

Body, gender, and a communist's shame (side notes on Stanisław Lem's utopian science fiction novels from the 1950's)*

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Stanisław Lem's output is a complex phenomenon, both in terms of the inspirations which permeated his every work and his writing practice. One could say that the intellectual inspiration, the 'ideology', in the broadest of senses, of his output was fundamentally derived from Enlightenment empiricism and rationalism. The situation was completely different when it came to what could be defined as the 'matrix of Lem's writing imagination', though, mind you, the interpretations of reality in his original artistic depictions of major issues for the human kind and the modern civilisation differed considerably and sometimes were even contrary to the conclusions included in his discursive texts or in the declarative layer of his literary works.

That is because the author of *Obłok Magellana* [The Magellanic Cloud] believed that the person writing a text, or – pushing this image to the extreme – was a body immersed in the Cosmos operating a pen to formulate interpretations of an existence and functioning of the Cosmos, was someone else than Lem the intellectual and 'Lem the ideologist' or even the writer reduced to 'pure intellect' in an emotionless and objective manner analysing the problems of civilisation. The former, contrary to the latter, focussed not so much on the rational/scientific principles and the 'post-Cartesian' mentality and civilisational practice, but rather on its backdrop: the imagination that had shaped the modern world and that accompanied it on a regular basis, on the frames of perception most external in rela-

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tion to the world of representation, metaphors or rhetorical figures that continue to maintain the humanised world in its temporal existence. Moreover, by exploring those mysterious areas of civilisational ‘foundations’ or ‘scaffolding’ the writer discovered, which surprised him every time, their arbitrary, accidental and fundamentally ‘not necessary’ nature.

When musing on the source of that difference, present in Lem’s works and possibly constituting one of its covert inspirations, one should bear in mind that the author of *A Perfect Vacuum* was a personality (both in psychological and creative terms) that very carefully covered the emotional and psychological sources of his pursuits and obsessions. Although he spent most of his writing career under a totalitarian regime (or maybe because of that?) he strived for internal clarity, alignment between his intentions and the products of his activities, precision in expressing what was given directly in the mind without any areas of ambiguity, twilight or mysteries caused by the complexity of the author’s psyche and not by the immanent contradictions of the persona discovering the world.¹ Therefore, when seeking the source of the conflict between the perspective of Lem that remained outside his writer intention and Lem outside his striving for coherence, I believe it is necessary to refer to what he said about himself and hope that, in this case, his intentions matched the outcomes and that the available autobiographies of the author of *Astronaucci* [The Astronauts] do not mention any attempts to mask anything or self-create.²

When searching for such sources of uncontrolled ambiguity (i.e., Lem’s literary questioning of his own rational assumptions), one could refer to, e.g., a well-known fragment of *Świat na krawędzi. Ze Stanisławem Lemem rozmawia Tomasz Fiałkowski* [World on the brink. Tomasz Fiałkowski’s talks with Stanisław Lem], where the author of Eden thus described how he made his way through his home city of Lviv during the Second World War:

W miarę jak się zagłębiałem w miasto, spotykałem coraz mniej ludzi [...] Szedłem jednak dalej – i nagle usłyszałem charakterystyczny silnik „Pantery”, grzechot gąsienic po bruku. Odwróciłem się – i rze-

As I went deeper into the city, the fewer people I met. (...) But I kept going. Suddenly I heard the distinctive sound of the engine of a Panther and the rattle of its tracks on the cobbles. I turned around

1 This has been discussed by, e.g., Mariusz M. Leś in *Stanisław Lem wobec utopii* [Stanisław Lem in the face of utopia] (Białystok: 1998). He has argued that Lem’s output is the best ‘example of one’s sense of responsibility for words, for thoughts, all harnessed to fulfil the arduous job of exploring the mysteries of the world. Any delusions, any escapism from real problems were unacceptable for Lem. His writings have been an expression of an active stance towards reality’, (M. Leś, *Stanisław Lem wobec utopii*, pp. 33-34). Mariusz Leś (clearly contrary to Małgorzata Szpakowska) has also been a proponent of alternative readings of Lem’s discursive and literary works as the former enable only a partial interpretation of the writer’s novels and short stories, creating only seemingly and actually a superficial interpretative key (*ibid.*, p. 52).

2 That, naturally, refers to an alignment that is not mediated by discursive reflection.

czywiście zobaczyłem [...] jadącą ku mnie niemiecką „Panterę”. Nie wiedziałem oczywiście, że w wielkiej kępie krzaków po mojej lewej stronie ukryto sowieckie działo przeciwpancerne [...] Chciałem uciec do jakiejś bramy, ale wszystkie były zamknięte. Mogłem się tylko wtulić we wnękę i czekać, co będzie dalej. Przed czołgiem nie uciekniesz. Nagle Rosjanie strzelili i trafili czołg dokładnie w miejsce między wieżyczką a korpusem; wieżyczka tak została skoszona, że zablokowała wyjście. Słyszałem straszne krzyki ludzi płonących wewnątrz, pamiętam też zdumiewającą siłę podmuchu, kiedy pocisk obok mnie przelatywał [...] Kiedy wróciłem po kilku dniach, traktor odciągał właśnie tę „Panterę”, tak spaloną, że nawet kółka, po których biegał gąsienice, przestały się poruszać. Z ciekawości wlażłem na górę tego żelastwa, zajrzałem do środka – i zobaczyłem osmalone czaszki Niemców. Także i ten obraz do dziś pamiętam³.

and there it was (...) a German Panther heading towards me. I wasn't aware, of course, that in a bush to my left a Soviet anti-tank cannon was hidden (...) I wanted to hide inside a tenement house but all the gates were locked. I could only press against a recess and wait for what was to come. You can't run away from a tank. Suddenly the Russians fired and hit the tank directly between the turret and the body; the turret got sliced in such a way that it blocked the exit. I heard terrible screams of people burning inside; I also remember the stupendous whiplash as the shell flew past me. (...) When I returned a few days later a tractor was pulling the Panther away; it was burnt so badly that even the wheels on which the tracks roll seized completely. I was curious so I climbed the pile of steel and peered inside – I saw the charred skulls of the Germans. I have remembered this image ever since.³

In this description one can easily find the figure present in various later Lem's narratives, e.g., the story of the titanic struggle of the automated tank named Cyclops against clouds of mechanical autonomous insects in the novel *The Invincible* or the scene of the catastrophe and the death of people in a meteorite-struck ship in the short story *Terminus*. That is because by utilising inspiration from his own life's story, Lem not only transformed it in various ways and presented the same motif in many variants extremely different from one to another, but also ignored the emotional connotations of such 'figure events', or part experiences that constituted the 'matrix' of him steered towards writing. The truth is that while the Germans (and their allies) at that time posed a deadly threat to Lem and his loved ones, Russians (or, more broadly, the Soviets) did not. However, the feeling sense of vengeful satisfaction remained unfamiliar to him, not because he felt some kind of Christian empathy towards the dying enemies but because he constantly subjected his narrations (even the autobiographical one) to the rational generalisation imperative, a kind of reflective duty that required him to ignore subjective emotions.

The problem is that that the duty to maintain rationality led Lem to conclusions which, in their artistic shape, i.e., after literary 'processing', weakened that rationality, somewhat undermining it as the base because a disregard for the emotional layers in descriptions of battle efforts, suggests an interpretation according to which the Second World War, despite the suggestive symbolic languages in which the conflict between the two warring totalitarian regimes and even between totalitarianism and democracy was expressed, was not a war between humans but be-

3 *Świat na krawędzi. Ze Stanisławem Lemem rozmawia Tomasz Fiałkowski* (Cracow: 2000), pp. 46-47. [Unless indicated otherwise, quotations in English were translated from Polish].

tween machines. What else could the quoted scene, always present in the ‘theatre of the memories’ of the author of *Solaris*, have been if not a proof of the paradox according to which the fundamental contradiction that causes wars in this case runs not along the indications of ideologies, rooted in the minds of the operators of mechanical devices, but along the very line of the ‘mechanical vs. organic’ distinction; and, to generalise even further, in modernity and in the perspective of its totalising ideologies it is the machine that uses humans (or organic tissue) to evolve, subject itself to selection according to the *fight for survival* principle, while ignoring its human users as irrelevant elements.

Yet Lem was a writer and a thinker too careful to be swayed by the atmosphere of fear of mechanisms, which had been expressed in literature (including science fiction) from the 19th century.⁴ More in the spirit of Hegel than of Aristotle or Descartes, he seemed to argue that it was not the cause that explained the effect but quite the contrary, it was the effect that expressed the essence of the cause. It was the mechanical nature, Aristotle’s *automaton* that constituted the hidden core of limitation, constantly ‘leaping’ over the trauma of death (of ‘no-time’ and ‘no-place’) through the perseverance of the very gesture. Thus, the mechanical nature – to the extent that it is fulfilled through the ‘anthropomorphic’ tool, i.e., that machine created by civilisation – reveals the seeming nature of life, the constant presence in the fiction of a separation from ‘dead’ materiality, which constitutes the precondition for life to continue. The source fiction, i.e., the ‘life narration’ which precedes the emergence of the simplest biological organisms on Earth, creates life’s ‘time’ (life time), without which the continuous existence of the *bios* based on leaps over unwavering nothingness would not be possible.⁵

4 A classic example of modernist conservatism in right-wing radical terms that was fostered by the fear of the ‘mechanical’ aspect of technology was the seminal work *Perfektion der Technik* (1946; translated into English as *The failure of technology*) by Friedrich Georg Junger, the younger brother of the well-known writer Ernst Junger. Friedrich Georg, who just like Ernst participated in the First World War, was severely wounded in the attack on Langemarck, a fact which, it would seem, largely defined his view of technology (with war being its ‘genetic element’ according to him and which *de facto* had never been anything else than a war with Nature, and which represented the side of the ‘Titans’ in a constant struggle with the ‘gods of the Olympus’, which had been unfolding for centuries in the basis of Christian culture). Junger intended to explicate the ‘Tyranic’ (‘demonic’) aspect of technology through, e.g., a description of the so-called ‘material battle’ (this is a strategic term) during the First World War, which led to a complete destruction of the landscape and its transformation into a barren ‘volcanic’ (exposing chthonic elements) and ‘lunar’ landscape (contrasted with, naturally, both the solar aspect of the rule of the gods of the Olympus and the harmony of Nature, which keeps those dark powers deep inside Earth). Junger’s work also features an important for this discussion association of technology with epic narration (see: F.G. Junger, *The failure of technology*, transl. F.D. Wieck, introduction F.D. Wilhelmssen (Flinsdale: 1949)). At this point one should remember about Derrida’s common position, supported completely by, e.g. Junger, that opposition towards mechanicality is related to the ‘totalising’ authoritarian aspect of modern culture to an at least equal extent as technology or ‘technocracy’ is.

