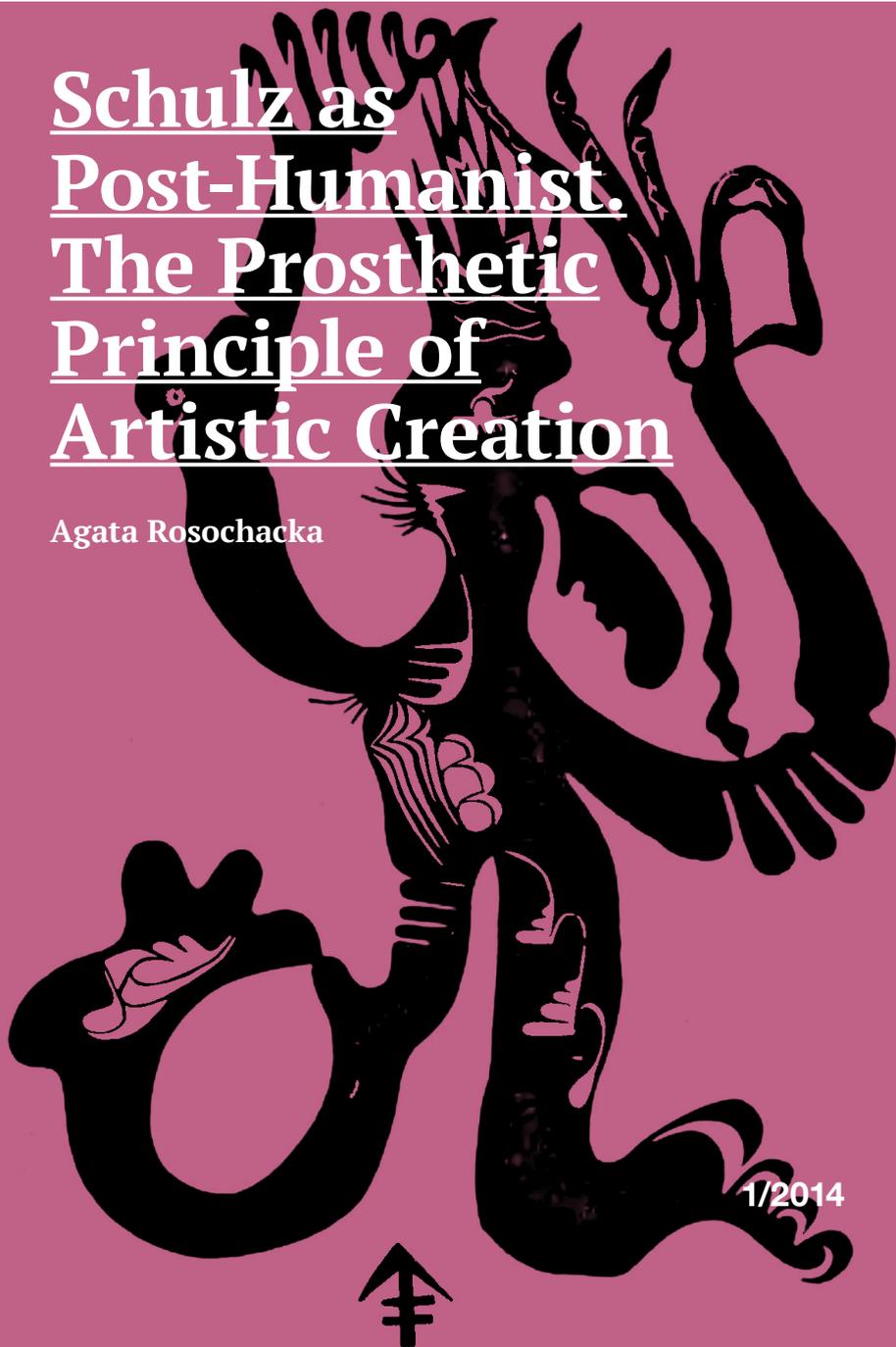


# CzasKultury/English

## Schulz as Post-Humanist. The Prosthetic Principle of Artistic Creation

Agata Rosochacka



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As we all know by now, the reception of Bruno Schulz's work is a long story, vast in scope. To free myself from the burden of summarizing its entirety, I will divide it into three categories: homogeneous, antinomic and ambivalent. These are important distinctions, since the adoption of each one of these interpretative positions leads to a completely different reading strategy.

The first of these perspectives presents Schulz's writing as manifesting a monolithic and completely formed worldview, and furthermore, often delineates no particular features of its poetics, influences, conventions and genres employed, or historical context. The category of homogeneity is most frequently selected and applied by commentators who are pursuing ideological agendas in their reading of Schulz, seeking above all confirmation of their own beliefs.

Those who choose the second interpretative approach, probably the most popular one, feel that the meaning of Schulz's literary legacy resides in his bearing witness to opposing and dramatically dissonant voices in *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass* and other works. This aporetic conflict appears to testify directly to the pessimistic undertone of Schulz's work, its catastrophic, vindictive, or at any rate, deeply melancholic content.

