

# Tolstoy's Infection Theory and the Aesthetics of De- and Repersonalization

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In the opening lines of a 2004 article on Tolstoy's 1898 aesthetic tract *What Is Art?* we read, "It is widely accepted in contemporary Anglo-American aesthetics that, despite Tolstoy's own literary achievements, his 'moralism' about art is a view without much merit. For the most part, I concur with this current consensus about Tolstoy. However, despite the many flaws in his view, I think Tolstoy was on to *something*, after all" (Trivedi 38). The author's tone of voice there, I suggest, tells us a lot about the socioemotional complexities of a modern response to Tolstoy's essay: Trivedi's decent embarrassment about Tolstoy's "moralism"; the awkward stress on "*something*"; the carefully modulated defensiveness of that hedging "after all." Listen to his qualifiers: "without *much* merit" and "for the *most* part" and "the *many* flaws in his view." Listen to his worry that we will take his solemn concurrence "with this current consensus" as an attack on Tolstoy's "own literary achievements" and his need to assure us that this is not his intention. "I believe a concept of artist-audience communication similar to what Tolstoy had in mind," Trivedi adds, "can be fleshed out so as to *avoid* the problems that Tolstoy ran into, while reclaiming the insights in his view" (38). Would we need that grim stress on "*avoid*" if *What Is Art?* did not make us profoundly uneasy?

The problem is, *What Is Art?* seems to leave the admirers of *War and Peace* and

*Anna Karenina* nowhere to put their eyes, or the rest of their body language, either. For the author of those novels to classify them as bad art sets up a critical feedback loop that first undermines Tolstoy's credibility in both directions, as post-conversion moral critic of his own novels and as pre-conversion author of those novels, and then, because he has just coached us to disapprove of *him* morally, and of his aesthetic treatise, begins to leak moral discreditation in ever widening circles, undermining our own moral credibility as well. And, though most of this is unconscious, as we neither want our moral credibility undermined nor want our credibility thematized in moral terms, we work to suppress Tolstoy's ideas as infamous, or to find some carefully hedged way to praise them.

What makes this leakage or seepage of moral self-condemnation from author to reader particularly disturbing in this case is that it is itself an instance, though not one Tolstoy himself theorized, of his own central claim in the book: that art works by the moral infection of feeling from authors to readers. In fact it is precisely because for him all artistic expression is infectious, and what is transferred from author to reader infectiously is feeling, and feeling is the primary channel of morality, that Tolstoy must work so hard to condemn art that he considers immoral: to prevent its infecting readers with its immoral (hedonistic) feelings; in effect, to quarantine it, to keep readers away from it. "We have the

terrible probability to consider that while fearful sacrifices of the labour and lives of men and of morality itself are being made to art, that same art may be not only useless but even harmful" (*PSS* 30: 81-82). His moral condemnation of bad art, including his own, is intended as a kind of one-man Center for Moral Disease Control, doing his part to stop the epidemic spread of emotional anesthesia or alienation in contemporary society—an epidemic of which he portrays himself too as a carrier, both as a reader and as a writer.<sup>1</sup> Because the wrong kind of art made him morally sick in his youth, he wrote a string of famous novels that infected others, and that, unfortunately, continue to infect others even now, in his late sixties, despite his Rousseauistic/Christian "conversion" almost two decades before. And, as I'll try to show, at the writing of *What Is Art?* he is still vulnerable to that infection. He is, in fact, still sick—only relatively symptom-free because he works so hard to avoid all carriers of the infection, which might bring about a relapse.

If the disease is spread by art, however, so may be its cure: "Sometimes," Tolstoy writes, "people who are together are, if not hostile to one another, at least estranged in mood and feeling, till perchance a story, a performance, a picture, or even a building, but oftenest of all music, unites them all as by an electric flash, and, in place of their former isolation or even enmity, they are all conscious of union and mutual love" (*PSS* 30: 240). Whereas the wrong kind of artistic infection—patriotic or other group-oriented songs that drive wedges between people, for example—estranges people from each other, the right kind of artistic infection unites them:

The chief peculiarity of this feeling is that the receiver of a true artistic impression is so united to the artist that he feels as if the work were his own and not some one else's—as if what it expresses were just what he had long been wishing to express. A real work of art destroys in the con-

sciousness of the receiver the separation between himself and the artist, and not that alone, but also between himself and all whose minds receive this work of art. In this freeing of our personality from its separation and isolation, in this uniting of it with others, lies the chief characteristic and the great attractive force of art. (*PSS* 30: 228)

Art, he says, the right kind of art, moral art, religious art, channels moral feelings to whole populations, and it does so in order to transform them without force: This is the cure. If the upper classes have infected first themselves, through high art, then the masses, through religious and patriotic art, with the modern disease—alienation, estrangement, depersonalization—then, Tolstoy argues, the new task for a new kind of art (which, he insists, is also the very oldest kind of art) must be to infect them with joy and spiritual union, and thereby with a new social order:

The feelings with which the artist infects others may be most various—very strong or very weak, very important or very insignificant, very bad or very good: feelings of love for native land, self-devotion and submission to fate or to God expressed in a drama, raptures of lovers described in a novel, feelings of voluptuousness expressed in a picture, courage expressed in a triumphal march, merriment evoked by a dance, humour evoked by a funny story, the feeling of quietness transmitted by an evening landscape or by a lullaby, or the feeling of admiration evoked by a beautiful arabesque—it is all art.

If only the spectators or auditors are infected by the feelings which the author has felt, it is art. (*PSS* 30: 122-23)

The two most significant aspects of feeling for Tolstoy, then, are that it is *infectious* (can be transferred from body to body like a disease, even through the medium of a work of art) and that it is a channel of collective beha-

vioral and intellectual *guidance* (shapes how we think and act). It is these two characteristics of feeling that make art, conceived as a feeling transceiver, so powerful and so important for Tolstoy: By channeling feelings to readers, art channels *moral* guidance, for good or evil, which is to say, in his quasi-secular theology, for psychological health or sickness.

What I explore in this article is the complex relationship in Tolstoy's imagination between the disease and the cure, between the infectiousness of depersonalized alienation and the infectiousness of dealienation or repersonalization—between his sense of the malaise of his era and of art's ability to channel the quasimystical "joy and spiritual union" that he takes to be the only effective medicine for that malaise. Specifically, what interests me is the psychosocial *intertwining* of disease and cure in Tolstoy's aesthetic imagination: the ways in which his imagination of a cure is contaminated and thus compromised by the disease, in particular, but also the ways in which his imagination of moral repersonalization (the collective moral guidance of shared feeling) survives this contamination and informs significant twentieth-century theories of literature.

In "Tolstoy's Aesthetics" Caryl Emerson lodges an animus against psychoanalytical readings of Tolstoy, beginning with that offered by William James while Tolstoy was still alive: "As provocative as these studies can be," she argues, "the feeling remains that it is not for us to interrogate and reduce to system the inexhaustible creative energy of Leo Tolstoy. What is seemly to investigate, in my view, is how Tolstoy strove to stimulate a sense of artistic productivity and receptivity in others" (249). I certainly agree that if a psychoanalytical reading of Tolstoy were no more than a "reduction to system" of Tolstoy's creativity, it would indeed be meretricious. What I want to argue in this essay, however, is that the many contradictions in *What Is Art?* make little sense without an analysis of Tolstoy's psychological disorder—what Richard Gustafson

calls the "stranger" in him, his emotional isolation from other people.

