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Note on Transliteration and Translations

Throughout this book, I follow the Library of Congress system of transliteration. However, for the proper names of the New York Group poets that appear in this book, I use the form the poets adopted in their country of residence (for instance, Tarnawsky instead of Tarnavs′kyi). Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from Ukrainian are by Stash Luczkiw.

Introduction

Yuriy Tarnawsky, one of the founding members of the New York Group of Ukrainian poets, is often considered the epitome of avant-garde experimentalism—a radical innovator whose commitment to the new is informed by the cosmopolitan atmosphere of urban America. In 1956, the critic Iurii Lavrinenko promoted the debut of the then twenty-two-year-old "lover of Sartre and poetry without rhyme," hailing his work as the providential "funeral" of what was old and destined to die in the literary practices of the Ukrainian diaspora.[1] Ever since, Tarnawsky has been almost unanimously defined as the "most consistent avant-garde" writer in Ukrainian literature.[2] Bohdan Rubchak underscored Tarnawsky's rigorous "detoxification" of poetic language from its lyrical slag, as well as his rejection of the national element.[3] Bohdan Boychuk placed him at the extreme "negative" left of an ideal poetic spectrum proceeding from the highest degree of linguistic density toward radical lexical-syntactic minimalism.[4] Others highlighted his dry anti-sentimentality and his geometric and "fiercely rational" language, warning readers of the trauma of a possible "aesthetic shock."[5]

Born in 1934 in Turka, southwest of Lviv, Tarnawsky experienced a series of geographical and cultural displacements in his early years: first from his birthplace in Western Ukraine to a displaced persons camp in Southern Germany (via Austria), and later to the United States, where he emigrated in 1952. At the age of eighteen, he settled in Newark, New Jersey, with his father and two siblings and was eager to join the US cultural environment. He enthusiastically engaged with the new trends in Western literature, seeking his models in

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1 Iurii Lavrinenko, "Povstannia proty zmory," *Ukraïns'ka literaturna hazeta*, no. 9 (1956): 1–8.

2 Ihor Kotyk, *Ekzystentsiinyi vymir liudyny v poezii Iuriia Tarnavs'koho* (Lviv: Institut Ukraïnoznavstva NAN Ukraïny, 2009); Anna Bila, *Ukraïns'kyi literaturnyi avangard: poshuky, styl'ovi napriamky* (Kyiv: Smoloskyp, 2006), 370.

3 Bohdan Rubchak, "Poeziia antypoeziï: Zahal'ni obrysy poezii Iuriia Tarnavs'koho," *Suchasnist'*, no. 4 (1968): 44–55.

4 Bohdan Boichuk, "Dekil'ka dumok pro N'iu-Iorks'ku hrupu i dekil'ka zadnikh dumok," *Suchasnist'*, no. 1 (1979): 20–33.

5 Natalia Kolesnichenko-Bratun', "Poetychna triada N'iu Iorks'koï hrupy," *Dzvin* 1 (1993): 131–35; Ihor Rymaruk, "Posol do modernoho svitovoho konhresu," *Berezyl*, no. 5–6 (1993): 12–13; Mykhailo Moskalenko, "Slovo ta obraz Iuriia Tarnavs'koho," in *Bez nichoho*, by Iurii Tarnavs'kyi (Kyiv: Dnipro, 1991), 5–14.

existentialism, surrealism, and the French poet Arthur Rimbaud. If the "sense of self as a poet" of an émigré writer like Ievhen Malaniuk "is born of the experience of defeat and disillusionment,"[6] then Tarnawsky should be viewed as the product of cultural displacement, with its inevitable sense of a new beginning and self-(re)invention.

The notion that Tarnawsky's literary experience developed at a particular moment in history—at the "coming of age of modernity," to use Theodor Adorno's phrase—and in specific geographical loci is crucial to a proper understanding of his style and evolution. He first encountered existentialism in Germany, whereas New York—particularly the New York art world, with its aesthetic provocations—gave him direct access to the Western avant-garde. The originality of his poetic idiom owes as much to the displacements of his early life as to the sense of a new beginning and self-(re)invention that was their legacy.