Readings that stress the union of contradictions in Schulz's views and compositional or narrative solutions appear to be the least selective. They can, however, easily be accused of choosing the least challenging interpretative path, avoiding final decisions, excusing themselves from making any such commitments by means of an all-embracing ambivalence.

Homogeneous readings of Schulz tend to avoid the question of irony, as it precludes, or at least considerably complicates, a monolithic interpretation. However, commentators who read the works of the author of *The Cinnamon Shops* as antinomic or ambivalent are keen to analyze his irony, though they reach different conclusions as to its function. For the antinomically inclined, his irony is simply antiphrasis, the purpose of which is to underscore the impossibility of consolidating Schulz's world into a coherent whole. Those who favour an ambivalent reading instead perceive the ironic nature of Schulz's work as the literary expression of precisely such a consolidation, a thesis confirmed, apparently, by Schulz himself: "The

very fact of individual existence contains irony, tomfoolery, a tongue stuck out in jest.”<sup>1</sup>

This geography of readerly strategies, though clearly simplified, shows that none of them is infallible. We need not be surprised; when reading such outstanding work as we are dealing with in Schulz’s case, it is hard not to fall into rhetorical traps of one’s own making. I find the antinomic perspective to be the furthest from my own. The most exact and interpretatively productive approach to the work of the Drohobych writer seems to me the ambivalent reading, though I sometimes let myself be led astray by a homogeneous interpretation. I probably find it seductive for two reasons. Firstly, to avoid treating ambivalence as a kind of interpretative alibi. Secondly, in view of the fact that Schulz – to use Stanisław Rosiek’s argument – is a writer who builds unusually intimate relationships with his readers, resulting in many an interpreter’s falling under the illusion that he or she is the first to get Schulz right.<sup>2</sup>

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The problem of the prosthetic body, which I will discuss here, is connected in modernist literature with the phenomenon of humanism: this is true, perhaps to an exceptional degree, in Schulz’s work. Humanistic postulates further give rise to catastrophic motifs, since both are

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1 B. Schulz, letter to St. I. Witkiewicz, in *Opowiadania. Wybór esejów i listów*, Wrocław 1998, p. 477. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted (TWD).

2 S. Rosiek, “Dlaczego dzisiaj nadal czytamy Brunona Schulza?”, paper read 12 September 2012 during the International Scholarly Conference “Bruno Schulz as a Philosopher and Literary Theorist” in Drohobych.

directly conditioned by the philosophy of language or are products of language. Before proceeding to an interpretation of Schulz's prose oeuvre, I would like to examine how the three threads I have mentioned are developed in his journalistic, critical, and epistolary writings, and also, briefly, how scholars of the Drohobych writer's work have previously dealt with the questions I raise.

Schulz's complicated anthropology was identified by earlier critics as the negation of humanism. A work much-discussed by more recent scholars, *Dwugłos o Schulzu* (Dialogue on Schulz)<sup>3</sup> is full of accusations of reducing people to a "species of objects," with "remarkably anti-literary and anti-humanist consequences" resulting.<sup>4</sup> Often, the evaluations of those first critics lead today's scholars to certain conclusions. One of these can be articulated as follows: Schulz was a surprise on the literary scene, who did not receive due recognition from all of his contemporaries. At the same time, it is remarked that these early critical judgments (by Wyka, Fik, Napierski and others) accurately grasp the fundamentals of Schulz's ontology and style, though their perceptivity is merely put in the service of negating the Drohobych master's work. Later Schulz scholars cannot be said to undermine the literary values of Schulz's works,<sup>5</sup> but in their interpretation of his views they often confirm the findings of the participants

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3 See especially works by Włodzimierz Bolecki, Jerzy Jarzębski, Michał Paweł Markowski, Żaneta Nalewajk.

4 K. Wyka, S. Napierski, *Dwugłos o Schulzu*, [in:] K. Wyka, *Stara szuflada*, Kraków 1967, pp. 259–271.

5 Some exceptions to this, though deceptive ones, are Janusz Rudnicki's notes on Schulz, contained in his book *Męka kartoflana*, Wrocław 2000.

in the “Dialogue on Schulz,” emphasizing not so much Schulz’s nihilism as his valuable (though far from cheering) diagnosis of the state of the world and the human being, interpreted by them as a catastrophic one.

Thus, Jerzy Spein writes in *Bankructwo realności* (The Bankruptcy of Reality) about the irreversibly dehumanizing effects of the negation of contemporary civilization<sup>6</sup> and the forceful anti-civilizational eloquence<sup>7</sup> of Schulz’s work. Likewise, in Czesława Samojlik’s criticism we read the following:

*Schulz’s people are ‘the insulted and humiliated,’ they are Christians no longer in search of a soul, but in search of their very selves, hoping to find themselves in everything and everything in themselves; they are indeed looking for what is most completely opposite to themselves, and the search itself is internally contradictory. Schulz is the writer of destitution and longing: a destitution which is found by no means only in external circumstances, but seethes deep down inside his characters; externality is remotely invincible. These characters long for individual existence amid the gray monotony of everyday life in all its triviality and, at the same time, never find contentment in the monotony that is their proper sphere of being.<sup>8</sup>*

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6 J. Speina, *Bankructwo realności: proza Brunona Schulza*, Warszawa 1974, p. 69.