5 The same fundamental relationship between life and narration was not, of course, discovered by post-

Therefore, the pessimistic truth in Lem's works, perceptible in this interpretative perspective, would assume that thus gained life is in some sense 'seeming life', that it cannot be framed as the opposite of 'lifelessness' (being living matter, as opposed to dead matter) according to the principle of universal logical opposition, but it rather constitutes something akin to artificial (grotesque) 'animation', the domain of actors, where life is 'played out' in an environment *de facto* a mixture of the elements of life and death. This revelation was not, of course, offered by the author of *The Invincible*; quite the contrary, it belonged to the classical philosophical and religious topoi reanimated in the 19th century by nihilism. As Slavoj Žižek argued in *The indivisible remainder. An essay on Schelling and related matters*:

» Schelling who, in the dialogue *Clara* (1810), drove a wedge into the simple complementary mirror-relationship of Inside and Outside – between Spirit and Body, between the ideal element and the real element which together form the living totality of the Organism – by drawing our attention to the double surplus that 'sticks out'. On the one hand, there is the *spiritual element of corporeality*: the presence, in matter itself, of a non-material but physical element, of a subtle corpse, relatively independent of time and space, which provides the material base of our free will (animal magnetism, etc.); on the other hand, there is the *corporeal element of spirituality*: the materializations of the spirit in a kind of a pseudo-stuff, in substanceless apparitions (ghosts, living dead).⁶

Elsewhere, the Slovenian philosopher (also following Lacan or creatively expanding his thoughts), suggestively termed that state of suspension between death and life, or rather the state of dead and living matter:

modern humanities; quite the contrary, the conviction about its existence lay at the basis of modernity appearing in, e.g., the Romantic version of German idealistic philosophy. As Katarzyna Filutowska argued in *System i opowieść. Filozofia narracyjna Schellinga w latach 1800-1811* [System and story. Schelling's Narrative Philosophy in the years 1800-1811] (Wrocław: 2007): 'Cosmic narration begins [in Schelling's works – M. P.] by dint of divine decision, through a descent into darkness of the foundation, nature or matter (...) For Schelling in *System of transcendental idealism* the material (...) of the epic of history is the mythical content contained in the so-called common ocean of poetry, from which all discourses have emerged and to which they will eventually return (...) Therefore, also the highest comprehensible truth shall have a symbolic and mythological nature, that is one which is fictional from the point of view what is empirical (see: K. Filutowska, *System i opowieść...*, pp. 36 and 38).

6 S. Žižek, *The indivisible remainder: An essay on Schelling and related matters* (London-New York: 1996), p. 4.

» In (...) the treacherously poetic description (...) of the mythical creature that Lacan called 'lamella' (which could be translated into Polish as 'człomlet' [English 'manlet'], i.e., a combination of 'man' and 'omelette'), an organ that embodies libido, every word has a specific weight to it. Lacan imagined that lamella as a version of what Freud called a 'partial object': a strange organ, which undergoes magical autonomisation, which can survive without the body to which it should belong (...) Lamella is the mere surface, something (...) endlessly plastic – can change its form endlessly or even leap from one medium to another (...) Lamella is indivisible, indestructible and immortal – more precisely, it is undead, like in a horror film: it is not supposed to mean some lofty immortality of the spirit but the grotesque undeadness of the 'living dead' that every time they get destroyed they get up and keep going (...) It is supposed to mean the mode according to which immortality appears in psychoanalysis: the uncanny surplus of life, the 'undead' urge that prevails outside the (biological) cycle of life and death, creation and destruction.⁷

This means the identification in technical civilisation of not so much the realisation of the stipulations of an enlightened mind but rather of the historical foundation of human activeness: the obscene extension of the undead urge of *libido*/Thanatos is precisely the product of Lem the artist, not Lem the rationalist or Lem the ideologist.⁸ The repetitiveness rooted in the death drive, the perseverance of only one gesture that constitutes the core of the structures of the 'human world' becomes a kind of grotesque parody of humanity derived from the depths of objects and reified matter (in this perspective 'Mother Earth' is called a 'planet', 'just like any other', only topically different from the millions of its potential diverse replicas spread across the Cosmos).

7 *Idem, Lacan: Przewodnik Krytyki Politycznej* [Lacan: A guide of Political Criticism], transl. and introduction J. Kutyła (Warsaw: 2008), pp. 78-79.

8 Interestingly enough, when Žižek was writing about Lacan's symbol (or rather the *pseudo*-myth) of *lamella*, which combined the problem of the mechanical nature of *libido* or the death drive and the 'seeming' nature of life, he referred to, as he used to, popular culture, i.e., the film *Alien* by Ridley Scott and to the well-known image of the germinating version of the antagonist that wrapped itself tightly around a person's face while at the same time (using an organic probe) developed as an embryo inside the victim's stomach (see: S. Žižek, *The indivisible remainder...*, pp. 79-80). In a fragment of Lem's *Obłok Magellana* where the protagonist participates in a marathon during Olympic games, which was for him a kind of a rite of passage that turned him not just into an adult male but actually a 'superhuman' befitting of a futuristic communist utopia, the protagonist eliminates his final challenger, a superb runner by the name Mehilla, accidentally revealing to him his... face terribly disfigured by the mechanical effort of the run (see: S. Lem, *Obłok Magellana* [Cracow: 2005], pp. 26-27).

The Enlightenment failure of the 'mythical' meta-narrative places the utopia – presented as a political program in the categories of social pragmatism – in a place once occupied by meaning-generating personifications of life as repetition, and Dionysian play and spectacle, masking any direct relationship between the *bios* and dead matter. In a collectivised utopia, e.g., the utopia of the society of the era of 'mature communism', which belonged to communist ideology, the sublime is saved from becoming grotesque by drawing that association between the suffering and dying, yet constantly regenerating Dionysus with society understood as the aggregate of humanised matter ('human resources') and means of production which a community has at its disposal ('production potential').⁹ Therefore, communism as an ideology created its own 'theology' and 'scholastics', which responded to that mythical perspective. In thus understood structure of thinking, the human body, being an 'atom' of the Dionysian social body, must play a significant role while the animalistic community of sensations is reconstructed through constant pressure based on ideological resentment.

No wonder, then, that Lem as a writer, who not so much applied in his literary practice the Marxist/Leninist theory but rather whose mind was shaped by the same post-Enlightenment patterns of mythologising events, which also formed communist, thought about human sexuality not within the perspective of the non-reducible differentiation of female vs. male, but rather in that of the body, and the phenomenon of mechanicality and fragmentation (the original 'division' of what in its perfect form can only exist as the 'whole'). As in Aristophanes' myth depicted by Plato, the gender-based difference becomes sign of an indefinite ontological difference that underwent stabilisation and materialised in this transition (from an idea to a specific item), while its inherent indefiniteness (or transition outside the system of language) found its expression in the expelled from the culture mechanical aspect of *coitus*, while, at the same time, in a technical civilisation, together with devices that only seemingly serve humans. Thus framed technical civilisation is no longer an achievement of *homo sapiens* and becomes a sign of its condition that is as complex as a labyrinth and, in a sense, fundamentally 'ailing'.

9 This was discussed by Mariusz M. Leś in the already-mentioned book (*Stanisław Lem wobec utopii*, p. 116): 'The mind is always aided by intuition and its every statement is aided by some sense of things that cannot be exhausted by cognition. Once statements are stripped of their existential halo and a deductive system is built on their basis, the unexpected appears (...)'. Yet in Lem's works that kind of 'mythical' background of cognitive conviction can only be revealed through a complex literary form, by dint of its ambiguity. As Leś posited: '(...) Lem has never made any ultimate statements about whether mythical extra-rational acts of cognition are true or not. (...) That would mean their inclusion into the cognitive order and a destruction of their specificity. To retain their load, they must remain a mystery (...)'. (*ibid.*, p. 141).