This book offers a thorough study of Yuriy Tarnawsky's early poetry (1956–1971), discussing his poetic output and the literary discourse of the New York Group amid the profound shifts occurring in Western poetry and culture during the 1950s and 1960s. At this time, new forms of expression and a "new consciousness"—the dispersion of the subject, a loosening of symbolic unity, and the textualization of reality—developed at the interstices between modernism and nascent postmodernism. Between the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1970s, the trajectory of Tarnawsky's poetry is marked by profound stylistic and thematic shifts common to the dissolution of the lyrical genre in Western Europe and the United States. From his debut collection, *Zhyttia v misti* (Life in the city, 1956), which depicts the alienation of modern life and the overall loss of a sense of reality without any rhetorical pretense, through his subsequent works, we proceed through the radical suspension of the subject as a grammatical and cognitive agent to the replacement of the referent (external and internal) with a *fictional* reality devoid of historical, moral, and psychological consistency.

Tarnawsky's anti-subjective and anti-representational turn is shared by much of the poetry produced in the second half of the twentieth century, particularly that which grew on the terrain of neo-phenomenological experimentalism, from concepts such as Edmund Husserl's *Lebenswelt* (Lifeworld) and Martin Heidegger's *Dasein* (Existence). More specifically, it is set against the backdrop of several macro-trends that run through the Western literary landscape during the transitional phase between modernism and postmodernism,

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6 George G. Grabowicz, "Shevchenko in the Critical Essays of Ievhen Malaniuk," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 28 (2006): 447.

defined by American scholar Brian McHale as "limit-modernism": the exhaustion of the avant-garde experience and twentieth-century utopian thrusts and the reduction of literature to an ahistorical and non-ideological context where metalinguistic and metaliterary aspects already present in the avant-garde come to the fore.[7]

The transitory nature of Tarnawsky's poetry and the crisis it embodies—a crisis of the lyrical genre and avant-garde procedures—has found little consideration in the critical studies dedicated to this author, which have been more interested in "Ukrainianizing" Tarnawsky than in historicizing his poetic experience in the context of the period, during which, to paraphrase McHale, "modernist poetics begins to hemorrhage, to leak away" into the postmodern.[8]

In her controversial and influential monograph dedicated to the evolution of Ukrainian modernism *Dyskurs modernizmu v ukraïns'kii literaturi* (The discourse of modernism in Ukrainian literature, 1999), Solomiia Pavlychko identifies the fourth and final stage of Ukrainian modernism in the activity of the New York Group and, therefore, of Tarnawsky himself. However, she does not consider the problem of the possible "schismatic," "passing" nature of a movement whose period of maximum activity, the 1960s, coincided with the appearance of the term "postmodernism" in the American cultural debate.[9]

The question of the "shadow zone," in which modernist aesthetics fade into postmodernism, is doubly insidious since it requires a preliminary terminological clarification of two concepts—modernism and postmodernism—which continue to elude clear definitions. Edward Możejko has pointed out that "modernism" takes on at least seven different meanings depending on the cultural tradition in which it is considered.[10] Contemporary critical discourse has ascribed various characteristics to modernism, such as "fragmentation," "the rupture of traditional forms," "discontinuity,"[11] and an excess of "elitism" and "conservatism."[12]

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7 Brian McHale, "Change of Dominant from Modernist to Postmodernist Writing," in *Approaching Postmodernism*, ed. Douwe W. Fokkema and Hans Bertens (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1986), 53–79.

8 Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1987), 12.

9 Solomiia Pavlychko, *Dyskurs modernizmu v ukraïns'kii literaturi* (Kyiv: Lybid', 1999). It is important to note that for Pavlychko there was no postwar modernism in Ukraine other than that of Tarnawsky and the New York Group.

10 Edward Możejko, "Tracing the Modernist Paradigm: Terminologies of Modernism," in *Modernism*, ed. Ástráður Eysteinsson and Vivian Liska (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2007), 11–33.

