

Gogol and Magritte: Towards Understanding Montage Strategies

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ABSTRACT

This article is aimed at the comparative analysis of the selected short stories of Nikolai Gogol and the paintings of René Magritte, the Belgian artist most often associated with surrealism. The dominant rule governing the works of Magritte and Gogol seems to be the poetics of negation, built, among other things, on emphasizing the lack of an expected value or its replacement with an opposite one. Gogol, whose works had a critical influence on the development of Russian literature, shows in most of his texts the decline of the human being. The exaggerated pictures of the physical degradation of the body are Gogol's method to turn attention to those characters who are pushed to live on the margins of society. Magritte, on the other hand, puts emphasis on an ironic play between the expected and unexpected, as well as the representation, reproduction and repetition of other typical elements of his technique. The publication shows that in spite of the differences between the medium of representation and the thematic content of the works, the authors use similar montage strategies such as the use of visual metonymy, synecdoche, suspense and repetitive close-ups of body parts. In this context, we refer to the Eisenstein's concept of montage and discuss the artists' experiments with prosthetic bodies.

KEYWORDS: Gogol, Magritte, montage, negation, Eisenstein

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The aim of the article is to discuss selected short stories of Nikolai Gogol and paintings of René Magritte showing that the authors used similar montage strategies to create the meaning of their works of culture. In spite of the fact that the medium of representation (i.e. the written word and painted image) in these works is totally different and that they are not compatible chronologically, it is known that Gogol was born in 1809 and died in 1852, whereas Magritte's life started 46 years after Gogol's death and continued for 69 years (1898-1967). This comparative case study, nevertheless, points out a number of factors integrating their shared phenomena. The theoretical base of such a juxtaposition is, first of all, Sergei Eisenstein's concept of montage and findings of many established methodological schools of the twentieth century, which emphasized the notion of treating the matter of culture as an open work of art, governed first of all by the rules of the receiver's engagement in the process of perception.¹ During the activity of reading, every written text tends to be seen as having two sides—verbal and pictorial, whereas an example of visual art can be perceived as a story which hides behind the represented image, a kind of a riddle based on the intertextual game between the title and the object on a canvas. Consequently, it could be said that the process of perception in both cases is dependent on the mechanism of montage, the juxtaposition of conflicting images and the reassembling of them together to build a spherical unity, as it was emphasized, for example, in various writings of Sergei Eisenstein. As a result, montage can be treated simultaneously as a type of narrative and mental operation, referring to the very nature of the world perception.

I. Theoretical Basis and Choice of the Material for the Analysis

In this context, it is worth recalling Viktor Shklovskij's famous exclamation: "Mir montazhen! The world is a montage! The world is chained. The ideas do not exist separately" (qtd. in Huttunen 164). A similar way of thinking is noticeable in Sergei Eisenstein's theories of montage and his idea of the spherical book. Tomi Huttunen notes that "in Eisenstein's theory the reader/viewer appears in a decisive role as a reconstructing subject: the author has an idea of the original image, which he/she deconstructs into fragments

¹ For example, Mikhail Bakhtin, Umberto Eco, Wolfgang Iser, etc. Although their concepts differed in many ways all put emphasis on the decisive role of the reader of the text in the process of perception of the work of art.

within the artistic text. The reader is then supposed to reintegrate the image the author had had in mind” (164). Eisenstein’s concept of montage is understood here as *pars pro toto* of the specific logic of thinking, the world view conditioned by the energy of continuous breaking and merging, “the principle of going out of self” and being in transition (Eisenstein 98). At the core of Sergei Eisenstein’s philosophy of montage, which is often called the theory of ecstasy, we perceive the phenomenon of indifferent nature, the ability of the work of art’s “extending itself” under the influence of its “blasting out” energy generated in the process of its perception by the recipient (Waligorska-Olejniczak 230). The energy is accumulated in all kinds of potential juxtapositions, which can be discovered by the viewer/reader, contrasts, counterpoints and negations finding their matching complementation due to recipient’s creative imagination and engagement. Consequently, the Russian thinker was able to go beyond narrow and technical understanding of montage and predict many changes in the area of film art, which were only to appear with the arrival of modernism and postmodernism culture (Ejzenstein 25).