7 Speina, *Bankructwo realności*, p. 107.

8 Cz. Samojlik, *Groteska – pisarstwo wszechstronnie banalne... Sprawa prozy Brunona Schulza*, in *Z problemów literatury polskiej XX wieku*, vol. 2, ed. A. Brodzka, Z. Żabicki, Warszawa 1965, p. 295.

In the newest readings of Schulz, we also encounter judgments ruling out any interpretation that would stress the affirmation in Schulz's work of nature, civilization or the times in which the author lived. Michał Paweł Markowski finds that "Schulz's characters and readers are condemned to melancholy,"<sup>9</sup> and, summarizing a book devoted to the author of "Spring," writes: "what is truly ours is our death, our dead body, our crippled form, through which life has passed. Life as such, the essence of life, is utterly inaccessible to us, beyond our grasp, which is infirm and fragmentary, but is ours, human."<sup>10</sup>

For Żaneta Nalewajk, a scholar specializing in the problem of the body in the work of Schulz and Gombrowicz, the images of deformed and overgrown bodily forms in Schulz are also connected with deadness: "The culmination of the process of development, but also its excess, are associated here with monstrosity and untimely mourning, and become a portent of inescapable death."<sup>11</sup>

A different view is presented by Włodzimierz Bolecki, above all in "*Principium individuationis*". Motywy nietzscheańskie w twórczości Brunona Schulza" ("Principium individuationis." Nietzschean Motifs in the Work of Bruno Schulz), where he claims that Schulz was uncritically fascinated with Nietzsche's philosophy, primarily with his concept of the Dionysian in *The Birth of Tragedy*.

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9 M. P. Markowski, *Powszechna rozwiąźłość: Schulz, egzystencja, literatura*, Kraków 2012, p. 52.

10 Markowski, *Powszechna rozwiąźłość*, p. 171.

11 Ż. Nalewajk, *W stronę perspektywizmu: problematyka cielesności w prozie Brunona Schulza i Witolda Gombrowicza*, Gdańsk 2012, p. 74.

Jerzy Jarzębski finds other reasons for renouncing the catastrophic interpretation of Schulz's work; he discusses its philosophical implications chiefly in terms of ambivalence. In addition, the absence of death in all its finality within the literary universe created by the author of "The Comet" leads Jarzębski to decisively reject a "pessimistic" reading.

I agree with Jarzębski, though I see Schulz's works as threatening the personalist view of the human being. That does not mean that they must be read as nihilistic. It often seems that the Drohobych master only undermines a particular understanding of humanism, issuing from the definition of the human being in terms of his antithesis. In Markowski's view:

*There are three main ways of answering the question [of what a human being is] and they are all based on building oppositions. The human, firstly, is what is non-animal, secondly, what is non-divine, thirdly, what is not an object. In all of these cases the human being (or its essence) is defined in terms of negation, through negation of what is non-human: the animal, the divine, or an object. A human being is a human being because it is not an animal, is not a god, and is not a thing.<sup>12</sup>*

Accustomed as we are to thinking in the terms presented above of the human being as graspable only when situated within a polarity, we are somehow forced to perceive

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12 M. P. Markowski, *Powszechna rozwiąźność*, p. 146.

Schulz's declarative and literary utterances as melancholy or even nihilistic.

In my opinion, however, we cannot find out what the Schulzian human being is by opposing him to animals, plants, or objects. Here, I agree with the view of Bruno Latour, who wrote:

*... the human, as we now understand, cannot be grasped and saved unless that other part of itself, the share of things, is restored to it. So long as humanism is constructed through contrast with the object that has been abandoned to epistemology, neither the human nor the nonhuman can be understood.*<sup>13</sup>

Schulz's anthropology represents an effort to think about the human being differently than in the categories of what differentiates him from nature. Schulz is opposed to anthropocentrism, but does not break with humanism entirely so much as continually distance himself from it, newly contemplating the human being in the categories of life. Here, he is close to today's philosophical propositions of post-humanism, which in their most absorbing variations do not suggest the (perhaps impossible) gesture of definitive abandonment of the humanist perspective. As Monika Bakke writes: "for post-humanism, the prefix 'post' does not mean making a clean break with the tradition of humanism, but rather it 'communicates with the spirits' that haunt it unceasingly. The past, after all, cannot be forgotten, and the 'trauma of

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13 B. Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter, Cambridge 1993, p. 136.

humanism' must return and will not swiftly be eliminated." Bakke therefore proposes to "treat post-humanist practices as practices critical not so much of humanism from an outside position as taking place within humanism."<sup>14</sup>

When Schulz writes about the human being as a "brilliant fiction," he is thus not rejecting humanism, but rather its anthropocentric and personalistic vision. He is subscribing to the belief that "without ceasing to be human beings, we cease to be what we were until now, that is, the measure and centre of all things."<sup>15</sup>

In what is probably the longest fragment in Schulz's oeuvre, plainly expressing his views on the human being, we read the following:

*I thought that whoever came up with the idea of the human being, the Greek statue of Hermes, was a genius of lying. The word 'human being' in itself is a brilliant fiction, concealing with a beautiful and reassuring lie those abysses and worlds, those undiscovered universes, that individuals are.*

*There is no human being – there are only sovereign ways of being, infinitely distant from each other, that don't fit into any uniform formula, that cannot be reduced to a common denominator. From one human being to another is a leap greater than from a worm to the highest vertebrate. Moving from one face to an-*

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14 M. Bakke, *Bio-transfiguracje: sztuka i estetyka posthumanizmu*, Poznań 2012, p. 19.

