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On Viktor Shklovsky's *Penchant for Forms*

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In the article, I have decided to sketch a brief portrait of the most significant Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky. In order to comment upon his contribution to the development of literary theory, I cast some light on his original term *ostranenie* (estrangement, defamiliarization), which allows the formalist to expose the essential features of writing based on unlimited changes of the plot: they always assume a participation of irony, parody, and reinvention in art. The listed devices determine the progress in literature, which makes use of the old conventions to create new ones what occurs in the course of transgressing consolidated forms and functions. What is more, the process of transgression (or – to be more precise – self-transgression) is manifested by a disruptive activity of irony at the same time collaborating with literary traditions and thwarting them with the force of the eternal, perpetual reinvention.

KEYWORDS: *ostranenie*; irony; parody; reinvention; detail; digressive interpolation

Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness
of an object; the object is not important
(Shklovsky, 2004, 19).

It goes without saying that from the contemporary perspective the Russian formalists' doctrines regarding the artistic creation (in process) cannot be a surprise to anyone, who is used to deal with many different theoretical-literary conceptions and methodologies being elaborated during the last century. What is more, the spectacular concentration on forms, partially inspired by Saussure's comportment towards language comprehended as a system of interdependent double entities called signs, results from the commonly known phenomena, which seriously determine the transformations within the academic paradigm of the human research at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century. Yet, it is worth reminding that from the conventional

point of view the beginnings of the formalists' movement are usually derived from such factors like radical changes in the realm of the then linguistics, crisis of the symbolic art and idealistic aesthetics, and eventually from the new achievements in the Russian avant-garde poetry (Burzyńska, Markowski, 2007, 113–117)¹. According to Danuta Ulicka (2007), who reveals her interest in literary studies conceived as memory, the above mentioned sources of the Russian formalistic school are not that obvious, and instead of the reminder concerning traditional academic discourse Ulicka takes into consideration a collection of three types of narratives, which thicken and complicate the commented "scene of instruction." Fascinated by this scene, the researcher lists the university, political, and formalistic narratives along with their intriguing variants: the university narrative including cosmogonical, teogonical, and developmental (psychoanalytical and sociological) variants, the political one referring to heroic, tragic, cynical, and dissident variants, and the formalistic one, which is dominated by ethical aspects what makes it closeness to the Formalism (constituted within the poststructuralistic, especially deconstructive conceptions) extremely visible and radically clear (Ulicka, 2007, 87). It seems important to emphasize that the cosmogonical variant of the university narratives manifests the antithetical attitude of the formalists to Dilthey's antipositivist hermeneutics rather than to natural history in general, which from the neo-Kantian perspective remains a permanent inspiration for the Russian explorers. This perspective unveils the ambivalent part of various media (including language together with many other cultural patterns) in the mental processes of cognition what explains, therefore, the Russian formalists' avocation for the material aspects of human expression. Furthermore, one cannot attempt to attribute the antipsychological preferences (traditionally related with Husserl's inspiration) to the formalists, since they often make use of the emotional factor in the process of creation, which might be also analysed from the view-point of the so-called psycho-aesthetics (Ulicka, 2007, 92). It is worth highlighting that the conventional cosmogonical narrative concerning the older brother's death, who as a symbolist and culture historian must be eliminated by the

¹ "Początki formalizmu w badaniach literackich wiążą się z trzema okolicznościami historycznymi. Po pierwsze – z sytuacją w ówczesnym językoznawstwie, po drugie – z kryzysem symbolizmu w sztuce, i po trzecie – z nowymi zjawiskami w poezji rosyjskiej" (Burzyńska, Markowski, 2007, 113).

