

extended as he raises his arms in a victorious gesture to the audience. Here is Elvis's "Yes, yes, yes!" in response to Ed Sullivan's "No, no, no!" This is the first and only full-length shot of Elvis; however, we still do not see his face—he is filmed from the rear—but it's clear he's the king, at the zenith of his career. The color signifies the passage of time—it's probably the sixties—and the blossoming of Presley's success as a radical break from the gray monotone of the respectable fifties.

This drama, a success story, ends with the corporate advertiser's name:

AIG

WORLD LEADERS IN INSURANCE AND FINANCIAL SERVICES

And what kind of drama is this? The corporate sponsor wants us to read it as a story of the young man who makes good by taking risks. Elvis's youth and sexuality are pitted against the repressive respectability of the fifties, and the shots of his fervent young (mostly female) audience make this also a drama of youth versus age. Our hero takes risks by refusing to conform to the standards of those who are the conservative gatekeepers to success: the mayor, the disc jockey, the mother, Ed Sullivan. And those crowds of adoring fans inspire him to take the risk and to go on gyrating. Of course, the media could not ignore such popularity, and the drama closes with the hero triumphant.

#### FOR DISCUSSION AND WRITING: REVERSALS AND RECOGNITIONS

1. Look back at the various narratives and dramas you have already considered, from the personal narratives of Pratt to the character contests of Goffman. Which of them have clear reversals, recognitions, or both? Is Aristotle right? Are the texts with reversals and recognitions the most interesting? Discuss any exceptions you find. It would be especially useful to consider your own dramatizations and personal narratives in the light of Aristotle's views.
2. Watch commercials on TV until you find one that follows the Aristotelian principles described by Esslin. If you have access to a VCR, record the commercial you are going to use so that you can study it carefully. If you don't have a VCR, do the best you can. You may have to see a commercial several times before you can complete your project.

This project has two parts. First, develop a written version of your chosen commercial, in the form of a play, with stage directions and everything else you would need for someone to act out the commercial. (An alternative to this would be to have someone with access to a VCR provide a written version that the whole class could use.) Second, write

an alternative version of the same commercial, in which some event happens or something is said that subverts or destroys the commercial function of the play. Try to make the smallest changes possible that will achieve the result that is being aimed at here. With some help from your classmates, act out your altered version.

#### REPRESENTATION AND ITS COMPLICATIONS

Thus far, we've looked at the structures of stories and plays, stressing their similarities to everyday texts. Now we'd like to explore further the ways in which literary texts create the effects they do.

At the end of the eighteenth century, William Wordsworth started writing a new kind of poetry, focusing on what he saw and felt in the everyday world. He rejected the use of poetic diction, stating that his purpose was "to imitate, and, as far as possible, adopt the very language of men." He also rejected the abstract subject matter of his predecessors. His colleague, poet and critic Samuel Taylor Coleridge, in his literary autobiography, *Biographia Literaria*, discussed Wordsworth's project in *Lyrical Ballads*:

Mr. Wordsworth . . . was to propose to himself as his object, to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us; an inexhaustible treasure, but for which, in consequence of the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude we have eyes, yet see not, ears that hear not, and hearts that neither feel nor understand.

A few years later, Percy Bysshe Shelley drafted his *Defence of Poetry*, applying Coleridge's formulation to all poetry and suggesting that by making the mind a "receptacle of a thousand unapprehended combinations of thought," poetry "lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world, and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar." In a later passage, he develops this idea further. Poetry

strips the veil of familiarity from the world, and lays bare the naked and sleeping beauty, which is the spirit of its forms.

All things exist as they are perceived; at least in relation to the percipient. 'The mind is its own place, and of itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.' But poetry defeats the curse which binds us to be subjected to the accident of surrounding impressions.

And whether it spreads its own figured curtain, or withdraws life's dark veil from before the scene of things, it equally creates for us a being within our being. It makes us the inhabitants of a world to which the familiar world is a chaos. It reproduces the common universe of which we are portions and percipients, and it purges from our inward sight the film of familiarity which obscures from us the wonder of our being. It compels us to feel that which we perceive, and to imagine that which we know. It creates anew the universe, after it has been annihilated in our minds by the recurrence of impressions blunted by reiteration.

