

Article

Andrei Sen-Senkov and the Visual Poetics of the Global Commonplace

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Abstract: This article considers the visual poetics of the prominent contemporary Russian poet and poetry translator Andrei Sen-Senkov whose work is examined through the Deleuzian lens as a prime example of rhizomatic poetry. Senkov's poetics is that of the commonplace: working with cultural clichés, and primarily visual material, it embeds very private concerns within a global matrix, with astounding and often theoretically challenging results.

Keywords: Sen-Senkov A.; Deleuze G.; visual poetry; Magritte R.; rhizome; global poetics

Introduction

In today's globalizing world, questions of poetic sameness and difference have long been in the foreground of literary debates. According to Jacob Edmond whose contribution to these debates *A Common Strangeness* remains unsurpassed for the rigour and sophistication of its approach to the question of global poetics, the old Cold War binaries of "us and them" have mutated into similarly conceived dichotomous models of commonness/strangeness or local/global; "yet they are also embedded in a messy, complex reality of interactions that a dichotomy such as local-or-global elides" (Edmond 2012, p. 3). Edmond's approach is informed by the logic of comparison as encounter and superimposition as an alternative to a single comparative framework of commonness and strangeness. This, no doubt, is an immensely fruitful strategy that carefully bysteps the risk of falling into the trap of single modernity models. At the same time, however, its applications are somewhat limited in that it is just as firmly grounded in the historical moment of the immediate post-Cold War decades to which it is applied and to which the poets he discusses travelled through the Cold War era.

I wish to suggest that in our own historical moment, poetry, while it certainly continues to be shaped by its contents, contexts, and individual transnational encounters, is also increasingly defined by sweeping challenges, the most obvious of which is posed by a competing representational medium. The visual has come to dominate the verbal in the global cultural sphere, pushing local poetic traditions bound by specific languages further and further into the margins. As the Russian poet Aleksandr Skidan noted back in 2007 in his manifesto "Poetry in the Age of Total Communication", "the centre of creative activity has shifted to the visual arts because they ... immediately reflect, and partially coincide with, the new technogenic sphere which, in turn [...] corresponds to the dominant regime of temporality and synthetic perception assigned by the mass media [...], is inscribed into the culture industry and consequently [...] into the machine of capitalism that deterritorializes any identities centred on linguistic competences which it replaces" (Skidan 2007). While poetry is excluded from this sphere, continues Skidan, this lot is nothing new as poetry is fundamentally homeless, placeless. "To hold on to this 'non-place,' this expanding hiatus [...], means to wish the impossible, but perhaps the impossible is the only asset and destiny of the poet" (Skidan 2007).

This essay focuses on a poetic strategy of impossibility that takes on the challenge of the visual sphere by working with it while at the same time embracing the deterritorializing,