younger formalist seems an effect of the Western exaggerated interpretation, and rather remains in a significant opposition to the non-antagonistic relationship between the Russian symbolists and formalists. Ulicka also tends to enfeeble Saussure's influence on the formalistic concepts as for the status of language: regarded as the father founder of the modern semiology, Saussure inaugurates and constitutes the Formalism of the 50s and 60s while the Russian formalists are trained by Jan Baudouin de Courtenay (Grodziński, 1989), whose exceptional part in their linguistic education is also illuminated in great detail by Shklovsky (1965, 114–124). Regardless of the individual development of the above mentioned narratives shaping the Russian school's choices and compartments, I would like to stress Ulicka's involvement in removing the Western spell cast on the formalists, according to which the researcher manages to uncover three fundamental properties present in their manner of thinking. For many convoluted reasons (largely determined by the political turns), the Russian formalists count on a negative attitude towards the institutional, academic, and official life, which result in their non-institutional, non-academic, and non-official programme, and that is precisely what makes them a marginal phenomenon totally preoccupied with its peripheral, artistic existence. It should be added that along with the formalists' assumptions, a special style of expression is being worked out, which allows them to pass over the conventional dichotomic division of language into the scholar and artistic manners of speaking or writing. Ulicka states that

Formalizm (...) rodził się poza centrum, poza oficjalnymi instytucjami i oficjalnym akademickim dyskursem, jako myśl "offowa" raczej (...). Przyszli formaliści terminowali też nie tylko u zwykle wymienianych wielkich profesorów z Kazania (de Courtenay), Petersburga (Wiesiołowskiego i następcy Baudouina, Lwa Szczerby) i Charkowa (Potebni), ale także u rówieśników i niewiele starszych artystów – teoretyków (Kornieja Czukowskiego, Waczesława Iwanowa, Dmitrija Mereżkowskiego, Wsiewołoda Meyerholda, Siergieja Eisensteina, Kazimierza Malewicza, poetów-futurystów). Ich sami wskazywali jako najważniejszych nauczycieli. Pod tym akurat względem znajdowali się w analogicznej sytuacji intelektualnej, jak o ćwierć wieku później formalisci-dekonstrukcyjniści. W obu przypadkach granica dzieląca myśl teoretyczną i literacką była w istocie płynna i w gruncie rzeczy niemożliwa do przeprowadzenia. Także w ich własnej twórczości (Ulicka, 2007, 04).

In consequence, the Russian formalists might be easily perceived as the precursors of their deconstructive inheritors, whose works openly manifest

freedom of language that is, its independence from the conventional usages, traditional divisions, acknowledged typologies, independence which is to unveil sensuality and matter of the very language. In practice, the commented perspective refers to a free combination of all available styles, which are to determine the whole tasks and commitments of the formalists, who paradoxically have to submit themselves to the patterns of the so-called *poeta doctus* namely, the one who works in language. And to the most important results of this activity belongs the pre-postmodern philological novel (according to the term coined by Ulicka, 2007, 127–160), which as an incarnation of writing fulfils the formalists' goals.² Moreover, this achievement, which finds its great representation in Shklovsky's *Zoo, or Letters Not about Love* (first published in 1923), carries with it a presence of such phenomena like parody (or self-parody; both devices should be fathomed in terms of the contemporary intertextuality³), literary fact, and literary evolution that determines the formalists' conception of meaning *in statu nascendi* namely, constituted in the act of reading and, therefore, revealing the necessary changes of interpretation, which never gains its conclusive, final decisions. The novel manner of writing also thwarts the academic belief in theoretical considerations on literature, since the latter provides a clear evidence of non-transparent (thus somehow impenetrable) language hidden in various tropes and figures, which instead of the analytical, objective cognition promises rather a never-ending quest for the individual expression, or singular articulation. What is more, the quest itself tends to treat the theoretical analysis and the artistic discovery as one, and due to this, as is manifested in the exemplary *Zoo*, one may face a sophisticated combination of the epistolary novel tradition, marked in the title of Shklovsky's text and streaked with elements of intimate love literature, autobiography, which is clearly indicated in the

²“Grom językowym towarzyszyły zwykle gry z konwencjami – pozostającymi w stanie inercji, zautomatyzowanymi chwytami, które należało przywrócić do życia przez równoczesne wykorzystanie i wzięcie w nawias. Szklowski postąpił tak nie tylko w *Zoo* (...), ale też w *Podróży sentymentalnej*, której fabuła, przedstawiająca wędrowkę esera przez front galicyjski (...) na pozór zgodna jest z wzorcem Sterne'owskim, w istocie zaś odsyła raczej do Proustowskiej podróży w głąb siebie” (Ulicka, 2007, 151).