The undefined difference, a difference in the form of an error or a lack of something, placed right in the centre of humanity, not simply expressed in mechanical motion but rather being a sign of mechanicality itself – that is one of the subdued embarrassing truths of the utopian narratives of communism. Yet to properly define the relationship between modern culture, technology and utopian narrative in the version which appeared in communist or ‘real socialist’ science fiction novels: *Astronaucci* (1951), *Obłok Magellana* (1955) by Lem, or the famous novel by Ivan Yefremov, which I shall use for comparison, titled *Andromeda Nebula* (1957) it is necessary, on the one hand, to possess an extensive understanding of the sources of the utopian nature of communist ideology (i.e., to approach their inherent idealism as idealism itself, e.g., in the context of Fichtean, Schellingian or Hegelian foundations of Marxism/Leninism) and, on the other, to notice in them mainly the signs of the dilemmas of modern mentality.¹⁰ That kind of reflection is provoked chiefly by the question about the interpretation of the rather peculiar approach of this totalitarian doctrine to human corporeality or sexuality, and, in turn, the cultural notion of shame, deeply rooted in the human experience of the body. That is because it seems that the special kind of ‘puritanism’ of the institutional discourse of communism (both as ideology and meta-narrative), was to a large extent redundant as it conflicted with its fundamentally atheistic core, which relativised traditional values.¹¹

Thus defined problem area enables one to approach utopian science fiction novels as valuable research material because their literary form enabled their authors to express more openly what they conveyed in the ideological subtext. Not to disregard the obvious impact of censorship (or, even more so, self-censorship by authors) on the final shape of the novels, one could assume that their metaphorical and symbolic language spontaneously revealed content the ideological status of which was undefined, and thus they could express a context of quintessentially modern authoritarian ideas, and, to use Lacan’s expression, their ‘fundamental

10 As Chris Shilling argued in *The body and social theory* (London: 2003), the identification of the ‘live-dead’ distinction as key for the modern experience of the body had been often stressed by the sociologist Anthony Giddens: ‘modern individuals have become increasingly aware that they live in circumstances of “existential contradiction”; being of the inanimate world, yet set off against it (...)’ (see: Ch. Shilling, *The body and social theory*, pp. 159-160).

11 To engage in such a reflection one would, of course, need to move beyond the simplistic conclusion that authoritarian control of corporeality and sexuality demands also (or possibly most of all) power over the body and its potencies. Indeed, this statement, though one could not dispute its obvious reading on the surface, holds the banner of truth only at the common-sense level; it is only a simplified application of Foucault’s theory of discursive formations to the interpretation of the problem. In fact, that framing of the notion of ideological ‘puritanism’ remained in contradiction with communism’s clearly ambivalent attitude towards corporeality and sexuality, e.g., the discourse’s relative acceptance of promiscuity (divorces were common, contraceptives were not banned, and abortion was generally available in the Soviet Union and its satellite states).

fantasy'. One should also note the relationship between the origins of the science fiction genre and modernity – it was basically the only type of literature that emerged under direct inspiration of the technological boom of the 19th century. Therefore, the dilemmas of modern mentality – in reference to fundamental human problems, such as corporeality or shame – should be 'clear as day'.¹²

For the purposes of this interpretation, one can assume the most general and yet the simplest definition of shame, according to which shame is a feeling closely associated with one's body that accompanies an unintentional or intentional act of revealing what is hidden, and the feeling itself is never 'welcomed' by the person.¹³ Sociologists and anthropologists alike further associate shame with interruption of social communication due to uncontrolled appearance of corporal reality, emerging from a different level of meaning than from the level of the logos. As Chris Shilling argued in *The body and social theory*:

» There is also a social equivalent to this painful or emotional dys-appearance of the body, and it concerns that bodily consciousness which can arise when there is disruption to social interaction. Goffman (1956) is particularly insightful on this point and suggests that when the orderly flow of interaction breaks down, as a result of inappropriate gestures or expressions, the offended becomes acutely conscious of their body. (...) Individuals become acutely aware of their bodily dys-appearance as the mutual attunement of people to each other is

12 This particular quality of science fiction literature was indicated by Joanna Russ in *To write like a woman: Essays in feminism and science fiction* (Bloomington: 1995). She has argued that the basic figure of science fiction is the 'dislocated' world, which consists mainly of the fact that science fiction discusses that 'which has not [actually – M. P.] happened' (which, of course, does not mean that it could not have happened in the past or could not happen in the future). That freedom enjoyed by science fiction when it comes to the order of facts enables one, according to Russ, to define its status as the modern myth or the mythology of modernity, more specifically, modern technical civilisation. She claims that the function of science fiction is to deliver 'new myths' to interpret the current human experience (J. Russ, *To write like a woman...*, pp. 7-8, 92).

13 Lem's later text, i.e., the short story *Maska* [Mask] (1974), which seems to be expanding on a problem particularly close to Lem, i.e., of the relationship between the experience of corporeality and shame and the topic of mechanicality, as well as with the cultural image of women (a problem, mind you, indicated quite clearly in *Obłok Magellana*) offers an excellent description of shame in a 'source' form. The female persona (a machine/woman) thus accounts her key experience of a Lacanian 'encounter with the Real', which consists of discovering the 'mechanicality' hidden in the 'organism' of her own body: 'The slashed skin-white surface opened and I saw in the mirror a nestled silvery shape like a huge foetus, as if a glistening chrysalis hidden inside me. (...) Not for fear but because of terrible shame [emphasis – M. P.] crushing my throat I tried with both hands to hide the silvery ovoid inside me, but it was too big and my cut was too extensive for that to succeed.' (As quoted in: W Michera, *Piękna jako bestia. Przyczynnik do antropologii obrazu* [Beautiful as a beast. Contribution to the anthropology of the image] (Warsaw: 2010), pp. 394-395. Michera's book quotes the text of Lem's short story *in extenso*).

ruptured, and as the dyad is dissolved and the encounter is reduced to two isolated, awkward bodies.¹⁴

Further, Shilling, just like Norbert Elias before him, associated the explication of thus understood shame with the cultural sources of modernity (understood as a civilisational process), more specifically, with the Renaissance court society as the model according to which modern social relations formed.¹⁵ Therefore, science fiction utopias of the communist era should include signs of that shameful, or unwelcome, presence of the body in interpersonal relations, and, even more so, they should be the more pronounced the more perfect a model of society that writers wished to present in them.

In *Obłok Magellana* the presence of the protagonists' corporeality is evident, while the manner in which the problem of human materiality and sexuality manifested themselves and is presented seems strictly correlated with the notion of social communication. That manner is also proposed as a relationship between an individual body and the collective body (the substance-based Hegelian notion of 'man'), presented in this case through the figure of amplification or elevation:

Lecz oto człowiek w swojej drodze już jest pomiędzy gwiazdami, poznał przestrzeń i czas, i gwiazdy same, które go wydały. Nic nie może się mu oprzeć. Tym staje się większy, im większe napotyka przeszkody. W nim jest wszystko: wielkość i słabość, miłość i okrucieństwo, to, co ograniczone, i to, co nie ma granic. Bo nawet gwiazdy starzeją się i gasną, a my pozostaniemy¹⁶.

Yet here man on his path is already among the stars, he has discovered space and time, and even the stars, from which he was born. Nothing can resist him. He grows even greater with ever greater obstacle he encounters. He contains everything now: greatness and weakness, love and cruelty, what is limited and what has no limit. Because even stars age and extinguish, while we shall remain.¹⁶

Therefore, one could say that shame in the case of Lem's characters could be caused by one of at least two reasons: by an 'unwelcome' appearance of the corporal reality, as discussed by Shilling, or by a sense of one's own imperfectness, a kind of inability to match the perfect image of man (or 'communist man') which, at the same time, was a coherent organic social bond with the 'collective body'.¹⁷ Both for

14 Ch. Shilling, *The body and social theory*, p. 185.

15 Shilling posited: 'the search for distinction remains a major motor force behind impression management in contemporary society and (...) can be seen as promoting levels of mutual identification between people which are far higher than in previous historical eras. Accompanying this process of mutual identification was an advance in thresholds of shame and embarrassment (...)' (see: Ch. Shilling, *The body and social theory*, p. 139).

16 S. Lem, *Obłok Magellana*, p. 4.

17 According to a declaration included in the 'program' speech by a female character in Yefremov's utopia: 'The upbringing of a new person is complicated work (...) Gone is the time when society was satisfied with haphazard, random upbringing of its people, whose drawbacks were justified by heredity and human nature. Now, every ill-bred person is a reproach to all of society, a grave error by a large group of people. (...) Humanity, comprising colossal masses of people, was faced with a real choice

Lem (as the author of *Astronauta* and *Obłok Magellana*), and Yefremov, the human body was an instrument shaped by biological evolution that should be, most of all, socially useful (useful, with a pinch of sarcasm, in the struggle with nature itself, which had shaped it in the first place!). Yet, from the very beginning the two authors of utopias shared an unnerving uncertainty as to the separation of the organic collective (or the human body in its personal dimension) from the mechanical element, which attacked humans as if from two sides: as the immanent component of technical civilisation and as a hidden threat caused by uncontrolled urges.¹⁸

The duality of the existence of shame as a figure of human fate became apparent in utopian science fiction novels of the communist era owing to the special approach to 'female-male' relations and by the 'unwelcome' displays of the existence of the elements of matter as the fundamental force of chaos that causes catastrophes, or, to the contrary, as emptiness, boundless void, negatively resonating with human subjectivity. On the one hand, to manage human communities ('collectives') is undoubtedly a difficult feat of managing one's 'nature within oneself',¹⁹ on the other, however, the anthropological dimension of technological civilisation and its psychological consequences are formulated in *Obłok Magellana* as an allegorical image of endless space and silence, only disrupted by the rhythmic clatter of machines:

Nie do zniesienia stała się atmosfera wypełniająca statek od szczytowych pokładów po najodleglejsze zakamarki. Na naszych zmysłach kładł się jakby

The atmosphere that filled the ship from top decks all the way to the furthest recesses has become unbearable. It was as if some invisible weight had laid

– whether to subject itself to society-wide discipline, extensive upbringing and education, or to perish. There were no other ways to survive on our planet, even with its natural plenty! (See: I. Yefremov, *The Andromeda Nebula*, transl. M. K. ((2014), p. 249 [Kindle edition]).