11 Ástráður Eysteinsson, *The Concept of Modernism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

12 Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977); Andreas Huyssen, "Mapping

Following Możejko, who systematized ideas already expressed by Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane,[13] I will use a characterization of modernism that is as flexible and inclusive as possible: I will understand modernism as an aesthetic "macro-container," the chronological boundaries of which extend from the fin de siècle to World War II, and in which "classicist" (T. S. Eliot, Russian Acmeism, Ukrainian and Polish neoclassicism) and "avant-garde" (futurism, constructivism, surrealism) trends coexist, united by the need to respond to a sense of "cultural crisis."[14]

No less controversial is the chronological successor of modernism, namely postmodernism, whose characterization changes according to the position one intends to assume vis-à-vis modernism (polemical refusal or enthusiastic adherence). American poet David Antin has summed up this matter effectively: "From the Modernism you choose, you get the PostModernism you deserve."[15] In the context of literary criticism, to which I will limit my consideration of the term, "postmodernism" was first employed around the end of the 1950s by the American poet Charles Olson to identify an anti-humanist, anti-rational, and "Heideggerian" current of contemporary poetry, in which language does not serve as an expression of a transcendental I but of the primordial experience of the world. Charles Jencks and Jean-François Lyotard agree in citing the American critic Ihab Hassan as the primary promoter of the term. In *The Dismemberment of Orpheus* (1971), Hassan contrasts the "complacent" humanism of New Criticism with literature which, under the influence of Nietzsche, tends toward epistemological doubt and the "unmaking" of form and language.[16] Hence the distinction is made—indebted to the Nietzschean categories of

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the Postmodern," *New German Critique* 33 (1984): 5–52; Richard Murphy, *Theorizing the Avant-Garde: Modernism, Expressionism and the Problem of Postmodernity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

13 Malcolm Bradbury and James Mc Farlane, eds., *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature 1890–1930* (London: Penguin, 1976).

14 George G. Grabowicz also argues that Ukrainian modernism must be understood "as a concept defining both a period and a style, with a flexible rather than schematic sense of a system of themes." Grabowicz, "Commentary: Exorcising Ukrainian Modernism," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 15 (1991): 281.

15 David Antin, "Modernism and Postmodernism: Approaching the Present in American Poetry," *Boundary 2* 1 (1972): 98–133. For a bibliographic review on the uses of the term "postmodernism," see Wolfgang Welsch, "'Postmoderne'. Genealogie und Bedeutung eines umstrittenen Begriffs," in *"Postmoderne" oder der Kampf um die Zukunft. Die Kontroverse in Wissenschaft, Kunst und Gesellschaft*, ed. Peter Kemper (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1988), 9–36; Hans Bertens, *The Idea of the Postmodern: A History* (London: Routledge, 1995).

16 Charles Jencks, *What is Post-Modernism?* (New York: Academy Editions, 1986); Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

"Apollonian" and "Dionysian"—between a "hieratic and hypotactic" modernism and a "destructive and paratactic" postmodernism, which, according to Hassan, took shape with the exhaustion of the existentialist experience. From existentialism, says Hassan, we arrive at "Aliterature"—silence.[17]

William Spanos, who along with Hassan was the most active promoter of the debate on postmodernism, helped establish the link between postmodernism and Olson's Heideggerian anti-humanism, locating the origin of postmodern literature in French existentialism. According to Spanos, postmodernism throws into crisis the logocentrism of the entire literary tradition culminating with modernism. Its purpose is to recover the individual's position of "being in the world," in order

> to perform a Heideggerian de-struction of the traditional metaphysical frame of reference, that is to accomplish the phenomenological reduction of the spatial perspective by formal violence, thus, like Kierkegaard, leaving the reader *inter esse*, a naked and unaccommodated being-in-the-world, a *Dasein* in the place of origins.[18]

However, as Frank Kermode and Andreas Huyssen have pointed out, there is no doubt that some of the characteristics usually ascribed to postmodernism, such as the absence of a center or the rejection of hierarchies, are also present in modernist discourse, especially in the anarchist negationism of Dadaism. Postmodernism would be, in this sense, a *belated* avant-garde, or avant-garde *à l'américaine*, in reference to the more widespread diffusion of the avant-gardes in continental Europe (France, Italy, Germany) compared to their subsequent position in the English-speaking world.[19]

The most widespread view of postmodernism, however, is one of crisis, or a reworking—a selective intensification of certain aspects of modernist aesthetics. Even critics like Hans Bertens, who are cautious about the possibility of establishing a clear distinction between modernist and postmodernist literary practices, emphasize the greater readiness of modernism in its "classical" period—that is, up to the conventional date of 1945—to admit the existence

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17 Ihab Hassan, *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Towards a Postmodern Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).

