

Worlds known from literature or science fiction films have accustomed us to terrifying contacts with the Other; be it through the invasions of extraterrestrial civilizations or the concept of soulless artificial intelligence. When in 1938, the US radio station CBS broadcast the radio play *The War of the Worlds*, based on the eponymous novel by H.G. Wells, panic is said to have broken out among the audience. It turned out, however, that the sounds of the inhabitants fleeing from “aliens” were only a simulation and originated from an archived recording of a plane crash. Thus, the fear of an alien invasion shifted to a fear caused by the power of a new, disembodied form of communication. Could this be how an actual confrontation with an alien life form of life would look in reality? Stanisław Lem goes even further and asks what the story of the Other would sound like and whether we would be able to hear it at all.

If we were to think about the depictions of non-human voices and ways of communication in Lem's work, probably the first work coming to our minds would be *Solaris*. It is a novel about the psyche and love, and above all about the limits of human reason, the apparatus of concepts and senses in an encounter with an alien life form. Arguably, it has become the most recognizable text of the Polish futurologist. The protagonist Solaris featured already in its title, an intelligent entity covering the entire planet with its size (or being an ocean-planet), sends numerous signals to various explorers. These signals, however, despite numerous years of scientific work, remain only incomprehensible aberrations that cause extreme emotions in people. Solaristics, an autonomous field of research in the novel, becomes a re-

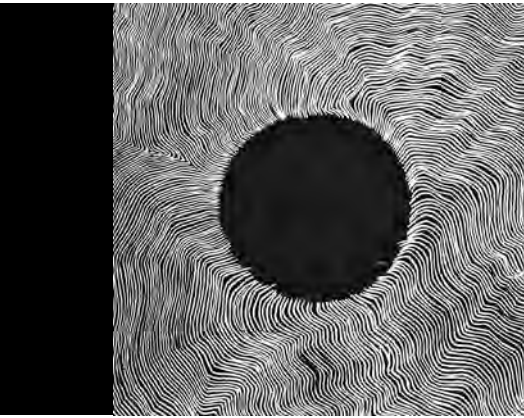
cord of the failure of science in the encounter with the Other and at the same time exposes the limits of humans and their convictions of being unique.

In comparison, the bloodthirsty aliens from Wells' novels, who emulate the violent patterns of behavior known from human history, become easier to digest, since they are more human. Such an anthropomorphic scenario, albeit tempting due to its predictability, is, according to Lem, unlikely. “We can be prepared for surprises, troubles, and dangers we cannot imagine today – but not for the return of demons and monsters from the Middle Ages disguised as technical larvae,” he explains in *Summa Technologiae*. However, Lem does not close the discussion, as *Solaris* leaves the readers with more questions than answers and provokes them to ask even more. For

example, would the *logos* of the rational ocean become clear to humans if Solaris spoke to the characters in Polish or English, and not by means of phantoms and monolithic constructions growing out of its surface? Based on this problem, Lem wrote a lesser-known story in which he actually gave the voice to the Other, creating a space in which the Other can autonomously tell its own story.

*Golem XIV* is constructed as a transcript of the lectures of the eponymous supercomputer, including a foreword and afterword by fictional human scientists. Already at the beginning of the book, Lem justifies the concept of the machine's narrativity, which turns out to be one of its most primal features. It was precisely the ability to create scenarios of potential events, i.e. to predict or rather make stories unfold,





Aleksandra Duma, *How The World Was Saved*,  
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which characterized Golem's military ancestors. The situation in which a computer holds lectures, both about itself and about the human being, is one manifestation of its need to participate in language, to be entangled in communicating and narrativizing reality. In *Golem XIV*, the Other has the answer to probably every question that haunts humanity. It does not seem that there is a communication barrier. Obviously, Golem has no biological body or senses; it is a perfect machine, pure Reason, however, the being's way of expression is consciously adjusted to the human audience. Has the problem of hearing and understanding the Other thus been solved? Quite the opposite. The lecture halls are gradually becoming empty, at the same time, however, attempts to communicate with *Golem* are made

more rarely, and the super-intelligent computer itself is realizing its powerlessness to make inhuman words comprehensible to humans.

The lack of understanding of the Other in Lem's text can be explained by the multitude of differences between the being and humans. Golem is not a person; the style of storytelling, emotions, the individual character as well as the "self" are fluid, resorted to only as a set of useful but interchangeable tools. However, the problem of the dramatically increasing number of differences becomes pale in comparison with language itself, since, paradoxically, it is the root of misunderstanding, as Golem says: "these are my very troubles, when I make attempts and try to use your language. The difficulty is not only, as you see, that you are not be able to ascend my mountain, but also

the fact that I cannot descend all the way to you, for when descending I lose on the way what I was to report."

The meeting of a human being and the Other made possible by the adoption of human language in *Golem XIV* ends in a failure. The compromise of complying with linguistic rules paralyzes both sides, and the medium of communication itself becomes a barrier. Eventually the artificial Reason retires to a higher level of being and becomes silent, leaving behind merely a monumental, mechanical body. In his works, Lem repeatedly provokes us to take up the challenge of hearing the Other, but at the same time warns us about the main problem of humans – "I must tell you that we really have no desire to conquer any cosmos. We want to extend the Earth up to its borders."