- 18 When recollecting his childhood, a character in *Obłok Magellana*, concludes: 'Like in any other home we also had a lot of automatons; for clearing, kitchen or handy work, and gardening. Those in the last category, which looked after flowers and trees, were called Monots. Monot One has been with us since my grandpa's time. He often gave me a piggy-back ride, something our German shepherd Pluto hated; dogs in general hate automatons. My grandma has told me that all lower creatures in general are afraid of automatons because they don't understand how something that isn't alive can move (...)' (see: S. Lem, *Obłok Magellana*, p. 8). This fragment offers a clear depiction of the effort to tame the 'extraordinary' quasi-life of humanoid mechanisms by introducing them into 'warm' and regular family relations. Soon afterwards, though, one of the mentors of the character notes: 'it is not befitting for humans to perform works which can be done by automatons. You must know it would undignified (...)' (*ibid.*, p. 14). Clearly, automatons fulfilled in that case a similar role to that of slaves in antiquity. One could argue that as per the well-known Hegelian explication of the dialectics of Master and Slave, their emancipation in Lem's works (in *Bajki robotów* [Fables of robots] and *Cyberiad*) had been prepared by the very fact of the proclaimed 'servile' subjugation of machines and by their association to the 'undignified' aspect of mechanical work.
- 19 As one of the 'spokesmen' of the communist utopia (Chairman of the Translators Committee) argues with pathos in *Astronauta*: 'For more than eight thousand years the human kind has inhabited Earth. Throughout the progression of consecutive generations filled with hardships and suffering humans have not only learnt ways for harnessing the forces of nature but also for managing the forces of society, which for centuries had hampered progress turning against humans (...)' (S. Lem, *Astronauta: powieść fantastyczno-naukowa* [Warsaw: 1970], p. 21).

niewidzialny ciężar. Sny, jeśli nadchodziły, nosiły koszty. [...] Nie sposób było schronić się przed owymi zmorami na jawie, gdyż czekała w niej gorza jeszcze, wielka cisza. Można się w nią było wsłuchać w każdym niemal zakątku okrętu; wiskała się między słowa rozmowy, rwała myśli, w ułamku sekundy roztrzącała ludzi na bieguny ciemnego, nieskończonego milczenia. Podejmowaliśmy z nią walkę. Tak na przykład w laboratoriach i pracowniach umyślnie wyłączano pochłaniacze dźwięków. Wówczas łoskot machin doświadczalnych niósł się daleko po całym statku, ale w jego monotonii kryło się jakby szyderstwo z naszych usiłowań i tym wyraźniej odczuwaliśmy utłudość podobnych prób, że jednostajny dźwięk był niby cienką jak papier powierzchnią czarnej ciszy²⁰.

on our senses. If dreams even came, they were nightmares. (...) You couldn't hide from those wraiths by staying awake, because then something even worse was there lurking: the great silence. You could listen deep into it almost anywhere on the ship. It squeezed between words in conversations, it tore your thoughts in a split second sending people off to the extremes of the dark endless quiet. We tried to fight it. For example, in laboratories and workshops people intentionally switched off sound absorbers. Then the clatter of lab machinery flowed far through the ship, yet its monotony carried a covert mockery of our endeavours and that made us feel even more the delusive nature of such actions, that the steady sound was a mere paper-thin film of the black silence.²⁰

In that situation the only escape from the cosmic void (which reflected, one could say, the void of modern subjectivity that broke off from its previous 'substance-based' content)²¹ was to engage in rushed, secret and shameful erotic relations, bordering on sexual promiscuity:

Na pokład Gei przybyło z Ziemi wiele kobiet i mężczyzn, dojrzałych już do miłości, lecz wciąż jeszcze szukających, i należało się spodziewać, że długi czas podróży złączy wiele par. [...] W drugim roku podróży zdarzało się, że pary powstawały przelotnie i rozłączały się jak gdyby przypadkowo, a ten nawrót zamierzchłej, barbarzyńskiej obyczajowości zdawała się otaczać jakaś zmowa powszechnego milczenia. [...] Było to owo wielkie spustoszenie, jakie nie przygotowanym na bezmierny trud podróży wyrządza próżnia.

Many women and men came from Earth aboard the Gea; they were mature enough for love but they were still searching, so one should have expected that the long voyage would produce many couples. (...) In the second year of the voyage couples formed briefly and parted as if at random, and this return of the long-gone barbarian morality seemed to be surrounded by a general conspiracy of silence. (...) It was that great devastation that the void afflicts upon those not prepared for the endless hardships of the journey.

20 See: S. Lem, *Obłok Magellana*, p. 138.

21 The emergence of the 'empty' subject (in an ambivalent yet direct manner related to freedom and nothingness) as the founding gesture of modernity was discussed extensively by Slavoj Žižek in the already quoted *The indivisible remainder: An essay on Schelling and related matters*, in which he referred both to Hegel and Lacan. He thus saw that attempt by the subject to shed its substance-based nature (meaning: specific and obliging cultural tradition that conditions the subject and gives it a local dimension): 'the modern subject is strictly correlative with the dimension "beyond the second death": the first death is the sacrifice of our particular, "pathological" substance for the universal Cause; the second death is the sacrifice, the "betrayal", of this Cause itself, so that all that remains is the void which is [Lacan's] S, the "barred" subject – the subject emerges only via this double, self-relating sacrifice (...)' (see: S. Žižek, *The indivisible remainder...*, p. 121). An important moment, constantly emphasised by Žižek, is the Shellingian equivalence of the gesture with the foundational act of the Absolute that established the Cosmos in a 'void of pure Freedom' by extracting from itself the 'own Other' and rejecting it (where, mind you, Žižek used for the description of this foundational gesture a notion introduced by Julia Kristeva, i.e., 'abject'); more on this issue see: J. Kristeva, *Potęga obrzydzenia: esej o wstręcie* [Powers of horror: An essay on abjection], transl. M. Falski (Cracow: 2007); cf. also S. Žižek, *The indivisible remainder...*, p. 11; an innovative feature of this Schellingian frame would be to associate the human counterpart of the Absolute's creative activity not so much with intellectual activities (as in Hegel's philosophy) but rather with a special kind of a phantasm of the 'transformation of matter' in human body).

[...] Stąd próby schronienia w ramionach kobiet, zaprzepaszczenia się w spazmie rozkoszy. Wiedzieliśmy, że nie złączy nas trwale ani wspólna liłość, ani rozpacz, ani chęć zrzucenia odpowiedzialności za wybrany świadomie los, że nie uczyni tego nic oprócz miłości, a jednak mężczyźni szukali kobiet, a one oddawały im się w skupionym, milczącym porozumieniu. Były to próby ratunku groźne i daremne. Nadchodzący odpływ porzucał przypadkowych kochanków, wypruty z myśli i bezbronych, i kiedy nad ich głowami rozlegał się w mroku głuchy świst powtarzającego się z nocy w noc ostrzeżenia, nie mieli odwagi spojrzeć sobie w oczy, bo była w nich pustka, od której chcieli uciec, a porzucony na chwilę ciężar wracał i tak leżeli obok siebie samotni, w zrozumieniu własnej klęski²².

(...) Hence, the attempts to seek refuge in the arms of women, to seek ruin in the spasms of pleasure. We knew that we wouldn't be connected permanently either by common mercy, or despair, or a willingness to shed your responsibility for the fate you consciously chose; that nothing but love could do that, and yet men sought out women, and women gave themselves to men in a focussed silent covenant. Those attempts at rescuing oneself were dangerous and futile. The imminent outflow deserted random lovers, devoid of thoughts and helpless, and when over their heads they heard in the darkness the muffled wizz of the warning that appeared every night, they didn't have the courage to look into each other's eyes because they would see the void which they were trying to escape, and the weight abandoned for a moment returned and they just lay together lonely, recognising their failure.²²

The indicated futility of sexual relations in the face of an external void strictly correlated with the 'empty subjectivity' also seems to belong to the realm of allegory: on this level it does not apply to any specific situation of the space voyage or any interpersonal relations in the utopia or even the society of 'real socialism'. In the context of what had been said about Lem's particular inclination towards innarrative analysis of external conditions applicable to the world of modernity, based on the Cartesian relationship between an empty subject and an internally divided object, which is perceptible and subject to technical manipulation, one should assume that that is an attempt to define the place of sexual relations in a thus defined world. It does not suffice to state that the relations are 'alienated'; they also create a paradigm of the practices of modern humans towards their bodies, the related shame, and the sphere of emotional life, while their 'failure' seems to herald the agony of modernity itself.²³

Naturally, literary descriptions of communist utopias founded on rudimentary Marxist ideology were always far from abandoning the ambition to regulate the sphere of humans' emotional life, sexuality and all kinds of uncontrolled reflexes

22 S. Lem, *Obłok Magellana*, p. 122.

23 The limitations of allegorical interpretations of science fiction sometimes undertaken by traditional literary criticism have been discussed by Joanna Russ in *To write like a woman...* She has argued that traditional motifs and topoi cannot constitute a key for unlocking science fiction texts due to their innovative and, at the same time, 'quasi-mythological' nature. The interest in science fiction, according to Russ, places itself within the epistemological realm, while the whole genre is a perception-focussed cognitive experiment. Therefore, one should not read science fiction works as 'allegorical' texts: if science fiction held an allegory, that would be the allegory of technical civilisation. This mode of radical allegorical generalisation is possible in science fiction by dint of its strong association with the post-industrial culture; it acquires the necessary distance towards both modernity and technology (as well as capitalism as a socio-political formation correlated with them) – see: J. Russ, *To write like a woman...*, pp. 7-12.

related to the body. Considering them from this point of view, one could say that they fit perfectly within the extensively (discussed by Foucault) discursive practices of ‘institutional regulation’ of the human body and the implied indefiniteness. Communism as an ideology, or at least a version of it that appears in literary utopias, differed, nonetheless from the methodology of institutional taming of sexuality in capitalist societies in that it seemed much more attentive to the ‘indivisible remainder’ that emerged from the dark sphere of sex and urges, the dark *residuum* that would not yield to verbalisation or symbolisation.²⁴ Because Marxism/Leninism was entangled in the dialectic aspect of the philosophy of German idealism, any attempt at discussing this problem within the ideological convention of depicting reality applied by the science fiction novels that I discuss also carry a dialectic aspect – they refer to the Marxist notion of practice and its Hegelian foundations.

