

On postmodernism, “the stairs of avant-garde”, and Brodsky

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Abstract. This article attempts to analyse Russian postmodernist poetics, proceeding from the concept of the “trans-semiotic stairs”, as presented by J. Faryno for describing the avant-garde. Examples from various texts are used to demonstrate how postmodernist texts contain divergent processes: the culturally specific and unique dissolves in tautology, meaningful entireties are dispersed into atomized empty particles. The significant teleological model of the avant-garde ceases to function here. A play by J. Brodsky, *Marble*, is examined on this background, as well as the position of the author that differs from the “postmodernist” context.¹

1.

The question of what the universal qualities of poetry are, what distinguishes the poetic trends and epochs from each other, and wherein the individuality of a definite poet manifests itself is quite a complicated one. Hence the theorizing of “recurrences”, quests for historical analogies, composing of diverse typologies.

Thus the peculiarity of literary postmodernism is often questioned by means of the argument that “we’ve already seen it all” (for example, Umberto Eco thinks that each epoch has its own “post-modernism”), while mixing up the skepticism of the very postmodern culture towards innovation and the possibility of “newness” with

¹ An earlier version of this paper, “A post-modern poet ‘on the stairs of avant-gard’”, has been read at the jubilee conference of Prof. Jerzy Faryno, “Literature as literature” (Bydgoszcz, Poland, 2001).

postmodernism as a historical-cultural phenomenon. As it happens, there is nothing new in such a disposition itself — for the realistic qualities of literature (especially that of antiquity) were discussed long before the emergence of realism, whereas the terms modernism and avant-garde, besides their historical-cultural meaning, were often applied to denote certain qualities of cultural artifacts or ideologies.

Various modes commonly used in theoretical and critical writing for describing the postmodernist paradigm on the background of modernism, involuntarily contribute to the formation of the idea about the independence of postmodernism (see, for example, Spears 1970; Eagleton 1983; Fokkema 1984; Spanos 1985; Hassan 1987). Postmodernism is often characterized through negation (cf. absence, refusal, death, deconstruction, uncertainty, indeterminacy), or else via oppositional pairs, as, for instance, in the well-known schema of Ihab Hassan, in which modernism and postmodernism are viewed as two systems, the qualities of the one being juxtaposed with those of the other: “plan, program — changeability”, “hierarchy — anarchy”, “distance — participation”, “synthesis — antithesis”, “semantics — rhetoric”, “presence — absence”, “signified — signifier”, “determinism — indeterminism”, “transcendence — immanence”, etc. (Hassan 1987: 91–92). It is not fortuitous, though, that the question of whether postmodernism is the last epoch of modernism (“the fatigued avant-garde”) or the beginning of a new one, a cultural cycle opposed to modernism, cannot be answered unequivocally. For the first time in the history of literature, we are faced with a phenomenon that is so elusive and indeterminable, defying all identification, paradoxically open and closed at the same time, focused on itself and destroying itself (Hutcheon 1989). The description of this phenomenon through comparison/juxtaposition of its constructive principles with the preceding tradition does not yield us necessary opportunities to delve into it. It is difficult to describe the structure of the object that demonstrates the destruction of the structure, especially without the necessary temporal distance. What facilitates our task, however, is an awareness of the simple truth that in any chaos, especially the one constructed by the creative imagination of a poet, there exists certain regularity. The destruction of a system presupposes a system of devices for that destruction.

In order to define postmodernism from the semiotic point of view, the terminological apparatus of deconstruction is most frequently applied, in which process the philosophical and poetic discourses

often merge, and the “localization” of deconstructive universal principles of text-reading takes place, wherein the latter become to be viewed as qualities of the particular type of texts. The standard definition of postmodernist discourse claims that it is the play of signifiers without the signified (here, as before, we detect a certain confusion in terms — the transcendental signified (Derrida, Deleuze) and the doubt in the strict ties between the signifier and the signified within the structure of the sign as an element in the sign system should be kept apart). If we wish to describe the respective literary practice from this point of view, we should not ignore the self-sufficient nature of the poetic expression.

2.

The present article endeavours to present one of the possible interpretations of the “working mechanism” of the texts of Russian postmodernism, using as an example the attempt of Jerzy Faryno to describe how the avant-garde text “works”. The main attraction of Jerzy Faryno’s approach for us lies in the fact that he does not engage in drawing up the catalogue of the characteristic features of Russian avant-garde. Instead, he views the text as an “event”, i.e. as a process of contemplation.