³As for Shklovsky's own terminological choices, he would rather prefer to remain in the old, well-known dictionary what is confirmed in his last book devoted to plots: “People today get carried away with terminology; there are so many terms that it's impossible to learn them all, even if you're young person on vacation” (Shklovsky, 2007, 177).

author's introduction (the description of his "Berlin period" as the time of his exile), and history/theory-literary tales dedicated to the contemporary writers (Biely, Remizov, Pasternak), which are to establish a "real" content of the individual letters. In effect, these three conventions are entirely subordinated to the overwhelming activity of irony, since they announce and at the same time withdraw their schematic, consolidated patterns, which are to demand, as the author tries to suggest, a reformed or renewed turns of phrase. The ironic *modus operandi*, which puts the aforementioned devices together, is also emphasized by the hybrid style of Shklovsky's narrative being developed under the banner of Sterne's essayistic compositions that turns out to be permanently "forced" to contrast itself with other words taking forms of quotations (along with quasi-quotations and self-quotations), allusions, continuations, and discontinuations (or even counter-continuations, so to speak), etc.⁴ In *Criticism in the Wilderness*, Geoffrey H. Hartman considers the essayistic style of Georg Lukács revealed in his *Soul and Form* (1910) in order to remind us that this style itself is derived from the German Romantics' poetics of fragments, although the content of Hartman's reflections on Lukács extremely well renders Shklovsky's arbitrary and ironic mode of writing, of which unlimited interruptions serve to keep the formal issues open:

Irony, in any case, in Lukács as in German Romanticism, and perhaps in Sterne [and undoubtedly in Shklovsky – A.M.S.], is a kind of familiar demon, a domesticated compulsion, the will to truth or even the demon of absolute knowledge transformed by the magic of art into something close to a human and socializing grace. The essay form is a secret relative of the Romantic "fragment": it acknowledges occasionalism, stays within it, yet removes from accident and contingency that taints of gratuitousness which

⁴This avocation for Sterne's manner of writing referring to the convention of digressive novel is also proved by another text by Shklovsky (also published in 1923) that is, *A Sentimental Journey: Memoirs* – "Indeed, the involvement of Shklovsky with Sterne and his *chef-d'œuvre* seems to go beyond that of a fond critic with his favourite object of study: it is a complex and multi-faceted relationship, resembling a lifelong and sometimes troubled love affair. The fictional writings of Sterne and the critical writings of Shklovsky may be said to form a kind of symbiosis and while there is always a strong element of theoretical reflection implicit in the former, the latter with their stylistic originality and brilliant imagery often read like narrative prose" (Neubauer, Stewart, 2004, 272).

"Sterne w ogóle stanowił dla formalistów niedościgniony ideał przełamywania i ożywiania konwencji. To na niego zazwyczaj wskazywali, postulując zerwanie z tradycyjną fabułą literacką, kompozycję kołaży, rozsadzającą jednorodność stylu i spójność zdarzeń, amorfie i fragmentaryzm" (Ulicka, 2007, 151).

the mind is always tempted to deny or else to mystify. ...The essay lives off the desire that has an in-itself, that is more than something merely waiting to be completed, and removed, by absolute knowledge (Hartman G.H., 1980, 193–195).

In the further passages of my own essay, I will turn back to the formalist's style in order to bring us closer to understanding his extra-ordinary process of writing, however, in the end of this paragraph I wish to present a pertinent commentary upon the idiomatic strategy of narrative elaborated by the author of *Bowstring*, commentary which is to confirm the above mentioned remarks made by Hartman:

Shklovsky interrupts himself continually; he compiles evidence obsessively but refrains from analyzing it; his conclusions are dropped throughout the text like stray coins which one is lucky enough to happen by accident. ...It is as though Shklovsky is just as interested in breaking up his thoughts as in substantiating them. He cuts his discussion into fragments and threads them through the book, so that, as we read, we come upon many unexpected intersections. This approach imbues literary theory with the digressive thickness of literature itself, though occasionally the ordering principles borders on the arbitrary (Foltz, 2010).

* * *

Art shouldn't be compared with mirror.
A mirror shouldn't be deprived of its ability to reflect.
Art's concern is not reflection but changes in reflection
(Shklovsky, 2007, 393).