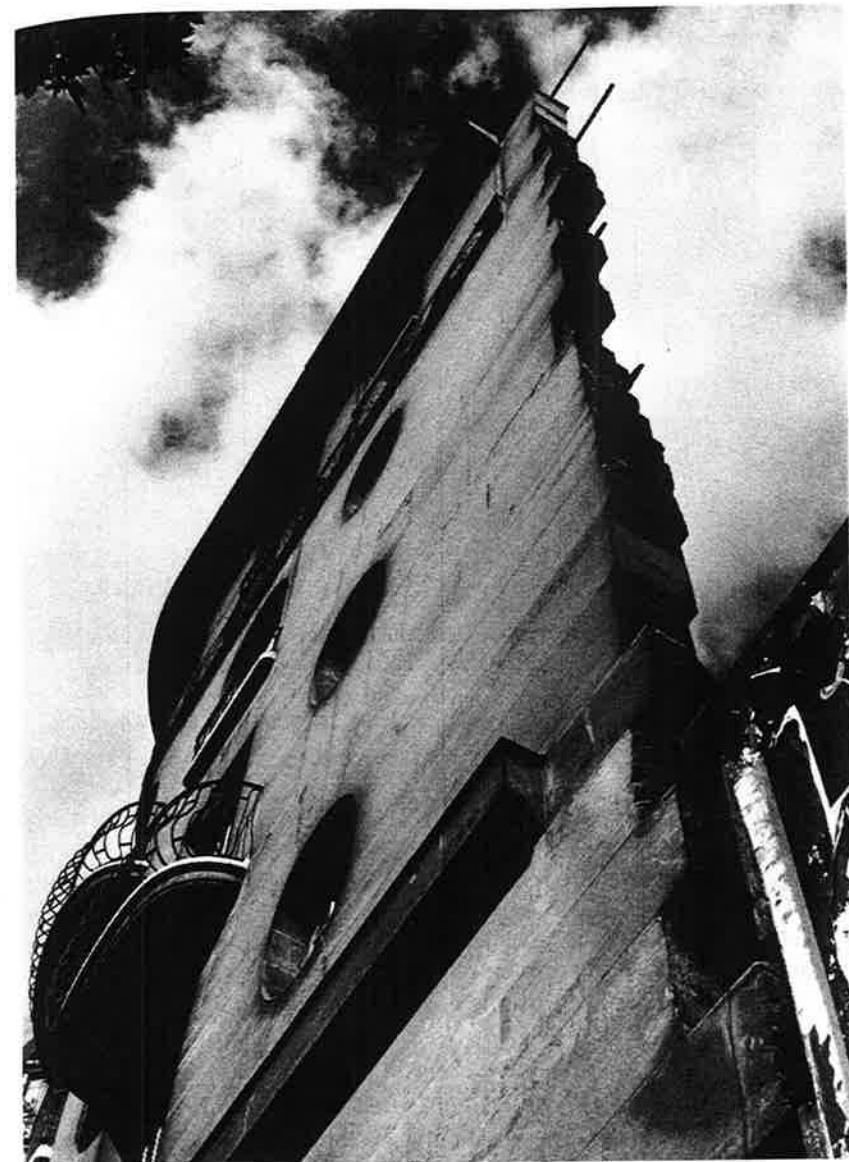
Some one hundred years later, the Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky developed this concept further and called it *defamiliarization* (*ostraneniye* in Russian). He applied the concept to narrative as well as poetic texts. "As perception becomes habitual," Shklovsky notes, "it becomes automatic." And he adds, "We see the object as though it were enveloped in a sack. We know what it is by its configuration, but we see only its silhouette." In considering a passage from Tolstoy's *Diary*, Shklovsky reaches the following conclusion:

Habitualization devours objects, clothes, furniture, one's wife, and the fear of war. "If all the complex lives of many people go on unconsciously, then such lives are as if they had never been."