As is generally known, Jerzy Faryno bases his work on the theoretical treatment of the function of language by Roman Jakobson and his model of communication. Besides, he also relies on the model of semiosis by Juri Lotman. We could consider Faryno’s concept as the elaboration of the ideas of Lotman on the principles of reencoding as the principles of generating meaning in the poetic text. In his *Structure of the Poetic Text*, Juri Lotman writes the following:

[...] meaning occurs only in those cases when we have at least two different chains-structures. In ordinary terms, one of those could be defined as the plan of expression, and the other as the plan of content. In the process of reencoding between definite pairs of elements that are different in character, correspondences are formed, while one element in its system will be perceived as equivalent to the other one in its system. Such crossing of two chains of structures at a certain common twofold point will be termed as sign, while the second of the chains — the one with which the correspondence is formed —

will act as content, and the first one — as expression. Accordingly, the problem of content is always a problem of reencoding.² (Lotman 1970: 48)

The meaning might be generated either by the internal — i.e. syntagmatic (as in the case of literary romanticism) — or the external — i.e. paradigmatic reencoding (prevalent in realism). While developing the ideas of Jakobson on equivalence, Lotman writes:

[...] it is necessary we give up the common idea, according to which the world of denotations of the secondary system is identical with that of the primary ones. The secondary modelling system of the artistic type constructs *its own* system of denotations which is not a copy but a model of the world of denotations in the general linguistic sense.³ (Lotman 1970: 63)

Studying the poetics of the avant-garde, Jerzy Faryno discovers certain characteristic regularities which, on the one hand, retain the connection with the classical semiosis, while at the same time contradicting it, in which he sees the peculiarity of the avant-garde.

In his article “Deciphering”, Faryno presents the thesis of the avant-garde text as a reversed act of communication which “instead of initiating a contact, presupposes its disruption and ends the communication” (Faryno 1989: 21), and in which the functions of the sender and the recipient of the message merge (the real sender is the world-generating instance itself). The content of the message is the entire communicative act: “[...] avant-garde, denying the poetic function, ascends the same stairs, but one step higher, turning into *metapoetry*, i.e. realizes the metapoetic function” (Faryno 1989: 47).

² “[...] значение возникает в тех случаях, когда мы имеем хотя бы две различные цепочки-структуры. В привычных терминах одну из них можно определить как план выражения, а другую — как план содержания. При перекодировке между определенными парами элементов, разными по своей природе, будут устанавливаться соответствия, причем один элемент в своей системе будет восприниматься как эквивалентный другому в его системе. Подобное пересечение двух цепочек структур в некоей общей двуединой точке мы будем называть знаком, причем вторая из цепочек — та, с которой устанавливается соответствие, — будет выступать как содержание, а первая — как выражение. Следовательно, проблема содержания есть всегда проблема перекодировки.”

³ “[...] необходимо отказаться от традиционного представления, согласно которому мир денотатов вторичной системы тождествен миру денотатов первичной. Вторичная моделирующая система художественного типа конструирует *свою* систему денотатов, которая является не копией, а моделью мира денотатов в общеязыковом значении.”

The very metaphor, “ascent on the stairs”, becomes the wording by which Jerzy Faryno discloses the mechanism of reference in the avant-garde text. It is certainly a process: the simultaneous “esthetization — de-esthetization”, as it is called in *The Trans-semiotic Stairs*; a movement from the conceptual world to the speech- and world-generating instance where the new language and new creativity dwell. A text like this is always “in a state of displacement”. Faryno examines in great detail this displacement that disrupts the interior integrity of the sign (the liberation of the signifier from the signified, the disruption of the referential connection as such).

This imperfect sign, being in the state of transformation, is always identical with and different from itself at the same time. In the first case we have the signified without the signifier (meaning without sign), and in the second case — the signifier without the signified. The text, however, turns into a series of transformations.

