Ostranenie
by M.H. Bowker

Ostranenie, the term for defamiliarization introduced by Russian writer Victor Shklovsky, means, among other things, to see in strangeness, to participate in an illusion that is more real than real. It may be achieved by (re)presenting the surface as the substance, the play as the thing, or by examining what is present before one’s eyes. Ultimately, ostranenie means confessing one’s complicity in making known what is known.

This little book is a meditation upon the moment of a mother’s death: a moment of defamiliarization in several senses. The body of the work consists of footnotes which elaborate, by exegesis, by parataxis, and sometimes by surprise, the intimate and often hidden relationships between parent and child, illusion and knowledge, shame and loss. These elaborations raise questions about the power of the familiar, the limitations of discursive thought, and the paradoxical nature of the interpersonal, political, and spiritual bargains we make for the sake of security and freedom. In a candidly unsettled examination of this relationship and its influence upon the reflections and concerns of the author, the reader is invited to experience a family, a disintegration, a psyche, and its defamiliarization, from the perspectives of both an adult and a child.

Cover Image: detail from M.H. Bowker, A Lot of People Bathing in a Stream, After Wallace Stevens (acrylic on canvas)
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