The problem of montage, which is seen as a metonymical device or from the point of view of the reader-response, was also very often reflected in the works of the Tartu-Moscow School of the semiotics of culture. In this context it is worth noticing Juri Lotman’s achievements, including his renowned concept of the minus-device, the theoretical works of Yuri Levin, Vyacheslav Ivanov, Yuri Tsivyan, Roman Timenchik and Mikhail Yampolski. Peeter Torop’s theory of total translation and chronotopical montage, developing Holmes’s and Toury’s ideas, seems to be also very meaningful as it explores the relationship between analytics and synthesis as well as uniform tendencies between cultural languages:

...in the concept of total translation that proceeds from the interpretation of culture as an infinite translation process, while any particular text in a culture can exist simultaneously in a form of multiple transformations, each of which can be considered translation in a semiotic sense. . . . Any particular instance of reception of a text creates a dialogue between the text and the receiver; the reception of different transformations of the same text changes this dialogue into an intersemiotic polylogue. (Torop 242)

The choice of the material for the interpretation is not accidental, it is justified by many similarities noticed in the visual sphere of the artistic worlds of both authors, mechanisms of the grotesque used by them, features of magic realism as well as the oneiric poetics present in the selected works of art. All these qualities are very often associated with the poetics of surrealism. Obviously, in the case of Gogol the trend was yet to come in art, while Magritte very often openly opposed such classifications of his works of art. Treating surrealism as the specific way of seeing the world as well as a defined artistic strategy and mental condition, I've decided to limit the selection of Gogol's texts which will be discussed here mainly to his Petersburg short stories, i.e. "The Nose" («Нос», 1836), "The Portrait" («Портрет», 1835), "Nevsky Prospekt" («Невский проспект», 1835) and "The Carriage" («Коляска», 1835), as they are perceived as a kind of model, in which the Gogolian voyeuristic fantasy and obsession with absence are the most corresponding to the means of expression of the Belgian painter. The comparative study of Magritte's pictorial texts will be based on his works, which were created during the period from 1926 to 1963 in order to exemplify strategies of building up meaning similar to Gogol's methods.²

II. Magritte's Attitude to Surrealism and Psychoanalysis

As most often Magritte's works are analyzed by researchers in the context of surrealism and psychoanalysis, we will turn attention to selected standpoints to build up the background for further interpretation. Celia Rabinovitch notes that "surrealism touches on the threshold of the sacred but departs from its supernaturalistic prefigurations because it embodies a wholly modern sensibility based on paradox, contradiction, and immanent power" (41). Scott Freer adds to this observation his opinion that Magritte tries to "re-create the sublime in the absence of God and without recourse to religion" (331). One of the sources of Magritte's paradoxes is his famous juxtapositions of titles and

² The amount of secondary resources concerning both Gogol's and Magritte's works as well as such broad phenomena as surrealism, psychoanalysis or montage is practically unlimited, it is impossible to mention all essential and relevant critical texts on those subjects. As the article is aimed at the attempt of the comparative interpretation of the selected Gogol's and Magritte's texts we refer only to the sources, which turned out to be most helpful in working out potential montage strategies, shared by these two artists.

objects and creating difficult to solve riddle-like combinations of familiar antinomies. It is important to note that the new contextualization of objects in unrelated positions remains in agreement with the elementary notion of surrealism, based on Freudian ideas: “visually juxtaposing the familiar (thesis) with the unfamiliar (antithesis) to create a new perception (synthesis) of reality, startling incongruity becomes a sign of the uncanny” (333). Although in this aspect Magritte was not far away from this psychoanalytical philosophy, he could not agree with André Breton’s notion of the “pleasure principle,” or in other words the dominance of “pure mental representation” over the “reality principle” (qtd. in Paquet 366). As a consequence, he strongly opposed the surrealist’s “omnipotence of the dream,” which can be easily traced in some of his paintings being a mockery of Freudian ideas, for example *The Interpretation of Dreams* (*La clef des songes*, 1927, 1930, 1935), *The Rainbow* (*L’arc-en-ciel*, 1948), *The Literal Meaning* (*Le sens propre*, 1929), and *Photomontage in La Révolution surréaliste* (1929). According to Magritte, the psychoanalytical vision of the world led to many simplifications in thinking such as setting boundaries to the unfamiliar, ready-made synthesis and artificial classifications. Scott Freer translated his comments: “Psychoanalysis allows us to interpret only those things that are susceptible to interpretation . . . I take care to paint only images that evoke the world’s mystery. In order to do so, I have to be very awake” (334). Renouncing Freudian achievements, Magritte commented that psychoanalysis had nothing to say, that it constituted the best case for psychoanalysis itself. He could not accept its reductionist approach as in his opinion Freud’s followers were reducing great things to small ones, the unknown to the known, the mysterious to something always knowable (qtd. in Paquet 143). He supported his opinion by ironically pointing out that in psychoanalysis love meant always the same, i.e. daddy, mummy and myself.