Once we have a series of such conditions-transformations-metamorphoses, we are dealing not with semiotics, but with the semiotics of semiotics, or — to be more exact — the trans-semiotic paradigm of the object, concept or word, phoneme or sound where every single condition is detected as a sign of the same (of itself), but within the framework of another semiotics or another ontology, but its meaning is not confined to that, since it does not in fact belong to any of those, nor does it entirely realize in any of them. (Faryno 1992: 10–11)

The structure of such stairs can be most generally specified as a vertical construction with fixed intermediate horizontal stages, each step being its substructure. If we interpret this image in terms of “paradigmatic — syntagmatic”, it is a chain of transitions from one “syntagmatic stage” to the next, a higher one, by means of paradigmatic “ascents”. We could, respectively, translate these transformations into terms of rhetoric and grammar, rhetoric and stylistics (Lotman 1992). We could also infer that “on the stairs”, in the transformations-metamorphoses (of which a text like this actually consists of), those two principles of organization penetrate into one another, which is exactly what renders the text its transitional nature at any moment. This is one of the paradoxes of the “trans-semiotic” stairs.

Both Lotman and Faryno proceed from the concept of the dual nature of the sign as formulated by Saussure. Despite certain differences of opinion, their general understanding of how the sign “ope-

rates” in the poetic text, in the virtual world, still remains pretty close (especially if we regard the latest works of Lotman). Jerzy Faryno’s writings display a certain similarity to the so-called “pure rhetoric” or “infinite semiosis” of Peirce.

This way, the interpretation of the sign does not lead us to its meaning but, instead, to another, more advanced sign, the interpretation of which gives us in its own turn the third sign, etc.

The steps of the “stairs” of avant-garde refer by this to the universal semiotic description of the structure of the metaphor. See, for example, the remark of Faryno that the metaphor “is not created by the violation of semantics, as is generally believed, but by the violation of referentiality, and therefore by semiotic displacement” (Faryno 1989: 48).

Which is to say that this mechanism of generating meaning as described by the example of avant-garde, could well have a more universal character (cf. the idea of Derrida, so often repeated in postmodernist criticism, according to which it is impossible to strictly distinguish between the signified and the signifier, that the signified is never present in the sign, and that it is impossible to acquire a definite idea of the world through it).

In the light of the afore-said, one should not take the idea of the disruption of the referential connection either in the avant-garde text or in the poetic practice of postmodernism too literally. Firstly, the reference in a poetic text does not principally coincide with that of the so-called primary semiotic systems. The sign does not represent here the object as such, but an element of the “imaginary world”, it does not refer to the world of reality (to the real world of ideas and texts). Instead, it refers to the world as it is embodied in the images of the conception of the author about the world, i.e. in principle, is not equal with itself.

3.

One of the possible ways of delineating the avant-garde and postmodernist strategy could well be the very elucidation of the character and results of the above-mentioned “rupture” of the referential connections. Thus, in the avant-garde poetics as described by Faryno, the disruption of the signifier-signified generates the gradation of the text and produces a series of changes in its ontological status, “a

permanent increase in the semiotic rank of the world”. The text possesses a clearly teleological nature — it is always moving towards its next meaning. In accordance with the spirit of structuralism, here, too, the author needs a congenial reader.

The postmodernist text is constituted as a world without centre and vertical, as expressed in the strategy of the destruction of traditional poetic and linguistic structures, the change of the position of the author in the text, who is alienated and ceases to control the text. A special type of subjectivity and biographical content is created here: on the one hand, the poet does not claim the role of the Creator or a medium, rarely allowing the reader to glance into the depths of his/her soul, ironically abstaining from assessments and preferences. On the other hand — in the poems (for example, the poems of Brodsky, Kibirov, Prigov, Krivulin, etc.) there are many details connected with the daily “non-poetical” life of the poet in his intimate space (e.g., the common motifs of the room, the corner) in the closed circle of relatives and friends. The poems are often written in the form of a message, they are dedicated to somebody, containing details known only to the “initiated”, sharing the “common language” with the addressee, which makes them somewhat hermetic. This can be viewed as a kind of peculiar compensation of the poet for abstaining from the role of the creator of the world and life.

It is possible that postmodernist literature realizes and at the same time takes to the extreme the two types of linguistic aphasia as described by Jakobson — the violation of the relation of similarity and agrammaticism as two-sided processes not just in the language but also on a wider scale — in culture. It is intriguing in this connection that there exists difference of opinion as to the prevailing metaphorical or metonymical type of writing in postmodernism. When discussing the rhetoric nature of postmodernist culture, one has first and foremost in view its total metaphorization, the principle of metonymy is mentioned considerably less often, at least directly. However, it is included indirectly in such assessments as *fragmentation, absence of entirety, parity, coexistence of the systems of ideas and viewpoints*. For instance, the afore-mentioned comparative paradigm of Hassan, “modernism — postmodernism”, includes among others also certain features that are specifically indicative of the metonymical nature of postmodernism and the metaphoric character of modernism, cf.: “modernism — metaphor, selection, paradigm / postmodernism — metonymy, syntagm, combination” (Hassan 1995: 91–92). It might

well be that the peculiarity of postmodernism still consists in the fact that among other binary oppositions the above-mentioned opposition ceases to function as well, and the two-fold transgressive relations between metaphor and metonymy will prevail, which creates the impression of total destructuralization and loss of sense of the world-text.