15 Bakke, *Bio-transfiguracje*, p. 7.

*other we must rethink and rebuild entirely, we must change all dimensions and postulates. None of the categories that applied when we were talking about one person remains when we stand before another. You referred to individualities as elements... I would say philosophers, systems, designs for the world, recipes for a world... That is what human beings are.*

*An entire world could be created from each of those recipes. When I meet a new person, all of my previous experiences, anticipations, and tactics prepared in advance become useless. Between me and each new person the world begins anew, as if nothing had been yet established and determined. How naive and dull is the classroom, academic physiognomy that sees in a facial expression merely a residue, a stratum of many mimicking movements – muscle cramps.<sup>16</sup>*

Humanism, as an unambiguous definition of the human being in terms of negations, has a closed, consistent form. The human being thus imagined does not exist; he perished in the catastrophe (more about this in a moment). The post-catastrophe convalescent has not forgotten the idea to which he earlier subscribed, nor has he rejected it with hate, but he is experimenting with its remnants. Is that because he has nothing else left? Perhaps also because in the experiment lies the surprise of life. Life is an experiment, a test of impermanent forms, continuation, addition, supplementation.

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<sup>16</sup> B. Schulz, letter to Maria Kasproviczowa. *Listy Brunona Schulza*, <http://www.brunoschulz.org/kasproviczowej.htm> [accessed 24.08.2015].

For Schulz, a human being is a fleeting materialization, a momentary adoption of certain boundaries and conventions.<sup>17</sup> “But within these boundaries there is space enough for all heavens, for all hells. Were not the ancients wiser, when they put the accent not on form, but on content? Content that burst out from the human form and ran through the whole scope of their mythology. The ancients who saw gods being born everywhere.”<sup>18</sup> The human being, who has remembered his “not entirely closed” form, is a participant in the “primeval beginnings,” in his presence “things reveal themselves, the silent cabinet rattles after years of silence, the table clicks out a broken word.”<sup>19</sup> The human being’s form, provocative in its openness, is therefore not his curse; his active relationship with the world of objects, plants, and animals is an honour, a condition for his creativity. His critical response to the art work of Egga Van Haardt, cited above, presents the apotheosis of the human figure unconstrained by the conventions of personalist humanism:

*“When [Egga] is alone, her blood dances, it branches out inside her fantastically and looms into an obscurely huge, flickering phantom, vibrating in all of its limbs. It is barely distinct from her body, it circles round her, she shrivels up, falling apart like a burnt piece of paper, deadening into a black arabesque.” Egga’s art “dominates the screen not through sight, but through her clairvoyant hand, her replacement organ, the eye*

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17 B. Schulz, “Egga Van Haardt w pracowni”, *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* 40/1938, <http://www.brunoschulz.org/egga.htm> [accessed 25.08.2015].

18 Schulz, “Egga Van Haardt w pracowni.”

19 Schulz, “Egga Van Haardt w pracowni.”

*of the blind man. Whoever has seen Egga's hand understands that she does not need eyes. The tree of her veins, branching out sevenfold, swarms with creations like the tree of life, creatures wander through it.*"<sup>20</sup>

His rejection of the conventions of personalist humanism thus binds Schulz, like today's post-humanists, to acknowledge a kinship with non-human matter.<sup>21</sup> His treatment of this relationship is, in my view, the foundation of his anthropology, as well as his artistic creation.

After these introductory reflections on Schulz's anthropology, I would like to examine the reification we so often find in Schulz's work. This procedure does not necessarily lead to the degradation of the human being. Reducing the human being to an object is degrading only when we have contempt for the object. In Schulz's work, however, the thing is also included in life's incessant fluctuation. That provokes readers to rethink such stylistic devices as objectification and personification. Reification need not automatically depreciate the human being, just as personification is not always elevating for animals or objects.<sup>22</sup> If we stop assigning these devices evaluative functions, we see their main effect in Schulz's work – counteracting the “ontological hygiene” of the human being, such hygiene being undesirable to

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20 Schulz, “Egga Van Haardt w pracowni.”

21 I am borrowing the term “non-human” (nie-ludzki) from Monika Bakke, who distinguishes it from the ethically loaded “inhuman” as well as the more strictly oppositional “not human.”