For Marx, at least according to Judith Butler, an object was mainly a ‘trace’ of action, thus an action, *praxis*, became a constituent of materiality itself and of the way in which materiality appeared in relation to the subject engaged in cognition.²⁵ The fact of treating both the material nature of the outside world and the uncontrolled emotive impulses in humans as instances of *praxis*, enables (similarly to how Judith Butler analysed the issue in “Bodies that matter”) a ‘politicisation’ of the indivisible remainder of reality and an ideological intervention of the logos in the human sphere of urges. That gesture of ‘politicising’ *libido* is, I believe, particularly important for understanding both, communism’s attitude towards sexuality

24 The formulation of the notion (metaphor?) of the ‘indivisible remainder’ (to which many post-modern humanists have referred – not only Žižek but also, e.g., Giorgio Agamben) can be attributed to F. W. J. Schelling. As Katarzyna Filutowska argued in *System i opowieść...*: ‘according to Habermas, Schelling replaced Hegelian negation with the category of counteraction. “Counteraction is made of a stronger material than negation, it is as if equipped with surplus moral energy that does not fit any logical category.” Therefore, it is the non-reducible and indivisible remainder that is inseparably associated with what truly exists, and it constitutes an unmistakable sign that differentiates fiction from reality.’ (See: K. Filutowska, *System i opowieść...*, p. 189). For Žižek (who quoted Lacan in this instance) that ‘indivisible remainder’ was the ‘undead’ impulse of *libido*, which protects the empty modern subject from accepting the truth in the statement: ‘I am animated only by the urge for the Other.’ Please note that unlike in the case of the classical Freudian notion of the Unconscious, located mainly within humans, the *indivisible remainder* endures and is visible both in human beings and the world they perceive (it possesses a ‘metaphysical’ nature in the sense of its fundamental participation in the world of objects) – see, e.g., Žižek, *The indivisible remainder...*, p. 75: ‘But the ruleless still lies in the ground as if it could break through once again (...). This is the incomprehensible basis of reality in things, the indivisible remainder, what with the greatest exertion cannot be resolved in the understanding, but rather remains eternally in the ground. From this non-understanding is born understanding in the true sense.’

25 As Butler argued, interpreting Marx’s *Theses on Feuerbach*: ‘Should materialism consider the practice as a constituent of the very matter of objects and should the practice be understood as activities that introduce social change, such activities would be understood as constituent for materiality itself.’ (See: J. Butler, “Ciała, które znaczą” [“Bodies that matter. On the discursive limits of sex”], transl. M. Rogowska-Stangret, in: *Przegląd Filozoficzno-Literacki* [Review of Philosophy and Literature] issue 4 (32) (Warsaw: 2011), p. 18 [Fragment translated from Polish]).

and repression thereof, and the general realm of practices in this sphere undertaken by modernity.

The tendency to politicise shame as an 'undesirable appearance of the body' (Goffman) undoubtedly governed Lem's imagination as a writer and the manner in which Yefremov described the corporal sphere or the gender-based difference in *Andromeda Nebula*. If the ideological pressure to write in line with the governing party and preventive censorship (which standardised the media's social communications), replaced in authoritarian communism the performative power of religious messaging, then hostility towards the bourgeoisie, capitalism or imperialism replaced in it the typical for most religions aversion to what is 'earthly, worldly and material'. As long as matter or immanence constitute a generalised synonym of Hegelian 'stopping of the Spirit at negativity' in religious communication, capitalism could play an analogous role in literary instances of communist utopias being a *sensu stricto* image of 'hell on Earth'. That quasi-mythology of communism, being a reverse image of the Marxist/Leninist scholastics, needed to somehow exist in the literary works of the era of 'mature' communism. Therefore, allow me to examine how that ousted into non-existence (through a typically Enlightenment gesture) foundation of the utopia of the fulfilment of human essence in social immanence appeared in Lem's text. That could be reduced to the question: what was the most terrible element for Lem in that foundation?

What the utopian community in *Obłok Magellana*, depicted 'en route to the stars', faced was not so much the 'Other Mind' (which, surely, would have confirmed the universal validity of the societal principles of dialectic development and their crowning achievement in the form of communism),²⁶ but its own 'Other'. That was, in fact, the exceptionally evocative image of the space station of the Americans (denoted in the novel under the telling name of Atlanteans),²⁷ which was origi-

26 That is the case in *Andromeda Nebula*, in which in a distant future the human civilisation belongs to the Great Ring, a group of intergalactic extra-terrestrial civilisations, and the level of their development leaves no doubt as to the fact that they commonly accept communism. However, even this extensive circle of Universal Order has an External Other: those include not only the archaic aggressive life forms from the planets of the Black Star, which the members of the expedition led by Erg Noor will have to face during their voyage, but also the mysterious alien spaceship, which centuries ago arrived from a different star system: the Andromeda Galaxy, having travelled an unimaginable distance (approx. 1.5 million light years) to become destroyed in a confrontation with the original forces of Darkness.

27 That was, of course, a thinly-veiled allusion to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and a reference to Plato's *Timaeus*. The insertion of the United States into the Platonic context helped, on the one hand, assign capitalism the quality of being dated (it was so 'primaeval' that the 'barbarity' it implied could be placed within the realm of myths) and, on the other, emphasise the inevitability of the failure of Americans and their allies (which is 'always-already' foretold, like the disaster of the Atlantis) and that it was only natural to fail (because that was how it had to unfold according to the principles of both natural and social development already identified by Marxism/Leninism). The peculiar *modus* of the existence of time in the ideology ('already but still-not') has been a recurring

nally intended to orbit Earth to defend the remaining areas of the 'free world' from the all-threatening ocean of communism (commonly accepted on Earth) by means of weapons of mass destruction. The genocidal intention of the 'Atlanteans' was somewhat tried and punished by the same irrational force (coincidence, the dark power of 'error') from which it had emerged: as a result of a navigational error, the space station left Earth's orbit and drifted through space; finally, after several centuries it reached Proxima Centauri carrying nothing more than frozen corpses of the crew, and a relic of the 'terrible' past of the human race which had introduced fundamental chaos: the nuclear bombs and biological weapons (cultures of deadly bacteria and viruses developed in military laboratories).

It seems interesting that the special manner in which the relic appears in 'the present' of the utopia combines elements of an extremely traumatic experience (it is for the crew of the *Gea*, and particularly for the protagonist, basically an 'encounter with the Real'), a materialisation of the foundations of ideological engagement of the travellers (as if a recreation of Žižek's gesture of 'identification with the very gesture of identification', which constitutes the foundation of the modern 'ideologised' subjectivity),²⁸ and an epiphany of shame associated with corporeality and related urges. Additionally, the image is filled with significant details, which enable one to interpret it within the realm of allegory, mainly in the sense assigned by Joanna Russ to the allegoresis common in science fiction.²⁹

Apparently, it is not the dead astronauts (soldiers?) who seem to the protagonist and his companions the most traumatic sight on the round space station:

Tuż u stóp Grotriana, obutych w srebrny metal, leżało coś skurzonego, jak na wpół opróżniony worek z zielonkawego brezentu. [...] To był człowiek. [...] Był martwy od wieków. [...] Czy to on tak przeraził Grotriana? Astrogorator spoglądał nie na leżącego, lecz na przeciwległą ścianę. Patrzała stamtąd naga kobieta. Siedząc na grzbiecie dużego

Right by Grotrian's feet, dressed in silvery metal, there lay something contracted, as if a half-empty greenish tarp bag. (...) It was a man. (...) He had been dead for centuries. (...) Was it he who terrified Grotrian? The astrogorator was looking not at the man on the floor but at the opposite wall. A naked woman was looking back. Sitting on the shell of

topic in several of Žižek's (as well as Giorgio Agamben's or Alain Badiou's) books. As Žižek argued in *Indivisible remainder*, in this case only a minor difference separates 'revolutionary messianism' from the most extreme forms of 'religious fanaticism': 'The outcome of the struggle for freedom will determine the meaning of the past itself: in it, it will be decided what things "truly were" (...) the past itself is not fixed, it "will have been" – that is to say, through the deliverance-to-come, it will become what it always-already was. [emphasis: S. Ž.]' (See: S. Žižek, *The indivisible remainder...*, p. 67).

28 That is caused, of course, by the fact that the members of the expedition who have become 'only mere humans' as they toiled in fulfilling their everyday routines and being faced with the endlessness of the Cosmos, once on the 'Atlantean station' become 'communists' once again as they can see themselves the menacing 'something' a struggle against which had centuries ago shaped the order of the Logos in which they are living.