18 William Spanos, "Heidegger, Kierkegaard, and the Hermeneutic Circle: Towards a Postmodern Theory of Interpretation as Dis-Closure," *Boundary 2* 4 (1976): 479.

19 Frank Kermode, *Continuities* (New York: Routledge & K. Paul, 1968); Andreas Huyssen, "The Search for Tradition: Avant-Garde and Postmodernism in the 1970s," *New German Critique* 22 (1981): 23–40; Huyssen, *Mapping the Postmodern.*

of a "center" and a "subject": "Modernism . . . in the view of practically all critics still clung to certain centers and tried to avoid the consequences of the radical indeterminacy that Postmodernism accepted."[20]

By offering this critical review, I do not want to direct my analysis toward a sterile sorting of Tarnawsky's works into the modernist, postmodernist, and late modernist fields. I instead aim to highlight how the 1960s, the period of Tarnawsky's most intense activity, represents a moment of transition in which the fundamental guidelines of modernity (the tendency to create all-encompassing visions of the world and to think according to categories of unity and totality in order to hierarchically order events) began to undergo a substantial "reordering" in a new theoretical constellation that prefers multiplicity to unity and replaces the centrality of a subject with language's ability to reveal processes that form reality.

In this study, my framing of Tarnawsky's evolutionary path will therefore go beyond the necessarily simplistic scheme of a linear sequence of phases, contrasting the *modernist* Tarnawsky with the *postmodernist* Tarnawsky. Rather, I prefer the image of a writer who "rethinks" the modernist paradigm in an anti-humanist key as he learns to relate in a different way to the complexity of reality.

Following literary theorist Brian McHale, this turn in Tarnawsky's poetic language is conceptualized in the present work as a "shift of dominants" from humanist (existentialist) questions to an anti-humanist and post-epistemological perspective. McHale describes the "shift of dominants" as such:

> The difference was one of priority, or of *dominance*: in modernist fiction, epistemological questions take priority over ontological ones; in postmodernist fiction, it is the other way around . . . what was present but "backgrounded" in modernism becomes "foregrounded" in postmodernism, and vice-versa, what was "foregrounded" in modernism becomes "backgrounded" in postmodernism.[21]

The dominant element ruling modernist strategies is epistemological, as modernist writing is designed to raise questions such as "How can I interpret this world of which I am a part?" and "What is there to be known?" The transition from modernism to postmodernism is a shift "from problems of knowing to

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20 Hans Bertens, "The Postmodern Weltanschauung and Its Relation to Modernism: An Introductory Survey," in *Approaching Postmodernism*, 46.

21 Brian McHale, "What Was Postmodernism? or, The Last of the Angels," in *The Shock of the Other: Situating Alterities*, ed. Silke Horstkotte and Esther Peeren (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 40.

problems of modes of being."[22] Then, the central questions become: "Which world is this?" and "What is a world?" The preoccupation with ontological questions leads to disbelief in the referential function of symbolic systems.

McHale's distinction between an "epistemological" modernism and an "ontological and post-cognitive" postmodernism can be found earlier in the work of Alan Wilde, who in *Horizons of Assent: Modernism, Postmodernism and the Ironic Imagination* (1981), ascribed to late modernism the renunciation of understanding the world—in particular, the rejection of the early modernist tendency to connect truth with depth—and the "inertial" acknowledgment of the world's fragmentary inconsistency.[23] Tyrus Miller, who dedicated *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction and the Arts* (1999) to the study of the "middle ground" between modernism and postmodernism, placed the beginning of this phase in the 1930s, when typically modernist characteristics, such as the artist's "heroic subjectivity"—the organic convergence of form and content in the symbolic unity of the work, and the belief in an aesthetic or mythological order underlying history—leave room for the "thinning" of a subjectivity deprived of its historical, social, and psychological coordinates ("the minimal positionality of a subject at face with its own extinction").[24]

Raoul Eshelman, a scholar of Russian postmodernism, also referred to the clash between a subjective and an anti-subjective *epistéme*—to a "cognitive" attitude, and not to a set of stylistic peculiarities—that rises from the constellation of theories following the end of modernity. This attitude is characterized by the replacement of dialectical thinking with a-dialectical, the minimization of the subject, what Fredric Jameson called the "weakening of historicity," and the impossibility of arriving at an *other* reality located beyond the region of signifiers.[25] The I abdicates all-encompassing narratives, or what Irina Paperno has

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22 McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, 10.