22 On this topic, see S. Wyslouch, *Paradoksy reifikacji w literaturze i sztuce*, [in:] *Człowiek i rzecz. O problemach reifikacji w literaturze, filozofii i sztuce*, ed. S. Wyslouch, B. Kaniewska, Poznań 1999. Though this Poznań scholar takes into account ambiguities of reification, they result not from changes in thinking about the human being but from more concrete narrative contexts.

the Drohobych master. Precisely that total dissociation of the human being from the rest of the world, situating him through negation of manifold forms of life, signifies solitude for Schulz.<sup>23</sup> Placing the human being in a relational existence, connected with other beings, and presenting life above everything else, can even be understood as “the end of the lonely and therefore impoverished human being, lonely and impoverished because reduced exclusively to himself.”<sup>24</sup>

In the passage cited from “Egga Van Haardt,” the influence of Bergsonism is clearly visible. Czesław Karkowski, discussing the work of Schulz and Leśmian, finds their shared inspiration in the philosophy presented by Bergson in *Creative Evolution*. This inspiration, Karkowski claims, is based on the approach to the human being’s relationship with external reality. As Karkowski writes, for Bergson “reality is governed by the two opposing forces of instinct and intellect, and human cognitive activity also manifests itself in two ways: in direct, intuitive sensing of ‘the essence of a thing,’ in the emotional act of becoming one with nature experiencing the world metaphysically, and in intellectual knowledge, mediated through language. The activity of the intellect, of an eminently pragmatic and instrumental nature, involves holding reality, which is moving and changing practically all the time, still, as a way of cramming it into the stiff framework of our mental concepts.”<sup>25</sup> Karkowski calls this diagnosis a “logical dichotomy.”

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23 Compare in particular with Schulz’s short stories “The Pensioner” (Emeryt) and “Solitude” (Samotność).

24 Bakke, *Bio-transfiguracje*, p. 87.

25 Cz. Karkowski, “Poezja na śmietniku”, *Poezja* (Poetry) 6/1978, p. 64.

At the same time, though I completely agree that Schulz was certainly inspired by Bergson's philosophy, I nonetheless find that Schulz also complicates this dichotomy between rational and intuitive knowledge. Furthermore, Bergson scholars do not interpret the dichotomy to be as unambiguous as Karkowski finds it. Elizabeth Grosz writes:

*In an extraordinary passage, Bergson claims that the intellect transforms matter into things, which render them as prostheses, artificial organs, and, in a surprising reversal, simultaneously humanizes or orders nature, appends itself as a kind of prosthesis to inorganic matter itself, to function as its rational or conceptual supplement, its conscious rendering. Matter and life become reflections, through the ordering the intellect makes of the world.<sup>26</sup>*

Elsewhere, Grosz writes:

*For Bergson, life expands itself by generating new capacities in both the living being and the prosthetic object. [...] objects, in being extricated from the multiplicity of connections they exert in the material world, are given new qualities, new capacities, a virtuality that they lack in their given form.<sup>27</sup>*

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26 E. Grosz, *Architecture from Outside: Essays on Virtual and Real Space*, MIT Press 2001, p. 178.

27 E. Grosz, *Prosthetic Objects*, [in:] idem, *Time Travels: Feminism, Nature, Power*, Duke University Press 2005, 151. See also Alia Al-Saji, *When Thinking Hesitates: Philosophy as Prosthesis and Transformative Vision*, "The Southern Journal of Philosophy", Volume 50, Issue 2, 351–361, June 2012.

The Schulz image that expressively shows how reason and creation need not be opposed to each other is the laboratory. This image, important for modernism and later currents in thought, acquires a new resonance in Schulz's work as a place where life's potential is explored.

For Schulz is not the bearer of an unambiguous critique of civilization or the attainments of science. In Schulz's universe, the father-experimenter of the laboratory is a combination of the terrifying mad scientist à la Dr. Frankenstein and the magical, fascinating alchemist of whom Arkadiusz Kalin wrote in his inspiring interpretation of "The Comet":

*we are here given an uncontradictory, chiasmatic (in the Derridean sense, meaning of double provenance) fusion of various thought traditions. The father's experiments are ambiguous from the start – Schulz in one sentence rams together the tradition of empirical, experimentally verified science with esoteric knowledge.<sup>28</sup>*

Schulz is thus not condemned to unrelieved melancholy at the loss of the mythical world through its conquest by the scientist. The scientist, on the contrary, is still a dreamer and an artist, whose experimental activity treats life as the most valuable artistic material. Jerzy Ficowski wonderfully encapsulates this in *Regiony wielkiej herezji* (Regions of the Great Heresy): "the 'glass and eye of the learned' held in

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28 A. Kalin, "Zaklinanie katastrofy – ezoteryka i nauka w Komecie Brunona Schulza", paper presented on June 26, 2012 at the conference "Schulz. Between Myth and Philosophy" in Warsaw.

such contempt by the Romantics are here adapted to a new use and undergo a kind of metamorphosis: they become an enchanted hybrid of magnifying glass and kaleidoscope.”<sup>29</sup>

We can, it seems, expand the image of the laboratory to include the rest of Schulz’s world, because its logic implies mixing together different scales. Latour finds that in the laboratory, “differences of scale are made irrelevant and... the very content of the trials made within the walls of the laboratory can alter the composition of society.”<sup>30</sup> The laboratory thus operates to erase the boundaries between inside and outside; we may read the Father’s laboratory this way, but also literature itself: the text as a kind of laboratory.