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rhizomatic logic of language itself. It does so in ways that are global, local, and homeless all at the same time. Andrei Sen-Senkov who in 2018 was awarded Russia's prestigious Andrei Bely prize for poetry (having been nominated a number of times in the past) is a very interesting case to consider. Despite the well-deserved recognition and prominence he now enjoys, his background could not be more marginal. Born in 1968 in Dushanbe, Andrei Senkov grew up in Soviet Tajikistan, went to medical school in Yaroslavl, and upon graduation settled in Russia, first in Borisoglebsk in Voronezh province, and subsequently in Moscow. A practicing doctor, he writes poetry in his spare time (publishing under the pen-name Sen-Senkov) and keeps this pursuit quite separate from his professional life even though his occupation clearly affects his writing. Author of numerous poetry volumes, he is also an avid translator; his own poetry has been translated into 21 languages to date, arguably more than most other prominent contemporary Russian poets could boast. He worked with other artists on collaborative projects with visual poetry and music. A note on his English-language volume *Anatomical Theater: in a Grip of Strange Thoughts* translated by Ainsley Morse observes that "Sen-Senkov's poetry comes across easily and well in translation . . . Translators and English-language readers alike can delight in the fact that the intuitive logic of his imagination essentially transcends linguistic boundaries" (Sen-Senkov 2013, p. 3). Part of this ease has to do with the fact that Senkov's poems are usually short vignettes, mostly narrated in syntactically uncomplicated, deceptively simple language, as a rule, with no rhythmical patterns, let alone rhymes. His work translates so well also because it hovers on the boundary between the verbal and the visual, sometimes resorting to calligrams, and, on occasion, to visual poetry. Senkov's poetry abides in a very peculiar kind of space where surfaces of familiar objects, familiar names, or familiar, well-documented facts, even clichés, are distorted ever so slightly so that they shrink, eventually morphing into something that can be visualised and yet explodes the habitual optics of linear vision and binary or hierarchical thinking. Doctor Senkov calls this strategy an attempt at healing: "I always liked small things that diminish if you look at them long enough. I got interested in this attempt to heal with the gaze" (Sen-Senkov 2003, p. 88). Mikhail Iampolsky is well-justified in calling this approach "post-conceptualism" which, to him, manifests itself in Senkov's "attention to the medium, rather than to what we usually call 'reality'" (Iampolsky 2003, p. 91). With conceptualists, it is the cultural artefact that becomes the object of aesthetic manipulation. According to Iampolsky's early article, Senkov's understanding of the medium is akin to that of photography which, to a degree, is a violation of reality and as such of necessity deforms and distorts, while allowing us at the same time to observe the structure of distortion and deformation. In other words, it is not the artefact per se but rather its medium, the intermediary realm that becomes the object of scrutiny. This medium is both image and language, and it creates its own space which most certainly could be construed as the impossible non-place of Skidan's manifesto, the only common place to which poetry has been aspiring from the very beginning. More recently, Massimo Maurizio suggests a special term (which he partially derives from Yury Lotman) to describe the kind of poetry Senkov writes: "mediated utterance" or "mediated self-expression" (Maurizio 2019, p. 4). This kind of mediation, according to Maurizio, is necessary in order to overcome the mistrust towards the language of emotional experience. In another recent study of the poet's use of the specifically photographic visual domain, Molly Thomasy Blasing describes his poetry as an attempt at transcending "the representational force of even the most experimental of photographic ways of seeing" (Blasing 2021, p. 240). Blasing also notes that Senkov's poetry often combines the visual language of violence with that of "innocence and childhood play": his poems "blend the rhetoric of war, violence, and abuse with sounds and visions of childhood" (Ibid., p. 234; see also Blasing 2013). The latter are both intimate and shared, and Senkov's overarching strategy, in my view, is often to manipulate immediately recognizable visual clichés in such a way as to draw the reader's attention not so much to the visual medium as to language itself, its representational surface which both conveys sensation and, impossibly, lays itself bare to view.

Clichés, Labyrinths, and Rhizomes

An interesting example of Sen-Senkov's baring the representational surface is the poem titled *Iz Podmoskov'ia s liubov'iu* (*From Moscow Region with Love*):

в пятидесятые лас-вегас привлекал туристов
не только своими казино

в сотне километров
от игровой столицы америки
военные испытывали ядерное оружие

люди сидели на балконах
в барах
лежали у бассейнов
наблюдая за бокалом сухого мартини
как после взрывов
красиво вырастают ядерные грибы
всевозможные подберезовики
подосиновики сыроежки
мухоморы поганки
шампиньоны лисички
размножаются спорами
о многом спорят
наступает дождливая
немного холодная
война

in the fifties las vegas attracted tourists
not only with its casinos

in a hundred kilometers
from the gambling capital of america
the military tested nuclear weapons

people sat on balconies
in bars
lay around by poolsides
watching with a glass of dry martini
nuclear mushrooms grow beautifully
after explosions
all sorts of birch and orange
bolets russulas
fly banes toadstools
button mushrooms chanterelles
multiply by spores
spar and argue about many things
a rainy and slightly cold
war sets in

