

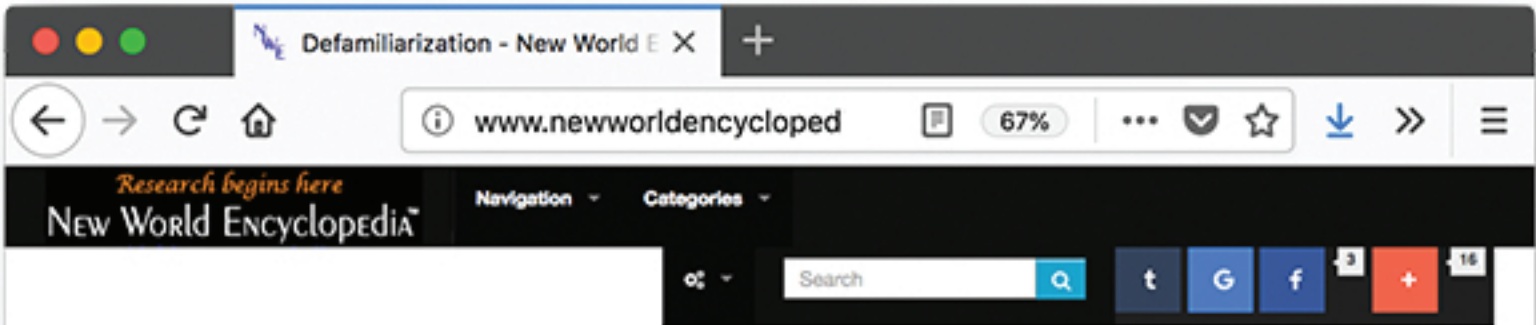
STUDIO10

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Unlikely Representation

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Defamiliarization or **ostranenie** (остранение) is the artistic technique of forcing the audience to see common things in an unfamiliar or strange way (literally "making it strange"), in order to enhance [perception](#) of the familiar.

The term was first coined in 1917 by Victor Shklovsky (or Shklovskij), one of the leading figures of the movement in [literary criticism](#) known as [Russian Formalism](#). Formalism focused on the artistic strategies of the author and made the literary text itself, and not the historical, social or political aspects of the work of art, the focus of its study. The result was an appreciation for the creative act itself. Shklovsky was a member of OPOYAZ (Obshchestvo izucheniya POeticheskogo YAZyka—Society for the Study of Poetic Language), one of the two groups, with the Moscow Linguistic Circle, which developed the critical theories and techniques of Russian Formalism. Defamiliarization is a central concept of twentieth century art, ranging over movements including [Dada](#), [postmodernism](#), epic theatre, and [science fiction](#).

History

Shklovsky introduced the concept of defamiliarization in his seminal essay, "Art as Device" (often translated as "Art as Technique")^[1]. The essay begins with the famous dictum, "Art is thinking in images." The notion that art is characterized by the use of images represents a "time-honored notion, dating back to [Aristotle](#) and upheld in modern times by critics so dissimilar as [Samuel Taylor Coleridge](#), Cecil Day Lewis, George Pleخانov, and Herbert Read"^[2]. In Russian literary criticism, it was the major premise of the dean of literary critics, [Vissarion Belinsky](#), but had become such a commonplace notion that Shklovsky claims, "The phrase may be heard from the mouth of a lycee student"^[3].

In the essay Shklovsky argues that such a shopworn understanding fails to address the major feature of art, which is not to be found in its content but its form. One of Shklovsky's major contentions was that [poetic language](#) is fundamentally different than the language that we use everyday. "Poetic speech is framed speech. Prose is ordinary speech—economical, easy, proper, the goddess of prose [dea prosae] is a goddess of the accurate, facile type, of the 'direct' expression of a child"^[4]. What makes art is not the "image," or the idea, which can easily be expressed in prosaic form just as well as in poetic form. This difference is the manipulation of form, or the artist's technique, which is the key to the creation of art.

The image can be given a prosaic presentation but it is not art because the form is not interesting, it is automatic. This automatic use of language, or "over-automatization" as Shklovsky refers to it, causes the idea or meaning to "function as though by formula"^[5]. This distinction between artistic language and everyday language, is the distinguishing characteristic of all art. He invented the term defamiliarization to "distinguish poetic from practical language on the basis of the former's perceptibility"^[6].

Technique

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