



On the Superfluous

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When where am I is I. Writing is concerned with such impossibilities of being. Translation is mainly its movement; it progresses by means of misunderstanding.

What could be funnier?

Arkadii Dragomoschenko

On the Superfluous

It is not particularly appropriate to speak of poetry nowadays (it has become unnecessary, “superfluous,” something that has fallen either to the lot of poetologists trying to extract some ontological root from ephemeral quadratures or to sentimental ignoramuses who should at some point have gone to police school).

Yet it is difficult to describe adequately how popular it was in those times that in turn resituated “poetic conversations” in a class of phenomena only partially identifiable. Having gone through a sequence of procedures in which it was simplified by aesthetics and pneumatology, poetry found itself at a place where “everything is understood” or, vice versa, is not worth understanding. That was at best; at worst, it arrived at a certain ideological space that represented it as an instrumental practice of language.

Despite attempts at decolonizing poetry, excluding it from the sphere of Great Literature, and subsequently introducing it into the conventional bounds of “writing,” it was gradually barred from naively questioning its own nature as well as the limits of the actual scene, that is, its book—in other words, one of the totalizing forms that offer the world existence beyond any “picture.” Synaesthesia is the forgetfulness of any definition.

Beyond the bounds of a metaphor lies the next metaphor, just as beyond one word lies another. Beyond memory, however, only the memory-producing machine is to be found, i.e., the structure of a *sign* that consists of a shadow or that fits into its own shadow. Thunder is neither the essence of lightning nor its signifier.

By calling time beautiful, horrifying, or bitter we only reaffirm our helplessness before the speed of discord in invisible substances.

The privileging of the momentous “now” in the age of representation and of the identity of word and thing established the manifestation of essence (ultimate indivisibility) as presence in that “now,” which in any case should not have been time but “its timeless nucleus,” while time

emerged in that classic metaphysical perspective as *not-now*, *not-being*, *not-truth*.

Vision is also a linguistic procedure, the process of description, differentiation.

Every voyage is a message to the past.

To give one case among many, a written/published book can be viewed as an attempt at rehabilitating (or possibly justifying) a *preceding* book, if one does not see it as a commodity involved in relations obviously separate from the interests of its writer and reader.

“Svistonov lay in bed reading, i.e., writing, as for him they were the same. He marked a paragraph in red pencil, and in black, entered its altered version in his manuscript. He did not care about the meaning of the whole and the coherence of it all” (K. Vaginov).

One can only regret the fact that none of Svistonov’s books have yet been published.

If one admits the obvious, that the culture in which we have been brought up—the one that takes into its body, forms the language, vision, ideas of ourselves (*I*) and the world around us, i.e., of “reality”—that this culture functions as a metaphysical machine of *perfection*, invulnerable *plenitude*, and technology, then it would be logical to assume that the inner space of the drama whose players we become at the moment *our own history* is born could be described as the space of *noncoincidence* produced by the machine of self-sufficient plenitude, telos . . . and by our inherent *insufficiency* determined by the known finitude of existence, or, simpler still, of *desire*.

Which means that is the *I* that is the breach, the gap taking on different names with apparent ease. Let us compare this *I* with the outline of a hole—the outline of absence. Including that of the *present*, which tends to expand its meaning.

Idleness is much harder than labor. It requires effort, durations of another sort, and richer imagination.

The technology of idleness is parataxis. The speed of conjunctions that lack momentum exhausts the possibilities of vertiginous stasis. But the temptation is most often irresistible.

The *I* unable strictly to follow the strategy of idleness, the *I* that does not rupture the circulation of its language (Khoma Brut’s chalk circle as

described by Gogol in “The Viy”) and, consequently, of history and memory, is doomed to failure. Everything is the residue of its own description.

Perhaps the Russian national idea is contained in the idea of Paradise (a communal “body without organs,” *sobornost*), while the asceticism of labor, the overcoming of one’s own nature (read Aleksandr Etkind) that such an idea suggests, does away with idleness just like Protestantism, which every day faces Hell.