23 Alan Wilde, *Horizons of Assent: Modernism, Postmodernism and the Ironic Imagination* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981). For a more recent exploration of the afterlife of modernist ideals in the second half of the twentieth century, see Anthony Mellors, *Late Modernist Poetics: From Pound to Prynne* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005).

24 Tyrus Miller, *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction and the Arts between the World Wars* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

25 Raoul Eshelman, *Early Soviet Postmodernism* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1997); Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review* 146 (1984): 53–92. This type of theoretical approach is also shared by Tamara Hundorova, who argued with Bohdan Boychuk about the latter's inability to consider modernism as a "cultural and philosophical concept" and not as a simple question of "style." Hundorova, "Trokhy pro modernizm v Ukraïni ta diad'ka v Kyievi," *Krytyka*, no. 1–2 (2010): 35–39.

called the "aesthetic utopianism" of modernism, and acknowledges that there is no *single* sense that allows for the construction of epistemological alternatives to the chaos of lived experience.[26]

As we shall see, Tarnawsky's literary path traverses these themes: the "death" of the subject, the end of history, and the substitution of the signified with a world of "pure signifiers." In doing so, it offers us a peculiar testimony of the "passing" of modernity through an observation point suspended between two worlds: the West that Tarnawsky ardently desired to be a part of (this need for inclusion definitively revealed with his switch to the English language after 1971), and the "ghetto" of the Ukrainian diaspora, in which he found himself working for at least fifteen years.

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Tarnawsky is not a man contained in a single work. Rather, he has relentlessly and successfully experimented with different genres and styles. Each of the books he has published constitutes a new beginning, an attempt to usher a breath of fresh air into the literary microcosm of the Ukrainian diaspora. "I'm simply suffocating from our artistic air; sometimes it seems to me that even the atom bomb would not be able to shake it—it stinks," confided a twenty-two-year-old Tarnawsky to Bohdan Rubchak, a companion on his literary adventures, in the secret hope that his work and that of the New York Group would one day turn into that "bomb."[27] This book will be the account of the explosion of these two small "atomic bombs"—Tarnawsky and the New York Group—within Ukrainian émigré literature.

Chapter 1 ("The New York Group and Its Meta-Critical Discourse: Between Modernism and the New Avant-Garde") examines the New York Group's emergence and formation while discussing its internal dynamics and meta-critical discourse as they emerged from the correspondence among the members and their literary statements. The New York Group was an ill-defined continuum of loosely associated Ukrainian émigré poets. What began as a friendship between Yuriy Tarnawsky and Bohdan Boychuk, who coined

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26 Irina Paperno and Joan Delaney Grossman, eds., *Creating Life: The Aesthetic Utopia of Russian Modernism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

27 Letter to Bohdan Rubchak, 10 September 1956. Quoted in Maria Rewakowicz, *Literature, Exile, Alterity: The New York Group of Ukrainian Poets* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2014), 21.

the name of the group in December 1958, expanded into a group of writers: namely, Bohdan Boychuk, Yuriy Tarnawsky, Patrytsiia Kylyna, Zhenia Vasylkivska, Emma Andijewska, Bohdan Rubchak, and Vira Vovk. Although the members shared the avoidance of anything resembling a program, they seemed to be headed in the same general direction insofar as they rejected traditional forms of expression and fought against the "backwardness" of Ukrainian poetry. This chapter presents a rethinking of Solomiia Pavlychko's notion of the New York Group as the "fourth stage" of Ukrainian modernism, suggesting that the group's activity and theoretical stances should rather be considered as part of those Western postwar literary movements known as the neo-avant-garde.

The study of the literary and human context in which the activity of the New York Group developed will provide us with the tools necessary to evaluate Tarnawsky's uniqueness with respect to the world of Ukrainian émigrés. Chapter 2 ("Running Barefoot Home and Back: An Introduction to the Life and Poetry of Yuriy Tarnawsky") outlines Tarnawsky's intellectual biography, paying special attention to the cultural interests (particularly existentialism and the visual arts) that are relevant for my further discussion of the poet's oeuvre.