Art exists to help us recover the sensation of life; it exists to make us feel things, to make the stone *story*. The end of art is to give a sensation of the object as seen, not as recognized. The technique of art is to make things "unfamiliar," to make forms obscure, so as to increase the difficulty and the duration of perception. The act of perception in art is an end in itself and must be prolonged. *In art, it is our experience of the process of construction that counts, not the finished product.*

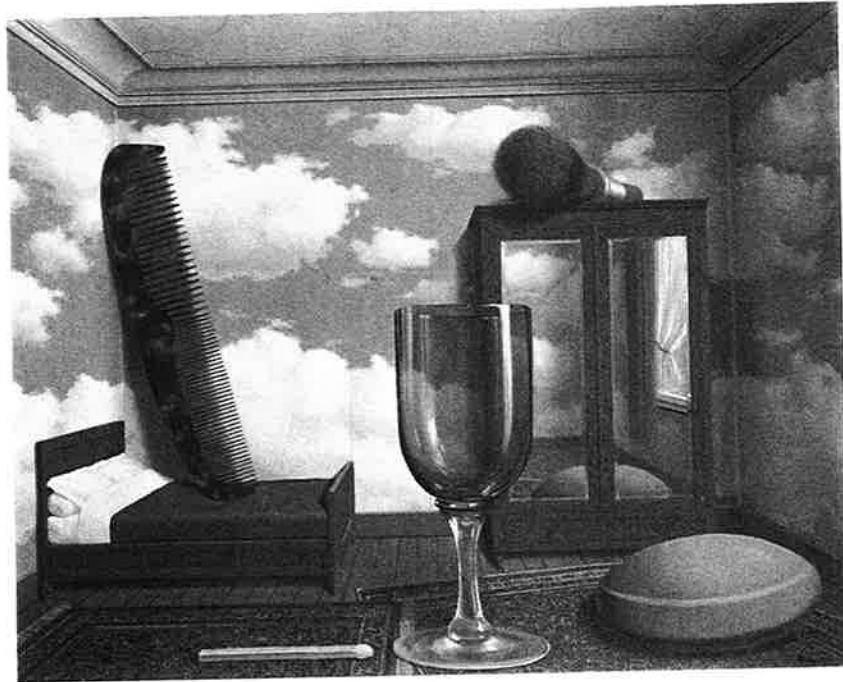
#### FOR DISCUSSION AND WRITING: THE FAMILIAR AND THE UNFAMILIAR

What do writers and artists do to make the familiar unfamiliar? There is no one device or method; rather, there are a number of ways. Look, for example, at Man Ray's photograph of a building's façade (p. 59). The disorienting effect is produced by shooting from an oblique angle. We might say that Ray has played with the cliché of approaching a subject "from a different angle." (We leave it to you to figure out what posture he had to assume to get that shot.) Poets, too, seek different angles, and poetry, for many readers, presents the challenge of the unfamiliar by its very appearance on the page. Look, for



Man Ray, 229 boulevard Raspail, 1928. Collection Lucien Treillard, Paris.

example, at the three poems that follow. They each present a form quite unlike a page of grammatically correct prose. They each have as their subject everyday things, and so too does René Magritte, in his painting *Personal Values*. All have the same intention: to make us see common things anew. Read



René Magritte, *Les valeurs personnelles* (*Personal Values*), 1952. Private collection, New York, New York.

each of these texts carefully several times, then consider the following questions and suggestions.

1. What are the features of each text that make the experience of reading it different from reading a housewares catalogue, a biology textbook, or a guide to Paris? Make a list of these features for each poem and visual text as a basis for class discussion.
2. Write a paragraph in which you compare your ordinary experience with tools or personal effects, bugs, people you see on public transportation, or buildings with experiences portrayed by one of these poets or artists.
3. Try your hand at making a familiar object or event unfamiliar, using Cummings, Magritte, Pound, or Ray as your model. Your text may be visual or verbal, or a combination of the two.

#### In a Station of the Metro

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;  
Petals on a wet, black bough.

Ezra Pound

#### Tool

If it's invented it will be used  
maybe not for some time  
then all at once  
a hammer rises from under a lid  
and shakes off its cold family  
its one truth is stirring in its head  
order order saying  
and a surprised nail leaps  
into darkness  
that a moment before had been nothing  
waiting  
for the law

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W. S. Merwin

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e. e. cummings