Another way of charting the differences between Emerson's approach and mine is that we track different lines of influence from Tolstoy into twentieth-century thought and to that end highlight different aspects of *What Is Art?* Emerson reads Tolstoy as anticipating the humanistic psychologies of Erich Fromm and Abraham Maslow and so seeks to normalize Tolstoy, to give pride of place to his idealized theory of the humanistic exchange of feelings between artist and audience—as Šilbajoris says, the ways in which for Tolstoy "art is not something that *is* but something that *happens* between the artist and his audience" (18; see also Barran 9-12). Since I want here to read Tolstoy as anticipating the modernist estrangement theories of Viktor Shklovsky and Bertolt Brecht, I seek instead to denormalize him, to explore the ways in which his often contradictory idealization of the utopian regulatory exchange of feelings grows out of his own estrangement from others, his inability to experience that exchange himself, and thus out of his need to imagine it by "remote control," by guessing at its collectivized emotional contours intellectually.

### Tolstoy's Diagnosis

The disease Tolstoy diagnoses in the book is an aesthetico-religious version of the proto-Romantic theory of alienation first developed by Rousseau (see Moore), the great hero of Tolstoy's youth.<sup>2</sup> Ideally, for Rousseau, in alienating (giving or selling) their natural anarchistic rights to the community in the so-called social contract, humans do not alienate their freedom, which is inalienable. As Rousseau himself recognizes, however, this ideal is everywhere trampled in actual social reality, corrupted by civilization, which he describes in terms of humans' "alienation from nature"—a "nature" that includes a utopian image of God and prelapsarian innocence that Tolstoy will find powerfully attractive: "Eve-

rything is good as it leaves the hands of the Author of things; everything degenerates in the hands of man" (*Emile* 37). Our basic human "constitution"—what for Rousseau is the *natural* constructedness of the body politic and psychologic—is good, pure, innocent, but is perverted or alienated by social institutions, which enslave it to every manner of vice. For Rousseau this social perversion of the individual's innate goodness comes from the "outside," which suggests a myth of the fall as a primal scene of perversion in which a single private vice is alienated from a single individual, cast out of the individual "inside" into the social "outside," where it propagates itself and becomes "civilization," which then, through its own alienated logic, corrupts and alienates everyone.

That this is a semisecularized version of the Christian myth of the fall should be clear (see Mészáros 28-33). Compare for example Paul's words to the Ephesians: "remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ" (Eph. 2: 12-13, RSV). As one might expect of a Christian discussion of salvation, Paul's thinking here is radically binary. In fact, he sets up three separate binary alienation metaphors for the central split between salvation and damnation: self/other (the social binary), local/foreign (the cultural binary), and near/far (the geographical binary). Implicit in all three is the notion that there is a border separating the "good" state of belonging, at-homeness, familiarity, acceptance, from the "bad" state of alienation, foreignness, and geographical distance, and that the transcendental—transcultural, transhistorical, transgeographical—being of God is not only the figurative home to which the alienated sinner seeks to return but, via the blood of Christ, also the mediator that facilitates the

border crossing from there to here, away to home, alienation to hope and promise.

Rousseau's version of this mythology is only semisecular in the sense that, like Hegel and Marx after him, he retains Christianity's ideal of a lost home to which we must somehow strive to return; also like Hegel but unlike Marx, he has no clear idea how that dealienation might be brought about. For Christians, obviously, the solution to alienation is the blood of Jesus, the transcendental mediator who stands at the boundary between home and away, the familiar and the strange, the self and the other and who polices traffic between them; for Marx, the solution is radical change in the material conditions of capitalism that generated the alienation in the first place. Tolstoy follows Rousseau here only in his diagnosis of the disease; he considers himself a Christian, but for his cure he is actually closer to Marx than to Jesus, whose divinity and mediatory redemption he rejects. He is no revolutionary, certainly (though many actual revolutionaries were inspired by him and came to sit at his feet, and, despite Lenin's disapproval, he was venerated by the Soviet regime), and he despises Marxist materialism for its denial of God; but his cure is ultimately materialist, based on the bodily-becoming-mental *infection* of the world's population with moral feelings and values, through art.

Tolstoy's version of Rousseau's diagnosis focuses specifically on the falling away first of the medieval Church from "true" Christianity, then of the European aristocracy, beginning in the Renaissance, from medieval "Church" Christianity. He begins with a nostalgic image of a prealienation Golden Age, the Middle Ages: "The artists of the Middle Ages, vitalized by the same source of feeling—religion—as the mass of the people, and transmitting in architecture, sculpture, painting, music, poetry, or drama, the feelings and states of mind they experienced, were true artists; and their activity, founded on the highest conceptions accessible to their age and common to the entire people—though for our times a mean

art—was nevertheless a true one, shared by the whole community” (*PSS* 30: 130-31). The problem arose as the educated rich, exposed to both widespread corruption in the Church and the “lucidity” of classical antiquity, began to doubt Christianity: “If in externals they still kept to the forms of Church teaching, they could no longer believe in it, and held to it only by inertia and to influence the masses, who continued to believe blindly in Church doctrine and whom the upper classes for their own advantage considered it necessary to support in those beliefs” (*PSS* 30: 131).

This degeneration of Church Christianity then brought about a degeneration of art as well, into sheer secular hedonism, which corrupted virtually every artist and every artwork and every artistic trend for the two or three centuries before Tolstoy—certainly all the “high” art, the art that everyone is taught to respect, which thus fell away from religion and morality and the public good and came to exist purely for the pleasure of the upper classes and their imitators among the lower orders. The primary signs of this corruption are (a) the impoverishment of subject matter (all high art is about sex, pride, and ennui, but Tolstoy is mostly worried about the ubiquity in art of sex, nudity, adultery, and general voluptuousness), (b) the exhaustion of form (the relentless quest for the new and the outlandish forces artists to use up traditional forms like tissues), and (c) the alienation of the artist from his or her audience (the conservatism of the audience seems to demand that the artist stick to the previous generation’s trends, a demand that the artist repulses by becoming more and more difficult).

### **Two Models of the Alienation Epidemic: Fake-Infectious and Perverse-Infectious**

This is a myth of the fall, obviously, but it is mostly an intensely historical myth. Modern Europeans fell from Tolstoy’s own post-conversion faith not in some dim Adamic prehistory but over the period of four or five or six centuries leading up to his own time.

Very much like Marx, in fact, Tolstoy historicizes the upper classes’ failure to convert to true Christianity in terms of the threat that conversion would have posed to their political and economic ascendancy over the masses, and their continued observance of the outward forms of Church Christianity in terms of their desire to protect that ascendancy.

Unlike Marx, however, Tolstoy is not particularly clear on how or why the upper classes succumbed to alienation—why they fell away from God and thus into alienation. He seems to offer two different epidemiological models of the genesis of this process, which I call the “fake-infectious” and the “perverse-infectious.” The former is his main or “official” model, his normative model, outlined consciously; the latter is mostly rhetorically suppressed, but constitutes his fall-back model, the one he finds himself applying surreptitiously.

