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THE BODY AND THE UNIVERSE: ON CORPOREALITY IN STANISŁAW LEM'S *RETURN FROM THE STARS*[1]

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ABSTRACT

The paper develops the implicit as well as explicit meaning which evokes Stanisław Lem's concept of the Body and the Corporality portrayed in the novel *Return from the Stars*. Moreover, Lem's novel about an astronaut Hal Bregg and his return on Earth is analysed. In this novel author uses the idea of Einstein's twin paradox. Hal Bergg—the stereotype of masculinity—is confronted with decadent and egalitarian society, which may be refers to the reunion masculinity with femininity. Such storyline shows the multidimensionality of the issue of Corporality, and presents the Body as a epistemological metaphor of modernism and postmodernism. In addition, the Body is depicted in the *Return of the Stars* as a figure of a mask and a costume. Furthermore, the Body in Lem's novel is also interpreted as part of the Universe—as the boundary between what is temporary and what is infinite and transcendent.

Keywords: body, corporeality, universe, utopia, dystopia, Stanisław Lem.

Stanisław Lem's interpretations of his own works are an important addition to the substantial body of his essays. It is then worth it to consider his self-interpretation of *Return from the Stars* in the chapter "The Structures of Literary Creation" of *Science Fiction and Futurology*, which sparked a discussion between Małgorzata Szpakowska and Andrzej Zgorzelski. The author of the novel makes an observation that although he had initially set out to write a novel on the innate evil of human nature, what he eventually created was a romance story revolving around its protagonist. The problem of social amelioration, which according to the author's original intention was supposed to be the central motif, Lem considers to have oversimplified and only scratched the surface of, failing to back it with an in-depth scien-

[1] A modified version of the article was published in Polish in: Ł. Kucharczyk, *Ciało i Wszechświat. Problematyka cielesności w "Powrocie z gwiazd" Stanisława Lema*, Bibliotekarz Podlaski, 2, 2018; Ł. Kucharczyk, *Granice ciała*, Warszawa 2021.

tific research. Instead, he focused on the problems of individual persons and a romance plot.[2] This opinion on the methodology behind the novel was reiterated by Małgorzata Szpakowska, calling *Return from the Stars* "possibly the weakest"[3] of Lem's novels, which she argued as follows:

> "The entire time, Lem holds fast on to the premise that he creates, after all, a novel. He builds up around the fundamental question with plot, complications, and romance (the last, as he explains later himself, out of simple humane pity for the protagonist), descriptions of surroundings, moments of suspense, and other adornments, not all of which complement the others well, but rather create a deadweight too great for the main problem to salvage the whole. There is a striking mismatch between the underlying thought process and the presented narrative."[4]

However, Zgorzelski attempts an analysis of *Return from the Stars* as an objectively existing work. He makes a valid remark that "after the writing process is done, the text functions as a separate entity with a logic of its own, independent and oftentimes varying from the extratextual authorial intent."[5] In the opinion of the scholar, Szpakowska's argument boils down to the fact that *Return from the Stars* is a novel and not a philosophical work, yet just the first-person narrative indicates the subject—the astronaut's reaction to the world he finds himself in, not the world itself. Because of its subjective presentation, the world acquires human traits; rather than a dystopia (which remains somewhere in the background), it is a psychological novel. Thus the scholar sums up Lem's self-critique and Szpakowska's critique:

> "Hence, the author's objection pointed at himself that the novel in question neither substantiates his thesis nor provides an argument against bioamelioration, is as relevant as, let us assume, a spaceship engineer's objections that the work does not explain the propulsion systems of the Prometheus, Hal Bregg's space vessel. With reference to the assessment of *Return from the Stars* by Szpakowska, perhaps a reminder is in order that the contemporary semantic studies of aesthetic value attempt to connect it with the *number* of meanings conveyed by the text, but do not mention anything regarding the philosophical or sociological "scale" of the problem the text deals with."[6]

We can include in these deliberations Andrzej Stoff's *Dialog interpretacyjny na temat „Powrotu z gwiazd"* (*An Interpretative Dialogue about "Return from the Stars"*). Its author remarks that the literary character of this novel is more prominent than that of an essay, unlike in other works by Lem. It is

[2] Cf. S. Lem, *Fantastyka i futurologia*, vol. 1, Kraków 2003, p. 303.
[3] M. Szpakowska, *Dyskusje ze Stanisławem Lemem*, Warszawa 1996, p. 85.
[4] Ibidem, p. 86.
[5] A. Zgorzelski, *O ucieczce Lema — z żalem*, Teksty, 1, 1973, p. 94.
[6] Ibidem, pp. 99–100.