Marcel Paquet notes that the titles of Magritte’s works play the role of specific obstacles disturbing the process of interpretation, which is treated by the artist as a kind of game he is playing with the receiver of his works of art (84). Patrick Waldberg remarks that in the case of Magritte the image should be understood as a visible thought, whereas the title serves as a counterpoint, a key which does not open any doors (qtd. in Paquet 41). Ben Stoltzfus analyzing the Belgian artist’s works comes up with the interesting idea of reversed ekphrasis: “Ekphrasis, usually defined as a rhetorical description of a work of art, has reversed itself in Magritte’s case and become the pictorial illustration

of thought” (133). Magritte’s paintings shouldn’t be read, however, as the visual negation of the sacred. Scott Freer claims that there is always something incomplete or unattainable in the pictures, which is a sign that the marvellous remains irreducible and veiled, teasing the viewer (338). Magritte himself comments that his main artistic aim is to look for the unknown in the sphere of familiar objects (609). Chao Shun-Liang, examining Magritte’s works from the point of view of grotesque mechanisms and juxtaposing them with the metaphors used by Crashaw and Baudelaire, emphasizes the Belgian artist’s attempts to show the triumph of pleasure over pain, which may be achieved through the strategies of play and joke-work (130-66).

III. Magritte’s and Gogol’s Poetics of Negation: the Unknown, Unspoken and Unwritten in the Artistic World of Moving and Missing Organs

Mechanisms parallel to the ones mentioned above can be observed in the poetics of Gogol, who is considered the master of negation, the writer obsessed with absence, whose influence can be recognized in Russian and foreign literature, among which the most remarkable continuations of his artistic method seem to be the works of Anton Chekhov and Venedict Erofeev. Donald Fanger says that “the absence that recurs on so many levels in the Gogol problem is a given” (18). Victor Terras in his analysis turns attention to Gogol’s “capacity for making Nonbeing almost palpable, for giving it an existential reality which readily causes us to mistake it for human life” (195). Sven Spieker in his Introduction to the volume *Gogol: Exploring Absence* emphasizes the fact that it is not possible to understand Gogol’s absence without its opposite, presence (3), which stays in agreement with Iser and Budick’s opinion that understanding the unspoken or unwritten parts of a text must be based on the reference to its spoken or written double (4). They link the notion of negativity, first of all, with the dimension of absence, pointing out that there will be always “a potentially infinite number of omitted details”, unspoken utterances, which could be included but don’t have to (4). According to Renate Lachmann there are two basic strategies noticeable in Gogol’s methods of expressing absence, i.e., hypertrophy and hypotrophy (18). Hypertrophy means a deliberate abundance of images, wordplays and other deceptive signs, whereas hypotrophy the “withholding of verbal expression” (18). The example of the former strategy in Gogol’s works is, first of all, nonsense and an absence of

common sense, while the latter strategy is introduced by various forms of impeded speech, denials, pauses, fragmentation or textual “self-cancellation” (18).

It seems that both in Gogol’s and Magritte’s works the human body constitutes the central object of artistic experiments. In the case of the author of “The Nose” the problem has been most often discussed from the point of view of sexual associations that the Gogolian corporeality may evoke, his use of hyperbole as the element of the grotesque or absurd, his method of description of characters based on reification, multiplication and emphasis of physical and psychological qualities the heroes do not possess. It is certain that in Magritte’s paintings the body is also erotically marked, with breasts and pubic hair exposed and very often resembling or coming out of inanimate objects, clothes, shapes raising associations with feminine or masculine genital organs, for example *The Rape* (*Le viol*, 1934), *The Eternally Obvious* (*L’évidence éternelle*, 1930), *Representation* (*La représentation*, 1937), *The Philosopher’s Lamp* (*La lampe philosophique*, 1936), or *Philosophy in the Boudoir* (*La Philosophie dans le boudoir*, 1948). The common strategy of Gogol and Magritte in this field seems to be the segmentation of the body, as a result of which some parts tend to be missing, doubled, moved, joined with inanimate objects or replaced with some prostheses (in Magritte’s works).