In the fake-infectious model, religion and art decay, and bring about the decay of culture at large, through a *sham* infection, a pretense, a kind of ghastly theater in which the principals do not actually feel the enlivening power of God or true art but know that they are expected to show the outward signs of feeling that power, so they fake it. The unstated assumption behind this model is that any religion requires real blood in its bloodstream, an actual somatic current from the deity; without that current, a religion comes to rely more and more heavily on reason-based imitations, imitations not just of religious rituals but of the conventional emotional states religion is supposed to generate in believers. Tolstoy repeatedly describes the emotional effects of these false forms of Christianity and European art on their constituents as a nervous excitement, a kind of hypnotic or drugged state; but because he wants to save the notion of the infection or sharing of feelings from one person to another for his *cure* for alienation, he insists that this is not a true effect or “in-fect” of art or religion but a rational simulation, a body state audience members deliberately

reproduce in themselves mimetically because they know they are supposed to receive both “God” and “art” in a state of exaltation. It is precisely this (ir)rational mimesis of religion’s and art’s emotional impact that brings about the entropic degeneration of both: Rather than channeling the felt infection of “true religion” or “true art” through their collectivized bodies, Tolstoy insists, Europeans are hypermimetically exhausting their own mimeses of artistic *and* religious receptivity, mimicking with progressively enhanced and therefore ever more intensely alienating exaggeration the outward appearance of an emotional current that they do not feel. The cure for alienation thus conceived can only be a new blast of true religion, a new infusion of that emotional current of joy and spiritual union that only the true (Rousseauistic or Tolstoyan) Christian can infect us with. Since there is no obvious historical error that European civilization committed that might be rectified in order to get itself back on course, since there is only entropic alienation from God, this model’s impulse to return home, to cross back over from the far to the near, from the strange to the familiar, from alienation to “one’s own,” must come from outside historical time, from an imagined God as a transcendental power.

The perverse-infectious model, on the other hand, is based on the assumption that the alienating disease or disorder of hedonistic secularism is not just a falling away from the true infection, as in the fake-infectious model—not just a failure to experience the sharing of feeling and to be enlivened by that feeling, not just a repeated attempt to conceal that failure through shamming—but itself infectiously *spread* by hedonistic secular art. Upper-class art since the Renaissance, he hints, including religious art, has been infected with the wrong kind of feelings, specifically pleasure, and specifically the wrong kind of pleasure, pleasure for pleasure’s sake, pleasure in beauty as the only moral good, pleasure in the new, pleasure in sexual arousal. This model

sets up an implicitly historical agon between rival infections, between infectious moral art and infectious immoral art, and offers as a cure for alienation the power of the true religious infection to overwhelm and banish the alienating power of the perverted infection.

Note that his definition of emotional infection as that which distinguishes true art from fake also includes an implicit warning against fake infection:

There is one indication that incontrovertibly separates true art from fake: its infectiousness. If a person, without any activity on his/her side/part and without any change of standpoint, while reading or having heard or seen another person’s work, experiences a state of mind that unites him with this person and with other people who also perceive the object of art as he does, then the object evoking that state is an art object. No matter how poetic the object is, no matter how closely it resembles reality, no matter how effective or entertaining it is, it is not an art object unless it evokes in a person that feeling that is totally different from all others, of joy, of spiritual union with another (the author) and with others (hearers or viewers) perceiving the same artistic work. (*Yto* 148, my translation)

The idealized infection theory, in other words, depends on the exclusion of *doing*. “If a person, without any *activity* on his/her side/part and without any change of position, while reading or having heard or seen...” Any activity at all, including any cognitive awareness or any emotional orientation or motivation, will distort the effect, and render the perceiver incapable of distinguishing true art from fake. By implication, civilization consists precisely of this sort of distorting activity: We are all taught by society to pretend to feel things that we do not feel, and we are infected by society with feelings that distort or pervert the true primeval meaning and function of art. Tolstoy imagines “that feeling that is totally different

from all others," therefore, as a utopian Rousseauistic feeling, a noble-savage feeling that is experienced in its pure form only by those hypothetical beings (such as Russian peasants, he hopes or postulates) who have never been perverted by civilization, those who are not pretending never to have been perverted by civilization, and that—more to the point—can be reexperienced by a modern civilized person only through the idealized activity of excluding or subtracting or negating the perverted and pretended activities of estranged and estranging civilization (especially, as we'll see below, "attuning" oneself to a work of art). Only thus can one reach that ideal primeval state in which one does not need to change one's standpoint in order to (pretend to) feel infectious joy and spiritual union.

Tolstoy's motives in suppressing the perverse-infectious theory of alienation rhetorically have something to do with his desire to present aesthetic infection as pure and good—in order, presumably, not to have to explain how the feelings with which the artist infects the audience have been perverted or how to distinguish between pure and perverted infections. But on a deeper level, I would argue, his motives are also themselves complex symptoms of the alienation he is diagnosing. According to his own diagnosis, Tolstoy, like others of his class, has been alienated from what he considers true religious feeling, anesthetized, so that he does not feel *either* infection, either the alienating perverse infection of pleasure or the dealienating true infection of moral art. As a result, the outward signs of emotional infection that he sees on other people's bodies seem to him false, counterfeit, rationally simulated, grotesquely entropic mimicries of true infectious feeling; and he feels driven to present the dealienating infection that he theorizes in the book as a transcendental ideal that he has mostly only heard others talk about, not something he has himself experienced:

I must say what I think, namely, that people of our circle...have never (except in childhood and earliest youth before hearing any discussions on art) experienced that simple feeling familiar to the plainest man and even to a child, that sense of infection with another's feeling—compelling us to joy in another's gladness, to sorrow at another's grief and to mingle souls with another—which is the very essence of art. And therefore these people not only cannot distinguish true works of art from counterfeits, but continually mistake for real art the worst and most artificial, while they do not even perceive works of real art, because the counterfeits are always more ornate, while true art is modest. (*PSS* 30: 226)

### Tolstoy's Self-Diagnosis

Tolstoy only passingly and hintingly suggests that he might himself be a sufferer from this disease, in passages like this one: "besides being insufficiently informed in all branches of art, I belong to the class of people whose taste has been perverted by false training. And therefore my old, inured habits may cause me to err, and I may mistake for absolute merit the impression a work produced on me in my youth" (*PSS* 30: 246n). As we will see, however, the entire book is a powerful testament to his suffering. His own alienation, inexorably produced by the historical forces he himself is theorizing, makes him unable or unwilling to feel either the spread of alienation through the infectiousness of pleasure or the spread of dealienation through the infectiousness of joy and spiritual union. As a result, he presents the disease (the "is") as an attrition or exhaustion of pleasure and the cure (the "ought") as a mystical resurgence of pleasure sparked, presumptively, transcendently by some force that he calls "God" but mostly imagines, through what Martine de Courcel aptly calls his "spiritual autism" (163), arising from within himself (i.e., *not* from others).

But he also finds—or, as he says here, used to find—the impulse to fake the infection arising within himself:

For a long time I used to attune myself to delight in those shapeless improvisations which form the subject-matter of the works of Beethoven's later period, but I had only to consider the question of art seriously, and to compare the impression I received from Beethoven's later works, with those pleasant, clear, and strong musical impressions which are transmitted, for instance, by the melodies of Bach (his arias), Haydn, Mozart, Chopin (when his melodies are not overloaded with complications and ornamentation), of Beethoven himself in his earlier period, and above all, with the impressions produced by folk-songs...and other such simple, clear, and powerful music, for the obscure, almost unhealthy, excitement from Beethoven's later pieces, which I had artificially evoked in myself, to be immediately destroyed. (*PSS*30: 222)

He *attuned* himself so as to evoke artificially the “obscure, almost unhealthy, excitement” with which high art is supposed to infect the upper classes. Before his conversion, in other words, he had to create the requisite emotional state internally, by an effort, by altering his standpoint, so as to *seem* to be appropriately infected by the work of art. This self-attuning response to art has now become his implicit model for the “fake-infectious” emotional response of everybody else in the world. He assumes that everyone who now claims to be “moved” by high art is doing what he used to do: faking it.

