

ESTRANGEMENT

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It. *Straniamento*; Fr. *Éloignement*; Germ. *Verfremdung*; Span. *Extrañamiento*. The roots of the concept of Estrangement can be traced back to Shklovsky's 1917 essay "Art as Device" (Boym 2017). In the essay, the Russian formalist first proposed the neologism *ostranenie* (estrangement), which suggests distancing, dislocation and something becoming strange (Trebeß 2006; Sutherland 2012). Solomon (2012) argued that, in Shklovsky's view, the effect of estrangement is produced by adopting an unorthodox point of view on a given object or topic, by thinking of the world as a question, an exercise of wonder that distances the automatically recognizable and the perceptible, a perception of the world with a strained sensitivity. According to Chernavin and Yampolskaya (2019), the concept of estrangement refers to a displacement from what a certain element appears because of an estranging detail, displacing different aspects of reality from an everyday context into a reinvented framework, returning sensation to life itself. Furthermore, the device of estrangement places emphasis on deferral and cognitive ambivalence, caused by a device that breaks up the routinized forms of perception. Both the reception and the complex cultural origins of Shklovsky's idea of estrangement, involving German Romanticism, the philosophy of Henry Bergson, Tolstoy's poetics as well as Russian and Italian futurism, are discussed in the contemporary debate.

THE DEBATE ON SHKLOVSKY'S IDEA OF ESTRANGEMENT AND BRECHT'S *VERFREMDUNGSEFFEKT*

Boym (2017) argued that the European reception of Shklovsky's concept of estrangement was characterized by a conceptual alteration. In fact, due the Soviet Union's mandate to shift Shklovsky's estrangement to the concept of *otchuzhdenie* (alienation), the German translation for estrangement became *Verfremdung* (alienation), the same term that Bertolt Brecht used for his concept of *Verfremdungseffekt*, which has debated connections with Shklovsky's *ostranenie* (Lachmann 1970; Tihanov 2005; Di Tommaso 2008; Jestrovic 2018). Commenting on Shklovsky's concept of *ostranenie* and Brecht's alienation effect, Mitchell (1974) noticed that in the former, the idea of *estrangement* was an aesthetic

concept, concerned with the renewal of perception, while Brecht's *Verfremdung* was a concept aimed at striking not just the perceptions, but the consciousness of his spectators. Brecht's *Verfremdung* consists in tackling reality to discover its possibilities, to specify its contradictions. As Kelly recently argued (2020), by operationalizing perceptive negation as an aesthetic device, Brecht's alienation effect suspends the intentional prefigurings of the audience on the performance, disrupting the spectators' ability to passively view the play and forcing them to critically engage with it. Despite the outlined difference, Kelly underlines how both in Shklovsky and Brecht, the role of art is seen as de-routinization and de-automatization. In fact, it renews and refreshes our perceptions by 'making-strange' and defamiliarizing. According to Trebeß (2006), Brecht's interpretation of Shklovsky's concept of *ostranenie* (Brecht 1963) brought the term out of the cultural environment of Russian Formalism and Futurism, transposing it in the debate on Theatre and inaugurating a broader debate on the concept. Robinson (2008) claimed, on the one hand, that both Shklovsky and Brecht referred to the Romantic idea of estrangement, intended as a feigned alienation designed to alienate alienation. On that other he claimed that Brecht, despite his proximity to the Hegelian and Romantic model of alienation, finds several points of contact with Shklovsky's estrangement, sharing his idea of art as a possibility to go beyond rules and conventions (Zipfel 2017). Furthermore, the author argued that Brecht's concept of *Verfremdung* derives on the one hand out of his interactions with people close to Shklovsky, on the other from the German tradition, which was essential as well in the development of the Russian formalist's concept of *ostranenie*.

THE DEBATE ON THE CULTURAL ORIGINS OF THE CONCEPT OF ESTRANGEMENT

According to Robinson (2008), the origin of Shklovsky's concept of estrangement neither coincides with the Romantic concept of *Verfremdung* (alienation), nor with the Hegelian dialectics of *Entfremdung*, later revised by Marx (Sensat 2016). Instead, the origin of the concept can be traced back to Novalis' idea of *Befremdung*. In fact, in an essay published in 1966, Shklovsky explicitly related the origin of his concept of estrangement to German Romanticism. In particular, he referred to Novalis' *Fragment on Romantic poetics* (1988), intended by the German poet as the art of enjoyable estrangement (*Befremdung*), i.e., of making an object strange and, at the same time, familiar and attractive. The cultural origin of Shklovsky's concept of estrangement does not lie only in German Romanticism, and its complex branches are discussed in the scientific literature. Firstly, both in his 1917 essay and his *Theory of Prose* (1990), published in Russia in 1929, Shklovsky referred his concept of *ostranenie* to Tolstoy's estrangement device, who intended it as an instrument to overcome appearances in order to achieve a deeper understanding of reality (Ginzburg 1996), as a device that unveils hidden portions of reality by employing an estranged view. According to Russian Formalists, Tolstoy's concept of estrangement had its source in French literature, in particular in Voltaire's *Huron*, or in the description of the French court made by Chateaubriand's *Savage*. Secondly, Todorov (1988) argued that the line of descent Shklovsky's technological metaphor of the estrangement device can be traced back to Russian Futurism. Steiner (1984) argued that a further influence was exerted by Italian Futurism, with its cult of the machine as the most crucial factor in the birth of the Modernist artistic sensibility. Thirdly, the recent scientific literature (Eskin 2019) has underlined that

a further relevant influence on Shklovsky's idea of estrangement can be traced back to Bergson's theory of perception. This hypothesis is based on Curtis (1976), who claimed that two main theoreticians of Formalism, Viktor Shklovsky and Yury Tynianov, developed a conceptual paradigm which derives from the thought of Henri Bergson. To substantiate this argument, Curtis states that various aspects of the concepts and the organization of Shklovsky's 1917 essay derive from Bergson's philosophical perspective. On the one hand, the Russian Formalist describes the process of automatization as part of the human condition, by claiming that, if we examine the general laws of perception, we see that as it becomes habitual, it also becomes automatic (Shklovsky 1990), and that he might be referring to Bergson's analysis of repeated encounters with the same person. On the other hand, according to Robinson (2008) and Curtis (1976), when Shklovsky describes the process of the automatization of perception by comparing it to the process of algebraizing, where objects are replaced by symbols, he is reinterpreting Bergson's passage on algebra and its limits, where he states that algebra can represent the results gained at a certain moment of duration and the positions occupied by a certain moving body in space, but not duration and motion themselves (Bergson 1896). Finally, when Shklovsky observed that if a literary work attains a great impact, the object is perceived not spatially but, as it were, in its temporal continuity, he is referring to Bergson's theory of art and his configuration of concepts such as duration, spatiality and continuity. Bergson's binary pair, namely seeing and recognition, imply further corresponding pairs for Shklovsky: continuity and non-continuity, de-automatization and automatization. In Shklovsky's theory, estrangement can be intended as a device that places emphasis on the process rather than the product, making perception long and laborious, breaking its routinized forms. According to Chernavin and Yampolskaya (2019), the concept of estrangement introduced by Russian Formalism does not need to be understood only as a literary device or technique that undoes the automatisms engendered by habit. Instead, it can be interpreted as a phenomenological tool, given the role it can play in the disclosure of the meaning-in-formation by problematizing our relation to the world, breaking the routinized forms of perception, and giving access to new meanings.

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