Inherited from the periods of Romanticism and early Modernism, the idea of language out of touch with its material autonomous existence demands, according to the Russian formalists, the process of its peculiar resurrection, since language is considered as a defunct creation resulted in its automatization along with a loss of its perceptible manifestations (Szkłowski, 1970, 55). In consequence, the resurrection of words assumes, therefore, defamiliarization (*ostranenie* or, more properly, *ostrannenie*, which seems a clear result of the formalist's fascination by strange and disruptive properties of Mayakovsky's poetry – Oever, 2010, 50)⁵, which

⁵ In his late *Theory of Prose*, Shklovsky explicates his famous mistake in the following words: "And then I coined the term *ostranenie*; as nowadays (1983) I can admit to have made spelling mistakes I wrote it with only one *n*. I should have written down *strannyi* first. And

“purpose is not to make us perceive meaning, but to create a special perception of the object” (Shklovsky, 2007, 18), and, as the formalist also claims, “it creates a ‘vision’ of the object instead of serving as a means for knowing it” (Shklovsky, 2004, 19). In *The Theory of the ‘Formal Method,’* Boris Eichenbaum attempts to illuminate the formalist’s goal with reference to a sort of necessary substitution:

The notion of ‘form’ here acquires new meaning; it is no longer an envelope, but a complete thing, something concrete, dynamic, self-contained, and without a correlative of any kind (Eichenbaum, cited after van der Oever, 2010, 63)⁶.

What is more, the object itself, in broader sense, is rooted in the self-referential properties of language, which are to free its structures from the sphere of conventional interpretation invalidating the formalistic aspects of various utterances. It is also important to remember that, according to Aage A. Hanse-Löve, “Die formalistische Erzähltheorie enthält als wissenschaftliches Objekt ihre eigene Herkunft” (Hanse-Löve, 1978, 35). In the quoted statement, the recognized Austrian Slavist accentuates that formalist narrative theory’s origin is regarded as scientific object which tends to reveal a new manner of rendering thoughts provided by literature itself. The above mentioned novel strategy of writing allows us to comprehend a necessary transformation as for the thematic issues manifested in the formalist’s text, since their intertextual (interdiscursive) involvement proves that the peripheral problems of forms become for them the centre of considerations and reflections (Boym, 2005, 72). For that reason, the formalists turn to a new set of questions posed under the address of the whole reservoir of literary devices, which from now on should be carefully examined due to their defamiliarization possibilities. Yet, to this something else must be added, since the process of *ostranenie* also demands its contradiction

so off it went and has been roaming the world ever since, like a dog with a torn ear” – cited after Annie van der Oever (2010, 12). Considering the fundamental meaning of Shklovsky’s term, Hanse-Löve also adds: “...nicht nur ein neuer literaturwissenschaftlicher Terminus, der Geschichte machen sollte, sondern auch das zentrale ästhetische und philosophische Prinzip der modernen Kunst und ihrer Theorie” (Hanse-Löve, 1978, 19).

⁶“In order to transform an object into a fact of art, it is necessary to detach it from the domain of life, to wrest it out from the web of familiar associations, to turn the object as one would turn a log in the fire,” Shklovsky adds (Oever, 2010, 63).

namely, familiarization that makes the institution of language invisible (or transparent), so to speak. This invisibility of language, confirmed by its non-reflective usage, turns out to be a proper point of departure for the quest of what is called strangeness. Furthermore, only the combination of familiarization and defamiliarization allows us to notice and appreciate a historical momentousness of the formalist's undertaking:

Form, thus, ultimately is an inherently historical category, and Shklovsky's explanation of the way in which *ostranenie* functions already implies, albeit in a more or less embryonic way, a conception of formal change. Not only in here a necessarily diachronic development taking place that leads to a habitualization of certain formal strategies, but there is also a specific historical context with regard to which formal defamiliarization has to be achieved. There is no form **outside** History (Kessler, 2010, 63; bold – A.M.S.).