The remaining five chapters address the "shift of dominants" in Tarnawsky's poetic production, distinguishing three phases. The first, existentialist phase corresponds to Tarnawsky's debut collection, *Zhyttia v misti* (1956). I will analyze this phase in the third chapter, "In Sartre's Shadow: *Zhyttia v Misti* and Existentialism," evaluating the role played by the existentialist theme—which Hassan, Spanos, and Hoffmann recognize as the breaking point for the humanist poetics typical of modernism—in the transition from an "epistemological" perspective to one in which the speculative position of the subject undergoes a progressive contraction in an objectifying direction.[28]

The second phase, in which a phenomenological orientation prevails, begins with the collections *Spomyny* (Memories, 1964) and *Bez Espanii* (Without Spain, 1967), which I will address in the fourth chapter, "Rewriting Space: *Idealizovana Biohrafiia* (1964), *Spomyny* (1964), and *Bez Espanii* (1967)." This chapter will highlight the transition from an anthropocentric approach to a descriptive-phenomenological perspective that inherits from *Zhyttia v misti* the tendency to conceive the sensory sphere as the way of manifesting Being.

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28 Hassan, *The Dismemberment of Orpheus*; Spanos, "Heidegger, Kierkegaard"; Gerhard Hoffmann, *From Modernism to Postmodernism: Concepts and Strategies of Postmodern American Fiction* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005).

In these three works, the sensory opening of the subject to external reality determines the deconstruction of the barriers between inside and outside, culminating in the complete dissolution of what is identified with a subject. In this perspective, consciousness and the world emerge *together* and are involved in a relationship in which one cannot exist without the other. That is, the subject is no longer acting in the world or reflecting on it and its laws; instead, the subject becomes one of the objects of which the world is composed. The marginalization of the subject is also reflected in the priority given to the spatial organization of the world. In chapter 4, I will show that there are some structural and conceptual analogies between the constructive principles of avant-garde art (geometrization, superimposition of planes, confusion between the subject and the background) and the way Tarnawsky's poems rewrite the notion of space in an anti-subjective direction.

The radical reshaping of the space/subject relationship also implies a radical questioning of the epistemological status of the external object, no longer conceived as a screen upon which the traditional Self projects its desires. This third phase, which coincides with the collections of the late 1960s *Ankety* (Questionnaires) and *Poeziï pro nishcho* (Poems about nothing) is distinguished by the compaction and reduction of the disordered sensory amalgam of the two previous works. The I capable of experiencing otherness is replaced by an objectual reality which, far from being the screen of human expectations and values, changes into a matter that is impenetrable to the epistemological efforts of an empirical subject. As we will see in chapter 5, "The Path toward Abstraction: *Ankety*," Tarnawsky isolates the material described from the opaque background of empirical reality, breaking it down into its essential characteristics through an abstractive technique of phenomenological-cubist derivation. The sense of existential anxiety in Tarnawsky's poetic debut, with its expressive Self and vital subjectivity, is supplanted by an ascetic bundle of geometrical lines, testifying to a shift of emphasis from the existentialist notion of human freedom to that of structure. The attitude toward poetic matter is cloaked in an aseptic impartiality that excludes the sensory collisions of the previous phase and lays bare those fictional—arbitrary—aspects of reality and language which, according to James McCorkle, represent the heart of postmodernist poetry.[29]

A further step in this process, as chapter 6 ("*Ut Pictura Poesis*: Object, Poetry and Visual Arts after *Ankety*") argues, is the representation of external

29 James McCorkle, "The Inscription of Postmodernism in Poetry," in *International Postmodernism: Theory and Literary Practice*, ed. Hans Bertens and Douwe W. Fokkema (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1997), 43–50.