primarily a story of an individual lost in a strange world, left on their own. Any interpretative tropes characteristic of dystopian novels pursued by Stoff, namely a critique of a totalitarian regime and exposure of liberalism, can be found in the subtle implied imagery presented, it would seem, incidentally along the main plotline.[7] Therefore, it is not the structure and functioning of the shown world, but how the main character *is being* in it; his attempts to find his way around it are the main problem here. It could even be proposed, following Andrzej Zgorzelski's reasoning, that in *Return from the Stars* the aspects of a psychological novel are more emphasised than those characteristic of science fiction. The protagonist's internal life, experiences, ideas, and sensations are of key importance here, whereas the predictions as to the world and society of the future serve mainly to reflect the protagonist's Self expressed through inner monologue. This characteristic of the work is vital for the subject matter; first-person narrative and a classic romance story allow for looking into the sphere of corporeality in the text. Żaneta Nalewajk writes that modernist literature employed its tools to create a type of hero for whom not only the external, but also the internal world is a mystery, something undefined and multi-interpretative, making the body an integral part in the study of the subject:

> "With a breakdown of the stable image of reality, which succumbing to entropy became its own antithesis, modernist literature protagonists are impelled to search for an identity. They realise the problems with corporeality and that Otherness and Strangeness need not necessarily pertain solely to the external. Faced with the remorseless potentiality of events, the modernist subject, struggling with their labile Self, discovers an omnipotence within, and confronts with the dialectic of what they may consider their own and what goes beyond them, something seeming universal, somewhat untamed, existing within them, always threatening to prove destructive."[8]

This thesis may be applied in the case of Lem's *Return from the Stars* as well. It begins where science fiction usually end as it deals with the return home after an intergalactic journey. Lem presents in his novel the consequences of an Einsteinian time paradox; whereas the main character Hal Bregg aged only a few years, 127 years passed on Earth. This makes for an interesting thought experiment. The home planet becomes an alien one, and Earthlings, despite being humans, become aliens from the astronaut's perspective. The man is therefore placed outside of the narrative of his own life and incorporated into that of others, people of a different age who have nothing in common with him. The main motif of the novel thus corresponds

[7] Vid. A. Stoff, Dialog interpretacyjny na temat "Powrotu z gwiazd," Postsriptum, 1, 2006.

[8] Ż. Nalewajk, *W stronę perpektywizmu. Problematyka cielesności w prozie Brunona Schulza i Witolda Gombrowicza,* Gdańsk 2010, p. 43.

to Charles Taylor's philosophy of the subject. According to the thinker, subjectivity is polyphonic in nature and self-definition is possible only in a common social space through a broadly defined dialogue with Others.[9] Paul Ricoeur arrives at similar conclusions. In his view, the subject's life narrative is effectuated with the participation of other people, with whom it is connected and whose own life narration it is part of.[10] It is precisely this opposition between an individual and a community within the text that is the source of numerous meanings, including those somatic in nature. Jerzy Jarzębski describes this leitmotif of the novel as follows:

> "The situation in the novel, a situation of an individual expulsed from a community and detachment with their own society, disconnects said individual from the set of habits, inertial behaviours and values taken for granted in the given civilisation, all of which normally allows them to function them somehow, without having to define their fundamentals at every step. Indeed, such a situation excludes any inertia and conduces to a very general reflection about the meaningfulness of existence—and more so, about humanness."[11]

What is the society on the future Earth like, then? It is egalitarian, anthill-like, artificial, and focused solely on consumption and entertainment. Their most important value is a universal and fair welfare. After birth, humans undergo betrization (a neologism rightly evoking associations with castration), which erases from the patient all atavistic urges, negative emotions, and the capacity to take risks.