The aforementioned quotation indicates a very significant property of the formalist's thought, which might be indeed called a diachronic one, since it does invest in the process of formal transformation occurring between familiarization and defamiliarization. This diachronic property, moreover, determines a fundamental difference that causes an expected distance between the Russian formalists and the structuralists, whose hyper-analytical activity mostly leads to the world of synchronic structures previously dissected from concrete literary texts (or other texts of culture)⁷.

* * *

The energy of delusion is the energy of search;
and at the same time – the energy of analysis.
The metamorphoses of life. It's interpreted by
man in its multiplicity
(Shklovsky, 2007, 392).

In the beginning of this passage, let me cast some light on the style of *Energy of Delusion*, which seems to remain in accordance with the hybrid poetics of the other texts written by Shklovsky. In the centre of his peculiar

⁷Due to this, the formalist writes his commentary upon the structuralism in his individual, metaphorical manner: "I have the impression that Structuralism began its study of the poem on an ice floe; the ice floe was close to the shore, then the wind carried it away into the open sea and people don't know if they should cry or shout for help, or be happy that they chose this course, that they are on their way" (Shklovsky, 2007, 179).

idiom, there is a brief, succinct or concise sentence reflecting the aphoristic thought and resembling, as Ulicka convincingly states (2007, 134), a verse that constitutes its intonation-syntactic variant elaborated within Slavonic versification systems (in Shklovsky's work significantly influenced by Mayakovsky's style⁸). Taking into account a metaphor of "serpentine" (the formalist's expression, which is to describe his own manner of writing: "My path is serpentine, and the books that I read – vary" – Shklovsky, 2007, 6), Christopher Byrd claims that Shklovsky's style "employs digression, repetition, autobiography and occasional salutations to the reader, confounding one's expectations of how a book of literary criticism should unfold" (Byrd, 2007). With regard to this, Shklovsky instead of communicating ideas rather tends to expose them "to the contradictions that work on them from all sides" (Foltz, 2010). For that reason, the formalist regularly combines theory of literature with fairy tale, which enables him to practice an anecdotal mode of narrative: it is always "partial and discontinuous, [it – A.M.S.] allows events and ideas to bristle against each other, to revise and contest one another through collision" (Foltz, 2010). Due to this bristling narrative strategy and in order to expose the text captured by a web of contradictions, all lingual units in Shklovsky's work are separated from each other by the intonation-syntactic pause (conjoined with a question of typography), which also refers to the avant-garde model of *vers libre* (free verse)⁹. The subsequent components of the formalist's narrative are rendered by the elliptical, loosely-linked sequences and episodes, which are unified by the conventional themes and writing solutions concentrated on

⁸In his last work, Shklovsky writes: "Mayakovsky Vladimir – a name, a memory without which I can't close this book because I'm not sure if I'll write another book about him. In a poem, Mayakovsky described his own death, and he described his resurrection... The poet, the resurrection of the poet, his vigilance, the sensation of a finished task can also be integrated in contemporary poetry" (Shklovsky, 2007, 403).

⁹"«Free» is properly a synonym for «nonmetrical», and it follows that the prosody of free verse is rhythmic organization by other than numerical modes. (...) What is important about free verse is the new insight it gives into the whole question of prosody in any verse. It neither aids or distracts the reader with an abstract pattern he can transfer in detail from poem to poem and codify in a formally closed, quasi-mathematical rhythm that bears only incidentally on the experience of poetry. Because the reader cannot pretend to account for its rhythms in abstract isolation, free verse confronts him directly with the complex relation of rhythm to meaning. It faces him back into the poem; and that is where he was always belonged" (Hartman C.O, 1980, 24–28).

presentation of what Shklovsky calls a story (considered as an opposition to his significant plot). In his last book written under the address of Lev Tolstoy's life and novels (interpreted in their relationship to the works of Boccaccio, Pushkin, Czekhov, Dostoevski, and Turgenev), and inspired by the writer's own "energy of delusion,"¹⁰ Shklovsky never gives up demonstrating his individual choices of articulation. In order to prove the formalist's willpower to the so-called self-exposition, let me cite one of the initial passages suggested or inspired by a significant coda of Pushkin's *Autumn*:

Here is a poem by a person who is full of possibilities to begin something.
 Poetry is timeless, or rather, it belongs to a different time – a different clock.
 The elements of work – the "old acquaintances" – they exist outside the whole, outside the existing whole.
 Not yet germinated;
 not yet sprouted;
 they are seeds.
 The poetic state doesn't come suddenly.
 Neither does inspiration.
 It's like the birds, returning to their nests.
 That's how poetry grows, by reconstituting its own origins.
 ...after this poem the author interrupts again and says that he doesn't want to think, he's afraid – the reader might think it's necessary to get deluded, *really* deluded, in order to write.
 This is a different kind of delusion.
 It's how people in the open sea, when by mistake they discover, instead of India, an island which they took for India – but they were mistaken – it was only an island, yet somehow they weren't wrong because behind it was the New World (Shklovsky, 2007, 11).

The category of being mistaken or deluded assumes Shklovsky's individual attitude towards writing based on such features like invention or reinvention¹¹ along with reconstitution of the text's origins, which are to

¹⁰In his letter to Nikolai Strakhov (April 8, 1878), Tolstoy alludes to the "energy of delusion," with which he is to replace inspiration: "...Everything seems to be ready for writing – for fulfilling my earthly duty, what's missing is the urge to believe in myself, the belief in the importance of my task, I'm lacking the energy of delusion..." (Shklovsky, 2007, 10).

¹¹"The term «reinvention» (*pereosmyslivanie*) is used throughout the text [that is, *Energy of Delusion* – A.M.S.] to explain the process of recreating or reconceptualising a plot that existed in some other form. As Shklovsky paraphrases Chekhov's method: the plot must be new, and the story doesn't matter. A good example of *plot reinvention* in Chekhov's *The Steppe*, which as Shklovsky illustrates throughout the book, re-envisioned the plot of Gogol's *Dead Souls*, creating a new form" (italics – Avagyan, in: Shklovsky, 2007, 23).

serve, in my opinion, a peculiar transgression expanding the borders of the previous works. Yet, the moment of the expected (and desired) transgression always refers to the formalist's privileged phenomenon namely, to the plot itself. In order to enter into the discussion on Shklovsky's concept, I would like to invoke Joshua Cohen, who states that

Shklovsky's late thesis on plot was the one with which he began: the plot self-proliferates, that's a book's form... [which – A.M.S.] generates itself, through identifiable if essentially organic or autochthonous technique (Cohen, 2007).

It is worth emphasizing that the plot as a term in none of the formalist's works finds its suitable definition, as if Shklovsky himself was not able to propose an unambiguous interpretation of this literary phenomenon. Considering the plot, one has to concentrate on the formal aspects of literature (fathomed as a "strange institution" in terms of Jacques Derrida¹²), thanks to which it maintains its artistic creativity or originality. Thus literary articulation of the story, its discursive dimension constitutes the realm of literature, which cannot be translated into any different system of signs (Burzyńska, Markowski, 2007, 123)¹³. For the formalist, the issue of the plot seems a vague or even apophantic notion, to which he devoted his *Energy of Delusion*. In the last chapter of this book, he admits he finds himself helpless when faces to define the central theme of his considerations:

I still haven't defined plot.

Throughout my life and until this day I still don't have a clear idea about what plot really is.

I know that a book can have a plotted beginning, when people – like the ladies in *The*

¹²In the famous interview granted by Derrida to Derek Attridge, the thinker states: "But given the paradoxical structure of this thing called literature, its beginning is its end. It began with a certain relation to its own institutionality, i.e., its fragility, its absence of specificity, its absence of object. The question of its origins was immediately the question of its end" (Derrida, 1992, 42).

¹³"Opozycja fabuły i jej narracyjnej artykulacji (*sjużet*) powtarza opozycję materiału (słowa) i chwytu stosowaną przez formalistów do poezji w miejsce fałszywej opozycji treści i formy. Tak jak chwyt jest świadomą konstrukcją słowną, tak *sjużet* jest językową konstrukcją fabuły, która nie podporządkowuje się logice przyczynowo-skutkowej. Jak pisał Szklowski, fabuła *Eugeniusza Oniegina* to romans Oniegina z Tatiana, zaś *sjużet* to artystyczne opracowanie tego romansu osiągnięte za pomocą dygresyjnych interpolacji" (Burzyńska, Markowski, 2007, 123).