The Father’s experiments bring to mind not so much contemporary science’s demiurgic endeavours as the ambiguously motivated works of artists from the bio-art school. Here, I am thinking above all of such artists as Grzegorz Kowalski, Daniel Lee, Oleg Kulik and Eduardo Kac, who in different ways “provoke rapprochement with bodies which are not human.”<sup>31</sup> In the context of Schulz’s writing, a particularly interesting figure from bio-art is Eduardo Kac, creator of the first genetically modified animal to originate as a work of art, the piece entitled *GFP Bunny*. The artist grafted alien genetic material – the green fluorescent protein that occurs naturally in a species of medusa – onto

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29 J. Ficowski, *Regiony wielkiej herezji: rzecz o Brunonie Schulzu*, Warszawa 1992, pp. 173–174.

30 B. Latour, “Give Me a Laboratory and I will Raise the World,” in *Science Observed: Perspectives on the Social Study of Science*, ed. Karin Knorr-Cetina, Michael Joseph Mulkay, London 1983, p. 159.

31 Bakke, *Bio-transfiguracje*, 93.

the rabbit's zygotes. In Bakke's words: "The rabbit's body can thus glow with a bright green light, though it does not do so at all times, only after having been activated by a blue light."<sup>32</sup> Another Kac art work discussed by Bakke is his creation of the genetically modified plant *Edunia*, part of a larger project entitled *The Natural History of Enigma*. *Edunia* is a plant onto which the artist grafted his own genetic material. "Kac calls this life form a 'plantimal.'"<sup>33</sup> Kac's work undermines "ontological hygiene" and highlights the proximity of human and not-human beings, while also directing our attention to the analogous construction of the human body and a plant.

My perhaps rather fanciful reference to the work of bio-artists in the context of the Father's experiments in Schulz's short stories underscores the fact that these experiments performed on matter serve no functional or technological goal, but rather constitute the scientist-artist's creative work. Monika Bakke proposes categorizing such creative work as zoe-aesthetics, creation focused on life, moreover, on life understood more broadly than simply *bios*. As an interpretative category, zoe-aesthetics might also be applied to Schulz's prose.

Schulz's vision of the human being is not as straightforward as it might appear from the above considerations. The ramifications of Schulz's post-humanist anthropology have been presented too unequivocally to elucidate the

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32 Bakke, *Bio-transfiguracje*, 168.

33 Bakke, *Bio-transfiguracje*, 172.

hitherto neglected possibilities for a humanist reading of the Drohobych master's work.

At the same time, however, that anthropology is more complicated, and has its source in a certain type of catastrophism. It is a rather particular catastrophism, not awaiting the annihilation of the world and humanity, but accepting that we have already survived a catastrophe, that we are functioning in a post-catastrophic world.

In Schulz's "Wanderings of a Sceptic," the rubble of the world has been "ploughed through and through by the indefatigable plough of human thought," and the catastrophe that has afflicted the world is thus a catastrophe brought upon it by human beings. Yet what has undergone collapse is precisely the anthropocentric. Before the catastrophe, the world had "relatively human proportions." What had been domesticated was now deserted, pressed through a narrow-hatched strainer, such as "Freudianism and psychoanalysis, the theory of relativity and microphysics, quantum theory and non-Euclidean geometry." The human being was stripped of his faith in the world's permanent shapes and his own separate status. Schulz vividly describes the landscape after the catastrophe. It is full of remains of thoughts and people; splintered ideas and body parts protrude from the "debris of culture." Nonetheless, what is left of life lies amid the rubble. This is not what we know from Aristotle under the name *bios*, it is not concrete, singular, unrepeatable

life expressible in easily grasped concepts. It is a kind of life closely related to the life of matter, life that makes the remains of a human being equal to the remains of plants and animals, life that knows no teleological hierarchy, a *zoe* kind of life. It is *zoe* that rules the dynamics that animate the “debris of culture,” initiating some astonishing combinations.

Who are the survivors of the catastrophe? Schulz maintains that only the dead or convalescents could have survived it. Who, then, is the wanderer who has survived his own death, who knows that he himself is matter, a part of the pulverized debris of culture? It is a human being who can no longer think of himself in the categories of the centre, who has felt his kinship with the rest of the cosmic garbage heap, a human being who no longer knows his own definition. For the personalist definition has been lost in the catastrophe. We may add evolution, transplants, and technologized bodies to the list containing psychoanalysis and quantum theory, as well as the bacteria who live in our bodies and the inability to find a clear boundary between ourselves and the animals. As Stefan Chwin has written, Schulz’s age was the age of transplantation, in which “the image of the body as a unique psycho-physical unit, whose foundation is the individual soul, the enduring *principium individuationis*, departs into the irretrievable past.”<sup>34</sup> The body also became the site of artificial, prosthetic organs. In Jerzy Jarzębski’s words:

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34 S. Chwin, “Grzeszne manipulacje”. *Historia sztuki a historia medycyny*, [in:] *Czytanie Schulza. Materiały międzynarodowej sesji naukowej Bruno Schulz – w stulecie urodzin i w pięćdziesięciolecie śmierci*, ed. J. Jarzębski, Kraków 1994, p. 278.