([Sen-Senkov 2018b](#), p. 30)

The machinery of Senkov's "rainy, slightly cold war" is based on a refusal of binaries and hierarchies. The visual image of Nevada nuclear explosions viewed from the balcony of a Las Vegas hotel morphs into mushrooms that germinate into an autumn in forests near Moscow, familiar to any Russian reader, especially one of his generation whose childhood surely included regular mushroom-hunting trips into the woods. This imagery explodes not the world but rather its habitual structures of meaning and, in a conscious nod to Giles

Deleuze and Félix Guattari, exposing the spatial logic of the language rhizome itself: “споры начинают спорить/*spory nachinaiut sporit*’ /spores begin to spar and argue.” Senkov’s little explosions capture the outlines of virtual worlds hidden in clichés, in places as common as familiar toponyms when the sounds of the Russian language and its gendered grammar suddenly conspire to reveal a peculiarly gendered dot on the visual map where a metro stop used to be.

РАЗНОВИДНОСТЬ ПОЛА: СЕДЬМАЯ ОСТАНОВКА ОТ КОЛЬЦА

ЗВОНОК НА МОБИЛЬНЫЙ:

- ты где сейчас?

- я в Люблино

звучит как влюблено

(не влюблен и не влюблена)

как может быть влюблено

только одиночество голыми руками (Sen-Senkov 2018b, p. 123)

A VARIETY OF GENDER: SEVENTH STOP FROM THE RING

a mobile phone call:

where are you now?

I am in Liublino [v liublino]

sounds like it’s in love [vliublino]

(not he’s in love or she’s in love)

as only loneliness can be in love

with its naked hands

According to Deleuze, a cliché is a sensory-motor image of the thing. We do not perceive the thing or the image in its entirety, we always perceive less of it, we perceive only what we are interested in perceiving, or rather what it is in our interest to perceive, by virtue of our economic interests, ideological beliefs and psychological demands. We therefore normally perceive only clichés. “But, if our sensory-motor schemata jam or break, then a different type of image can appear: a pure optical-sound image, the whole image without metaphor, brings out the thing in itself, literally, in its excess of horror or beauty, in its radical or unjustifiable character, because it no longer has to be justified, for better or for worse . . . ” (Deleuze 1989, p. 20). Deleuze is speaking here in the context of cinema, but the same thinking is clearly at the heart of Senkov’s poetry, where the thing in itself jumps at the reader as the virtual is freed from its clichéd actualisations. Anything can be this thing, including, for example, colour which has its own taste:

девочка спрашивает

а зачем фиолетовый цвет

и сама отвечает знаю зачем

раскрашивать космос

своей беспросветной бесцветностью

он сам как маленький ребенок раздетый до трусов

раздетый потому что вот земляной арбуз

и нужно не испачкать одежду

и нужно счастливо наестся

и нужно провалиться в самую большую ягоду на свете (Sen-Senkov 2018b, p. 73)

a girl is asking
 and why do we need the colour purple
 and answers herself I know why
 to colour the cosmos
 with its impenetrable colourlessness
 it itself is like a little child stripped to his underpants
 stripped because here is the earthen watermelon
 and you don't want to dirty your clothes
 and you want to happily gorge yourself
 and you want to fall into the biggest berry in the world

People are in no privileged position here. A person is also just such a thing, emerging at birth, like a chewed-up “sheet of two-legged pink paper” out of a malfunctioning photocopier:

человек тесно выползает из липкого лабиринта плохо работающего ксерокса
 зажеванной двуногой розовой бумагой на которой напечатаны подлые варианты
 ответа на вопрос **так кого ты больше любишь папу или маму?**

*a human being squeezes himself out of the sticky labyrinth of a poorly operating photocopier in a sheet of chewed-up two-legged pink paper printed on which are treacherous answers to the question **so who do you love more, mummy or daddy?*** (Figure 1) (Sen-Senkov 2010, p. 93)