Experience tells us that a tremendous amount seems to have been done toward that end, but most probably, not “the way” it should have been done.

An error is always conscious.

Sometimes an error is the result of extremely complicated, multi-level operations and calculations (Freud, for the moment, is rejected).

Poetry does not err in any projection of its questioning itself because it is the *unconscious* of a society (a pre-organic growth): the four-dimensional landscape of an impeccable action, *X*, where everything converges precisely, even if somebody’s notes don’t tally (Pound).

It is the fullest absence (above all, of *representation*). Meanwhile, the desire for absence is accompanied by the insurmountable fear of transgressing the line that separates us from it. This is why such “transgression” never really transgresses (with balance caught at the last moment, fear of irreversibility); it abides (*prebyvaet*) beyond the past and the future and arrives (*pribyvaet*) at the perfect time of the present—(which “evaporates in its own shining”).

It is the same, whether “four,” “green,” or “the dream of Paradise.”

I am not interested in the “how” or the “what,” but in the “why.”

Yet only the idle (*prazdnye*) set out on the journey (*stranstvie*)—they who celebrate (*prazdnuyut*) estrangement (*ostranenie*) (and removal [*ustranenie*]) of their *I*, they for whom the being (*sushchestvo*) of the *other*, which is so necessary for self-identification, loses its necessity (*nasushchnost*).

The poet remains a badly exposed photograph in the album of his time. The picture is washed away in patterns of oozing salts and oxides. Sometimes they represent completely different relations. But all this is only wild speculation.

Later they easily claim that he/she *resembles* someone. On resemblance see below.

The author's well-known dictum, "I exist because of the existence of the other," is replaced by a different one: "Since my *I* is separate from my being-ness (*sushchestvennost*) the *other* in this case also loses his or her necessity (*nasushchnost*)." Pan-European dialogism governs any narrative but not the writing of poetry. *You* and *I*, *past* and *future*, *and*, etc. can be exhausted in the metaphor of the shell that rotates on a single axis the exterior and the interior, moisture and sand, presence and absence—the shell that was once simultaneously the instrument of calling and the labyrinth of hearing. There is not certainty. *Not* signifies ways whose trajectories do not belong to any single design or trace. Sleep is nothing but a combination of phonemes necessary at a given moment. It offers the trusting mind the theme of resemblances, the conjugation of examples, the representation of patterns which are to strengthen that theme.

It would appear that the simplest comparison of one thing to another gives evidence of the coherence of the whole. Yet every word, even if preceded or followed by another, speaks of *nonconnectibility*, *noncompatibility*, of being ruptured. Like speech, reality consists of holes. Of difference. Of endless beginnings. Because "poetry is always already different."

But the *accumulation* and subsequent transformation (is it really into its opposite?) of insufficiency again presupposes the growth of its *critical* mass and its transition to something akin to a residual *surplus*, with whose *expenditure* Bataille was so preoccupied.

The melancholy of speech as the state that precedes its emergence, its dissection—difference. Is any one seed the center of the field?

The yearning for stasis, which in any of its respective rhetorical frames of reference can bear any of the commonly accepted names—is described by another metaphor as the yearning for death, absolute self-sufficiency and completion. Whereas erotic rapture (rupture) represents the permanent destruction of the forming picture of balance.

Perhaps the hidden nature of this rupture, its resolve not to disclose itself, besides being the mystery of its very presentation, is also the pretext (I do not want to say reason) for our daily labor—*writing*, or some other trivial occupation, venture, or project, including publishing. From which nothing actually follows.

Neither loud, nor quiet. One can sing a song or make a film. If one so desires. About how they speak. Only speak or keep silent soundlessly moving their lips (the dream of a hand). Or do both at the same time.

As usual, nothing superfluous.

(Translated from Russian by Evgenii Pavlov)