiencing an object, to make one not “recognize” but “see” it.

The goal of imagery can be traced most clearly in erotic art.

Here, the erotic object is commonly presented as something seen for the first time. Take Gogol’s “Night before Christmas”:

He then came closer, coughed, chuckled, touched her full naked arm and said both slyly and smugly:

—What have you got here, then, magnificent Solokha?—

Having spoken thus, he jumped back a little.

—What a question! My arm, Osip Nikiforovich!—replied Solokha.

—Hm! Your arm! Heh-heh-heh!—replied the sexton, heartily content with his opening move, and made a tour of the room.

—What have you got here, dearest Solokha!—said he, still with the same expression, approaching her again, lightly putting his hand around her neck, and then jumping back, as before.

—As if you couldn’t see, Osip Nikiforovich!—replied Solokha,—my neck, and on my neck a necklace.

—Hm! A necklace on your neck! Heh-heh-heh!—and the sexton proceeded to take another tour of the room, rubbing his hands.

— What have you got here, then, incomparable Solokha . . . ?
 — Who knows what the sexton was about to touch this time
 with those long fingers of his . . . ³⁶

Or in Hamsun's *Hunger*:

“Two white marvels showed through her chemise.”

Or else, erotic objects are depicted indirectly, clearly not with the goal of “bringing [the meaning] nearer to our understanding.”

In the same vein, we find the depiction of sex organs as a lock and key, as devices for weaving, as a bow and an arrow, or as a ring and a spike, as used in a game in the epic of Staver.³⁷

In it, the husband fails to recognize his wife, who is dressed up as a warrior. She poses him a riddle:

“D’you remember, Staver, can you not recall
 How we went into the street, we little ones,
 How we played the game of spikes in the street,
 And you had a silver spike, and I a gilded ring?
 And I hit the ring only now and then,
 But you hit the ring every single time.”
 Staver, Godin’s son, gives a strict reply:
 “I have never played rings and spikes with you!”
 Vasilisa, daughter of Mikula, speaks again

and asks him, reminding him:

“D’you remember, Staver, can you not recall
 How we learned to write, me and you the same,
 And I had a silver inkwell, you a gilded quill?
 And I dipped the quill only now and then,
 But you dipped the quill every single time.”³⁸

Another version of the epic provided a solution:

Then the fearsome ambassador Vassily
 Raised his clothes up, raised them all the way.

36. [It could be argued that neither the reader nor the protagonist experiences *ostranenie* here. Rather, the latter coyly pretends to experience it, putting the “sex” in *sexton*. — Trans.]

37. [For “Staver,” see Alexey Gruzinsky, ed., *Pesni, sobrannye P.N. Rybnikovym* (Moscow: 1916), song no. 30. The other riddles mentioned are to be found in D. N. Sadovnikov, *Zagadki russkogo naroda* (Saint Petersburg: 1895), nos. 102–7, 588–91. Here, I have elaborated on a brief note in Shklovsky’s text — Trans.]

38. [*Sic*. The fact that the sexual imagery seems somewhat confused here is not a matter of translation. Arguably, the less-than-obvious meaning of “now and then” versus “every time” makes the image more difficult to process and therefore more attractive to Shklovsky. — Trans.]

And the young Staver, Staver Godin's son,
Recognized the familiar gilded ring.

But enstrangement is not only used in euphemistic erotic riddles, it is also the basis and the only sense of all riddles. Every riddle describes an object with words that define and depict it but are not usually used in reference to it (“two stings, two rings, a nail in the middle” for scissors), or else it is a kind of enstrangement through sound, a parroting parody—“floor and teiling” instead of “floor and ceiling,” and so forth.

Erotic images that are not riddles are still examples of enstrangement, such as all cabaret “maces,” “airplanes,” “little dolls,” “little brothers,” and so forth.