The intratextual movement is not gradational here — in the direction of “ever more text”, “ever more art”. It is rather a circular movement: the centripetal force endeavours to merge all difference of the world into a single point, to turn it into an alloy, in which everything coincides with analogies, fuses into tautology, while the centrifugal force disperses the language/culture into meaningless atomic particles. We witness the disintegration of culture without achievements — the combining of elements of the destroyed systems does not yield new languages, the piling of cultural codes on each other does not form a hierarchical structure. Often the text is built on the model of the growing energetic impulse, accompanied by ever intensifying desemiotization. In the extreme case, this leads to the silence of language, void.

For example, a number of works by Vladimir Sorokin are built upon the principle of acceleration, where not only the textual reality is destroyed in the end, but also the language as the means of creating this reality ceases to exist in its nature as a system of signs. Thus *Part Five of Norms* [Норма] ends with the destruction of articulated speech, leaving behind the cry “aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa”, which sounds on several pages; the ending of the novel *The Thirtieth Love of Marina* [Тридцатая любовь Марины] drowns — on more than twenty pages — as does the heroine herself, in the absurdity of the Soviet propaganda; but in *Novel* [Роман] — it is the death of the protagonist, genre and the Russian novel as “norms”. In the parallel manner, the phrase gets reduced — at first the singular subject actions remain — in *Novel* — verb and direct object, but then only the elementary syntactical construction: subject (=Novel) + verbal predicate in the perfect aspect. Everything ends with the phrase, “Novel has died”.

Or *Махроть всяя Русу* [untranslatable word-play] by Prigov, in which the classical culture dissolves in erotic ecstasy:

Она поет, поет, хоры подхватывают, растут, разрастаются, ширятся, звук нарастает, нарастает, становится невыносимым, и каждая поющая точка сама прорастает поющим хором, который тут же вступает и сам

разрастается поющими точками, все все тонет, тонет и само в себя все захватывает, все дрожит, содрогается, исторгая звуки на пределе звенящие: Слава! Слава! Радость! Радость! — это ода радости, это Бетховен, тема и Бетховен, Бах, Чайковский, Баховен, Баховский, Бетбах, Бетовский, бетчайбах, чайбахвен, бетхачабахскиофьев, стравинхабехошостский, шостербухкетжов, шенбухсстрашопцарт, Шоцарт, Царт, Ский, Кий, Ий. Ой, Ай, Охаминадроза, Охали, Кали! О! О! О! О! (Prigov 1990: 97)

Or else his own *Obituaries* [Некрологи] or other genres, levelling the culturally different, the power of discourse, stereotype and cliché as demonstrated by Prigov. Or, for example, *The Yellow Arrow* [Желтая стрела] by Pelevin, in which the simultaneous presence of various codes essentially empties the text, or a sequence of incarnations in *The Life of Insects* [Жизнь насекомых], void as the theme and device in *Chapaev* and *Void* [Чапаев и Пустота]. Or the application of mutually revoking verbal and figurative devices of expression by Илья Кабаков, or his often used device of ending series with white empty sheets. Pause as a zone of freedom from language in the catalogues of Rubinshtein. This is the “empty action” in the performances of the group “Collective Actions” of the 1970s, where depiction was practically reduced to zero and merged with the background; but also their “empty field” in the actions based on the experience of expectation:

The real field can be brown, green, even, uneven, etc., but it is very obvious that at this moment its main peculiarity for the man that has previously experienced expectation and is still experiencing it, lies in its “emptiness”. (Monastyrsky *et al.* 1998: 22)

In one of his discussions of the acts of “Collective Actions”, Sergey Letov says the following:

Like the ball of threads: you start to unravel it, but there’s not just one thread in it but many, and sooner or later all of them will break. But this is not the problem. It is not only here, but on the whole, new art tends towards what ends up in NOTHING. On the level of consciousness, man appears to be in contact with language, with this habitual world of his — well-ordered, etc. But on the level of the subconscious, what he gets under this appearance is regular NOTHING. (Monastyrsky *et al.* 1998: 322)

The poetics of the conceptualists of Moscow is based on the very demonstration of the empty “shell” of the linguistic sign: expressions that hitherto seemed meaningful are turned inside out, structures as

dead skeletons emerge, incapable of generating new living meanings. As Vladimir Sorokin writes about literature: “Literature as I see it — it’s paper, covered with some kind of marks. Literature in general — it’s a dead world. Any textual utterance or any poetic writing is in origin dead and false” (quoted in Roll 1996: 117).

It is often claimed in various writings that the principle of arrangement or collage governs postmodernist literature. Actually, this is contradictory to the very nature of postmodernism. Indeed, at first glance the “textual multiplicity” might outwardly resemble the avant-garde arrangement, but the process of boundaries losing their meaning does not allow us to consider it similar to the avant-garde effect. The boundaries of compositional fragments, quotations, and various communicative levels are desemioticized. The process of tautological aspect-changes gets thematized, whereby the ways of expression are changed, yet not the expressed. Repetitions that are tautological by nature — versions, variants, and copies do not themselves include any new information about a fact or object. Despite the seeming diversity of phenomena, the world is still invariant, and no variability of discourses or codes rids us of the feeling that it is “always the same”. According to Brodsky, “the diversity of strivings is completely reduced by the tautological nature of the result”. If we abstract from the world definite bodies and events, the habitual space of the poet changes into the Euclidean one, the landscape into a geographical map, speech into linguistic categories, separate opinions into formulae (v. also his numerous definitions and images of “multitude” and “common denominator”). The motif of the wrong or back side of a thing is quite common in Brodsky’s poems — as a rule, depth or the reverse side do not contain a secret: the reverse side of the icon turns out to be just crude cardboard.

One of the favourite devices of Brodsky’s poetics — enumeration — is perceived in this connection as an attempt of the poet to “rescue things” in their singularity. Although this attempt, too, is in vain, since the replacement of things by words in writing already means loss of uniqueness. Cf. the ending of the poem by Lev Losev, *Joseph Brodsky, or Ode to 1957* as a kind of catalogue of the more important words of Brodsky’s poetic vocabulary:

Но главное — шумит словарь,
словарь шумит на перекрестке.

*Душа крест человек чело
век вещь пространство ничего
сад воздух время море рыба
чернила пыль пол потолок
бумага мышь мысль мотылек
снег мрамор дерево спасибо.*⁴

(Losev 1996: 27)

The above-mentioned tendencies are intertwined in an interesting manner in Brodsky’s play *Marble* [Мрамор]. The theme of tautology acquires a central role in it. Everything in the depicted world is in a state of repetition, fluctuation, everything is equal to everything, and at the same time nothing is equal to itself. The first stage direction in Act I describes the time and place of action in the Tower — the prison. It is

[...] идеальное помещение на двоих: нечто среднее между однокомнатной квартирой и кабиной космического корабля. Декор: более Палладио, чем Пиранезе. [...] Вид из окна должен передавать ощущение значительной высоты (скажем, проплывающие облака), поскольку тюрьма расположена в огромной стальной Башне, примерно в километр высотой. Окно — либо круглое, как иллюминатор, либо — с закругленными углами, как экран. В центре камеры — декорированная под дорическую колонна или опора: внешняя сторона ствола, внутри которого — лифт. Ствол этот проходит через всю Башню как некий стержень или ось. Он и в самом деле стержень: все появляющееся в течение пьесы на сцене, и все, с нее исчезающее появляется или исчезает через находящееся в этом стволе отверстие, являющееся помещью ресторанный лифта и мусоропровода.⁵ (Brodsky 1995, IV: 247)

⁴ But most important — dictionary shouts, / the dictionary shouts at crossroads. / *soul cross man forehead / century thing space nothing / garden air time sea fish / ink dust floor ceiling / paper mouse idea moth / snow marble tree thank you.*