objects as pictorial artifacts in the 1970 collection *Poeziï pro nishcho*. Drawing on the aesthetic concepts of "ekphrasis" and "iconic poem," I will suggest that in this collection, everyday experience is ossified in an artificial dimension in which, to quote Fredric Jameson's reading of postmodernism, depth is shunned in favor of surface. In this regard, the emphasis on both the visual and fictional qualities of the objects portrayed in the collection allows us to draw a parallel with the concept of the "simulacrum" developed by Jean Baudrillard. Following Baudrillard, Tarnawsky's pictorial poems are defined as simulations ("the production of reality as a series of plausible copies") that engender a new hyperreality supplanting "reality itself, which then becomes irrecoverable."[30] This transition toward forms of meta-representation/hyperreality is revealing, as suggested above, of the postmodern notion of the absence of a signified. One of the topics of postmodernism is, precisely, the textualization of reality. As postmodernism rejects the modernist notions of integrity and depth, reality is seen as textuality with no external referent—a tissue of simulacra with no original. Thus, the poems in the collection explore the problematic relationship between sign, meaning, and referent and conclude that reality is a fictional construct. In this respect, the bulk of Tarnawsky's work from the late 1960s actively engages with the notion of surface, rejecting a mimetic approach to reality.

This attitude of "withdrawal"—of the subject and from reality—is also evident in most of the non-pictorial poems of *Poeziï pro nishcho*, which, at its best, is about paying attention to minor details and the unexpected depths of horror and despair glaring from the surface of everyday objects. Here, Tarnawsky's typical poetic strategy is to take a common object—a glass, a hand, a mouth—and defamiliarize it by rendering visual phenomena in an over-meticulous and ultimately grotesque way. As argued in chapter 7 ("The Poetics of Nothingness and the Death of the Subject"), Tarnawsky engages in a "negative mimesis," focusing on the gaps, holes, and absences constellating everyday reality. His objects—a glass of water caught "in the tight triangle of the night," "with no hands around it"—have a peculiar Heideggerian inflection: they come forth as Beings rather than instruments available for human use. The poems' odd syntactical forms enhance the sense of the displacement of the traditional lyrical subject, which becomes a mere "grammatical function." The world and the self are neither given nor granted: they are created through language at the very time of writing; hence, the collection's obsessive focus on actions "in the making."

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30 Mikhail Epstein, *After the Future: The Paradoxes of Postmodernism and Contemporary Russian Culture* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), 189.

Throughout this book, I will draw typological parallels with literary currents, such as the Nouveau Roman in France or the Neovanguardia in Italy, that were contemporary with Tarnawsky and equally involved, under the influence of Jean-Paul Sartre's discovery of the *opening* of consciousness to the world, in a general weakening of the subject and a questioning of the traditional epistemological status of the object. This will show that there is an actual convergence between Tarnawsky's transition from existentialist to post-existentialist and anti-humanist and the analogous changes taking shape in the European and American conceptual horizon between the end of the 1950s and the early 1970s. A similar operation will be carried out when discussing the New York Group, of which I will highlight some affinities with transitional movements between modernism and postmodernism, such as the new avant-gardes of the 1960s.

A final note should be reserved for the sources I used in my study of Tarnawsky's poetry. This book examines drafts and unpublished poems dating back to the period of 1953–1955 for the first time. The unpublished works are contained in two hardcover notebooks kept in the collection of Columbia University's Rare Book & Manuscript Library dedicated to the New York Group Papers: the first of the two notebooks contains the proofs for printing the debut collection, *Zhyttia v misti*, from whose final version three compositions have been excluded: "Lyst do Pablo Neruda" (Letter to Pablo Neruda), "Bazhannia" (Desire), and "Absurd." The second notebook contains at least fifty compositions, some of which are partially illegible or erased, which the poet has never proposed for publication.

The New York Group collection also contains the correspondence, divided by the recipient, between Tarnawsky and other members of the group (Emma Andijewska, Bohdan Boychuk, Bohdan Rubchak) as well as some prominent personalities of the Ukrainian émigré literary scene (the critics Iurii Lavrinenko and Ivan Koshelivets, the critic and writer Ihor Kostetsky). The same archive also contains the letters of Emma Andijewska, Bohdan Boychuk, and Iurii Lavrinenko. The letters, some of which have already been published by Maria Rewakowicz, will be analyzed as evidence of the dynamics and conflicts within the literary environment of the Ukrainian diaspora in the United States.[31]

This volume is completed by an appendix, in which I present seven unpublished poems, one of which is in English, composed by Tarnawsky between 1954 and 1955.

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31 Rewakowicz, *Literature, Exile, Alterity*.

