

## REVIEW ARTICLE

### THE B-EFFECT, OR: HOW TO DO LITERARY CRITICISM WITH A NUCLEAR POWER-PLANT

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#### ABSTRACT

The essay, in the process of making its meta-critical point, reviews the collection Co-memorative essays on Herman Melville's 'Bartleby the scrivener' edited by Janusz Semrau (2009). The collection was published almost simultaneously with the new Polish translation of Melville's story, published as a companion volume with Gilles Deleuze's and Giorgio Agamben's pertinent essays (Melville 2009). There follows a wave of interest among Polish critics, which amounts to a new, local Bartleby industry (Czapliński 2009; Jankowicz 2009; Kapela 2010). This review is inspired by one important example, a lecture delivered on March 24th, at the Department of Polish Studies of Poznań's Adam Mickiewicz University, in which one of the preeminent Polish literary critics presented the 'melancholic vampire', the predatory writer, the walking death that lingers, does not want to go, stalks, and sucks out the life of his friends and admirers. Although the speech was primarily about Arthur Miller, Bartleby loomed (stalked) behind, until he surfaced, with a reference to the new Polish translation.

*"This new law-table do I put over you, O my  
brothers: Become hard!"*

The Hammer Speaks  
(Nietzsche 1967a: 112)

Since every industry relies on physical effects, there is obviously a *perverse core* (Žižek 2003) in every artificial, premeditated, cultural, written, expressible, intentional, comprehensible design: the incomprehensible core which does not belong to the design, but makes it possible. This core is nature, described in terms of effects, or in terms of a God ruling by *fiat* rather than *law* (Bensaude-Vincent and Newman 2007: 3; Kuhn 2009: 112). The Bartleby Industry (Semrau 2009b: 8), relies on the B-effect, aptly summarized by Bieńczyk (2010) as a lethal "force" that contaminates literary critics, and threatens to suck out their

life completely. With the evocative reference to contamination and force, Bińczyk described the vampire as a perverse core of writing. He did not follow an industrial path, however, the path of nuclear physics, which clearly defines the exceptionality of Bartleby Industry, an industry based on the portent of our very existence and the immense powers (and potential energy) inherent in it.

The B-effect is a side-effect of the potentiality of non-symbolic (dead) voice to produce subjectivity and meaning. Out of nothing (static no-I-se), there emerge thoughts. The effect occurs when the potentiality becomes visible as a singularity. The effect consists in a powerful and virulent tendency of the singularity to attract signifiers, that become stable meanings and explanations of the potentiality. These signifiers are attracted to the singularity, and subsequently repulsed (emitted) in processes of fusion and fission of signifiers. The B-effect performs a large amount of work necessary to trigger and sustain the fusion and fission processes, and consequently it is often described in terms of force and energy. The effect shares all the qualities of the “atom” feared by anti-nuclear environmentalist activists: it is a source of “a phenomenon unlikely to ever yield an interpretative *consensus gentium*”, even if it is capable of producing “a kaleidoscopic (dis-)order” (Semrau 2009a: 84), a destructive order of magnitude, the *yield* of a nuclear bomb. Anti-nuclear activism, strangely, is akin to critical attempts at stabilizing and ordering phenomena; anti-nuclear activity is not so much pitted against industry, but against the disorderly power at the core of it. The B-effect is, consequently, surrounded by “impenetrable walls” of specialized architecture (tombs, chambers). The effect requires specialized equipment and personnel, whom and which it contaminates, destroys and kills, slowly and secretly; it is, like the “atom”, a modern vampire<sup>1</sup>. The effect, of course, is a source of energy used on an industrial scale, connected to “a vital, purposeful, regular, circulatory, physical exchange” (Semrau 2009a: 85), like a nuclear plant is connected to the national grid. The effect has the paradoxical status of simultaneous ubiquity and isolation, “placed off-limits” (Semrau 2009a: 104), while being “non-particular” or universal, like nuclear effects. In other words, although everything is made of atoms, “the atom” is perceived as a particular, dangerous singularity that must be kept safely in isolation at all times. Finally, and most importantly, there are no atoms, as Nietzsche asserts, calling them the most positively inexistent things that exist (*bestwiderlegten Dingen, die es giebt*):

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<sup>1</sup> Increasing affinity between subjectivity and technology is asserted by modern philosophers of technology, for example in Paul van Dijk’s discussion of Günther Anders’s antiquity of human being (Dijk 2000: 55-57), and in Stefan Breuer’s equation of technology with the world of ideas (Breuer 1992a: 161).

