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| Viktor Shklovsky (1893-1984) |
| Shklovskii; Ви́ктор Бори́сович Шкло́вский |
| Born in St. Petersburg, Russia, Victor Borisovich Shklovsky (or Shklovskii; Ви́ктор Бори́сович Шкло́вский), was a literary critic and autobiographical novelist, a leading figure of Russian Formalism (1910-1930). A charter founder of OPOYAZ (‘The Society for the Study of Poetic Language’, 1917), he was also associated with the Moscow Linguistic Circle, and contemporary avant-garde writers, such as the Serapion Brothers and the Russian Futurists, especially the poet Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893-1930), all of whom similarly emphasised literature as language against the moralizing idealism of symbolist poetics and impressionist criticism prevalent in pre-Revolution Russia. However, formalism was later attacked as ‘decadent’ aestheticism, and Shklovsky was forced to compromise. In his much-quoted essay ‘Art as Device’ (1917), a ‘manifesto of the Formalist method’ (Eichenbaum 113), Shklovsky posits the autonomy of literature and affirms the formalist pursuit of the immanent, scientific study of the ‘literariness’ of literature derived from its distinctive language and techniques instead of its content, resonating with modernist aesthetics. Here he develops the concept of ‘estrangement’ or ‘defamiliarisation’ (*ostraneniye*) as both the aim and method of all art, self-reflexively impeding the automatism of our perception. Renamed as the ‘alienation effect’ or ‘distancing effect’ (*Verfremdungseffekt*) and endowed with a political function, ‘estrangement’ became the foundational technique of Bertolt Brecht’s epic theatre. |
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| Further reading:  (Bennett)  (Brewster)  (Eichenbaum)  (Erlich)  (Lemon and Reis) |