Decameron who haven't yet invited any men, who know how to get things done (like Boccaccio himself) – reinvented the old, incorporated in the new.

The old never dies.

The plot in *Eugene Onegin* isn't just about Eugene Onegin, but about the Onegin who was studying the science of love – the way that Ovid did.

How to approach love, how to seduce her, how to give private lessons in quiet.

But loves turned out to be something else.

Something that we can't define.

Plot is a device that exists in reality, or could have existed had it not been deflected by the logic of time.

Plot is like finding a new love, a new faith – the loss of fear of an ending (Shklovsky, 2007, 414–417).

The formalist's plot, identified with the essence of art, might be, therefore, conceived as eternal changes of reflection, of which he speaks in the motto initiating to the second paragraph of my text. In *Energy of Delusion*, this essence is expressed metaphorically by three ironic and apparently independent prefaces, which are to open Shklovsky's book on plot. The formalist explains their necessary usage in the following words that serve as a peculiar guide to his last work:

Two books, in fact: one on the history of plot, and the other, let's say, on the history of specific plots, primarily those of Tolstoy, Czekhov, and Pushkin – I am reversing the chronological order.

The two books are unified in one – the third – book. (...)

Parody and reinvention of plot – this is the title of the second book within the current one (Shklovsky, 2007, 21–23).

For Shklovsky, literature matters only if proves its ability to create new forms achieved either by parody or reinvention, and both devices are frequently applied to his own writing that, alike the works of his favourite authors, tends to swerve and meander in its assumed erratic mode of articulation. Regardless of any other attempts made by the formalist to explicate the term of the plot, I wish to regard it as an event of irony, since all interruptions occurring in the stories are always carried with a necessary change in the plot. In spite of Shklovsky's own contribution made to the development of theory of literature, the formalist undoubtedly prefers to remain in the well acquainted dictionary of literary terms, and due to this he keeps avoiding usage of new notions and concepts. With reference to the terminological hyper-invention of the structuralists', the formalist

notices ironically that “People today get carried away with terminology; there are so many terms that it’s impossible to learn them all, even if you’re a young person on vacation” (Shklovsky, 2007, 177).

Along with the unquestionable apotheosis of the plot, Shklovsky accentuates meaning of detail, which, conjoined with the strategy of digressive interpolations, reveals itself as the basis for the formalist’s own technique of narrative clearly related with the view-point method (presented either by modern literature or world cinema, since both of them expose “montagability” providing us with evidence that “ideas don’t exist in isolation”):

Detail allows one to perceive the world as a change, not through a colourful curtain, and not through colourful shutters, and not through tinted spectacles.

It’s what we perceive through detail, it’s when we can draw a line adjacent to the other angles and perceived differently for that reason (Shklovsky, 2007, 332).

Shklovsky’s plot corresponds, therefore, to change linked with various, multi-faceted interpolations often inaugurated by certain details (radical turns or reversals), which cause many developmental transformations in the realm of literature. In the formalist’s works, the interpolations might be regarded as the writer’s own interventions in the tissue of the analysed or depicted texts, in order to expose a selected detail that is to disrupt the narrative, distort its coherence, and allows Shklovsky to change his subject. Thus instead of the announced interpretation of Tolstoy, Czechov, or Pushkin, the formalist begins to present either his own memories from the past or the stream of general reflections on the unattainable and indeed strange essence of literature. Its strangeness might be also considered as a result of the activity of a single word namely, “suddenly” which controls all literary changes and movements:

“Suddenly” is an introduction of a new force, new qualities, and new proposals.

“Suddenly” is a discovery.

And of course, in art “suddenly” should have been placed at the entrance of the temple of art – refuting the inscription above the Inferno, composed or found by Dante: “Abandon all hope, ye who enter.”

The human mind that created eternal punishment later also created the destruction of the inferno – it created redemption (Shklovsky, 2007, 337).

What is more, “suddenly” also refers to a specifically textual phenomenon of readiness to end, although the very same phenomenon assumes

ironically that the end is a convention, and, as Shklovsky would have added, one mustn't be afraid of conventions (in order to transgress them towards the future of this strange institution called literature).

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