Argumentatively, of course, the fact that he used to do it himself stands surety for the truth of his claim: He is not merely speculating about what people do; he knows for a fact that this is done. Subtextually, however, his argument opens a can of worms. Based solely on his knowledge that he used to attune himself so as to display the appropriate body language

of aesthetic infection, how can he be sure (a) that other people did it as well, and (b) that he isn't doing it still? His only evidence for the near-universality of these self-attunements, after all, is external body language: it *looks* to him as if others are faking it too, just as he used to do. And yet the methodology of fakery is by definition aimed at undermining all such empirical judgments, all such certainty that things are (or even are not) as they seem. Could it be that his demystificatory skepticism is a mere projection of his own earlier fakery, indeed a mere projection of his isolation from the sharing of others' feelings that he now idealizes as the true religious alternative to fakery, and that other people really do delight in late Beethoven and other art that he now wants to condemn as bad?

And note what happens eight years after *What is Art?*—and, more to the point, a quarter century after his “conversion,” when everything supposedly changed for him—when his favorite daughter Masha dies at the age of 35. Tolstoy is calm: “Just now, one o'clock in the morning, Masha died. A strange thing. I didn't feel horror or fear or the awareness of anything strange taking place, nor even pity or grief. I seemed to consider it necessary to arouse in myself a special feeling of emotion, grief, and I did so, but at the bottom of my heart I was more composed than I would have been in the case of another person's bad or improper behavior, not to mention my own” (Tolstoy's diary, November 27, 1906; *PSS* 2: 561). At the age of seventy-eight, Tolstoy is still “attuning” himself. He still needs to fake the emotional displays expected by society.

### **Tolstoy's Depersonalization**

The rubric under which I propose to discuss Tolstoy's psychological disorder is “depersonalization,” meaning roughly his isolation from other people's feelings, his inability to feel those feelings, so that other people seemed to him “unreal,” as if they were not people at all but strangely animate objects. The use of this rubric to describe Tolstoy is

not original with me: The French Freudian psychoanalyst Annie Anargyros-Klinger diagnoses Tolstoy as a melancholic depressive tending toward depersonalization; the Russian critic and literary theorist Vadim Rudnev focuses exclusively on Tolstoy's (and, more problematically, Viktor Shklovsky's) depersonalization.

Depersonalization has been a recognized medical condition since Ludovic Dugas identified it in 1898 and is now considered the third most common psychiatric symptom, affecting at least 70% of the population at some point in their lives. It has also been called the "Alice in Wonderland" disease and compared philosophically to existentialism, Buddhism, and positivist science; but there is little that is wonderful, philosophical, religious, or scientific about it. It is characterized by a pervasive sense of strangeness, foreignness, unreality, not-rightness—the sense not only that the sufferer has just passed over into a strange world, but that the sufferer him- or herself is strange, estranged from self, from thought, from feeling. It takes different forms: Sometimes it dissolves into a feeling of numbness, even of nothingness, as if the sufferer were emotionally dead; other times, as in Tolstoy's crises of the 1870s, it explodes into a full-blown kaleidoscopic panic attack, akin in its disorientations to schizophrenia. As Rudnev describes the disorder, "From the physiological point of view, depersonalization most often appears as the brain's answer to a sharp emotional shock by way of an increased secretion of endorphins, which anesthetize consciousness. From the point of view of the behavioral strategy of consciousness, depersonalization appears as a powerful defense against stress. The *locus classicus* of depersonalization is when after the sudden loss of a loved one the person seems to become 'petrified,' to lose all affect" (55; all translations from Rudnev's Russian are my own). Noting that Levi-Strauss called myth a mechanism for the destruction of all oppositions, especially the opposition between life and death, Rudnev

adds that "it is clear why depersonalization is not just a symptom of illness but a powerful defense against reality, an anesthesia, albeit a doleful one. The sufferer from depersonalization falls into the special world of myth, among the basic characteristics of which is the absence of logical binary thought ('it's all the same to me'). Of course this is a special 'lack-luster world'" (56-57).

Rudnev's analysis of Tolstoy's depersonalization centers around his determination to destroy convention through estrangement: "To the extent that Tolstoy was a Rousseauist, depersonalization, the destruction of conventions (the 'social contract'), was a good thing for him. This is why in his novels a character who is too fastidious about conventions is doomed" (60). A few paragraphs earlier he argues that "the paradox of Tolstoyan depersonalization consists of the consciousness ceasing to understand and accept conventions" because "depersonalized consciousness does not accept the insincerity of small talk, which to it is somehow mechanical, meaningless" (59). In response, it seeks to lay waste to all conventionality, by estranging it—by doing precisely what Viktor Shklovsky will isolate as the supreme modernist gesture, laying bare the device (*обнажение приема*). The connections between depersonalization and Shklovsky's *остранение* or "estrangement" are interesting and significant but problematic, and I will return to them below. For Rudnev the estranging quest of a depersonalized writer like Tolstoy is like externalizing a consciousness that has "unlearned the language of opera, and so believes that it is not an art as conventionally defined but reality, a kind of absurd, half-nonsensical reality. (It was in precisely this mode," he adds—"aggressively depersonalized—that the later Tolstoy began to concern himself with art: as with something mendacious, absurd, nonsensical)" (58).<sup>3</sup>

### Obstacles to the Depersonalization Diagnosis 1: The Psychological Depth of His Novels

This “depersonalization” diagnosis seems to me a relatively noncontroversial reading of Tolstoy the man; everyone who has devoted any amount of time to the study of Tolstoy’s psyche has said similar things about his emotional isolation from others. There are, however, two important obstacles to our accepting it uncritically as true: the deep psychological complexity of his novels and stories (if he cannot feel other people’s feelings, how is he so powerfully able to recreate their lives in fiction?), and his infection theory in *What Is Art?* (would a man who had never experienced the sharing of feelings be able or even inclined to build an aesthetic theory around it?). Since the former is beyond the scope of this essay, I invoke Anargyros-Klinger’s psychoanalytical diagnosis as a sketchy solution to it and devote the bulk of my discussion to the second.

As Anargyros-Klinger reads Tolstoy, his brilliance as a writer posed a severe threat to his precarious psychic regime: The fact that, as she puts it, writing fiction unleashed in him “a destructive flood of impulses unacceptable to the ego [which] caused a fear of loss of the self” (411). We might in fact reframe that idea in terms of Tolstoy’s own infection theory to suggest that when he wrote, an overwhelming flood of other people’s feelings was channeled infectiously through his body into his characters—we know that Tolstoy’s characters were modeled so closely on actual people he knew that his family and friends would recognize them instantly—and that this flooding of shared feeling caused a fear of loss of the self. Either way, as Anargyros-Klinger continues, “He was thus compelled toward defence mechanisms of a psychotic nature—splitting and projection—which were not able to protect him from the fear of death and self-accusations and never managed to relieve his guilt” (411). He defended against this threat of psychosis by “converting,” not just to ascet-

ic Christianity (no sex) but to an anti-literary moralism (no writing of fiction):

For a time, sublimation through writing acted on the partial drives, inhibited their aim, displaced and desexualized, relieving the feeling of a haunting and dreadful guilt.

... The fantasies that inspired him retain the marks of primary processes that will be perceived by the reader, contributing to the emotion aroused through reading.

But Tolstoy had not yet managed to establish a sufficiently protective distance through his writing. He sometimes felt threatened within by what emerged from him in certain moments of inspiration.