As regards materialistic atomism, it is one of the best-refuted theories that have ever been advanced, and in Europe there is now perhaps no one in the learned world so unscholarly as to attach serious signification to it, except for convenient everyday use (as an abbreviation of the means of expression) – thanks chiefly to the Pole Boscovich: he and the Pole Copernicus have hitherto been the greatest and most successful opponents of ocular evidence. For while Copernicus has persuaded us to believe, contrary to all the senses, that the earth does NOT stand fast, Boscovich has taught us to abjure the belief in the last thing that “stood fast” of the earth – the belief in “substance”, in “matter”, in the earth-residuum, and particle-atom: it is the greatest triumph over the senses that has hitherto been gained on earth. One must, however, go still further, and also declare war, relentless war to the knife, against the “atomistic requirements” which still lead a dangerous after-life in places where one suspects them, like the more celebrated “metaphysical requirements”: one must also above all give the finishing stroke to that other and more portentous atomisms which Christianity has taught best and longest, the SOUL-ATOMISM (Nietzsche [1886] 1997: 26-27).

In other words, atoms are there, but are not pieces of matter, and minds are there, but are not pieces of thought. Nietzsche is evidently contaminated by the B-effect, and consequently tries to equate the atom with nothing. Viewed as a small piece of what we know from everyday experience, the atom becomes an extension of common knowledge, and therefore a useless idea, another strange and superfluous word (a work of literature). In Nietzsche’s terms, atoms may just as well be nothings, mere empty points, places where specific effects occur. In one and the same sentence, Nietzsche extends the argument to the “atom” of spiritual world, i.e. to the subject:

With regard to the superstitions of logicians, I shall never tire of emphasizing a small, terse fact, which is unwillingly recognized by these credulous minds – namely, that a thought comes when “it” wishes, and not when “I” wish; so that it is a PERVERSION of the facts of the case to say that the subject “I” is the condition of the predicate “think”. (...) It was pretty much on the same lines that the older atomism sought, besides the operating “power”, the material particle wherein it resides and out of which it operates – the atom. More rigorous minds, however, learnt at last to get along without this “earth residuum”, and perhaps some day we shall accustom ourselves, even from the logician’s point of view, to get along without the little “one” (to which the worthy old “ego” has refined itself (Nietzsche 1997: 34-35).

Thus, in Nietzsche’s work, the vocabulary of atomic physics is equated with the vocabulary of subjectivity and self-consciousness; in both cases Nietzsche dismisses the idea of a *core* (a microscopic source and cause, the basic, small piece homogenous with the effect) as an effect taken for cause. The B-effect, according to the passage from Nietzsche, has no core. And yet, when treated as a core, it becomes a dangerous core of an industrial process. The effect is based on a residue, which allegedly does not exist, because it constitutes, or causes existence,

but *is not* (non-being) part of it. This e-effect, or Nietzsche's "false causality" ([1889] 1968: 48-50) is "soft", whereas the residue, for which materialism and voluntarism longed, was "hard"; industries (nuclear, electronic, chemical, structural rough and fine) are build at the interface between softness and hardness.

In Semrau's collection, the B-effect contaminates, and has to be isolated, because it turns the hardness of subjectivity into a horrid soft jelly (force) around an empty point. Likewise, the people affected by it (critics) have to be decontaminated, because they can contaminate others: similarly to the life-sucking vampire, the B-effect engenders softness, it destroys the hardness of subjectivity and existence. When not directly affected by softness, however, customers are happy with the effect, because it produces energy. Finally, the effect is everywhere, but not perceived as such; customers see its softness only in one particular chamber, the dark and irradiated nuclear room. Critics, who work within the confines of nuclear architecture (hardness), inform readers about the effect's universality. Affected by the B-effect, critics start to engender softness outside of their plant; they start to contaminate.