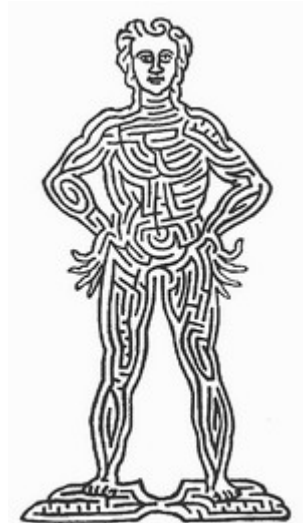


Figure 1. Woodcut from Francesco Segala’s *Libro de labirinti* (Padua, late 1500s), included by Sen-Senkov with the above poem.

Like many other Senkov poems, this one is ekphrastic. Entitled “*Labirint-roddom 1*” [Labyrinth-Maternity Hospital 1], it is part of a series describing a set of early Baroque labyrinthine prints by the Paduan architect and sculptor Francesco Segala. The person who has just completed a journey through the birthing labyrinth is no less labyrinthine, made up of endless folds. In his book on Leibniz and the Baroque, Deleuze points out that etymologically “labyrinth” means “multiple” because it contains many folds: “the multiple is not only what has many parts but also what is folded in many ways.” The Baroque then, according to him, refers not to an essence but rather to an operative function, that of producing folds, unfurling them all the way to infinity: “The Baroque endlessly

produces folds . . . The Baroque trait twists and turns its folds, pushing them to infinity, fold over fold, one upon the other. The Baroque fold unfurls all the way to infinity" (Deleuze 1993, p. 3). Deleuze calls such unfurling series "impossible", which he means to be a relationship distinct from impossibility or contradiction.¹ According to Leibniz, the only thing that does not allow impossible worlds to coexist is the theological hypothesis that God chooses the "best" one among the infinite number of possible worlds. As we enter the modern era then, as Deleuze writes in *Cinema 2: the Time Image*, literature turns not just to language as its own precondition of existence, but also frees the virtual from its actualisations as monadology becomes nomadology (Deleuze 1989, p. 54). Deleuze often cites Borges' "Garden of Forking Paths", a novella in which the book that is also a labyrinth of the Chinese philosopher Ts'ui Pên describes a purely virtual world: "In all fictional works, each time a man is confronted with several alternatives, he chooses one and eliminates the others; in the fiction of Ts'ui Pên, he chooses—simultaneously—all of them" (Borges 1964, p. 26). In Ts'ui Pên's labyrinth, God is no longer the higher Being that chooses the best "compossible" world, but is instead just a Process that goes through all these virtual possibilities and spinning the web of converging and diverging series (Deleuze 1993, p. 60).²

Similarly, Sen-Senkov throws open the doors into a labyrinth whose bifurcations embrace endless virtual possibilities, while belonging to one and the same universe. The visual means of representing the fold that makes this labyrinth are extremely important in his poetry. Consider Sen-Senkov's story of Che Guevara from his 2006 book *Zaostrennyi basketbol'nyi miach* [*A Sharpened Basketball*]. Che Guevara's iconic image has long become a stilted cliché of late postmodernism, and the title of the poem about him, "A Rare Specimen of Che Guevara", directly points to the multiplicity of the impossible versions of his story. But the "specimen" presented here is singled out from the entire series of ideological and media products under the name of Che Guevara not because the biography presented here is different from the rest. The baffling subheading of the poem ("a novel-pin that broke when it touched a Cuban guerrilla newspaper) and its "pin-like" graphic presentation (one word per line) give the reader to understand that this is not so much about an object of reality as it is about its representation that has acquired a life of its own. At the same time, one cannot say that we are dealing exclusively with a cultural artefact: rather, this is a certain virtuality that is not reducible to a limited number of actualisations.