They have much in common with the folk image of trampled grass and broken viburnum bushes.³⁹

The device of enstrangement clearly appears in another widespread image—the motif of the erotic pose in which a bear or another animal (or the devil as another motivation for nonrecognition) fails to recognize a human. This is how the nonrecognition, the strangeness of this pose, is presented in a Belorussian fairy tale:⁴⁰

He then led his wife to the bathhouse, and, before having quite reached the steam room, spoke: “Now, wife of mine, take off all your clothes and remain as naked as your mother bore you!” “How can I strip naked before we reach the steam room?” “Well, you have to!” So she shames him: how can she strip naked before they reach the steam room? But he says: “If you don’t, you’ll be a widow, and I’ll kick the bucket.” So the wife undressed, let her hair loose and went down on her hands and knees; he sat down on top of her, facing her behind. The door was opened. The devils looked: who is he riding? He said: “Look here, you devils—if you can tell who I’m riding, I’m yours; and if not, get out of here, all of you!” And he slapped [his wife’s] behind. They walked around and around—and couldn’t guess. They could tell there was a tail—but what was that other thing? “Well, that’s a piece of work, you dear; we’ll give you whatever you want, and we’ll stay away from here!”

39. [It could be argued that these traditional images are the very opposite of *ostranenie*: after all, they are so familiar that the reference to sexuality is immediately “recognized,” not “seen.” “Trampled grass” is obvious enough; red viburnum berries (*kalinka*, as in the song “Kalinka-Malinka”) refer to defloration in Russian folklore. On the other hand, when used—or heard—for the first time, such an image can indeed be enstranging. — Trans.]

40. “Spravyadlivyy soldat” (“The Fair Soldier”) is to be found in E. Romanov, *Belorusskii sbornik* (Kiev: 1886, Vilna: 1912), tale no. 84, p. 344. [Shklovsky also mentions “Besstrashnyi barin” (“The Fearless Master”), Dmitry Zelenin, *Velikorusskie skazki Vyatskoi gubernii* (Saint Petersburg: 1915), tale no. 52. Here, again, I have elaborated on Shklovsky’s brief note. — Trans.]

Very typical is nonrecognition in the following fairy tale:

A peasant was plowing his field with a piebald mare. A bear came to him and asked: "Uncle, who has made this mare piebald for you?" "I myself." "But how?" "Shall I make you piebald, too?" The bear agreed. The peasant tied up his legs, took the plowshare, heated it in the fire and went on to apply it to the bear's flanks: the hot plowshare scorched off his fur right to his flesh, making him piebald. He untied the bear, and the bear went away to lie under a tree. A magpie came down and wanted to peck at some meat on the peasant's field. The peasant caught it and broke its leg. The magpie flew away and alighted on the tree under which the bear was lying. Then, after the magpie, a spider (a big fly)⁴¹ flew onto the peasant's field and began biting the mare. The peasant took the spider, shoved a stick up its bum, and let it go. The spider flew off to the tree where the magpie and the bear were. So there they were, all three of them. The man's wife came to the field, bringing him lunch. The husband and his wife had their lunch in the fresh air, and then he toppled her onto the ground. The bear saw this and said to the magpie and the spider: "Oh my! He's about to make someone piebald again." The magpie said: "No, he's about to break someone's leg." And the spider: "No, he wants to put a stick up someone's bum."

This device is identical to the one used in "Strider": this, I believe, is obvious to everyone.⁴²

Enstrangement of the act itself is very frequent in literature. *Decameron* is an example: "the scraping of the barrel," "the catching of the nightingale," "the merry wool-beating work" (the latter image is not developed into a plotline). Sexual organs are enstranged just as frequently.

A whole series of plots is based on their "nonrecognition." Afanasiev's fairy tales, such as "The Bashful Lady," provide examples: the whole tale consists of not naming the object,⁴³ of pretending not to recognize it. Same in his

41. [Sic. All original absurdities are preserved. The word *pauk* (spider) is rendered as *fly* in both published translations. The addition of "a big fly" in brackets is Shklovsky's own and refers to a somewhat more plausible version of the tale. Still, penetrating an insect with a stick is a feat worthy of Nikolai Leskov's "Lefty," the master who horseshoed a fly. — Trans.]