Nuclear architecture is the theme of two first essays in the collection: Andrzej Kopcewicz's "Dark rooms and Bartleby" (2009: 13-27), and Joseph Kuhn's "Bartleby in Egypt" (2009: 29-42). Kopcewicz's intertextual reading spans from Emerson's iridescent "chamber" of the over-soul, through the dungeon in Borges's "God's Script", to Paul Auster's *New York trilogy*. Emerson's chamber, like the Wilson chamber in John Ashberry's "Self-portrait in a convex mirror", is an inaccessible space where nuclear reactions become visible (as long as the chamber is closed). The B-effect, compared to the "emblem of God as a circle whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere", is confined and unconfined to a paradoxically limited and unlimited space, the "Tower of Babel as the dark room – read as a parody of the Emersonian temple and Borges' 'The God's Script'", a room paradoxically dark and "suffused with brightness", a paradoxical temple of recognition and of tortures, compared to Robert Burton's terrible, dark "baroque chamber" (the monad) of the "melancholy of writing" (Kopcewicz 2009: 17, 19). The chamber is illuminated by writing (Kopcewicz 2009: 21), but writing, again, is not the effect itself (B-result but not the B-effect). Irradiation of the chamber, apart from scattering (fission) signs (protons, thoughts), is also contaminating the area with fission products (protons), the remnants of the non-being nuclear core. The chamber, however, also stores the fusion products, the concentrated, visible (radiating) centers that were scattered (fission) "everywhere". This fission-fusion chamber found its technical objectification in the reactor chamber of a nuclear power plant, a "sanctum" (Breuer 1992a: 154) surrounded by protesters who are afraid of the effect in its center, apparently not realizing that the effect which is ubiquitous, the stuff of their bodies, the essence of their being. With frequent refer-

ences to prisons (Borges, Burton), Kopcewicz describes the paradoxical chamber (subjectivity), which is everywhere, and whose thick walls are nowhere. Confined to this chamber, the B-effect becomes visible and produces energy.

Joseph Kuhn's essay focuses on the plant's personnel, "the Jacksonian urban stranger" (Kuhn 2009: 29), who is the subject without qualities, a non-descript singularity whose qualities, the "transcribed *modus vivendi*" (Semrau 2009a: 99), do not isolate (mask) the B-effect. The critic, strongly contaminated by the B-effect, is focusing on the paradoxical "doubling point, where an empirical or sociological vision ... is forced to touch the archetypal" (Kuhn 2009: 29), and, forced to touch (hardness), does not touch (softness) the radioactive source. Kuhn, following the language of the text, tries to emulate the B-effect, and soften all the "attempts to decode the stranger linguistically as a kind of script or handwriting", while noticing the imminent, archetypal, conventional hardness of the e-effect's residues: the meaning "crystallizes around what has now become the corpse of Bartleby, just as in Egyptian art a pyramid externalizes the spirit of the body it contains" (Kuhn 2009: 39, 31). The article discusses very interesting comparisons between the definition of Egyptian (symbolic) art in G.W.F. Hegel's *Aesthetics* and Melville's "intuitive Hegelianism in connection with the Egyptian art product" (Kuhn 2009: 32). What in Melville's journals is still an externalization of spirit in "crude materiality", becomes a architecture of "depletions" – the power plant – surrounding the B-effect, and eventually, when the critic is totally contaminated, the imaginary residue of hardness, "a means for Melville of holding on to the absence within the sign as an image" (Kuhn 2009: 32, 35, 39). However, neither Hawthorne's "visual emblem" (in "Wakefield"), nor Poe's "materialized opaque letters of an unreadable book" (in "The Man of the Crowd") set off a strong B-effect. Melville's "architectural form", derived from contemporary fascination with Egyptian hieroglyphs, and covered with "a glaze of meaning" (Kuhn 2009: 42), already bears traces of contamination with the B-effect; the glazed walls have been exposed to tremendous temperatures, radiation waves, and radicals that initiate reactions on the walls of Bartleby's reactor chamber.