*From the beginning of the twentieth century onward, the human body is treated increasingly unceremoniously by medicine, becoming an object of surgical intervention, bolder and bolder use of transplants, finally undergoing cyborgization, the union of the natural body with implanted mechanical devices. These processes activate society's deeply rooted fear of the destruction of human identity, and simultaneously fascinate creative minds eager to invent [...] bizarre mechanical-biological hybrids.<sup>35</sup>*

What does a convalescent do? What can he begin after his return from the dead? Schulz's sceptic challenges matter, arranging it according to the new, absurd principles, since there are no others. Are the wanderer's pastimes a symptom of desperation, however? Perhaps they are a symptom of the madness he must face after experiencing death, when the known meaning of the world has disintegrated? The sceptic "pokes his walking stick at the rubble in a melancholy way: problems and more problems, splinters, shards, and fragments of problems. Here a severed head looks askance, there a leg scrambles out, tumbles and hobbles along by itself through the dump." We thus see in the wanderer a certain melancholy, a kind of tenderness for the old order, an irreparable sense of loss. But when an old idea tries to raise its head, to join its old torso, the wanderer stifles this tendency: "He may seem to be claiming stolen limbs on behalf of a damaged idea,

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35 J. Jarzębski, *Schulz*, Wrocław 1999, p. 149.

but woe to this recipient of special attention. He will soon suffocate it in the surplus of reclaimed innards.”

For what would the creature risen from the pulverized body be? A monstrous memory, a bungled copy of a world that no longer exists. Its stitches and scars would constantly draw notice, as it frightened onlookers with the death it lived through. The wanderer therefore prefers to leave melancholy and longing where they belong, and move on to experiments instead of false repetition, choosing to see what unpredictable addition to the world comes next.

*The new longing for adventure, for the untasted and untried, fills his chest with a strange sigh. And maybe it's good that everything lies in rubble, that there is nothing sacred anymore, no ties, laws, or dogmas, that everything is permitted and everything can be expected, that this one time we can reconstruct ourselves from the rubble according to our own whim – at one's pleasure, following an illusion that we do not yet apprehend.*

*The catastrophe that Schulz writes about in “Wanderings of a Sceptic” is thus not so much an experience of annihilation or even the extinguishment of hope as an ambivalent situation of both longing for the sheltered world before the cataclysm and a fascination, considerably stronger than that nostalgia, with the new creative possibilities, a dazzlement at the absence of obligation to the lost forms. As Schulz writes of his own work: “What is the meaning of this*

*universal disillusionment with reality – I cannot say. I will only say that it would be insupportable, if it did not meet with compensation in some other dimension. In some way we experience deep satisfaction from that loosening of the fabric of reality, we are interested in this bankruptcy of the real [...]. Destruction? But the fact that this content has become a work of art means that we affirm it, that our spontaneous depths have spoken in its favour.*<sup>36</sup>

A similar ambivalence can, I believe, be found in the passages from “The Mythologization of Reality” on the subject of language. “The first word was a hallucination, *spinning around the meaning of light*, it was the great universal whole. The word in its colloquial contemporary meaning is only a fragment, a rudiment of some earlier all-embracing, integral mythology. That is why it has a tendency toward growth, toward regeneration, toward replenishment in its full meaning. The life of the word is based on its tightening and *tautening for thousands of combinations, like the quartered body of the snake in the legend*, whose pieces search for each other in the dark.”<sup>37</sup> (Emphasis mine – A.R.)

These statements have almost always been interpreted as unambiguous expressions of nostalgia for the lost Word. Yet if we look closely at the legend of the snake to which Schulz refers, the situation becomes more complicated. Until now, commentators have not read the reference as

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<sup>36</sup> B. Schulz, *Letter to St. I. Witkiewicz*, in *Opowiadania*, p. 478.

<sup>37</sup> B. Schulz, *Mityzacja rzeczywistości*, in *Opowiadania*, p. 384.

citing a precise, particular legend.<sup>38</sup> What is more, interpreters of the Schulz text such as Władysław Panas lean toward identifying the “light” and “meaning” in the passage with each other, though an editor cannot have failed to notice the ambiguity of the formulation (it may refer to “light endowed with meaning”) and would not have let a simple printer’s error pass.<sup>39</sup> If, however, we accept that the snake of legend to whom Schulz refers is Apep (Aphopis, Apepi) from Egyptian mythology, the phrase about spinning around the light becomes clear. The Egyptian god Ra, identified with light or the sun, “insures the stability of the cosmos [...]. And indeed this cosmogony is repeated every morning, when the solar god ‘repels’ the snake Apophis, though unable to destroy him.”<sup>40</sup> The legend claims that each day the snake was bashed to pieces by Ra, and at night his members returned to each other, in accordance with the story Schulz mentions (the pieces of the snake’s body look for each other in the darkness). The placement of the legend in Schulz’s piece reveals an astonishing interpretative consistency.