29 Thus, in line with the argument that the entire world depicted in science fiction as a genre is an allegory of modern technical civilisation (cf. footnote 21).

zółwia, z nogą założoną na nogę, trzymanym kwiatem dotykała obnażonej piersi i uśmiechała się. Na stopach miała dziwne trzewiczki z obcasem w kształcie ostrego dzioba. Paznokcie palców były zakrwawione. Czerwone były też usta, rozszerzone w uśmiechu, ukazujące bardzo białe zęby. W uśmiechu tym było coś nieporównanie ohydneho. [...] Większość przedmiotów, wydobywanych z mroku światłem lamp, była mi nie znana. W ich bezładnym pomieszaniu [...] leżały, kłęzczały, siedziały mumie, po dwie, po trzy, splecione kurczowo rękami, z przyściśniętymi do podłogi lub w tył odrzuconymi twarzami, o oczach zmienionych w grudki mętnego lodu, [...] przyprószone śnieżnym kurzem [...] a jednak to były ludzkie szczątki [...]. Ale wizerunki na ścianach? Te nagie kobiety o białych, cienkich palcach, zakończonych skrwawionymi paznokciami w kształcie spiczastych kropel, zezujące ku nam zawzięcie z kątów zmrużonych powiek, znieruchomiełe w pozach lżących wszystko, co jest bezbronną tajemnicą i milczeniem nagości – czy to też byli ludzie?³⁰

a large turtle, with her legs crossed, she was touching her bare breast with a flower and smiling. She had strange shoes on her feet, with the heels in the shape of a sharp beak. Her toenails were blood-stained. Her lips were also red, opened in a smile, presenting very white teeth. There was something incredibly disgusting in the smile. (...) Most items extracted from the darkness with the light of the lamp were unknown to me. In their chaotic shuffle (...) there were mummies lying, kneeling or sitting, two or three together, their arms locked tight, their faces pressed against the floor or thrown back, their eyes turned into clumps of murky ice, (...) covered with a thin layer of dust (...) but they were human remains after all (...). But the images on the walls? Those naked women with white thin fingers blood-red nail tips in the shape of pointy drops, persistently squinting towards us from underneath half-closed eyelids, fixed in poses offensive to everything that is the defenceless mystery and silence of nudity – were those humans, too?³⁰

This is an example of the epiphany of basic shame, a key element for the novel, which appears in a significant context that associates alienated (*mechanical*) sexuality (or its object-based correlate in the form of a series of pornographic photographs) directly with death, more specifically: with the uncanny presence of corpses that have survived the terrible cosmic cold.³¹ The Atlantean station has a shape of a round cylinder, a circle, which means that the images haunting the protagonist's perception and consciousness will continue to return, as if in a nightmare:

Kiedy tak kroczyłem raz już przebytą drogą, powróciło wrażenie, że jestem w głębi koszmarnego snu,

As I walked through a path that I had already taken I once again got the impression that I was

30 S. Lem, *Obłok Magellana*, p. 178.

31 This image is the more significant when one considers the fact that it was preceded by a conversation about death between the protagonist and the pilot Ameta (the latter is soon going to die and he will receive in the novel the status of a 'martyr in the name of the new quality of social order' because it will have been his death that will have enabled communication between humans and another intelligent civilisation from a planet orbiting Alpha Centauri; even more so, this death will have been directly linked to the presence of the 'dark relic' of human history, i.e., the Atlantean station, in this region of the Cosmos). In the conversation, the fact of individual death is associated with shame and overcoming it: 'Ameta said: What is death? A terrible reminder of nothingness? An image of that shameful dust [emphasis – M. P.] into which we'll turn? (...) Yes. But, at the same time, it is a source of the priceless value in every moment, every breath, an imperative to do whatever you can to live long enough to do and convey to new generations as much as you can, a reminder of the unwavering responsibility of every action because you can't take back or forget anything you do in the tiny period of human life. Through all that, death teaches us to love life, but most of all others, who are mortal just as you are, who carry inside the same courage and fear as you do, who through longing lean outside the limits of their physical existence and build with love that future which they will never be able to see. (...) I say to you: I – shall not let death be taken away from me (...) '(see: S. Lem, *Obłok Magellana*, p. 168).

płynące z nie uświadomionego dotąd przekonania, iż rzeczywistość nie może być tak okrutna. Szedłem, pogrążony w myślach, gdy zniemacka serce ścisnęła mi trwoga; stanąłem, wsłuchany w bezdenną ciszę; wydało mi się, że jestem sam. Nie obawiałem się trupów; gorsze było sąsiedztwo owych jaskrawych obrazów, z których ponad oszronionymi gazem mumiami uśmiechały się przez próżnię nagie kobiety³².

inside a nightmare, an impression born out of previously unrealised conviction that reality could not have been so cruel. I was walking, buried deep in my thoughts, when suddenly fear gripped my heart. I stopped and listened to bottomless silence. I thought I was alone. I wasn't afraid of the corpses. The company of those bright images from which naked women smiled through the void over dust-covered mummies was far worse.³²

In Schelling's description of the unrealised dark sources of reality offered in the treaty *The Ages of the World* (its first version was written in 1811 and the philosopher has never completed it) the very moment of the creation of the Cosmos is presented through the figure of the emergence of the Absolute as a Subject in an act of distancing from the chaotic 'wheel of urges' (potencies). According to Žižek, unlike the description of the Beginning in the *Gospel of St. John*, in which 'in the beginning was the Word', which was preceded by 'the void of divine eternity', in Schelling's *The Ages of the World*:

» (...) is not a nondescript mass – a lot of things take place in it. Prior to the Word there is the chaotic-psychotic universe of blind drives, their rotary motion, their undifferentiated pulsating; and the Beginning occurs when the Word is pronounced which 'represses', rejects into the eternal Past, this self-enclosed circuit of drives (...) the true Beginning is the passage from the 'closed' rotary motion to 'open' progress, from drive to desire – or, in Lacanian terms, from the Real to the Symbolic.³³

It is no accident that this context triggered theological reflection in the form of speculation on the notion of the Absolute. If what Žižek argued is true, i.e., that Schelling's philosophical output fulfilled the role of a 'vanishing intermediary' between the pre-modern vision of the universe as a 'theological' and at the same time 'sexualised' cosmology, and the modern vision of progress and the related 'void' of subjectivity, it would mean that only in his works (particularly in *The Ages of the World*, which Žižek considered one of the 'key works of materialist thought' akin to Lucretius's *De rerum natura*, Marx's *Capital*, and Lacan's works)³⁴ one could find the unique reflection of the modernity-shaping motion of the imagination (Lacanian order of the Imagined) that accompanied those changes.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 181.

33 Slavoj Žižek, *The indivisible remainder...*, p. 13.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 6.

The alliance of eternal death and alienated sexuality pronounced by Lem in *Obłok Magellana* seems to be irresistibly associated with the attitude towards the sphere of corporeality and urges so typical for early Christianity, especially its gnostic variants.³⁵ Indeed, the missing element of the image of the 'capitalist inferno' (in its 'theological' dimension), depicted by Lem also appears toward the end of the novel's chapter entitled 'The United States Interstellar Force' (this is a sign found on the outer surface of the American space station, utterly vague for the Gea expedition), a fact which further amplified the potency of the dark mystery:

Był to duży, pusty pokój. Naprzeciw drzwi znajdowała się wysoka, lukiem sklepiona nisza. Wisiał na niej drewniany krzyż, bardzo czarny na białym tle. Nagle spostrzegłem, że pod niszą kłęczy trup przyściśnięty do podłogi; ostry kręgosłup unosił czarną, okrywającą go tkaninę. Mumia ta, podobna do zbrylonej grudy ziemi, rzucała na białą ścianę bezkształtny cień. Poszedłem wzrokiem w drugą stronę, szukając źródła światła. W głębi pokoju stał Piotr z Ganimeda. Jego naramienna lampa oświetlała mocno krzyż, a on, smukły, ogromny w srebrnym skafandrze, z rękami skrzyżowanymi na piersi, długo patrzył na ten znak wiary daremnej³⁶.

It was a large empty room. Across from the door there was a high recess with an arched ceiling. A cross hung in it; it was pitch black against a white background. Suddenly I noticed a kneeling corpse pressed against the floor; its sharp spine was pulling a black fabric that was covering it. This mummy, like a lump of soil, was casting a shapeless shadow on the white wall. I looked the other way searching for the light source. Deep inside the room I saw Piotr from Ganymede. His shoulder lamp was lighting up the cross, and he, slender, in a huge silver spacesuit, arms crossed on his chest, was staring at that sign of futile faith.³⁶

Piotr of Ganymede is special, a somewhat highlighted secondary character in the novel. He is a young man who originally was not supposed to take part in the expedition, and he ended up aboard the Gea only because he had suffered a severe, nearly fatal accident in space and the medics from the intergalactic spaceship (among them the protagonist, the story's narrator) took him on board and by some miracle saved his life. Suffering from near complete amnesia due to brain damage,

35 This was discussed by Peter Brown in *The body and society: Men, women, and sexual renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: 2008). He has argued that a distinct feature of the views of Marcion, Tatian, the Encratites, or Valentinus and other Gnostics, which formed in a close relationship to Christianity, was the belief in the ability of humans to regain power over their own bodies (from before the 'Cosmic Downfall') by repressing their sphere of urges, the force of which would return to the 'divine' sphere of cosmic potencies. Brown posited that: "The 'present age' might be a vast engine, too large to be seen. Its faceless energy was too dangerously impalpable to the average person, its tyranny too intricate to trace in all its ramifications. But at least one part of that mighty current could be symbolically condensed in the sexual urge and in its manifest consequences, the endlessly repeated cycle of birth and death. In a world seemingly governed by iron constraints, the human body could stand out as a clearly marked locus of free choice. To renounce sexual intercourse was to throw a switch located in the human person; and, by throwing that precise switch, it was believed possible to cut the current that sustained the sinister perpetuum mobile of life in "the present age" (...) (P. Brown, *The body and society*..., pp. 84-85). When considering Lem's novel it seems interesting that thus transformed urges, as they deconstructed the social foundation of object-based reality, were according to Gnostics supposed to transform into a kind of a Salvation 'machine', thus enabling the soul to ascend to heaven.