It is possible that the prospect of this unconscious fantasy breaking into the ego, brought about by writing, added to the “unspeakable anxieties” that appeared after writing *War and Peace* and contributed to drying up Tolstoy’s creativity, which was perceived as a vital danger, a threat to the ego. Numerous passages in Tolstoy’s two major novels reveal in him a disposition towards a state of depersonalisation that encouraged the emergence of images and thoughts from the preconscious, the thinly veiled expression of forbidden desires. At the time when the depression manifested itself, he had to block the path of these forbidden desires at all costs. And in order to do this he had to give up writing. (416-17)

It seems reasonable to speculate, in other words, that he did have access to other people’s feelings—to what his big brother Nikolay taught him to call the “Brother Ants”—and channeled that access into and through his novels; but that his access to those feelings was dangerous for him, undermined his precarious psychic regime, brought him to the brink of psychosis, so he gave it up, blocking it at such a deep level that he was not even aware that it was there. This would

suggest that depersonalization for Tolstoy involved not so much a *depletion* of shared feeling as a *wall* against shared feeling—a wall that he thickened against the feeling it occasionally let through.

### Obstacles to the Depersonalization Diagnosis 2: The Infection Theory

What then of his infection theory of art? Does his 300-page treatise on the contagion of feeling, written in his late sixties—the universalization, as it were, of the Brother Ants game—suggest that a decade and a half of Christian love has truly now begun to convert him, to open him up to collective feeling? More specifically: Does Tolstoy theorize aesthetic infection out of his own experience of shared feeling—of being what Richard Gustafson calls a “resident” in the most transpersonally emotionalized sense of the word—or is his infection theory of art a utopian vision conceived as the idealized inverse of his own depersonalized experience?

I would argue the latter: that in *What is Art?* he writes about the moral guidance exerted by shared feelings without the benefit of collective moral guidance *or* shared feelings. The book is a scandal not just because he rejects high art, including *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, but because it is mired in stupid and stubborn inconsistencies, indeed impossibilities, born, I suggest, out of his depersonalization—out of his inability to be guided by the very forces of shared moral feelings that he is theorizing. Tolstoy writes about the moral/aesthetic guidance of shared feelings as one who has borrowed what he knows about it from other people, has taken over their aesthetic descriptions anesthetically and imposed on them rational universalizing principles borrowed from an idealized/depersonalized vision of human life.

For example, look back at the quotation on page thirty-nine excluding “any activity” from the determination of true art. As noted earlier, for Tolstoy this distorting “activity” was fundamentally the operation of civilization in the

individual. It is also important to note, however, that the estranging root “стран-” appears in this passage, in the form of сторона “side,” the etymological boundary that splits the key words derived from it into here and there, good and bad, strange and familiar: “if a person,” Tolstoy writes, “without any activity on his/her side (своей стороны) and without any change of standpoint.” “Своя сторона” is grammatically the subject’s side and phenomenologically *this* side, the familiar side; etymologically in Russian whatever is on this familiar side is “страна” or country, while whatever is on the other side is “странный” or strange. The “иностранец,” someone from the other side of the line, from a different country (из иной страны), is a foreigner. The “странник” or pilgrim is someone who estranges himself from hearth and home and family, crosses the line from familiar to strange.

But to the extent that Tolstoy follows Rousseau in seeing civilization as the regulatory shared feelings over on the *other* side, the foreign side, the “strange” side—and “any activity” as the disturbing and distorting leakage of those regulatory group feelings over into the attitudes or motivations or cognitions of the individual on this side—he breaks with the collectivist Russian etymology that associates this side, the familiar side, with the country, the group, one’s own culture. For Tolstoy, what is on this side is the isolated Rousseauistic individual, the Noble Savage, shaped only by God and Truth, unaffected by others, unconditioned by shared feelings to want or expect anything in particular out of a work of art. Before his “conversion” he attunes himself so as to feel, or to seem to be feeling, the emotional infection from late Beethoven that others expect him to feel. A few years later, when Masha dies, he again attunes himself to pretend to feel what society expects him to feel. Both emotional “attunements” to group guidance are for him equally corrupt. Tolstoy claims to desire the unification of all human beings in moral guidance

through the artistic infection of feelings, but in reality any specific real-world form of group moral guidance through infectious feelings is “strange” to him and must be condemned as either perverted or fake. This animus against the group is directed not against collectivity itself but against any group smaller than all humanity; as Thomas Barran writes, “Both Rousseau and Tolstoy condemn the role of partial societies within the larger socio-political organization. Tolstoy objects to them because of the pressures they can exert on an individual to pull away from the community and follow his or her own selfish interests” (*PSS* 30: 11n). The apparent contradiction is apparent: It is not that membership in the community can pull the individual away from the community, but that membership in a *real* group can pull the individual away from “the community” defined ideally as all humanity, as the “universal brotherhood of man,” an abstraction that can only exist in the imagination of the isolated Romantic individual and thus on the safe “familiar” side of the split. Real groups, shunted in Tolstoy’s imagination to the other side, the strange side, are—strangely—associated with “selfishness.”

For Tolstoy these social groups are the enemy; it is precisely their regulatory work that he is constantly at pains to undermine throughout his tract. “It is true,” he says, “that this indication is an *internal* one and that there are people who, having forgotten what the action of real art is, expect something else from art (in our society the great majority are in this state), and that therefore such people may mistake for this aesthetic feeling the feeling of diversion and a certain excitement which they receive from counterfeits of art” (*PSS* 30: 227). “There are people,” he says, at first suggesting that it’s only a small group, say the upper classes, who have “forgotten” or fallen away from this pure Rousseauistic capacity to be infected by the pure feelings of joy and spiritual union; but then it turns out that *the great majority* are in this state, indeed perhaps even everyone, with the result that

people almost invariably feel the wrong feelings: “the feeling of divertisement and a certain excitement which they receive from counterfeits of art.” This is patently a kind of infection of artistic feeling, but Tolstoy despises it and wants to distance himself from it as far as possible in order to elevate to definitive status a specific *idealized* and *universalized* emotional infection. The privileged infection is here grounded experientially, by inversion, in Tolstoy’s own depersonalization: The pure infection of joy and spiritual union he theorizes in the book is precisely his own depressed isolation turned imaginatively inside-out.

### Depersonalization in *What Is Art?*: Hypnosis

Tellingly, many of the examples he gives of this pure infected state are based on other people’s reports: “I lately read of a theatrical performance among the savage tribe—the Voguls. A spectator describes the play....The audience, as the eye-witness describes them, are paralyzed with suspense: deep groans and even weeping are heard among them. And, from the mere description I felt that this was a true work of art” (*PSS* 30: 225-26). When he is personally present at this sort of artistic event, his response is more often the depersonalized inverse. He comes away from a performance of *Hamlet* disgusted: “I experienced all the time that peculiar suffering which is caused by false imitations of works of art” (225).

Reading Zola, Kipling, and others, Tolstoy employs an estranging reading strategy typical of his approach to everything in life:

I was provoked with the authors all the while as one is provoked with a man who considers you so naïve that he does not even conceal the trick by which he intends to take you in. From the first lines one sees the intention with which the book is written, the details all become superfluous, and one feels dull. Above all, one knows that the author had no other feeling all the time than a desire to write a story or a

novel, and so one receives no artistic impression. (224)

He attends a performance of day two of Wagner's *Ring* in Moscow and is again disgusted:

Sit in the dark for four days in company with people who are not quite normal, and through the auditory nerves subject your brain to the strongest action of the sounds best adapted to excite it, and you will not doubt be reduced to an abnormal condition and be enchanted by absurdities. But to attain this end you do not even need four days; the five hours during which one "day" is enacted, as in Moscow, are quite enough. Nor are five hours needed; even one hour is enough for people who have no clear conception of what art should be and who have concluded in advance that what they are going to see is excellent, and that indifference or dissatisfaction with this work will serve as a proof of their inferiority and lack of culture.