⁵ [...] an ideal room for two: something in between a one-room apartment and the cockpit of a space ship. Décor: more like Palladio than Piraneze. [...] The view from the window should create the impression of being very high (say, clouds float by), since the prison is in a huge steel Tower, about a kilometre high. The window — either round like a porthole, or — with rounded corners like a screen. In the centre of the cell — a column or pillar decorated in the Doric style: the outside of a tube in which there is a lift. This tube extends through the entire Tower like some wake or axis. It is a wake, indeed: all that appears on the stage

The description of the Tower offers simultaneously different clues for reading — from ancient myths to Freudian symbolism. However, we are interested in the form of the circle itself. The following concentric model emerges in the play: cosmos — empire, that embraces the entire earth — Rome as the centre of the Empire — in the centre of Rome, the Tower — in the centre of the Tower, a lift. There are two men in the cell — prisoners of the Empire, of their own body and way of thinking. There is also a cage with a canary in it, a kind of miniature prison, reduction to a formula. “Hieroglyph. Sign” (v. also the discussion of a wasp under a glass as a miniature version of a gladiator on an arena). When at the end of the play Tullius falls asleep, Publius feels himself like a point in the P-R-Square, drawn by dividers (elsewhere a square is mentioned, the sum of its angles equalling the circle). Thus the circle and square are mutually transferable, these elementary spatial forms correlate as symbols of eternity and time.

Tullius regards everything spatial as tautological, and as the same, — empires, North and South, East and West, streets of the town, rooms:

Нужник, Публий, от Персии только размером и отличается. Хуже того, человек сам и есть тупик. Потому что он сам — полметра в диаметре [...] Вещь в себе. Клетка в камере. Оазис ужаса в пустыне скуки. Как сказано у поэта.⁶ (Brodsky 1995, IV: 278)

There is nothing but twins and doubles, so that passion, too, becomes meaningless (toposexuality, as if with oneself). Man’s life is like the song, “The priest had a dog once...”. And the Tower represents fight with space, with its very ideas. For Tullius, it is “nothing”. There is nowhere to run from the Tower, except pure time. Tullius escapes to reading classics and sleep. His typical expressions are, “it’s all the same”, “no difference”. He needs the other only for thinking his thoughts to the end. He perceives time as an abstraction that exists separately from the world, as a condition “in which” objects exist.

Publius cannot accept imprisonment, he needs *Lebensraum*. He considers important and remembers that which exists in his own

during the play, and all that disappears from it, appears or disappears through an opening in the tube, which is a mixture of a dumb waiter and a rubbish chute.

⁶ Publius, the lavatory differs from Persia only in its size. Worse still, man himself is a blind alley. Because he himself — his diameter is of half a metre [...] A thing in itself. A cage in a cell. An oasis in the desert of boredom. As the poet put it.

(emotional, physical) experience. The most terrible thing for him is to know the place of his death, and if he considers escape from the Tower, it is only from it as the place of the forthcoming death. Contrary to Tullius who is a Roman, Publius is a barbarian and a former soldier. He takes care of his body, he needs physical contact with the other in order not to start doubting his own existence. His memory is full of concrete events, time is spatial for him, where “before” and “after” exist. He quotes poets, most often the Scythian ones, from Eastern Europe, he mimics the canary. The theme of voice, live sound, and speech is also connected with him. Tullius calls his stylistics melodramatic. While Tullius needs the other in order to think his thoughts to the end, Publius is “too lazy” for that. In the dialogue of the two characters, he mostly asks questions and tells spicy stories that he has witnessed. It is Tullius that forms abstract conclusions, reducing everything to the common idea, “it’s all the same” (cf., for example, their way of reasoning about the probability of life on Sirius and Canopus: Publius thinks that if there were life, “we’d hardly see them. Especially at night. One switches off lights and goes to bed at night”, but by life he means — “It’s when you put out the light — and then — woman”. Tullius agrees with him that “Темнота таки действительно форма жизни. Так сказать, состояние света [...] а свет [...] — форма энергии, источник жизни”⁷ (Brodsky 1995, IV: 271).