Of all the seven contaminated critics in the volume, only two try to save themselves: Marek Paryż in his comparison between literary and medical discourses in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Paryż 2009: 43-56), and Marek Wilczyński, who identifies contamination in Lacanian terms, as "the reader's desire" (Wilczyński 2009: 155). In both cases, what Semrau (2009a: 101) calls after Abraham Maslow "the B-cognition" is treated as a pathological contamination with the B-effect, and cured by means of medical historicization (Paryż) or medical structuralization (Wilczyński, who is actually amputating the contaminated tissue). Paryż describes an interesting correlation between the historical rise of medical science and literature in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the rise to privileged, institutionalized

positions in the social hierarchy of professions (from quack to GP, from hack to MA). Apparently, literature and medical science helped each other by exchanging vocabulary; Paryż provides several interesting examples, but focuses on medical discourse in Melville's story: disease is described, *pace* Foucault and Sontag, as a rich man's description of "unnatural" and unhealthy qualities that he does not like (Paryż 2009: 45). The essay describes examination as reading, diagnosis as writing, case as character, and (presumably) criticism as postmortem, but in "Bartleby" the medical procedure is subverted by Melville's metanarrative reflection: Bartleby's case is the narrator's medical failure (mal-treatment), but only if treated as a scientific search for signifieds (the nuclear core, the B-effect). When narration is understood as an arbitrary creation of signifiers, medical discourse is effectively neutralized, and so is the B-effect. In this meta-literary move, Paryż leaves "Bartleby" as a decontaminated area of protest against institutionalization of literature and medical science.

Written in a more ominous manner, Wilczyński's essay echoes the days when "immediate high amputation was considered the only possible first-aid measure" (Heinlein [1949] 1951: 50) to save a contaminated body. This is the only essay in the collection which identifies the B-effect as a threat, referring to Giles Deleuze's essay about the "ravaging" and "devastating" formula, which Wilczyński also ventures to call a "black hole in discourse" (2009: 170). Wilczyński's essay is built on the Lacanian description of psychosis as an identification of ego with the Other(A), a mode of being which evicts the subject from the symbolic order, and places it in (identifies it with) the Real. This mode is apparently structurally incompatible with the usual I-function that is constructed through infinite chains of signification in an unending quest for satisfaction of the desire of the other(a), evicting the subject from the Imaginary, constituting it as something different (separate from) the Real, and inserting it in the symbolic order. The author of the essay, however, repeatedly asserts that he does not want to psychoanalyze Bartleby. What the author does, implicitly, is that he himself severs Bartleby from the symbolic order, to let the character be as it (he) is, that is as a chain of empty signifiers. This is an amputation; the limb (voice) contaminated by the B-effect is cut off and triumphantly held aloof as "the speech of a psychotic, the dead speech which, although it physically comes from the mouth of a human subject, only pretends to be a normal utterance" (Wilczyński 2009: 166). In this way, the critic divides the text into two joints of meat, the Symbolic and the Imaginary (Wilczyński 2009: 170), and saves the reader who could be exposed to the B-effect. What is left of the operation, is ubiquitous and neutral, the pure potentiality of all space to produce atoms, to fold itself into matter (or into subjectivity). This is not the B-effect, not to mention the e-effect, but pure softness, the dead space, empty or not, as you like it, but totally ejected from the symbolic order:

Most likely, even though he claims not to be choosy he ironically is, and to some utmost degree, too. The adjective “particular”, however, reverberates also with other meanings, such as ‘separate’ or ‘specific’. In that sense, Bartleby is “not particular” at all, for he is unable to *be*, having never constituted himself as an autonomous subject within the symbolic order (Wilczyński 2009: 165).

In this desperate act of amputation, the author tries to cut off something that is neither separate nor specific, and manages to do so. Bartleby’s speech, sawn off from the symbolic order, becomes a scandalous and terrible case of speaking matter (a conclusion rounded off with a reference to Poe’s “Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar”). The B-effect is safely neutralized in the process: terrible as it is, speaking matter is better than speaking nothing.