I observed the audience present at this representation. The people who led the whole audience and gave the tone to it were those who had previously been hypnotized and who again succumbed to the hypnotic influence to which they were accustomed. These hypnotized people being in an abnormal condition were perfectly enraptured. (*PSS*30: 216)

As Michael Denner tells us, "in an earlier version of the essay, Tolstoy offers 'hypnotism' as a synonym for infection (p. 53)" (284-85); and indeed Tolstoy's third-hand description of the Vogul audience's response, "paralyzed with suspense," sounds very much like a hypnotic trance or a drugged state. But when Tolstoy is physically present and observes that state with his own eyes, he is invariably repelled. He says that Wagnerites will protest that you have to see the *Ring* in Bayreuth, in the dark, with the orchestra out of sight, and every detail of the performance brought to the

highest perfection, and retorts: "Yes, naturally! Only place yourself in such conditions and you may see what you will. But this can be still more quickly attained by getting drunk or smoking opium" (*PSS*30: 216).

"So one is quite at a loss," he remarks early in the treatise, referring to the works of high art that so disgust him, "as to whom these things are done for. The man of culture is heartily sick of them, while to a real working man they are utterly incomprehensible. If any one can be pleased by these things (which is doubtful), it can only be some young footman or depraved artisan, who has contracted the spirit of the upper classes but is not yet satiated with their amusements, and wishes to show his breeding" (*PSS* 30: 79). Since the whole point of his book is that "men of culture" are almost without exception "falsely" enraptured or hypnotized or drugged by high art, feeling all the wrong feelings of "divertisement" and "excitement," all he can mean by "the man of culture is heartily sick of them" is that *he himself* is sick of them—that his overwhelming response to the emotional infectiousness of so-called great art is one of disgust and revulsion. Almost everyone at these performances is powerfully affected by them, but he describes their infection as an artificial, hypnotic, drugged state that is something like the demonic inverse of the ideal state he is theorizing. The only kind of viewer that he can imagine actually responding authentically to these works is an ambitious upwardly-mobile footman or artist "who has contracted the spirit of the upper classes"—which is to say, again, that the perversion with which the upper classes have been infecting the lower orders *is* an infection and not mere fakery.

### The New and the Old

For the most part, then, Tolstoy builds his argument in the book around his observations of aesthetic response in the actual or virtual body language of other people—both the "bad" kind, which he tends to observe in the

flesh, and which he wavers between identifying as sheer mummery and attributing to an infection of perverse hedonism, and the “good” kind, which he tends to read about in books and articles by other people and is better able to trust because, without the distorting or disgusting impact of actual body language, he can *imagine* the idealized sort of body language he believes the universal effect of true aesthetic infection will provoke.

But he does give us a few examples of his own actual experience of the latter kind of artistic infection, such as this famous one:

A few days ago I was returning home from a walk feeling depressed, as sometimes happens. On nearing the house I heard the loud singing of a large choir of peasant women. They were welcoming my daughter, celebrating her return home after her marriage. In this singing, with its cries and clanging of scythes, such a definite feeling of joy, cheerfulness, and energy, was expressed, that without noticing how it infected me I continued my way towards the house in a better mood, and reached home smiling and quite in good spirits. (*PSS* 30: 221)

It is telling that as his favorite daughter Masha arrives home from her wedding, Tolstoy is off on a lonely walk, feeling depressed, and that he describes his homecoming from the walk again in solitary terms, not as “rejoining the others” but simply as “continuing my way towards the house” and “reaching home.” Tolstoy spent the decades after his “conversion” almost entirely alienated from his family: “I can hear them playing tennis and laughing...Everyone is well, but I feel depressed and can’t control myself. It’s like the feeling I had when [my childhood tutor Prosper de] St. Thomas locked me in and from my dungeon I could hear everyone enjoying themselves and laughing” (Tolstoy’s diary, July 31, 1896; *PSS* 2: 430). Still, it clearly suggests that Tolstoy may have been physically capable of responding with shared feeling to some moments of

artistic expression—just not very often or very strongly (“in a better mood,” “quite in good spirits”). It may also be that the cries and clanging of scythes helped him respond: They were strange enough, alien enough from the high culture on which he had been raised, that they pierced through his depressed/depersonalized indifference.

This rare case of apparently authentic infection and therefore “real art”—“the song of the peasant women was real art transmitting a definite and strong feeling” (223)—does seem a bit strange in another way, though, in that it is Tolstoy’s theory throughout the book that true or real art must infect the audience not just with a “definite and strong feeling” but with *new* feelings:

The first result—the impoverishment of subject-matter—followed because only that is a true work of art which transmits fresh feelings not before experienced by man. As thought-product is only then real thought-product when it transmits new conceptions and thoughts and does not merely repeat what was known before, so also an art-product is only then a genuine art-product when it brings a new feeling (however insignificant) into the current of human life....

The same powerful impression is made on people by feelings which are quite new, and have never before been expressed by man. And it is the source from which such feelings flow, that the art of the upper classes has deprived itself of by estimating feelings not in conformity with religious perception but according to the degree of enjoyment they afford. There is nothing older and more hackneyed than enjoyment, and there is nothing fresher than the feelings springing from the religious consciousness of each age. It could not be otherwise: man’s enjoyment has limits established by his nature, but the movement forward of humanity which expresses itself in religious consciousness has no lim-

its. At every forward step taken by humanity—and such steps are taken in consequence of a greater and greater elucidation of religious perception—men experience new and fresh feelings. And therefore only on the basis of religious perception (which shows the highest level of life-comprehension reached by the men of a certain period) can fresh emotion, never before felt by man, arise. (*PSS* 30: 149-50)

Technically, then, the song of the peasant women should only have been considered true art if it infected Tolstoy not with a slightly better mood, but with “fresh feelings not before experienced by man.” And perhaps it did. Perhaps the “definite feeling of joy, cheerfulness, and energy” that Tolstoy felt infected by was in some way unique, so perfectly shaped by the honest feelings of these peasant women that no one had ever felt it in the world before. It is difficult to imagine just how these new feelings of the peasant women might have been shaped by “a greater and greater elucidation of religious perception,” but here perhaps we can give Tolstoy the benefit of the doubt, and assume (contrary to the evidence he marshals in *A Confession*, but never mind) that the Russian peasants are in fact the Rousseauistic Noble Savages of his time, uncorrupted enough by upper-class civilization as to be perfectly attuned to “the highest level of life-comprehension reached by the men of a certain period.”

The crippling difficulty Tolstoy faces in making this argument, however, is epistemological. How on earth could he ever *know*? How is he in a position to know what every other person in the world has felt? Does he even know his own feelings well enough to distinguish an old one from a new one? What if these women always sing this song in exactly this same way, with exactly these same feelings, and he has simply never heard it before? What if their singing is so conventionalized that their mothers and grandmothers

and great-grandmothers sang it in exactly the same way, with exactly the same feelings? In order for his claim to have any factual basis, he would have to have the godlike power to feel every feeling any human being ever felt on earth; clearly he does not have such power.