36 S. Lem, *Obłok Magellana*, p. 181.

he is someone who was ‘born anew’, with all the possible symbolic connotations. He is the only crew member who is a *de facto* transformed ‘renewed’ human, a fact which triggers various associations in the context of the multitude (in fact, just as in Lem’s *Astronautci* or Yefremov’s *Andromeda Nebula*) of motifs related to human transubstantiation, which requires one to ‘transition’ the experience of death.³⁷

As long as the above-discussed motif of the ‘space station of Atlanteans’ could be associated with the psychoanalytic notion of the ‘crypt’, concealed in the unconscious, meaning a place for storing those psychological details which under no circumstances could be revealed as that could cause the disintegration of the subject,³⁸ one could ask what that allegorical image truly contains. Clearly the ‘subconscious’ of the system (or its utopian phantasm developed by Lem) holds the truth of the ‘immortality’ of the structures of urge-centred life (with all its consequences, i.e., egoism, aggression, etc.), which can never be reached by the ‘light’ of ideological Logos. Technical civilisation is also a relic of the ‘blind mechanics’ of urges, which always evokes the ineffaceable subjective sense of shame, and thus the use of its devices will never be free of sin.³⁹

What else is there in the ‘crypt’ of Lem’s text? Surely there is ‘the woman’, her relationship with the maleficent male *praxis* (of sexuality, as well as war), which cannot be removed by any ideological interpretation.⁴⁰ The woman considered not

37 These motifs and allusions apply, of course, to the transformation of humans in the sense of creating a being to match future communist utopia. Yet in the quoted scene Piotr of Ganymede, as if a secular Messiah, seems to be celebrating the described by Žižek ceremony of the ‘self-sacrifice’ of the modern subject on the altar of ‘empty transcendence’ (see footnote 19).

38 For more on the notion of the ‘crypt’ formulated by two French psychoanalysts of Hungarian descent: Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, see: *Cryptonimie. Le nerbier de l’homme aux loups* (Paris: 1976) quoted after: W. Michera, *Piękna jako bestia...*, pp. 223–235. For the purposes of further interpretation, as well as for the interpretation of Lem’s short story *Maska*, offered by Wojciech Michera, Derrida’s argument seems particularly significant: ‘A resident of the crypt is always a living dead that you wish to keep alive but as someone deceased; who you want to keep even if dead, but provided he is retained whole, untouched, healthy [sauf], i.e., alive.’ (as quoted in: W. Michera, *Piękna jako bestia...*, p. 230). In an obvious manner this status of a ‘resident of the crypt’ could be associated both with the ‘undead’ state of the ‘indivisible remainder’ of either idealistic yet materialistic ideology (a state discussed by Žižek in reference to Schelling’s discussions) and with the ‘contents’ of the Atlantean space station, which symbolises the recurring impulse of *libido*/Thanatos (as well as with the Lacanian *lamella*, the ‘copies’ of which in *Alien* by Ridley Scott also lay hidden in the ‘crypt’ of the crashed spaceship).

39 This reflection impacted Lem’s later works, in which the figure of the ‘emancipation of an *automaton*’ assumed the specific shape of ‘world devoid of humans’ (without subject?). Despite that, grotesque is the indispensable stylistic aspect of those works (e.g. *Cyberiad*) which, in my opinion, proves that according to Lem emancipated ‘slaves’ would inherit the fundamental sin of their former ‘masters’ (or, to use Lacanian terminology, their ‘fundamental fantasy’), and their rule would not be the Schellingian ‘Parousia of the Logos in the darkness of Ground’.

40 Judith Butler has come to similar conclusions, though arriving from a different perspective, in the quoted “Bodies that matter...” She argues, by expanding Luce Irigaray’s interpretation of *Timaeus*, that rape is the foundational gesture of patriarchal culture and its implied concept of matter (formed ‘according to the male vision of the woman’) as the model of ‘subjective action’ (of the male subject

only as a 'mirror' in which the male subject can see himself, but also as the source of subjectivity or the *sensu stricto* subject. As Žižek argued:

» patriarchal symbolic authority emerges in order to 'gentrify' the scandal of 'Woman doesn't exist', to constrain the feminine subject to a determinate place in the symbolic structure. (...) the status of the subject is feminine [emphasis – M. P.] – what eludes logical construction, the reef of impossibility at which symbolic construction fails, is precisely the subject *qua* S, the lack in the signifying chain.⁴¹

That is why a woman's gaze, even one represented in a photograph, who has been dead for many centuries, is so dangerous (consider the already quoted fragment of *Obtok Magellana*: "Those naked women with white thin fingers (...), persistently squinting towards us from underneath half-closed eyelids (...)", because of her 'incompleteness': 'it signals that she "sees through" the fascinating presence of the Phallus, that she is able to discern in it the "filler" of the inconsistency of the big Other'.⁴²

For the male subject there is no single woman, there are always many – yet another embarrassing truth that Lem could place only inside the 'crypt', at the bottom of the utopian image of communist society. Since the subject being a 'constitutive lack' triggers the 'dynamics of endless movement' between 'various figures of substantial unity',⁴³ it means that desire, as a process that corresponds to the modern subject cleansed of any positive content, retains the inscription of urge in the form of a drive towards many objects, and the movement, which decides about the success of technical civilisation, will also lead to the failure of its moral consequences. Therefore, the 'crypt' also contains some bad news for communism: just as there cannot exist 'modern perfect love' outside love for many women, so it

by default) performed on the body of a woman (being a disorganised and reactive substance that Plato called *Chora*). (Cf. J. Butler, "Ciała, które znaczą" ["Bodies that matter..."], p. 43). It seems that the interpretation of the text by Lem, who also in this case has proven to be an honest writer despite his ideological entanglement, completely confirms these conclusions even though, as I have already mentioned, from a different perspective; regardless of its moral and legal aspects, rape (to use Hegelian terminology) is a kind of 'modality' of *coitus*.

41 S. Žižek, *The indivisible remainder...*, p. 165.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 157.

43 See: *ibid.*, p. 128; the process outlined here constitutes a definition of Althusserian 'subjectless process' i.e., of that shape of the preconditions for a modern image of the world, the allegories of which appear in, e.g., *Cyberiad* and *Bajki robotów* by Lem. The modification of Althusser's concept, performed in this case by Žižek, consisted of introducing an 'empty' subject as a 'fading intermediary' between different 'substantial' (ideological) orders.

is impossible to involve the modern subject in love for the Logos of a single ideology. In other words, that same individual is (in modernity) an 'indivisible remainder' that evades symbolisation and the inevitable solution in this situation is to leave each individual the possibility to choose their 'own Logos'.⁴⁴

One could argue that all the lost elements of the utopian reality about which the author of *Obłok Magellana* was not allowed to write by the 'official' puritanism (including the naked female bodies, the voyage companions of the Gea crew, whom Lem did not describe anywhere in the book lest a general outline of their figures, or a description of their clothes or dresses) 'are found' on the Atlantean space station. It holds the entire misery, smallness, feloniousness, and the blind mindless faith of humans who lived 'hand in hand' with their shame, in close proximity to the chaos of urges, in which, according to Lem's characters, the capitalist world existed. Despite the many years which have passed, though, that traumatic relic has proven unerasable – the act of the destruction of the shameful past will have proven to be a sign of the evil intentions of humanity directed (unwittingly) towards the Others.⁴⁵ Such a solution would have presumably been welcomed by psychoanalysts – it was Freud who posited that the act of erasing a recollection from one's mind is a sign that it is particularly strongly 'remembered' at the level of the unconscious.

Finally, it seems appropriate to ask whether Lem and Yefremov have found a better way of coming into contact with femininity, the body and shame, and whether they proposed it to their utopian characters as a cure for the dilemmas of modern subjectivity. As Peter Brown argued in *The body and society...*, the Gnostics of the first centuries A.D. (Valentinus and his students, in particular) considered 'the lack of knowledge on the divine world and the destiny of the soul (...) the source of shame and major anxiety.'⁴⁶ That is why they proposed spiritual knowledge, i.e.,

44 In his books, Žižek has often emphasised the fact that by dint of the foundational gesture of modernity, which consisted of the subject's distancing from their own urge-driven life and shifting it outside, like Julia Kristeva's abject, any Logos (having established harmonious, though not without a conflict, cohesion of an 'enclosed' Cosmos of meaning) will from this moment on reveal itself 'through the prism' of the perspective of an egotistic individual, and inevitably has an 'authoritarian' or 'totalitarian' nature, even if it utilises the most sublime community-focussed rhetoric. As the author of *The sublime object of ideology* has argued "Evil" is not particularity as such but its erroneous, "perverted" unity with the Universal: not "egotism" as such, but "egotism" in the guise of its opposite.' Thus, the Universal dimension was degraded 'to the extent of my own particular will (...)' (see: S. Žižek, *The indivisible remainder...*, pp. 64-65).

45 The Others (Aliens), the inhabitants of the White Planet orbiting Alpha Centauri, are going to interpret the flash that will have accompanied the destruction of the station (which they have visited before and left it, like a 'mausoleum of evil') as a sign of a 'fratricidal' war started by other intelligent beings, a war that is sure to come their planet's way. Therefore, in an act of self-defence, they are going to destroy the initial rockets from Gea, sent to the planet's surface to establish first contact. (That is when the pilot Ameta, among others, dies 'a martyr').