42. [The device might indeed be identical but certainly not the effect. It does not seem that obvious how the depiction of human society from an alien perspective is identical to the punch line of a joke in which sexual intercourse is mistaken for violence (the acts of laying bare the skin on someone's flanks, putting her or his legs at an angle, and sticking a lengthy object into her or his lower parts are united in a denouement that each of the animals associates with its own misadventure). Though animal perspectives are employed in both cases, it is doubtful whether the bawdy tale really leads the reader (or, originally, the listener) to perceive the strangeness of sex as intensely as Tolstoy's readers might perceive the strangeness of society. — Trans.]

43. [Shklovsky applied this device to romantic love rather than sexuality in his 1923 novel *Žoo, ili pis'ma ne o lybvi* (*Žoo, or Letters. Not about Love*). By attempting to refrain from talking about love, the narrator does nothing but talk about love. — Trans.]

“The Bear and the Hare.” The Bear and the Hare “mend a wound.” Same in Onchukov’s “A Woman’s Blemish.”

Constructions such as “the pestle and the mortar” or “the devil and hell” (*Decameron*) are also devices of enstrangement.

Enstrangement in psychological parallelism is discussed in my article on plot formation.

Here, let me repeat that in a parallelism, the sense of nonidentity despite affinity is crucial.

The goal of parallelism — the goal of all imagery — is transferring an object from its usual sphere of experience to a new one, a kind of semantic change.

When studying poetic language — be it phonetically or lexically, syntactically or semantically — we always encounter the same characteristic of art: it is created with the explicit purpose of deautomatizing perception. Vision is the artist’s goal; the artistic [object] is “artificially” created in such a way that perception lingers and reaches its greatest strength and length, so that the thing is experienced not spatially but, as it were, continually. “Poetic language” meets these conditions. According to Aristotle, “poetic language” must have the character of the foreign, the surprising.⁴⁴ It often is quite literally a foreign language — Sumerian for Assyrians, Old Bulgarian as the basis of literary Russian — or else it might be elevated language, like the almost literary language of folk songs. Here, we can also name the widespread use of archaisms in poetic language, the difficulties of the *dolce stil nuovo* (XII), Arnaut Daniel’s dark style and hard forms *that entail pronunciation difficulties*.⁴⁵ Yakubinsky in his article proved the law of phonetic difficulty in poetic language using the example of sound repetition.⁴⁶ The language of poetry is difficult, laborious language which puts the brakes on perception. In some particular cases, the language of poetry approaches the language of prose, but this does not violate the law of difficulty. Pushkin wrote:

Tatyana was her name . . . I own it,
self-willed it may be just the same;
but it’s the first time you’ll have known it,
a novel graced with such a name.

(Translation by Charles H. Johnston)⁴⁷

44. [Shklovsky appears to refer to the concept of *xenikón* (Aristotle 2008: chap. 22). — Trans.]

45. Friedrich Diez, *Leben und Werke der Troubadours* (Leipzig: 1829), 213.

46. [Expressions such as “proved the law” are worth noticing, being typical of the young formalist. — Trans.]

47. [This version was chosen from the many English translations of *Eugene Onegin*, as in this particular stanza it arguably mirrors best the original light tone and playful rhyming — features crucial to this example. Tatyana was a “simple” name, not considered elegant enough for poetry — just as Pushkin’s style itself was too colloquial for his time. — Trans.]

For Pushkin's contemporaries, Derzhavin's elevated diction was the usual language of poetry, so that Pushkin's style was unexpectedly difficult for them in its ordinariness. Recall that Pushkin's contemporaries were horrified by his vulgar expressions. Pushkin used the vernacular as a device to arrest attention, just as his contemporaries used *Russian* words in their everyday French speech (for examples, see Tolstoy's *War and Peace*).