The characters of *Marble* discuss the idea of becoming one brain (not excluding the possibility of a computer brain), thus suggesting one of the possible interpretations of the play, according to which Publius represents thinking with the right hemisphere of the brain, and Tullius that with the left one. Considering the homonymous character of the word “hemisphere” (hemispheres of the brain and the Western and Eastern hemispheres on the geographical map), well practised in Brodsky’s poems, this interpretation does not contradict the generally accepted point of view, according to which the author clashes the ancient, Roman, and the contemporary, barbarian (as Scythian, eastern) visions of the world. In either case, Publius is predominantly a man of experience, and Tullius — that of ideas. (In *The Twenty Sonnets to Mary Stuart* [Двадцать сонетов к Марии Стюарт], Brodsky writes: “What makes History? — Bodies. / Art? — Beheaded

⁷ Darkness is still a veritable form of life. Which is to say, a state of light [...] a light [...] — a form of energy, a source of life.

body” [Brodsky 1992, III: 341], in *Marble*, Tullius reads classics and keeps their busts in his cell — “the cut heads of mankind”.)

The play contains a highly sophisticated play on signs in it. Assessments, substantiated by experiences and emotions (fear of death, desire) — but “an emotion is always a simple predicate” (Peirce 1992; Brodsky 1992, I: 44), — correlate with abstractions, “thoughts about thoughts”. The play is constructed as a system of projections and mirror reflections: the characters are unable to distinguish between the boundaries of the real world and the one they themselves have transmitted by TV cameras, they feel uncertain about the boundaries of the external and the internal. As a peculiar kind of auto-communication, the play may be interpreted through the psychoanalytical concept of the mirror-effect, the mutual representation of signifiers in the spirit of Lacan, or be translated into the meta-language of “seriality” according to Deleuze. But the double structure of the work is further made more complex by a third constituent — “the word of the poet”, which is beyond either of the characters, and which in its own turn correlates with the aesthetic reality of the play on the whole as “the word of Brodsky”. The poetic word forms the background to the conversations of Tullius and Publius, forcing them to acknowledge the insubstantiality of their own talks. “The word of the poet” is narcissistic by its nature, though, symbolized in *Marble* by lines reminiscent of Akhmatova, which introduces yet one more mode of mirror-effect into the text:

И лебедь, как прежде, плывет сквозь века,
любуйся красой своего двойника.⁸
(Brodsky 1995, IV: 272)

Publius repeats those lines after Tullius, but the poetic expression itself is unrepeatable, this alone can make the experience (“the monotony of art”) valuable and escape tautology.

The meta-position of Brodsky towards the postmodernist type of writing is based on the very close connection of him with the poetic tradition, including the avant-garde, which by now has also become classic. In this connection, to return to the beginning of this article, we would like to quote the description of the stairs in the play, *Marble*:

⁸ And the swan, as before, floats through the century, / admiring the beauty of its double.

А поэт там начинает, где предшественник кончил. Это как лестница; только начинаешь не с первой ступеньки, а с последней. А следующую сам себе сколачиваешь...⁹ (Brodsky 1995, IV: 273).¹⁰

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⁹ But the poet begins where the predecessor stopped. This is like stairs; except that you don’t begin on the first step, but on the last. And you knock the next one up yourself...

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О постмодернизме, “лестнице авангарда” и Бродском

Статья предлагает анализ поэтики русского постмодернизма, отпавляясь от концепции “транссемиотической лестницы” Е. Фарыно как механизма работы авангардного текста. Автор пытается показать, что в постмодернистских текстах происходят двусторонние процессы опустошения смысла: или слияние культурно разного в тавтологии или разложение на атомарные обесмысленные частицы. Телеологическая модель лестницы перестает здесь работать. На этом фоне, на примере пьесы “Мрамор” рассматривается позиция Бродского как несопадающая с “постмодернистским” контекстом.

Postmodernismist, “avangardi trepist” ja Brodsky’st

Artiklis on tehtud katse analüüsida vene postmodernismi poeetikat lähtuvalt J. Faryno poolt avangardi kirjeldamiseks pakutud “transsemiootilise trepi” kontseptsioonist. Tekstinäidetele toetudes kirjeldatakse, kuidas postmodernistlikes tekstides toimuvad erisuunalised protsessid: kultuuriliselt erinev ja unikaalne sulandub tautoloogias, tähendust omavad tervikud pihustuvad atomaarseteks tühjadeks ühikuteks. Avangardi tähendusloov teleoloogiline mudel lakkab siin töötamast. Lähemalt vaadeldakse, kuidas nimetatud tendentsid kajastuvad J. Brodsky näidendis “Marmor”. Brodsky positsiooni eristab vaadeldud “postmodernistlikust” kontekstist usk poeetilise sõna tunnetuslikesse võimalustesse (ühendades unikaalset ja korduvat väärtustab see tundeelamust ja päästab tautoloogias).