The opening part of the novel is a reminder of the protagonist's alienation, invoked exactly through touch. When saying farewell to the manager of Adapt (an institution providing care for returning astronauts) before his flight, Bregg says, "I didn't crush his fingers,"[12] which emphasises the difference in the physicality between a human from the past and those living currently. He has to be careful about his motions, though strength is not the only thing that makes him stand out. Bregg also looks differently: he is much taller and stouter than a typical man of the future. The scene on-board the ship underlines just how the main character is an Other, making his fellow uncomfortable: "Their dumbfoundedness did not concern me much, although I realized immediately that there was not an iota of admiration in it."[13] The protagonist feels the disconnection between his own body and the world of tomorrow, and at one point confesses that he is "feeling the weight of [his] own body, its unnecessary size."[14] A vital part of the story is when

[9] Ch. Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity,* Harvard 1989.
[10] P. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, Chicago 1992.
[11] J. Jarzębski, *Trudny powrót z gwiazd*, in: S. Lem, *Powrót z gwiazd*, Kraków 1999, p. 272.
[12] S. Lem, *Powrót z gwiazd,* Kraków 1999, p. 5.
[13] Ibidem, p. 7.
[14] Ibidem, p. 96.

the main character is lost at a station. The station becomes another symbol of the man's alienation and separation from the world he arrived to, reiterates his transitional status. When Bregg navigates the corridors of the futuristic building all alone, without the assistance of a guide, the reader can see the new world through his eyes. A labyrinth, it illustrates just how he is lost in this new reality, wandering among the mosaic of nature and artificiality. It is being noticeably deconstructed; the protagonist watches the constantly changing structure of the station, the whole building repeatedly disintegrates and transfigures into something else, preventing the narrator from finding his footing in the world or discovering it, because it is ceaselessly undergoing change. He describes it in the following way:

> "It was hard to rest the eye on anything that was not in motion, because the architecture on all sides appeared to consist in motion alone, in change, and even what I had initially taken to be a vaulted ceiling were only overhanging tiers, tiers that now gave way to other, higher tiers and levels."[15]

The protagonist makes a horrifying observation that from the outside, the station looks like a mountain. In another noteworthy scene, the main character ends up in something resembling a photo booth, in which he accidentally takes a three-dimensional photograph of himself. The moving artificial face symbolises the dissipated identity of the hero, and the disappearing distinction between the artificial and the natural in the world of the future. Proof to that are also the outfits of the people, which appear to wholly integrate with the human body. For example, when the protagonists bumps into a passer-by, the latter's fur 'collapses' but later fills out when he gets up. Some other woman's clothes are made out of a translucent fabric in which she appears naked to the protagonist. What is significant about the outfits are metal elements—women wear metallic film over their eyes, and whole articles of clothing are often made out of metal. Everything about them is shining and bright. Bregg encounters a couple and describes them as follows:

> "In front of me stood a man in something fluffy like fur, which, when touched by light, opalesced like metal. He supported by the arm a woman in scarlet. What she had on was all in large eyes, peacock eyes, and the eyes blinked. It was no illusion—the eyes on her dress actually opened and closed."[16]

The outfit becomes therefore an extension of the body, imitating its motion, and develops some form of independence. In a way, the body itself becomes a canvass to be filled with an array of colours and embellishments. Clothes

[15] Ibidem, p. 12.
[16] Ibidem, p. 11.

also serve to mask the wearer. The primary concern of the future society is to showcase the external and artificial, completely ignoring the natural human beauty and internal traits. Writing about the phenomenology of a mask, Gaston Bachelard remarks that its basis is found in the desire to transform oneself and acquire a new future. People do not only want to impose their will on their own faces, but also alter it and have a new one.[17] Worth mentioning in this context is the transience and disposability of every outfit; Nais just tears her clothes off and throws them away. It signifies the indeterminateness and fluctuation of the identity of the people in this age, who constantly hide their true Selves and want to constantly change it, wear a new mask. Katarzyna Bocian describes the society in the novel accurately as masquerade properties: "Bodies become pictures, ephemeral and shifting, and this ephemerality or flimsiness now becomes the defining characteristic of the world [...]."[18] Another important aspect of the perception of an ideal body concerns a terrible fear of old age and its manifestation: wrinkles and white hair. Any imperfections are masked with hormone therapies. White hair implicates a social stigma and rejection; doctor Juffon compares it to leprosy. Bregg realises that he did not see any elderly people around. Significantly, the two old men he does meet are scientists: Juffon specialises in cosmic medicine, and Roemer is a mathematician (the actress Aen calls him "a horrible old man"). Thus, the main category in the presented world is corporeality, both as a property and a means of aestheticization. The body must be fully adjusted to the current fashion and beauty standards. *Viva activa* definitely outweighs vita contemplativa. Andrzej Stoff points to the lack of art in the world created by Lem. There exist only 'tawdry substitutes,' and everyday life is a "perpetual carnival."[19] Taking in consideration also the fact that entertainment is the highest form of spending time here, it becomes noticeable that the society described by Lem greatly resembles our own contemporary one, which Wolfgang Welsch calls a society of leisure-time and experience:

> "In surface aestheticization the most superficial aesthetic value dominates: pleasure, amusement, and enjoyment without consequence. This animatory trend reaches far beyond the aesthetic enshroudment of individual everyday items—beyond the styling of objects and experience-loaded ambiances. It is increasingly determining the form of our culture as a whole. Experience and entertainment have become the guidelines for culture in recent years. [...] Comparable observations are to be made when one goes from material and social reality over to subjective reality, to the form of individuals' existence.