If on the other hand he means that any true sincerity will necessarily generate a new feeling, then he can assume that new feelings are quite common experiences, perhaps so common as to be mundane, things that every human being on earth experiences many times a day. This assumption would let him off the hook of trying to claim that he can distinguish a new feeling from an old one; but it would still leave the burden of proof on him to distinguish between sincerity and shamming. (“His” peasants aren’t just pretending to love the master and his family sincerely; their love is real; he can tell.)

Really the only way for him to avoid having to prove that he has godlike powers of discrimination would be for him to admit that all of our feelings are always new—that, as Heraclitus says, we never step into the same river twice. But, since the perverse elitist faker patently never steps into the same river of fakery twice either, this argumentative stratagem would allow high aesthetic fakery the same claim to newness that he wants to reserve for the sincerity of true art. In fact, hard as he works to distinguish bad art from good, fake art from true, disturbing parallels between them keep surfacing:

There is only one explanation of this fact: it is that the art of the society in which these versifiers lived is not a serious, important matter of life, but is a mere amusement; and all amusements grow wearisome by repetition. And in order to make wearisome amusement again tolerable it is necessary to find some means to freshen it up....The substance of the matter remains the same, only its form is changed. It is the same with this kind of art. The subject-matter of the art of the upper

classes growing continually more and more limited, it has come at last to this, that to the artists of these exclusive classes it seems as if everything has already been said, and that to find anything new to say is impossible. And therefore to freshen up this art they look out for fresh forms. (*PSS* 30: 166-67)

The significant difference between this self-exhausting newness of elitist art and the ever-replenished newness of true art for Tolstoy is that true art is replenished by true religion: Because “the movement forward of humanity, that which is voiced by religious perception, has no limits,” the chorus of peasant women does not have to go restlessly searching for fresh forms. The “greater and greater elucidation of religious perception” does the searching for them; all they have to do is open themselves up to that perception.

One way of framing the epistemology behind Tolstoy’s discriminatory argument here is that he *just knows*. He just knows the difference between true and false newness, between true and false sincerity, between true and false religious perception, and therefore also between true and false art. Judging from his rhetoric in *What is Art?*, this is how things seemed to Tolstoy himself. Another, less idealized way of putting that is that he *doesn’t* know and so somehow has rhetorically (and perhaps even psychologically as well) to convert his not-knowing into an ideal form of knowing, into the truest and most perfect form of knowing. As Caryl Emerson suggests, drawing on Barran, Tolstoy wants to run the utopian (Rousseauistic) temporal dynamic both ways: He wants the authentic infections of true art to be the alpha and the omega, the primeval force of innocence arising out of the unfallen past *and* the new utopian future in which the primordial innocence of edenic shared feeling is restored.<sup>4</sup> What he ends up with instead, though, is the confusion arising out of his own depersonalization: Unable to respond emotionally in the present to the old

or the new, determined to imagine a utopian future built out of a restored edenic past, he has to try to sort out his many examples by depersonalized or derealized remote control, guessing anesthetically at which example might be appropriate for which phenomenon. So he theorizes true art in terms of the infection of new feelings, but gives his rare examples of true art based on the infection of old feelings, the oldest of all, the pure feelings of joy and spiritual union arising out of what he calls the true primeval (pre-creation) meaning of Christianity, and “instinctively”—with the instincts of depersonalization—associates the infection of new feelings with the perverse repetitions of exhaustion.

### **The Infection Theory in Twentieth-Century Literary Thought**

From the idealized point of view of Tolstoy himself and his most ardent admirers, perhaps, my reading of the infection theory in this essay is entirely negative: Because Tolstoy did not feel the infection he was theorizing, because he could not allow himself to feel it, the theory remains a transcendental hypothesis that is wracked with self-contradiction. Infectious art has a hypnotic effect on the reader or viewer, but actual evidence of such hypnosis awakens in Tolstoy only disgust and the accusation that the audience is either on drugs or shamming. Infectious art must be radically new, but in his actual response to art anything new strikes him as perverse and destructive, and the few examples of “good” art he is able to muster are highly conventional. His memory of attuning himself to “great” art in order to simulate the appropriate state in his body awakens in us the suspicion that without this somatic attunement or shamming he is unable to respond to art (or other people) at all.

But what we have seen so far is only the negative first part of a two-part argument that ends by finding great utility in Tolstoy’s infection theory. By infecting each side of Tolstoy’s binary with its opposite, the disease with the

cure and the cure with the disease, I may have undermined the theory's specific (rather naïve) conceptual foundation, but in so doing I have also, I hope, pointed the way toward subtler influence studies. For example, in Viktor Shklovsky's 1917 article "Art as Device" ("Искусство как прием") Tolstoy is invoked as a practitioner of what Shklovsky calls *остранение*, literary estrangement—which turns out to be a more complex kind of homeopathic or cathartic cure for the disease of depersonalization, estrangement as a cure for estrangement, alienation as a cure for alienation. In a sense with this theory Shklovsky turns Tolstoy on his head, playing Aristotle to his Plato, for like Plato Tolstoy believes in what the computer people these days call "garbage in, garbage out": If you imitate perversion, what comes out the other side of the imitation is the same perversion. If you imitate the disgusting, your readers will be disgusted; in order to spread joy and spiritual union, you have to imitate joy and spiritual union. Perversion in, perversion out; purity in, purity out. You cannot expect to transform perversion into purity cathartically, through art. In a deeper sense, however, Tolstoy's subterranean task in *What Is Art?* is to transform his own estrangement from others into purity cathartically through *theory*: to retheorize his own earthy disgust at what he takes to be perverted art (which in fact turns out to be *all* art) as a deep spiritual belief in the existence and infectious power of pure art; to mystify his own inability to respond to the infectiousness of *real* art as a readiness to respond to the infectiousness of *ideal* art. Because Tolstoy himself cannot respond with feelings of joy and spiritual union to existing art, *there must exist* a kind of art to which he would be able to respond in that idealized way: His own abject failure to date stands surety for his future success and for the emergence of a channel of artistic infection that would depend for its salvific effect on that success.

By bringing that repressed dialectic to the surface in his own version of the theory, Viktor Shklovsky not only inserts Tolstoyan estrangement into the modernist mainstream, he brings something like the infection theory with it as well. This is often missed in twentieth-century readings of Shklovsky, who is typically read by the structuralists and poststructuralists as interested purely in the "machine" of literature, in literary "devices," in pure abstract form; indeed Vadim Rudnev reads him as depersonalizing twentieth-century literary theory. But the transformative power of shared feeling that Tolstoy theorizes as aesthetic infection is strongly at work in Shklovsky's conception of literary estrangement:

And so, in order to restore the sensation of life, to feel things, to make the stone stony, there exists what we call art. Art's purpose is to give us the sensation of a thing as seeing rather than as recognizing; art's device is a device for the "estrangement" of things, a device of belabored form that increases the laboriousness and duration of perception, because in art the perceptual process is self-purposive and should be prolonged. *Art is a way of experiencing the making of a thing, but the thing made in art is not important.* (12, my translation)

Shklovsky is clearly at pains here to harness Tolstoyan estrangement to the deautomatizing power of art: "in order to restore the *sensation of life*, to *feel things*, to make the stone stony, there exists what we call art"; "Art's purpose is to give us the *sensation of a thing* as seeing rather than as recognizing." Art's purpose, in other words, is to infect us with a sensation of being alive—and it does so for Shklovsky through estrangement, through precisely that which Tolstoy worked consciously to eliminate from his theory of "good" infectious art but which, due to his depersonalization, seeped through anyway and conditioned his imagination of paradise. Shklovsky's imagination of estrangement as

having a deautomatizing and therefore salvific impact on the reader's phenomenological construction of a world is heavily influenced by more recent thinkers coming out of a very different intellectual tradition than Tolstoy—William James, Broder Christiansen, Henri Bergson (see Curtis, Svetlikova)—but these thinkers really only help him reshuffle the literary theory and device cards dealt him by Tolstoy.