If Ra quarters Apep, then the “meaning of light,” Schulz’s myth, breaks language (the body of the snake) into pieces. This appears to signify that full presence means the dismemberment of language. And it is only thanks to this mutilation that the dynamism necessary for creation, for the gravitation of individual pieces toward each other, is made possible. As Schulz writes: “Speech is the human being’s metaphys-

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38 Compare especially with Jarzębski’s commentary in *Schulz, Opowiadania*, p. 384, footnote 4.

39 Rosiek, “Dlaczego dzisiaj nadal czytamy Brunona Schulza?”

40 M. Eliade, *A History of Religious Idea*, trans. Willard R. Trask, vol. 1, Chicago 1985, p. 92.

ical organ. However, the word over time becomes stiff, gets worn out, and ceases to be a conductor of new meanings. The poet restores words' conductive capacity through new collisions, that emerge from accumulation."<sup>41</sup> The impulse toward new poetic combinations of words would not exist if the body of the language-snake remained whole.

(Various legends developed from the myth of Apep. One tells the story of the "joint snake"; according to this version, when you replace one of the snake's dismembered parts with a knife, the new union of the parts incorporates the blade with the other pieces.<sup>42</sup> The legend was also adopted by Benjamin Franklin as the visual representation of the union of British colonies, with the slogan "Join or die."<sup>43</sup> I cite these iterations of the legend to show its ubiquity.)

An analogy can therefore be drawn between Schulz's body of the world, subject to metamorphoses, and language with its continual reconfigurations. This parallel was also perceived by Hans Bellmer, the affinity of whose work with Schulz's artistic imagination has often been noted: "The body is like a sentence that needs to be broken up into individual words and with the help of successive, endlessly multiplied anagrams have its real meaning discovered anew."<sup>44</sup>

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41 Bruno Schulz, *Mityzacja rzeczywistości*, in *Opowiadania*, p. 386.

42 See the article "Joint Snake" at the Myth Bests website, <http://www.mythicalcreatureslist.com/creature.php?beast=Joint+Snake> [accessed 28.08.2015].

43 See the article "Join, or Die" at Wikipedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Join,\\_or\\_Die](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Join,_or_Die) [accessed 28.08.2015].

44 H. Bellmer, *Mała anatomia*, Lublin 1994.

Schulz scholars have paid heed to the analogy between fractured bodies and fragmented language. Tadeusz Rachwał declared that from what we read in such writings as “The Mythologization of Reality,” it follows that: “the current situation for the word is that of a patient with an amputated leg. The patient continues to feel its presence, despite the reality of having a disability.”<sup>45</sup>

Włodzimierz Bolecki<sup>46</sup> and Krzysztof Stala,<sup>47</sup> the most penetrating interpreters of the Drohobych master’s style, have also written extensively on the interdependence of language and the body. For both, the relationship is manifested in, among other things, the specificity of Schulz’s metaphors, which typically gravitate toward a certain literalism. As Stala writes: “Reality changes in such a way as to ‘adapt’ to the metaphors created in language, chases after them, attempts to catch up with the ‘liberated’ word.”<sup>48</sup> As a result of this use of metaphor in Schulz’s work, “the word is made flesh” in the sense of literal bodily representations in the world of his short stories.

Prosthetic logic in Schulz’s oeuvre through “the grafting of the human onto the natural becomes as much a possible source of creativity as its figural horizon.”<sup>49</sup>

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45 T. Rachwał, *Remityzacja słowa. Rzecz o manekinach w prozie Brunona Schulza*, [in:] *Znak i semioza*, ed. W. Kalaga and T. Sławek, Katowice 1985, p. 118.

46 W. Bolecki, *Język poetycki i proza: twórczość Brunona Schulza*, [in:] Bolecki, *Poetycki model prozy w dwudziestoleciu międzywojennym. Witkacy, Gombrowicz, Schulz*, Kraków 1996.

47 K. Stala, *Na marginesach rzeczywistości. O paradoksach przedstawienia w twórczości Brunona Schulza*, Warszawa 1995.

48 Stala, *Na marginesach rzeczywistości*, p. 168.

49 Stala, *Na marginesach rzeczywistości*, p. 90.

To conclude, I wish to cite another remark of Stala's, while keeping in mind the story of the snake whose mutilated body internalizes the knife's blade:

*Creation understood as a supplement to the great book of the world, a seemingly insignificant and informal extension, but which grows into it over time, changing our view of the world in an imperceptible way, indiscernibly but consistently revolutionizing tradition, seen as an inseparable part of existence. The paradoxical and authoritative nature of the official logic of mimesis (model – copy, nature – creation, inside/idea – outside/appearances) is here creatively undermined by the logic of non-exclusivity, shared presence, growth and implantation; the logic of the supplement that relieves contradictions.<sup>50</sup>*

**translated by Timothy Williams**

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<sup>50</sup> Stala, *Na marginesach rzeczywistości*, p. 50.