[17] G. Bachelard, przeł. B. Grzegorzewska, *Figura maski*, in: *Maski*, red. M. Janion, S. Rosiek, Gdańsk 1986, p. 19.

[18] K. Bocian, *Odmienne stany cielesności. Antropologia ciała w polskiej literaturze fantastyczno-naukowej*, Kraków 2009, p. 84.

[19] A. Stoff, *Powieści fantastyczno-naukowe Stanisława Lema*, Warszawa 1983, p. 96.

> Here too there is a superficial and obvious aestheticization, but this too is underlain by a deeper aestheticization. The current aestheticization seems to attain its perfection in individuals. We are experiencing everywhere a styling of body, soul and mind-and whatever else these fine new people might want to have (or acquire for themselves). In beauty salons and fitness centers they pursue the aesthetic perfection of bodies, and in meditation courses and Toscana seminars the aesthetics spiritualization of their souls."[20]

Since the people of tomorrow assign the greatest importance to the artificial, the presentation of characters embodying artificiality itself should be examined. These characters are naturally robots. Bregg describes the automata he meets with body-related vocabulary, such as "stomach,"[21] "transistorized heart,"[22] "long, delicate arms,"[23] or "glass eyes."[24] The landscape itself is described with the help of corporeal categories as well. Moving lifts are compared to "fat on muscle,"[25] and the entrance to a virtual pavilion "resembled a human face, with smoldering eyes for windows, and a huge, distorted mouth, full of teeth, opened to swallow the next helping of jostling people, to the accompaniment of general merriment."[26] A portcullis the protagonist walks under in a park had "bared teeth."[27] In his imagery, Bregg employs equally often comparisons and metaphors related to nature. A corridor he goes in 'flow[s]'[28] and the seats emerging from the wall "grow out [...] in an undeveloped form, like buds."[29] This way of representation signifies the protagonist's longing for naturalness and resistance against the mimetic structure of the world of tomorrow. Jerzy Jarzębski notably points up the role of aesthetic experience in Lem's novel as a unifying factor of its characters with the strangeness of the world they discover,[30] the purest representation of which are robots. They perform dangerous works instead of humans and so they inherit the most human traits—the capacity to act and take risks; Bregg learns that for the past fifty years or so there had existed a total separation between work and life. Marek Pąkciński comments on the grotesqueness of artificial life in Lem's novel:

> "The pessimistic truth of Lem's texts that we can grasp in this interpretative perspective would then be that such a life is somehow illusory, and cannot be placed against deadness (as living matter as opposed to dead one) under

[20] W. Welsch, *Aestheticization Processes: Phenomena, Distinctions and Prospects*, Theory, Culture & Society 13, 1996, pp. 1–24.
[21] Ibidem, p. 64.
[22] Ibidem, p. 23.
[23] Ibidem, p. 53.
[24] Ibidem, p. 174.
[25] Ibidem, p. 46.
[26] Ibidem, p. 107.
[27] Ibidem, p. 46.
[28] Ibidem, p. 26.
[29] Ibidem, p. 22.
[30] J. Jarzębski, *Wszechświat Lema*, Kraków 2003, pp. 205–206.

> a universal logical opposition; rather, it constitutes some artificial (grotesque) animation, which pertains to stage play; acting out life in an environment comprised indeed of elements of life and death."[31]

A perfect example to support this thesis is the scene in which Bregg enters a scrap dump and meets robots awaiting scrapping. He witnesses how the robots beg to be spared, claiming they are new and got there by mistake, and asking the protagonist to touch them. They mock human culture and metaphysics, reducing them to illusions of purely corporeal nature: "And the dough-headed took their acid fermentation for a soul, the stabbing of meat for history, the means of postponing their decay for civilization."[32] What seems most peculiar, though, is that the automata say some form of grotesque litany. What the robots in *Return from the Stars* took over from humans is not restricted to the sphere of agency, but also includes the need to survive, which vanished in the "risk-free" world, and even some simple form of a religious experience. Moreover, in the second volume of *Science Fiction and Futurology*, in the chapter "Robots and humans," Lem makes an observation that the problems of "personalist nature, 'the metaphysics of robots,' meaning a consideration of their ontological status, rights, and morality, are barely touched upon in science fiction literature, if at all."[33] This approach to presenting artificial organisms, with blurred distinction between the artificial and the natural[34], corresponds to the claims of Donna Haraway. In her *Cyborg Manifesto*, she comments on the development of the ontology of the machine:

> "Pre-cybernetic machines could be haunted; there was always the spectre of the ghost in the machine. This dualism structured the dialogue between materialism and idealism that was settled by a dialectical progeny, called spirit or history, according to taste. But basically machines were not self-moving, self-designing, autonomous. They could not achieve man's dream, only mock it. They were not man, an author to himself, but only a caricature of that masculinist reproductive dream. To think they were otherwise was paranoid. Now we are not so sure. Late twentieth-century machines have made thoroughly ambiguous the difference between natural and artificial, mind and body, self-developing and externally designed, and many other distinctions that used to apply to organisms and machines. Our machines are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves frighteningly inert."[35]

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[31] M. Pąkciński, *Ciało, płeć i wstyd komunisty: na marginesie fantastycznonaukowych powieści utopijnych Stanisława Lema z lat pięćdziesiątych XX w.*, Napis. Pismo poświęcone literaturze okolicznościowej i użytkowej, 18, 2012, p. 249.

[32] S. Lem, *Return from the Stars,* op. cit., p. 149.

[33] S. Lem, *Fantastyka i futurologia*, t. 2, Kraków 2003, p. 62.

[34] The artificial-natural opposition is one of the basic problems of Lem's work, and of course only mentioned in *Return from Stars*.

[35] D. Haraway, *A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century, in: Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, Routledge, 1991, pp. 149–181.

Another type of artificial beings in the novel are moving mannequins and holograms, so similar to real people that Bregg actually confuses them for humans:

> "Several times I mistook the figures moving within for people. They were puppets, for advertising, performing a single action over and over again. For a while I watched one—a doll almost as large as myself, a caricature with puffed-out cheeks, playing a flute. It did this so well that I had the impulse to call out to it."[36]

Lem thus understands the mannequin as a caricature of a human, who turned from a person into an object. The repetitiveness of one and the same action reflects the mindless and superficial existence of the human of the future.

The plot which became a target of criticism for *Return from the Stars* should also be considered—the romance plot. It is twofold: purely corporeal on the one hand, and spiritual on the other. The former is characteristic of Hal's romance with Aen, who is impressed by the fact that he is not betrizated, his capacity for aggression, and his primal urges. He is aware of all this and calls himself a "savage." Andrzej Stoff remarks that Bregg is indeed a representation of a stock character of a savage: "In literary tradition, a savage personifies value; his naturalness stands in contraposition to the artificiality of culture, his instinct to nurture, his heart to reason, and truth to deceit."[37] Aen is a symbol of the artificial world Bregg returns to. She is an actress of the real, a three-dimensional television of the future. The peculiar depiction of a sexual intercourse makes it sound as if the man forces himself to do it: he describes the woman as "painfully beautiful, terribly alien," and the pleasure is "unbearable." He feels that one of them is "false."[38] The protagonists cannot accept the fake culture and the illusory society the actress represents. His body, which comes in an intimate contact with the artificial, constitutes a corpus delicti and is "a source of suffering."[39] Bregg's second romantic involvement is with Eri, of whom he thinks in terms related to nature:

> "[She] did not have pretty eyes or lips, or unusual hair; she had nothing unusual. She was in her entirety unusual. With one like her, carrying a tent on her back, I could cross the Rockies twice, I thought. Why mountains, exactly? I didn't know. She brought to mind nights spent in pine forests, the labor of scaling a cliff, the seashore, where there is nothing but the sand and the waves. Was this only because she wore no lipstick? I felt her smile, felt it across the table, even when she was not smiling at all."[40]

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[36] S. Lem, *Return from the Stars,* op. cit., p. 117.
[37] A. Stoff, *Powieści fantastyczno-naukowe Stanisława Lema*, op. cit, p. 99.
[38] S. Lem, *Return from the Stars*, op. cit., p. 117.
[39] This perception of the body is discussed by Żaneta Nalewajk, in: idem, op. cit., Gdańsk 2010.
[40] S. Lem, *Return from the Stars*, op. cit., p. 142.