Over the decades, much debate has centered on the extent to which Shklovsky's theory of the прием острания or "estrangement device" influenced Bertolt Brecht's theory of the *Verfremdungseffekt* or "estrangement effect." In the most likely scenario (see Mitchell), Brecht was taught the theory in Moscow in the spring of 1935 by his and Shklovsky's mutual friend Sergey Tret'yakov. However, whether Brecht picked up the theory from Shklovsky or developed it himself out of the German Romantic/Idealist tradition, it is clear that Brecht too moved from a depersonalizing approach to the theater in his twenties (plays "ought to be presented quite coldly, classically and objectively. For they are not matter for empathy; they are there to be understood. Feelings are private and limited. Against that the reason is fairly comprehensive and to be relied on," 15) to a more mature dialectical view of empathy and estrangement, emotion and intellect, identification and critical thought in his forties. His early attacks on empathy-based drama are remarkably reminiscent of Tolstoy, repeatedly likening the body state into which "Aristotelian" acting puts the audience to various forms of depersonalization: a trance (26), an "obstinate clinging to the pleasure element" and "addiction to drugs" (40-41), an appeal to "the mental immaturity and the high emotional suggestibility of a mob" (79), "stock narcotic attractions" (85), "a machine for simulating the effects of dope" (88), "one of the most blooming branches of the international narcotics traffic" (90), a "rape" of the spectator (93), "a view to achieving more or less primi-

tive shock effects or hazily defined sentimental moods which in fact are to be consumed as substitutes for the missing spiritual experiences of a crippled and cataleptic audience" (160), and what he called the behaviorism of American-style advertising and salesmanship: "a man goes into a showroom, mildly infected, and comes out, severely ill, in possession of a car" (67). Even as he begins to recognize the importance of emotion as a *goad* to critical thinking, he continues to use Tolstoy's infection metaphor negatively to deride the kind of empathetic response he is trying to circumvent:

In this case, however, there is not the same automatic transfer of emotions to the spectator, the same emotional infection. The estrangement effect intervenes, not in the form of absence of emotion, but in the form of emotions which need not correspond to those of the character portrayed. On seeing worry the spectator may feel a sensation of joy; on seeing anger, one of disgust. When we speak of exhibiting the outer signs of emotion we do not mean such an exhibition and such a choice of signs that the emotional transference does in fact take place because the actor has managed to infect himself with the emotions portrayed, by exhibiting the outer signs; thus, by letting his voice rise, holding his breath and tightening his neck muscles so that the blood shoots to his head, the actor can easily conjure up a rage. In such a case of course the effect does not occur. But it does occur if the actor at a particular point unexpectedly shows a completely white face, which he has produced mechanically by holding his face in his hands with some white make-up on them. If the actor at the same time displays an apparently composed character, then his terror at this point (as a result of his message, or that discovery) will give rise to an estrangement effect. Acting like this is healthier and in our view less un-

worthy of a thinking being; it demands a considerable knowledge of humanity and worldly wisdom, and a keen eye for what is socially important. In this case too there is of course a creative process at work; but it is a higher one, because it is raised to the conscious level. (94-95)

By the 1940s and especially the 1950s, however, his tune has changed: "We must," he writes in 1951 or 1952, "*infect* a working-class audience with the urge to alter the world (and supply it with some of the relevant knowledge)" (247, emphasis added). And his strategies for accomplishing that infection are complexly grounded in Shklovsky's dialecticization of Tolstoy's estrangement and infection theory, with the added elements of pushing the viewer to undertake critical/ideological analysis (from Marx) and the infectious impact on the viewer of body movements (from his decades directing actors).

I suggest, then, that while Tolstoy's infection theory is too much a transcendental idealization of his own depersonalization to work on its own terms, its very experiential grounding in his estrangement from other people gives it the power to mediate between the aesthetics of depersonalization *and* repersonalization in twentieth-century literary theory. In that sense, Tolstoy's infection theory performs the task that Paul assigns to the blood of Jesus: policing the boundary between the familiar and the strange, the own and the alien, the at-home and the away, the near and the far; adding a little estrangement to the mix (in the reader's emotional response) when things get overly conventionalized, a little familiarity when things get too weird.<sup>5</sup>

### Notes

1. For those who would complain that заражение (infection) is simply the opposite of выражение (expression), the inward movement (impression) of expression, and has nothing to do with disease, Caryl Emerson's stricture is trenchant: "The epidemiological resonances of 'in-

fection' and 'infectiousness' (*zarazhenie, zarazitel'nost'*) are of course deliberate—for in Tolstoy's view, every important truth had to prove itself on the individual body" (238).

2. The famous passage is this one from 1901, uttered in conversation with Paul Boyer: "I read the whole of Rousseau, all the twenty volumes, including the "Dictionary of Music." I was more than enthused about him, I worshiped him. At the age of fifteen, I carried a medallion with a portrait of Rousseau around my neck. Many pages in Rousseau are so close to me that it seems as if I had written them myself" (quoted in Šilbajoris 33).

3. Rudnev's opera image here is based on his reading of Natasha's depersonalized reaction to the opera in *War and Peace*. For an important discussion of the connections between Tolstoy's art and his art theory—one that does not, however, go as far as Rudnev—see Šilbajoris:

For instance, Natasha's feelings of estrangement at the opera in Book Eight of *War and Peace* resemble almost perfectly Tolstoy's own description at the beginning of the essay [*What Is Art?*] of an opera rehearsal he saw and was disgusted by. The point emerges from such comparisons that while in reading the essay we are expected to confront the argument itself, in the fiction we need not judge that argument but are free to respond to the characters' human experiences in the context of their depicted lives. This may help us understand why the art of Tolstoy seems so powerful, and the essay often so unacceptable. (11)

Šilbajoris here seems to imply that the argumentative form of Tolstoy's depersonalization in *What Is Art?* disturbs us because argument requires generalization, indeed in this case universalization; I would add that equally problematic in Tolstoy's depersonalized argumentation is its repressive idealization, its presentation of estrangement in the idealized guise of non-estrangement.

4. "Thus Tolstoy can despise the developmental 'historical view' and yet still posit a utopia up

ahead, because, like Rousseau, he is convinced that humanity's task is not to move forward but to move back" (Emerson "Aesthetics" 246). See also Barran "Rousseau": "In order to understand *What is Art?*, we must read it as a political work containing both a critique of present civilization and a utopian outline of an ideal society" (1).

5. I adumbrate here a homeostatic model of estrangement that I develop at length in Chapter Three of the book-length version of this article, *Estrangement and the Somatics of Literature*. That model is anticipated to some extent by Daniel Laferrière, who argues that "the familiar" is what is familiar to me and "the strange" is what has been excluded from the "me"—and that Shklovskyan estrangement in effect remobilizes a repressed or otherwise excluded aspect of the "me" that is therefore experienced simultaneously as "strange" and "familiar." He does not stray into the realm of depersonalization; his conclusion is that "the great accomplishment of the literary artist is to present us with complexes of semantic material that harmlessly return us to early ego states" (186-87).

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