IV. Segmentation of the Body and Automatization of Gesticulation

It is important to notice that in both Magritte’s and Gogol’s artistic world the organs which are moving or missing are usually connected with thinking, perception or the senses, they are not functional parts such as legs or hands, which—by contrast—are often replaced by artificial ones. The most striking example here, of course, is the disembodied nose which (who) is living on its (his) own and the case of the doctor to whom Kovalyov turns for help. The doctor is described as a young and tall man who had a healthy wife, ate fresh apples in the morning, kept his mouth clean gargling for forty five minutes every morning and polishing his teeth with five types of brushes. Besides, the storyteller mentions the fact that the doctor’s face could not be seen, which leads the reader to making associations with a doll (Sofronova 13) or even a robot, taking into account his automated way of life:

This doctor was a handsome man with fine whiskers as black as pitch, and a fresh-looking, healthy wife. Every morning he used to eat apples and was terribly meticulous about keeping his mouth clean, spending at least three quarters of an hour rinsing it out every day and using five different varieties of toothbrush. (Gogol, *Diary of a Madman* 62)

The quotation above shows that the important morning routine which constitutes a part of the doctor's impeccable manners and appearance can be associated with the dominance of taste in his life, the oral, which—in psychology—is often interpreted as the inner child in us. Kovalyov's disembodied nose is treated by him without emotions, matter-of-factly, he even suggests selling the nose for a good price, which supports the thesis of his automated robot-like existence. What is characteristic here is also the fact that Kovalyov perceives his lack of the nose as a loss in a material sense. The nose is understood as a kind of mask necessary to wear to be considered the elegant man of his professional rank. On one hand, the nose is the symbol of status and superficiality which are visualized in the behaviour of the living nose-major's double; on the other, however, at the same time we find the rather messy barber in possession of two noses, organic (his own) and inorganic (Kovalyov's), which could be perceived as both hyperbole (there are too many noses) and the zero sign (one [alive] nose plus (+) (-) minus [dead] nose makes (=) no nose, zero). Zero as the symbol of oscillation between everything and nothing, wholeness and emptiness, may turn the attention of the reader to the condition of all three men (doctor, barber, major), who are defined by their profession but who on the personal level are incomplete, dominated by the outer, not inner reality. It seems that appearances replaced the truth in their life. In a sense the doctor does not have a nose either as he resembles a robot with no face, the barber—although at some point he has two noses—cannot satisfy his wife and seems to make up for and hide his impotency in his liking for alcohol and food. Kovalyov, in turn, celebrates the comeback of his nose in two ways: he goes to the bakery to have a small celebration and he uses every opportunity to look in a mirror in order to check if his nose is in the right place:

When everything was ready, Kovalyov rushed to get dressed and took a cab straight to the café. He had hardly got inside before he

shouted, 'Waiter, a cup of chocolate,' and went straight up to the mirror. Yes, his nose was there! Gaily he turned round, screwed up his eyes and looked superciliously at two soldiers, one of whom had a nose no bigger than a waistcoat button. Then he went off to the ministerial department where he was petitioning for a vice-governorship. (Failing this he was going to try for an administrative post.) As he crossed the entrance hall he had another look in the mirror: his nose was still there! (68-69)

Consequently, it could be said that in the final part of the story the nose is multiplied, reflections with the nose are everywhere; they become even more important than the nose itself because they prove the existence of the real one, and they constitute its false naturalistic double in a way.

It could be said that the absurd adventures of Kovalyov's nose serve Gogol as the way to show and motivate the reflection in two ways of representation: the false naturalistic and the true symbolic (using Pavel Florensky's terminology; 19-20). Truth seems to be a deviation from the exterior. The absence of the nose, on one hand, intensifies the existence of the non-represented object (which is also a strategy often used by Magritte), while, on the other, the physical presence of the nose in its multiplications could become a symbol functioning on its own as the model, virtual analogy replacing the object which can be linked to the real (Grigorjeva 219).