The girl's natural self is what helps Bregg find his own identity. She reminds him of images of nature that the man stands alone in, a nature unsullied by human civilisation. It is precisely Eri who brings Bregg back to the world. When the desperate Bregg is on the brink of breaking, she saves him from his demise and grants him her love, something extinct in this world.

In *Return from the Stars*, the body is also imagined as part of the universe. Bocian describes the connection between the characters' corporeality and the cosmos as follows:

> "The cosmos is a being, just like humans inhabiting it. The characters seek community with the cosmic. The most recent fantasy does employ a distinction between terrestrial and extraterrestrial. The image of Earth as a tamed, familiar world, a planet belonging to mankind, from which space vessels are launched to conquest and explore, vanishes forever. Space seems to be perceived the same way as nature in romanticism: an entity permeated by a spirit, imbued with a mystic force, influencing humans (and other characters, not necessarily human). Its power and mystery will forever remain undiscovered, and the power it radiates seems to be on a whole different level than that of humans."[41]

His time among the stars is a source of traumatic memories for Bregg, who recounts multiple times the constant danger space posed. The insignificance of a human compared with the universe is symbolised by Bregg's changes in size. After returning to Earth, he gets taller, which turns out to be the result of the expansion of his intervertebral disks. In the cosmos, human life is subject to the randomness and harshness of an endless space. As the protagonist says: "A man is a bubble of fluid. All it takes is a defocalized drive or a demagnetized field, vibrations are set up, and in an instant the blood coagulates."[42]

Bregg reminisces that all that was left of his friends who died in space was a "pinch of dust,"[43] and that "Venturi ceased to exist in maybe five seconds,"[44] emphasising the meaningless of a human when confronted with the universe. Interestingly, the tests the protagonist had to undergo before the flight, mirror the unforgiving trials he would be subjected to after leaving his home planet. The first test, the Ghost Palace, consists in locking a human "inside a small container, cut off completely from the world."[45] The enclosure leads to hallucinations and blurring of boundaries of one's own body: "[The body] began to assume an independence, first in spasms of individual

[41] K. Bocian, *Odmienne stany cielesności,* op. cit., p. 150.
[42] S. Lem, A. Stoff op. cit., p. 76.
[43] Ibidem, p. 199.
[44] Ibidem, p. 200.
[45] Ibidem, p. 228.

muscles, then, after a tingling and a numbness, contractions, and finally movements, while I watched, amazed ..."[46]

Thus, space deprives the human of his body and control. The second test, called the Wringer, affirms the power of the universe, making the body experience rapid acceleration and force. The third test, the Coronation, consists in leaving the astronaut on Earth's orbit for an indefinite time. It reflects how lonely and helpless a human is in the eternal and mighty universe. Bregg describes it as: "... the never-ending fall, the stars between the useless, dangling legs, the futility, the pointlessness of arms, mouth, gestures, of movement and no movement, in the suit an earsplitting scream, the wretches howled, enough."[47]

It should be noted that Bregg's body itself is connected with the traumatic reminiscence of space, in the form of a scar on his chest. Eri's touch jogs his memory; he says that "[t]he scar stood out under the warmth of her fingers—as if returning to life." It is the woman's love that finally allows the man to open in and release the distressing memories. The scar was formed when Bregg's space suit malfunctioned during an attempt to save Thomas. His travel companion dies, however, making the scar a reminder of the frailty of life in the merciless conditions in space.

The ending of the novel should also be mentioned. The man travels to the mountains, to his childhood house. Watching the sunrise, he feels a transformation occurring within him, which he recounts as follows:

> "And all at once, in my immobility, something began to happen; formless shadows around me—or within me?—shifted, receded, altered in proportions. I was so preoccupied with this that for a moment it was as if I had lost my vision, and when I regained it, everything was different."[48]

The protagonist of Lem's novel eventually finds his identity. He makes peace with the fact that he is different and thus accepts the world he is supposed to live in. What is important is that it takes place in the mountains; therefore, the man finds his Self in nature unaffected by the artificiality of the world of the future. In conclusion, the presentation of the body in Lem's work calls into question the boundaries of the artificial and the natural, and constitutes a reflection of human mimetic efforts, a dream of having creative power. In the façade world of tomorrow, it is also a reminder for humans of their connection with nature; the body of the protagonist allows him to perform a sexual act and have an aesthetic experience, which consequently lead him to the discovery of his own Self. The human corporeality is finally presented against the universe, as its integral though frail element.

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[46] Ibidem, p. 230.
[47] Ibidem, p. 234.
[48] Ibidem, p. 267.

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