The general rule for reading this text is given in its very first pages:

Эрнесто начал читать с четырех лет. Чуть позже у него появилась любимая игра. Он рвал книжки и перекладывал страницы так, что получалась какая-нибудь новая история. Несколько другой игрой была поэзия: комкая страницы, он превращал стихотворения в бумажные шарики, на которых сдвинутые взрослые строчки становились ему наконец-то понятными. (Sen-Senkov 2006, p. 63)

Ernesto started reading at four years of age. A bit later he started a favourite game. He would tear up books and move pages around so that a new story would result. Poetry was a somewhat different game: he crumpled pages and turned poems into paper balls on which shifting adult lines finally became comprehensible to him.

The poem is prefaced with an epigraph from a song by the Russian rock singer Yegor Letov "Nasekomoe sterpit vse" ["An insect will bear anything"] (and these three words are merged together, as per Ernesto's poetry game) which suggests that the specimen in question is also a kind of a rare beetle that refuses to be pinned down by the "novel." As we read early in the poem, "Argentines borrowed the interjection 'che' from the Guarani people who use it to express practically any emotion (both human and animal) depending on the intonation" (Sen-Senkov 2006, p. 54). Thus the function of the proper name amounts to a gradual depersonalisation of whoever is behind it, in turning it into a hieroglyph filled with all possible meanings that refer the reader to political history,

literature, mythology, medicine, pop-culture, and critical theory. Intonation is all that matters. Thus commonly known facts from Che's life get augmented in the spirit of Latin American magic realism: "Celia, Che's future mother, was born in Venezuela. The country where fish with lungs instead of gills live in Angel Falls. Where only girls get sick, and boys do not drink mother's milk at all. Where men are so handsome that they often get kidnapped by female wild animals" (Sen-Senkov 2006, pp. 56–57). Borges, Guevara's compatriot, professional librarian, and the author of "The Library of Babel", also makes an implicit appearance in the narrative: "Ernesto had a job at the University Library famous of its disappearing and appearing books. No one knew the exact number of volumes. It was the librarians who were busy unsuccessfully counting the books and searching for the universal law of their movement in space" (Sen-Senkov 2006, pp. 69–70). We further learn that "in Mexico, Che works as an allergy doctor at the Institute of Cardiology and studies the impact on the human immune and cardiovascular systems of the beetle *Prosopium follius* that lives between pages of old books" (Sen-Senkov 2006, pp. 85–86).

One of the central episodes of Che's revolutionary adventures tells the story of Che's transcending his own body and his merging with the outside physical space: "They practiced blending in with the sea waves, changing their colour to blue, practiced moving so quietly that dogs would take them for the shadows of their own leads, and they learned a special technique that allowed people to change their faces beyond recognition by using muscles of expression" (Sen-Senkov 2006, p. 90). With this, we finally enter the media space of radio and print where the poem ends abruptly with a graphic diagram of the novel-pin coming into contact with the guerrilla newspaper *El Cubano Libre*:

Большинство
номеров
«Эль
Кубано
Либре»
выходило
с
бумажными
прорезями,
символизирующими
раны
повстанцев

(Sen-Senkov 2006, p. 105)

[the majority of issues of *El Cubano Libre* came out with paper cuts symbolising the wounds of the guerrillas]

The symbolic slots in the newspaper, while being just paper cuts, prefigure Che's own future stigmata inflicted upon him by his captors to imitate his dying in a shoot-out. This brings to mind yet another Deleuze passage, this one from *The Logic of Sense* where the philosopher talks about the French poet Joe Bousquet who was badly wounded in WWI and spent the rest of his days paralysed, in constant pain for which he took opium, and often in the company of surrealists.

Joe Bousquet [. . .] apprehends the wound that he bears deep within his body in its eternal truth as a pure event. To the extent that events are actualized in us, they wait for us and invite us in. They signal us: "My wound existed before me, I was born to embody it." It is a question of attaining this will that the event creates in us; of becoming the quasi-cause of what is produced within us, the Operator; of producing surfaces and linings in which the event is reflected, finds itself again

as incorporeal and manifests in us the neutral splendour which it possesses in itself in its impersonal and pre-individual nature, beyond the general and the particular, the collective and the private. It is a question of becoming a citizen of the world. (Deleuze 1990, p. 148)

Senkov's poetics, if anything, aspires to a mode of representation which is precisely this: intimate but also pre-individual, impersonal, virtual, unactualized, beyond the general and the particular, in other words, truly global because it is in fact homeless. This is achieved in multiple ways the most radical of which are presented in poems where the reader is made to see what is normally given in pure sensation, quite often a sensation of pain.

