

In the aftermath of the Russian revolution the newly formed state was facing the task of putting to work the utopian vision of early Bolshevik ideologues which involved a radical remodeling of society. To help organize the society they envisioned the revolution had to bring forth a radically new kind of human being. This post-revolutionary experimentalism went far beyond envisioning a society populated by new men and women in ideological manifestos and literary utopia. Innovations in civil and biological engineering were to transform different areas of the new society, from regulating sexual and reproductive functions of citizens to distributing houses and forging new, healthier and more efficient, bodies and minds for Soviet citizens. Similarly, a prominent group of literary theorists dubbed Russian Formalism turned to the question of the role of the individual in creative practice. Osip Brik's famous statement that if Pushkin had never existed *Eugene Onegin* would still have been written is a classic example of the Formalist rejection of the view of creativity as an essentially individual process.

This project focuses on the rethinking of human agency, understood as the capacity of individuals to interpret their situation, to exercise free will and to perform purposive action, in the writings of Viktor Shklovsky, a self-proclaimed founder of Russian Formalism. It begins from the following premise: that Formalism's rethinking of human agency acquires historical and cultural significance when seen as part and parcel of a broader project of creating "the new human," launched after the revolution in the field of education, lifestyle policy, the press, popular psychology and biomedical disciplines. While in Europe and the US, literature's interest in contemporary scientific advances can be traced to the rapid development of natural sciences and technology in the first quarter of the twentieth century, in Soviet Russia it also reveals the complex relationship between the social, scientific, ideological and literary politics of the period. As the disciplines that focus on the rethinking of what it is to be human (such as genetics, endocrinology, eugenics, psychiatry and experimental biology) were the main areas of State support, the Formalists' work on human agency could be used to present literary studies as an important area of scientific research and thus establish its place in the new system of social institutions.

The project of creating "the new human," at its most radical, took a literal turn when attempts were made to alter existing human beings through the use of hormones (for example, in an attempt to rejuvenate aging revolutionaries) or, in the late 1920s, to create a hybrid species of human and non-human primates by means of artificial insemination. The limits of the human, both as a theoretical concept and a physiological being, has been a key subject in contemporary debates on posthumanism, as the regulation of biotechnology becomes a subject of international policy. In focusing on early responses to these limits my project contributes from a specific Russian perspective to the twentieth-century history of ideas.

In entering the general field which examines the changing understanding and representation of the human, my study aims to explore to what extent Formalist work on agency, subjectivity and individuality is indebted to the development of the human sciences in the first quarter of the twentieth century. It engages with the existing work concerning the institutional establishment of biomedical and mind sciences in the 1910s and 1920s in order to position Formalist attempts to create "the science of literature" within the process of the restructuring of scientific disciplines and social institutions. Rather than remaining confined within the disciplinary boundaries between humanities and natural sciences, the current project demonstrates that Russian formalists constructed a reciprocal dialogue between these fields of inquiry. The publication of such a study is particularly relevant now, at a historical moment when literary theory is often opposed to science, even when interested in a dialogue with it, as witnessed in the recent relevance of neuroscience and cognitivism in literary studies.

As its case study the project takes Shklovsky's books produced in 1923 during his exile in Berlin, tracing their relations to both Soviet and European cultural and scientific climates. Because these texts (*Zoo, or Letters Not about Love, A Sentimental Journey, Knight's Move* and *Literature and Cinematography*) have been translated into English the project discusses their original publications in the early 1920s, their later translations and critical responses to them. The project integrates readings of fiction (including science fiction), criticism and periodical materials from the 1910s-1920s into an interdisciplinary investigation of how, in Formalist practice, human agency is approached from the perspective of other disciplines concerned with the human subject, such as biomedical disciplines, sexology, biomechanics and mind sciences. Such an approach is particularly pertinent in a society where romantic and religious understandings of the human subject were to give place to a new model of authorship, individuality and subjectivity. In other words, for literature, the arts and literary theory to become ideologically and socially approved practices in the new socialist society, human agency had to be written into the discourse of science.