Quite on the other side of a continuum is the most contaminated essay in the collection, Janusz Semrau’s study of “domestication of Bartleby” (Semrau 2009a: 69-124). Semrau’s is the fullest description of a nuclear power plant, complete with Anti-American protesters at the gates:

Once again, Bartleby does not represent, prostetize or set up any (counter hegemonic or renegade) doctrinaire platform. He has no blatant/blunt missionary political axe to grind, and he is no dormant dissent-in-residence either. Naturalizing him as a *Gespensst des Ideologismus* and specifically *des Anti-Amerikanismus* is a case of seriously flawed heroics and (especially today) it reads simply as opportunistic wishful thinking (Semrau 2009a: 96).

This quotation is accurate in rendering both the emptiness at the core of Bartleby, and the energetic attempts to fill it; it is a description of the B-effect. Importantly, Semrau’s attempts at domesticating Bartleby are conducted with the categories of softness (spectral ghostliness, non-existence) and hardness (corporeality, adherence). Bartleby’s story is described as “discourse of enunciative and affiliative plenum and a corporeal dynamics of towardness, openness, adherence, abidance, and circumambulation”, and the character himself as “post-performative, post-scribal (as well as post-scripted), un-pretentious, ‘anybody’, which is to say as a positively existing in-dividual, a ‘groundling’; in other words still – a salient human being” (Semrau 2009a: 99). This is not a description of the B-effect, but the effect at work: the performative, not to mention situational, self, a paragon of softness, is repeatedly hardened, filled with organic and human substance. The substance, gingerbreads and all, is sucked in by a singularity, a euphemism for black hole: “The thesis advanced by Melville’s story is that a human being is not an entity that can be understood in terms of fixed properties, but is to be appreciated as a spatio-temporal singularity, one that at all times retains a discursive potential and an open assignment of meaning” (Semrau 2009a: 101). Intensiveness of the effect is on a par with the energy it produces. Semrau introduces Turkey and Nippers as protective kit,

with Turkey inserted “kernel-like”, or the heart of the hole, a hole which “defies society understood as a joint stock-company”, which is precisely what the atom does, even though it makes an energy company possible (2009a: 101-103).

Like all fundamental effects, Bartleby is marginalized as inhuman and dangerous, obscure and boring. He is “inevitably, cascadingly, downgraded from a subaltern scrivener to a former hired man to a de-proprated and de-named “silent” man – Bartleby is placed off-limits, becomes a *persona non grata*” (Semrau 2009a: 104). Semrau, however, is astutely sensitive to the question that gives title to his essay, the question of the effect’s efficacy, or rather indispensability, in all human ventures (including business): “He would do nothing in the office: why should he stay there?” (Melville 1984a: 651). The answer proposed in the essay seems to be, because he produces energy, or in other words, triggers vigorous response. Being a site of the B-effect, the powerful character is obviously connected to the national grid of “accessibility, exposability, interaction, transaction, and signification” (Semrau 2009a: 98). For a reader of Melville’s story, on the most basic level, the B-effect consists in the powerful work of writing: “Bartleby scrawls the line like a monographer, grapho-maniac, or hyper-lingual cryptic graffitist” (Semrau 2009a: 107). The effect is an outcome (!) of space’s potentiality to produce attraction and repulsion, to emit and absorb subjectivity: “It is a quality to be finally appreciated as ‘pure’, fallen but redeemed, re-nominalized writing or *prima materia*, writing-*qua*-writing (Semrau 2009a: 108). Semrau accumulates tropes of industry, energy and work, radiation, softness and harness, to show how the ubiquitous B-effect, closed and activated in a reactor chamber, made the story, how it makes stories in general, and how it makes mind and matter:

Accommodated serenely wall-to-wall away from one another, the artisans are single-mindedly, trans-fixedly, ambi-dexterously fabricating (drafting-crafting, knitting-stitching, scribbling-scrumbling) a voluble, a con-fluent material that that spills/scrolls from wind-hole slits in the brick walls to unite in the all-aroundness and exposability of the out-side(s) (Semrau 2009a: 108).