Today, an even more characteristic phenomenon takes place. Russian literary language, originally alien to Russia, has penetrated the human masses so deeply as to level many dialectal varieties. Literature, in the meanwhile, began to care for dialects (Remizov, Klyuev, Esenin, and others, unequal in talent but close in their intentionally provincial language) and barbarisms (which made Severyanin's school possible).⁴⁸ Maxim Gorky, too, is making a transition from literary language to dialect, not any less literary, in the manner of Leskov.⁴⁹ In this way, folk language and literary language have changed places (cf. Vyacheslav Ivanov and many others). Moreover, there is a strong tendency to create new language specifically intended for poetry; as we know, Vladimir Khlebnikov is leading this school.⁵⁰ Thus, we arrive at a definition of poetry as decelerated, distorted speech. Poetic speech is constructed speech. Prose, on the other hand, is ordinary speech: economical, easy, correct (*dea prosae* is the goddess of correct, easy birth, of the baby's "straight" position).⁵¹ I will speak in more detail about deceleration and delay as a general *law* of art in my article on plot construction.

In regard to rhythm, the position of people who believe economy to be a driving and even defining force in poetry seems strong at first sight. Spencer's interpretation of the role of rhythm seems incontestable: "Irregular blows force us to keep our muscles in excessive, sometimes unnecessary tension as we cannot foresee the repetition of the blow; regular blows help us economize energy."⁵² This seemingly convincing observation suffers from the usual fallacy—the confusion of the laws of poetic and prosaic language. In *The*

48. [In Russian *barbarizmy* refers exclusively to the use of foreign words or calque expressions (of which Igor Severyanin was particularly fond). — Trans.]

49. [Shklovsky uses the word *govor* (idiom, dialect); however, as he talks not of authentic dialect but of its literary imitation, he appears to be anticipating the concept of *skaz* (Eikhenbaum 1919), which involves the literary approximation of "folksy" speech. — Trans.]

50. [Actually, Velimir Khlebnikov. — Trans.]

51. [Prorsa, or Prosa, or Antevorta is the lesser-known sister of Porima, or Postverta, or Postvorta, also a birth goddess. — Trans.]

52. [Shklovsky is quoting an abbreviated paraphrase of Spencer's *The Philosophy of Style* (Veselsky 1983: 445). The original is: "Just as the body, in receiving a series of varying concussions, must keep the muscles ready to meet the most violent of them, as not knowing when such may come; so, the mind in receiving unarranged articulations, must keep its percepts active enough to recognize the least easily caught sounds. And as, if the concussions recur in definite order, the body may husband its forces by adjusting the resistance needful for each concussion;

Philosophy of Style, Spencer made no distinction between them, though there might well be two kinds of rhythm. The rhythm of prose, of a work song like “Dubinushka,” can replace a command;⁵³ it also simplifies work by automatizing it. It really is easier to walk with music than without it, but it is just as easy to walk while engaged in animated conversation, when the act of walking vanishes from our consciousness. Therefore, prosaic rhythm is important as an automatizing factor. The rhythm of poetry is different. There is “order” in art, but not a single column of a Greek temple corresponds to it exactly; poetic rhythm consists in the distortion of prosaic rhythm. Attempts to systematize such distortions have been made; they are the current task of the theory of rhythm. It seems probable that such systematization will not succeed, for we are talking not of complicating but of disrupting the rhythm, of disrupting it unpredictably; if such a disruption is canonized, it will lose its power as a device of deceleration. But I will not discuss rhythm in more detail; a separate book will be dedicated to the topic.⁵⁴

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so, if the syllables be rhythmically arranged, the mind may economize its energies by anticipating the attention required for each syllable” (Spencer 2009: 51). — Trans.]

53. [The song’s refrain can be very roughly translated as “Move it!” It was used as a signal for strenuous collective actions. “Dubinushka” is similar to such work songs as sea chanteys and African American call-and-response songs. — Trans.]

54. [Shklovsky never wrote that book. — Trans.]

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