CHAPTER 1

The New York Group and its Meta-Critical Discourse: Between Modernism and the New Avant-Garde

By the time the young Yuriy Tarnawsky was submitting his poetic debut to print, the center of Ukrainian émigré literature had moved to the Americas. Between 1948 and 1950, following the dismantling of the displaced persons camps throughout West Germany, there was a massive migratory flow of Ukrainians to Latin America, Canada, and the United States.

Before this time, in the period between the two world wars, the literary map of the Ukrainian diaspora was spread across Warsaw, Paris, and Prague, its most productive center. The city of Prague had given its name to the first Ukrainian émigré poetry collective, the Prague School (Praz′ka shkola). The Prague School was founded in the 1920s by Ievhen Malaniuk (1897–1968) and included poets Natalia Livyts′ka-Kholodna (1902–2005), Olena Teliha (1906–1942), Oleksa Stefanovych (1899–1970), Oksana Liaturyns′ka (1902–1970), and Oleh Ol′zhych (1907–1944).[1]

The Prague School—whose geographical name is more a matter of convenience, since some of its members, such as Malaniuk, would later leave Prague for Warsaw—was not characterized by a homogeneous style, nor by a clearly formulated aesthetic program. Its members, however, found themselves sharing, as Mykola Il′nyts′kyi observed, a common "historiosophical orientation" and a "politicization" of poetic discourse.[2] The literature of the Prague School contrasts the miseries of a wounded and imprisoned country with Ukraine's

1 Mykola Il′nyts′kyi, *Ukraïns′ka povoienna emihratsiina poeziia* (Lviv: Institut Ukraïnoznavstva NAN, 1995).

2 Ibid., 75.

glorious past. The Malaniuk of the Prague period is a poet of passionate invectives and apocalyptic visions, formulated in the tones of the "tribune" and the "warrior."[3] Ol'zhych, Liaturyns'ka, and Livyts'ka-Kholodna invoke the utopian restoration of the Kyivan period of Ukrainian history, in a neo-medievalism suspended between the folk tale of *Kniazha emal'* (Princely enamel, 1941) by Oksana Liaturyns'ka and the myth reconstructed with archaeological expertise by Oleh Ol'zhych in *Rin'* (The shore, 1935) and *Vezhi* (The towers, 1940).

In the years immediately following the end of World War II, the geography of non-Soviet Ukrainian literature underwent a new and more radical reconfiguration, moving to the refugee camps of the American occupation zone in Bavaria. This context, in which at least two hundred thousand Ukrainian refugees found themselves living, shaped what George G. Grabowicz has called a phase of "paradoxical literary revival."[4] Between 1946 and 1948, more than 1,200 books were published in various fields of knowledge and dozens of new journals appeared, often destined to be short-lived. Such journals included *Zahrava* (Sunset), *Vezhi* (Towers), *Literaturno-naukovyi Visnyk* (Scientific-Literary Herald), and *Ukraïns'kyi almanakh* (Ukrainian Almanac), among others.[5] Of all the movements and trends that emerged against the background of this lively literary season—a season largely based on the physical and psychological contiguity between the writers and their audience, united by the experience of the refugee camps and the traumas of the war that had just ended—the most stable and long-lasting was undoubtedly MUR (Mystets'kyj ukraïns'kyi rukh, the Ukrainian Artistic Movement). MUR was the last non-Soviet Ukrainian literary group to develop on European soil, and the first émigré cultural movement to experience the abrupt severing of all contact with the motherland.

The acronym recalls the intense cultural season of the 1920s, with its proliferation of groups and organizations such as MARS (Maisternia revoliutsiinoho slova, Workshop of the Revolutionary Word, 1926–1929) or VAPLITE (Vil'na akademiia proletars'koï literatury, Free Academy of Proletarian Literature, 1925–1928). If read as a noun, *mur* means "wall" or "bulwark," effectively defining the role of the peculiar *antemurale civilitatis* that the organization intended to play regarding Ukrainian literature, safeguarding it from Russian-Soviet influence through a detailed program of publications and conferences.

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3 George G. Grabowicz, *Do istoriï ukraïns'koï literatury* (Kyiv: Krytyka, 2003), 406.

4 George G. Grabowicz, "Paradoxical Renaissance Abroad: Ukrainian Émigré Literature 1945–1950," in *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe*, ed. Marcel Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer, vol. 2 (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2006), 413–27.

5 Ibid.