Feet, They Hurt

In 2018, Sen-Senkov completed a project titled *Nogi, im bol'no* [*Feet, They Hurt*]. Pain is at the centre of this project. To celebrate the 120th anniversary of René Magritte, he wrote twelve ekphrastic poems, each on a drawing of feet by the artist Igor Ulangin. Senkov's poems were then translated into 11 different languages (Albanian, Georgian, English, Italian, Polish, Belarusian, Greek, Latvian, Lithuanian, Bulgarian, and Serbian) in four different scripts. The resulting series is a fascinating exercise in ekphrasis, an original poetic statement, and, last but not least a novel, theoretically significant contribution to global poetry.

That Magritte should hold special significance for Senkov is to be expected. In his famous discussion of *La Trahison des Images* in *This is Not a Pipe*, Michel Foucault makes an interesting comparison between Magritte, Kandinsky, and Klee. The latter two artists worked with the medium, Kandinsky giving up representation and "thingifying" colours and shapes, while Klee wove a new space. Magritte, on the other hand, allowed "the old space of representation to rule, but only at the surface, no more than a polished stone, bearing words and shapes: beneath, nothing" (Foucault 1983, p. 41). Magritte is eminently quotable, his work—for want of a better word—iconic and easily adapted by artists from any place and for any purposes. What Magritte does to the visual image, Senkov does to words, and with very similar effects.

The *Feet* project is, however, more complicated. Ulangin's drawings (which incidentally were completed before the book project was conceived—by his own account, Senkov saw the set on the artist's Facebook page and immediately wanted to write a poem for each picture) enter into a conversation with Magritte's famous series of paintings in which a pair of shoes changes into a pair of feet the shoes are meant to cover (Figure 2). What happens in Magritte, is, par excellence, what Deleuze calls the appearance of the thing in itself as the image foregrounds mechanisms of perception and demonstrates how easily the viewer is led by clichés, readily confusing the image with the reality it both describes and obscures (Figure 3).

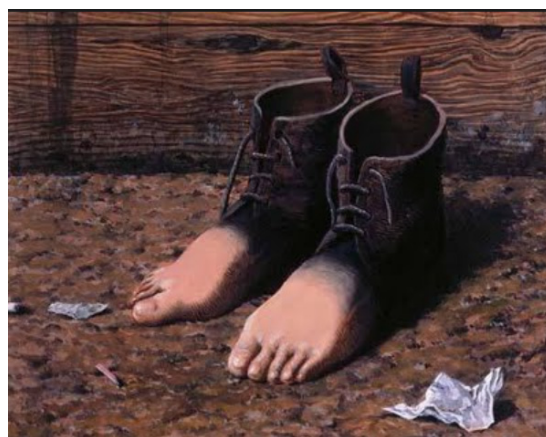


Figure 2. Woodcut from Francesco Segala's *Libro de labirinti* (Padua, late 1500s), included by Sen-Senkov with the above poem.



Figure 3. Woodcut from Francesco Segala's *Libro de labirinti* (Padua, late 1500s), included by Senkov with the above poem.

Ulagin's drawings complicate these inside/outside confluences further by adding new elements to them that suggest a temporal dimension, without, however, telling a proper story. These drawings speak even if it is up to the viewer to read what it is that they say. What Senkov does then is an ekphrasis of the images that in themselves already comment on the original image by Magritte. And in Foucault's view, Magritte's paintings speak too.