This work, performed in fits of “hand-downed top-to-bottom graffiti torrent, a condensed, extratextual, concretized manifestation of *Ein-bildungs-kraft*”, and “seen literally down-loading, palimpsestually superscripting and circumscribing” (Semrau 2009a: 109), defies society “understood as a joint stock-company” (2009a: 104), because it is the foundation of any society, anything, including joint-stock companies.

Production of something (rather than nothing) is fraught with imminent disaster; the control room (rather than the office) is a stage of unending and unpredictable drama. Tadeusz Rachwał’s essay, a “response to Bartleby” (2009: 57-68), connects the B-effect to mechanical control through a feedback loop of



copying and difference; the epigraph, an encyclopedia entry about scrivener software, suggests that the essay is about computers. The control-room drama, like the *China Syndrom* film, is based on the interface between the “undeliverable”, “authentic” (Rachwał 2009: 62) B-effect, and the dead, mechanical response to it. Before any response is possible, the B-effect must be copied, since “one cannot really respond to it again without a repetition, without copying, without a ‘scrivening’ of sorts” (Rachwał 2009: 57), whereby Rachwał feeds his response mechanism with copied data, gathered not from the effect itself (since it is *not there*), but from sensors, from copiers of energy emission triggered by the effect. In this way, already the supposedly raw data are actually translations of the B-effect into signals intelligible for computers: “Copies of legal documents, in whose production Melville’s *Bartleby* is engaged, are initially handwritten imitations; but a process of their verification, in which *Bartleby* refuses to take part, is in fact a process of translating them into the inauthentic iterability of law” (Rachwał 2009: 58). The effect itself, because it does not belong to the realm of cybernetics (theory of information and control), is the elusive and indefinite part of the system, the element that “seems to be always elsewhere, thus refusing to be repeated, or copied” (Rachwał 2009: 59) into a control signal. There is no authentic contact between the B-effect and its controllers, “as the correspondence will inevitably turn into a dead letter” (Rachwał 2009: 59). The control engineers, thus, are using dead readings, “read as a lack of origin, of the beginning, of history, of a biography, of a written record” (Rachwał 2009: 59); the effect is not one of the regulatory control signals, because it is the perverse *core* that needs to be regulated. In other words, the only vital data, which must be reliable, are by definition unreliable. Signals, treated as “hard” data, are translations of the B-effect, which is unavoidably “soft”, which does not belong to the system:

If, as Ferdinand de Saussure famously had it, in language there are only differences without positive terms, *Bartleby* is an expression of difference that always situates itself away from the original. Difference is always in a sense inauthentic as it is thinkable only in the context of another presence that assumes the status of the original (Rachwał 2009: 59).

Thus, the foundations of a control system are laid: translation of the B-effect, the only difference positioned “away” from the system, are fed into it (input), and modified by “inauthentic” differences (output), to be fed back (feedback) into the darkest chamber of being, that is back to the outside. The B-effect, because it escapes all “inauthentic” models and copies, is unpredictable, and this is precisely the reason why it must be controlled; otherwise it could be left alone.

Rachwał, like most authors in the collection, observes that the B-effect is based on what, in everyday speech, is called nothing. It is “nowhere to be

found”, questioning “the very idea of the place” (2009: 60), i.e. contaminating it with softness. With this observation, the author concludes that both ends of the feedback loop, the B-effect and the control mechanism, are “inhuman” in the sense proposed by Jean Francois Lyotard: “the technological/capitalist inhuman that desires to confine humanity to rationality and calculation, and the inhuman that stands in opposition to that desire, the disoriented inhuman irreducible to thought or calculation” (Rachwał 2009: 63). Thus, what cannot be calculated is inhuman (Bartleby), what can be calculated is also inhuman (Wall Street), and presumably the thing that calculates is also inhuman (the B-effect). Commenting on this effect, Rachwał focuses on the difficulties in control and the danger of contamination:

Bartleby’s haunting presence in the Wall-Street office is an undelivered message from this ‘no-man’s-land’, a dead letter that cannot be delivered, but one that testifies to there being a space away from the totalising economy of payment and employment which it, as it were, contaminates (Rachwał 2009: 63)