46 See: P. Brown, *The body and society...*, p. 125.

gnosis, to their followers, which was supposed to also lead to a transformation of the body (the formation of 'redeemed body') as a universal cure for materiality and urges. Encratites ('self-controlled'), another faction of Gnostics, placed a strict division between gender differences and the sexual act arguing that:

» (...) Adam and Eve rejected their marriage with the Spirit of God and because of their mortality they had to enter a mutual intercourse, in a way that had not been intended for them by God. In so doing they pushed the Spirit even further and blurred the sharp line between their own human category and the category of animals different from theirs.⁴⁷

One could argue that the solutions of the problem of human corporeality and sexuality applied by the utopian societies in Lem's and Yefremov's works constitute, in the broadest sense, a remote continuation of the Gnostic inquiries from the early centuries of Christianity. That is where both writers found opportunities for filling the gap in the Marxist/Leninist doctrine as they creatively expanded upon the ideology's (and modernity's in general) implied 'neo-Gnosticism', which mainly consists of a synthesis of materialism and idealism, which the authors presented under the protective halo of Marxist dialectics. The slight shift of the doctrine in *Astronauta*, *Obłok Magellana* and *Andromeda Nebula* consists most of all of an introduction of the broadly understood science, or knowledge (the 'scientific collective' being, as I understand it, a distant echo of the circle of the chosen followers of *gnosis*), to replace ideology (as the driving force that helps unite the presented communities), in order to serve as a guarantee of the proper economy of affective life.⁴⁸

As a result, those novels offer a worldview in which the fundamental difference of the human subject separates not so much 'this' world from 'the other' or 'femininity' from 'masculinity', but it rather runs across those divisions.⁴⁹ As long as ideology can interpret and reconcile these divisions (for example, by placing the blame for all the possible imperfections and errors on the capitalist 'relic' still pre-

47 *Ibid.*, p. 111. [Fragment translated from Polish]

48 Žižek noted that a similar idea emerged among Lacan's successors: 'Another solution [than the general acceptance of the cynical or ironic attitude in post-modernity as a result of the a-substantial emptiness of the subject – M. P.] proposed by some Lacanians involves the attempt to articulate two distinct modes of the big Other: analysts form a collective of knowledge [emphasis – S. Ž.] kept together by the shared reference to their Cause, (...) in contrast to the regular community of faith (...) [emphasis – S. Ž.]' (see: S. Žižek, *The indivisible remainder...*, p. 181).

49 This distance, it would seem, is the relationship between an active working individual (whose body exists as long as it is useful) and the 'area' of their activity defined by society. Thus, it would overlap Nietzsche's fundamental division of forces into active and reactive.

sent in human minds and social life; that relic is called ‘egoism’, of course); it offers an opportunity for a kind of a transubstantiation of the subconscious potentials of the collective body, i.e., the collective: a transformation of many drives into a single ‘progress’ actively supported by all. In other words, a communist utopia, like the Gnostic communities of early Christianity, feeds off of the belief in the ability (to use Derrida’s term) to ‘loosen’ the basic anthropological oppositions, a fact which is supposed to result in ‘freeing’ both women and men to become active objects/ subjects of ideology.

That creation of the ‘collective body’ does, however, require major fundamental ‘cuts’ and other actions undertaken by a community in the corporal sphere of the individuals who belong to the collective. That is what the various ‘initiation ceremonies’ are for, as well as communal holidays, in which the representatives of utopian societies participate.⁵⁰ In Lem’s novel one which is most of all the ‘unwritten’ ban in force in *Obłok Magellana* on presenting female corporeality except for the face. It seems striking that the descriptions of even intimate encounters between the characters ignore the corporal aspect except for the face as something that belongs to the Logos, an overt representation of the *psyche*.⁵¹

At times, it seems that the woman’s face, the description of which transcends the limits of allegory, becomes the guarantee of the hidden harmony of nature (if this claim was applied to notions in Schelling’s philosophy, one could say that the face represents Wisdom, the feminine element of God, present in nature as *natura naturans* intermediating between the freedom of the Absolute and the ‘dark vortex’ of urge-driven life):

50 In *Andromeda Nebula* Yefremov wrote: ‘The Fire Goblets Festival became a spring women’s festival. Every year (...) the loveliest women of Earth put on dancing, singing, and athletic performances. (...) Equally beautiful was the fall men’s celebration of Hercules that took place in the ninth month. (...) Young men entering maturity completed their Labors of Hercules. Later it became customary to dedicate this festival to the planet-wide viewing of wonderful projects and achievements accomplished over the course of one year. The festival started including both men and women and became divided into days of Beautiful Usefulness, High Arts, Scientific Courage, and Fantasy (...)’ (see: I. Yefremov, *Andromeda Nebula*, p. 222 [Kindle edition]). Anyone interpreting it should not omit either the aesthetising typically ‘Schellingian’ context of those imagination-based creations or their, so typical for post-modernism, cultural syncretism.

51 Consider this sample description of ‘bodiless intimacy’: ‘This was great, strange beauty. Oval face, low eyebrows, dark eyes and clear, calm, prominent forehead, and all that not quite yet established, like the dawn of a summer day. Completed, formulated, you might say “final” were only her lips, as if more mature than the rest of her face. In their expression there was something that triggered both happiness and want. Something melodious, light, and yet so earthly. She imparted her beauty to everything she came close to. When she approached the bottom of the stairs, she placed her white hand on the rough scrappy vulcanite and that dead boulder came alive in the blink of an eye. (...) Her heavy loose hair sparkled in all shades of brown which flashed golden when struck by light. (...) her cheeks were smooth, tight, slightly triangular, and she had a child-like dimple in her chin. As she was passing by she looked me in the eyes and the sinews in her neck rose like the strings of a delicate instrument (...)’ (S. Lem, *Obłok Magellana*, p. 48).

Podeszła do szklanego muru tak blisko, że jej twarz wypełniła przejrzyste okienko. Byłem pewny, że mnie zobaczy. [...] Jej wielkie, nieruchome źrenice powoli rosły, jak gdyby piły mrok. Nie dostrzegęła ani mnie, ani nic w ogóle. Wzrok jej na nic nie czekał, nie spodziewała się żadnego obrazu, żadnego światła ani nawet ciemności⁵².

She came so close to the glass wall that her face filled the transparent window. I was certain she would see me. (...) Her huge motionless pupils grew slowly, as if sucking in the darkness. She didn't notice me or anything at all. Her eyes were waiting for nothing, she wasn't expecting any image, any light or even darkness.⁵²

Special caution displayed both by Lem and Yefremov about presenting female bodies and figures seems to have resulted not only from the demands of censorship or self-censorship that they internalised but from that particular covert relationship between the woman and the creative aspect of nature, which was supposed to be bound with the utopian communist society through a special intimate relation.⁵³ The face is, in this case, the epiphany of female subjectivity, *natura naturans* as a version of the Logos or the dialectics of matter in its 'becoming'. This was most certainly the aesthetic utopia of active nature about which Schelling wrote in *The Ages of the World*:

» It is the oil by which the green of plants is fed, the balsam of life from which health springs. It is discernible in the transparence of the flesh and of the eyes, in that undeniable physical emanation (...) [through it – M. P.] we are influenced by the reality of what is pure, healthy, alluring; therefore, it is the same in the spiritual form as what in the highest transfiguration of the human body emanates as charm.⁵⁴

The price Lem paid in *Obłok Magellana* to conditionally support of the utopia was a selective presentation of reality, which in the case of the image of the woman, basically consisted of a fragmentation of her body which was just as brutal as the *libido*-stimulated pornographic multiplication. The space of human shame stretched between the 'terrible' image of the woman's face as the undead *lamella* (on the Atlantean space station; allow me to quote this again: 'Her lips (...) red, opened in a smile, presenting very white teeth. There was something incredibly disgusting in

52 *Ibid.*, p. 98.

53 In *Andromeda Nebula* that is not so much a 'spatial' limitation of the description of the face (as it even contains a mention of the breasts of the characters!), but rather a presentation of a woman in a much aestheticised context: while dancing or against the background of a very 'natural' landscape filled with active elements, as well as (which is, in fact, both interesting and worthy of further study) as a representative of a certain specific human 'race' (!) or 'interracial dialogue.'

54 F.W.J. Schelling, *Die Weltalter. Erstes Buch*, p. 254, as quoted in: K. Filutowska, *System i opowieść...*, p. 64 (transl. K. Filutowska) [English version translated from Polish].

the smile')⁵⁵ and the ethereal vision of the goal, the 'sublime object of ideology' (which, according to Žižek, is the very subject in the existential *modus* of absence), i.e., the unimaginably remote Magellanic Cloud. And there is nothing that could indicate that the authors of utopian novels of the communist era managed to reduce that distance, which in turn could convince readers that the humans of the future would one day become shame-less beings unified with the Logos of nature.

*Translated by Jakub Wosik,
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55 It seems, that the 'terror' implied by that image of the face as a *lamella* would be based on the fact that it was a mask placed 'directly' on the blind vortex of urges. Therefore, it could signal the subjectification of the forces of Ground that only imitate the Logos, pretending to be it.

ABSTRACT

This article is an attempt to answer the question: what prompted the authors of utopian science fiction novels which appeared during the communist period (mainly in the 1950's) in Poland and the Soviet Union, to adopt a particular convention of presenting the human body, and especially the woman's body. The analysis of these works (the novels *Astronaucci* [The Astronauts] and *Obłok Magellana* [The Magellanic Cloud] by Stanisław Lem and Ivan Yefremov's *Andromeda Nebula*) is conducted in a dialogue with the concepts of Jacques Lacan and Slavoj Žižek, as well as Judith Butler or contemporary sociologists (e.g., Chris Shilling), regarding the body image and an idealistic element contained in the Marxist-Leninist ideology, which is the theoretical basis of the utopian vision of a society of the future. Psychoanalytic and deconstructive readings of Lem's and Yefremov's texts lead the author of this article to the conclusion that the image of the female body (and, thus, inseparable from human sexuality of shame) undergoes here a sort of 'politicisation' in relation to a vision of capitalism as a 'dark vortex' of life governed by drives, mediated falsely by logos. However, the image of femininity and sexuality, included in the novels, refers to the early Gnostic version of Christianity (among others to opinions by Marcion, Valentinus, and the Syrian's 'Encratites'), kindling the hope to transform body by eliminating areas of drives, but the place of the Gnostic 'salvation of the soul' in the communist utopias is occupied by progress, understood as an increase in knowledge and an achievement of the ideal of the ultimate end of human history through a union with nature.

KEYWORDS: Lem Stanisław (1921-2006), Yefremov Ivan (1908-1972), science fiction, gender studies, gnosticism, communism