This, on the face of it, very much goes along with Lessing's attempt to justify and codify the distinction between the plastic and the verbal modes of art in his *Laocoon* where the former is attached to the privileged or frozen moment extended in space, while the latter can be dramatic and narrative, extended in time. It is Senkov's ekphrastic poems that narrate: each of the poems sets in motion the static image with a story told in the present tense. And yet, the plastic and the verbal are very closely linked; they overlap, puzzle, confuse, and dumbfound. This kind of representational practice already features in *Zaostrennyi basketbol'nyi miach*. There Senkov describes a certain passage from the Egyptian Book of the Dead in which a dead person on his way to heaven on meeting a scarab who pushes two dung balls has to "write a picture" on one of them and to "draw a letter" on the other. "Неспособного это сделать превращают в какой-нибудь еще не существующий иероглиф и сбрасывают вниз" ["Whoever is unable to do this, gets turned into some other, not yet existing hieroglyph and is thrown down"] (Sen-Senkov 2006, p. 111).

What exactly are these "feet" in which the action of poems unfolds? They are neither a thing, nor an image of anything material but rather hieroglyphs of sorts, schematic representations of sensations, of pain or discomfort, a space of pure virtuality—a present that is always a product of a certain past or an as of yet unactualized future. The most poignant of the 12 poems is one representing the passage of time as an act of killing it, with the clock being an instrument of cleaning up the murder scene (Figure 4).

часы вместе со всеми своими стрелками
маленькая фирма по уборке места преступления
чистят

ОТМЫВАЮТ
 ВОССТАНАВЛИВАЮТ
 ВЫНОСЯТ ИЗ НОГ КРАСИВО УПАКОВАННЫЕ ТРУПИКИ ВРЕМЕНИ
 В КОНЦЕ РАБОТЫ
 СЕКУНДНАЯ СТРЕЛКА СТРЕЛЯЕТ У МИНУТНОЙ СИГАРЕТУ
 ЖАДНО ЗАТЯГИВАЕТСЯ
 И ДОКУРИВАЯ
 ВТАПТЫВАЕТ ЕЕ В ГОРЛО
 СВОЕЙ НЕВИДИМОЙ ПЯТКОЙ (Sen-Senkov 2018b, p. 30)

the clock with all its hands
 a small company that cleans up crime scenes
 they clean
 wash out
 restore
 carry nicely packaged little corpses of time out of the feet
 when the work is done
 the second hand bums a cigarette from the minute hand
 takes a deep drag
 and finishing up
 stamps it into the throat
 with its own invisible heel (Sen-Senkov 2018a, p. 31; translation modified)

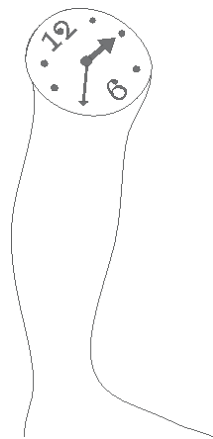


Figure 4. Woodcut from Francesco Segala's *Libro de labirinti* (Padua, late 1500s), included by Sen-Senkov with the above poem.

Little corpses of time are neatly packed up and evacuated from the feet by the clock's hands. The verbs here emulate the movement of the second hand round the dial while the last breath is a drag it takes on a cigarette which is then stamped into the throat in the final second. The alliteration "стрелка стреляет/*strelka streliaet*" [the second hand bums] as well as the semantic suggestiveness of the colloquial term for bumming a cigarette (literally: shoots) add to the overall metaphor. It is, however, unclear whose throat this is—that of the foot whose heel is incidentally also invisible in the picture, or of the second hand itself.

Language once again becomes the place where this very visual, deceptively familiar, and yet utterly staggering scene is taking place. What lies at the centre of this scene, as well as all the other scenes, presented in the poems is pain, abstract, impersonal, and devoid of actualisations.

A different scenario is presented in poem 8 (Figure 5).