Referring to Nietzsche, the author describes subjectivity in terms of a mere habit of speech, the word *I* being an empty word that “posits the subject behind all its actions” (Rachwał 2009: 65). Melville’s story is subsequently identified as a description of the B-effect, and a design of a power-plant based on this effect, a meeting place between hardness and softness:

Melville’s project in “Bartleby the Scrivener” is a project of grammatical reorientation in which the position of the subject gets destabilized and which, unlike the grammatical subject of a sentence, becomes part of the always changeable and changing reality of “the deed”. (Rachwał 2009: 65)

The deed, with its qualities of changeability and instability, is easily converted to a weapon, or “weaponized” into a bomb. Tadeusz Sławek (2009: 125-153) describes the B-bomb, is the final, most “extreme” manifestation of the B-effect. The bomb design is based on combining the *I* and the *Other* into a super-critical mass that releases energy in an uncontrolled way, spraying signifier into the “excesses of power” (Sławek 2009: 146), dangerous abuses of friendship, or a violent conflict. To trigger this chain reaction, two sub-critical elements must be combined into a single critical word:

On the one hand, we have a promise of **auto**presentation, on the other – rhetorical strategies do everything to mar the clarity of this obligation. What is actually **pre-sented** is bereft of the quality of assurance we would expect from the auto – we receive the “rather” of an individual operating in a world that in an exuberant way rejects the practice of common sense (Sławek 2009: 127).

When auto (Bartleby, singularity, the Other) and presentation (signifiers, Law-ers friendly expectations) get too close together, B-effect releases a violent burst of energy, so that the effect becomes visible through symptoms of irradiation poisoning: “it is the wound of sickness, the enfeeblement of life, a diminishment of ‘I’, that discloses our relatedness with being” (Sławek 2009: 129). As Sławek argues, Bartleby challenges human attempts not only at anesthetization of life, but generally the attempts transforming reality into a semiotic system; Bartleby is the reason why “the rational control over reality gives way to a vision of a world as a mysterious challenge” (2009: 135). This impossibility, discussed in terms of friendship in the essay, shares all the qualities of the war, especially the silence and false communications (camouflage) between adversaries:

Silence is the most dangerous weapon of Bartleby, as it bares the existential tissue of man, opens him/her to inspection, act as a wound, an opening from which a suffering body emerges. Silence, which makes it possible for what is normally hidden under the layers of discourse to surface, does not allow the soothing and camouflaging operations of words, whose ambition is to seal all apertures through which a passionate body could haunt our orderly everyday reality. (Sławek 2009: 136)

Thus, the B-effect becomes a subversive weapon, capable not only of softening the core of subjectivity, but also of disrupting a semantically stabilized system of “everyday reality”. An explosion based on the effect can “haunt”, like nuclear fallout, because “everyday reality” is made of the same stuff as the “passionate body” and can be promptly transformed (irradiated) into the contaminated, dangerous source of the B-effect.

In Italo Calvino’s “Italian Diary” there is a comment about America’s special relation to energy released from atoms:

In some vague way this is an accursed land, so it is natural that it was in this desert that they secretly invented the atomic bomb and continue to manufacture it, thus bringing to life the Indian legend that is unique to this area that here a power capable of destroying the earth was unleashed (Calvino 2004: 103).

Even without a reference to Deleuze and Guattari’s war machines, it is clear that the unleashed power cannot be reduced to purely mechanical and inhuman energy, because mechanical means of engineering are incarnations of human ideas, or are (monistically, homologically) identical with ideas. Such observations were made by several cultural critics, such as Anders and Breuer, mentioned earlier here, or by Lewis Mumford (1966: 278) with his “megamachine”, or Branka Arsić (2007: 109) with her “celibatory machine”. The compatibility of nuclear vocabulary with the criticism of Melville’s novella is not a forced and insincere exercise in metaphor, because, at the level of the basic, childish

question about matter and subjectivity, the same concepts are valid for physics and for literature. The B-effect is but another name to the question of “how is it that there is after all existence and writing – *au fond*, something rather than nothing – a world rather than none” (Semrau 2009a: 112). Bartleby’s dead voice unleashes energy in a similar way as dead matter which, responding to “questions” asked by physicists, starts to shine brighter than a thousand suns.

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