нога показывает крылышки
ее слегка трясет
как секунданта протягивающего пистолеты
все это подшерсток события
в котором
ноготок состриженной пули
вылетит в девятнадцатом веке
из нижней конечности
указательного пальца (Sen-Senkov 2018a, p. 95)

this foot is showing its wings
shaking a little
like the second handing over the pistols
this is all just the underwool of an event
in which
the nail of a neatly clipped bullet
in the nineteenth century will fly
out of the lower extremity
of the pointer finger (Sen-Senkov 2018a, p. 96)



Figure 5. Woodcut from Francesco Segala's *Libro de labirinti* (Padua, late 1500s), included by Sen-Senkov with the above poem.

This poem is just as hard to visualise as the previous one, with many intricate folds added to what literally is in the picture—a foot with wings. While in the clock poem,

time is already packaged up in little coffins of past events, here the event of inflicted pain is prefigured; it is virtually real but not yet actualised. This “underwool” of an event—presumably a 19th-century duel—is a certain anticipation that is both a physical trembling and an abstract, visualised extension of this anticipation that gets represented in a sequence of verbal folds that have little to do with material reality. The fingernail of a bullet flying out of the foot of the index finger is nothing but a series of impossible extensions, pointing to what is about to occur without communicating anything whatsoever.

Another poem in the series is even more confounding in its optics (Figure 6).

если смотреть
глазами ноги
на руки
то как в боковом зеркале автомобиля
они ближе чем кажутся
если сбросить скорость и остановится в тихом месте
ноги начнут проникать
в отражения рук
с бижутерией мягких волосков посередине (Sen-Senkov 2018a, p. 56)

if you look
through the foot's eyes
at your hands
it's like in the side mirrors of an automobile
they're closer than they appear
if you slow down and stop somewhere quiet
the feet will start to penetrate
the hands' reflections
with a jeweled cluster of soft little hairs in the middle
(Sen-Senkov 2018a, p. 58, translation modified)

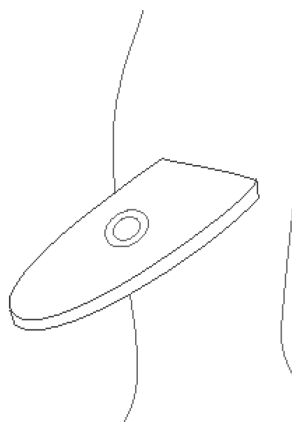


Figure 6. Woodcut from Francesco Segala's *Libro de labirinti* (Padua, late 1500s), included by Sen-Senkov with the above poem.

Mirrors play a significant part in Senkov's poetry. In Lacan's terms, reaching the mirror stage of development is about the non-coincidence of our own internal image of ourselves

with what we see in the mirror. In the above scenario, however, something different seems to occur. As the feet's eyes become mirrors by which the hands are seen and in which they are also reflected, the very process of vision closes in on itself, with the feet penetrating the reflections of the hands, becoming both a sensation (hence the little hairs in the middle) and an object of unhurried contemplation akin to a meditative experience. The astounding thing, however, is that this expressive scenario is taking place entirely within the sphere of schematic ideation. These poems really communicate nothing and yet succeed in schematising pure sensation.

The fact that the poems appear not just in their Russian original but in eleven other languages is in itself a statement of profound significance. As said, the mechanisms and tools of such poetry are indeed easily accessible to translators who each in their own language are able to produce yet another part of the infinite series that can stretch as far as the eye can see and further. This poetry is homeless in the fullest sense of the word—it is homeless because it is rooted in the global common place, in fact, in artefact, in cliché, which is to say, no place at all. No matter in what language we read it, it remains confined to this non-place of visibility, both on the near and the far side of representation.

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Notes

- ¹ “Inpossibles can be called (1) the series that diverge, and that from then on belong to two possible worlds. and (2) monads of which each expresses a world different from the other (Caesar the emperor and Adam the nonsinner). The eventual divergence of series is what allows for the definition of impossibility or the relation of vice-diction” (Deleuze 1993).
- ² See Gilles Deleuze. *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, tr. T. Conley (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 60.

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