V. Prosthetic Bodies in Modern Culture

A visual exemplification and commentary on Gogol's story in a way could be George Grosz's painting *Republica Automaton* (1920), showing the automated life of people similar to mannequins, whose distinctive features (nose, eyes, mouth or even part of the head) have been replaced by numbers, letters or mechanical tools. This picture could be read as the visual embodiment of his notion of the marionette of history, which, in consequence, would lead to noticing mechanical aspects of behaviour of Gogol's characters, for example their compulsive habit of eating while being under pressure or automatization of gesticulation. The idea of android robots or puppet-like movements could inspire the associations with Sergei Eisenstein's concept of expressive movement based on the studies of the relationship between the

Schopenhauerian body (a body of the will) and the Kleistian puppet (a body without will) (Bulgakova 209) as well as the idea of the übermarionette worked out by Edward Gordon Craig and understood by him as the perfect inorganic creature, which is able to overcome the organic limitations of the human being.

This kind of mechanical associations bring to mind also the idea of prosthetic bodies, which appeared in the Russian avant-garde in the twenties and thirties of the twentieth century and resulted in a variety of strange concepts and fantasies of the body, whose organs were replaced by perfect mechanized prostheses (Bulgakova 201). Oksana Bulgakova in her analysis of this phenomenon mentions, for example, El Lissitzky's self-portrait from 1924, in which the eye is partially replaced by the compass, and Umbo's collage of the reporter Egon Erwin Kisch of the same year, in which bicycle wheels replace legs and the photo camera takes the place of the eye (201).

The measuring and optical instruments replaced the eyes, the head became an empty container to be filled with calculating machines and telephones, and pleasure did not rely on organic energy sources but was displaced by a machine. These motives circulate in Russian plays, films, and short stories and transform the human beings into joyful apparatuses that move freely between inorganic and organic. (201)

The tendencies mentioned by Bulgakova were obviously connected with the futuristic fascination with city life and the idea of the perfect machine replacing the limited human being. They were undoubtedly also a part of the Great Theatre Reform, which changed the way of looking at the actor's movement and his or her role in a performance. Bulgakova points out that similar images were present in German films and plays. German artists were inspired by Russian achievements, even though they did not know each other personally and did not cooperate directly.

VI. Types of Magritte's Experiments with Mechanized Bodies

Admiration for mechanics is also strongly present in Magritte's works. There seem to be three basic types of visual images that could be related to the Russian avant-garde way of thinking. The first group of paintings is connected

with Magritte's obsession with the missing head, e.g. *The Central Story* (*L'histoire centrale*, 1928), *The Lovers* (*Les amants*, 1928), *The Nocturnal Kind* (*Le genre nocturne*, 1928), and *Panic in the Middle Ages* (*Panique au moyen âge*, 1927); the second one includes the canvases, in which parts of the human body are replaced by mechanical or organic objects, e.g., *The Man from the Sea* (*L'homme du large*, 1927), *The Secret Double* (*Le double secret*, 1927), *The Torturing of the Vestal Virgin* (*Le supplice de la vestale*, 1927), and *The Knight of the West* (*Le chevalier du couchant*, 1926); while the last group consists of the works presenting some parts of furniture or household elements made of both organic and inorganic parts, e.g., *The Rights of Man* (*Les droits de l'homme*, 1948), *The Promised Land* (*La terre promise*, 1947), *The Encounter* (*La recontre*, 1926), *The Difficult Crossing* (*La traverse difficile*, 1926), *The Loftiest Gaze* (*Le sommet du regard*, 1926), and *The Bright-eyed Tree* (*L'arbre aux yeux clairs*, 1926). Almost all the realizations of this mechanical approach mentioned above are built on the repetition of the visual schemata, known from photography or discussion of popular myths. The painting *The Son of Man* (*Le fils de l'homme*, 1964), classified here as belonging to the second group of works, is interpreted by David Sylvester in the context of Magritte's fascination with the relationship between the visible, the invisible, and the hidden. Magritte wrote to his friend, a teacher of philosophy, in 1967: "In the invisible, we must after all distinguish what is invisible from what is hidden. What is visible can be hidden—a letter in an envelope, for example, is something visible but hidden, it isn't something invisible. An unknown person at the bottom of the sea is not something invisible, it's something visible but hidden" (qtd. in Sylvester 32).

Sylvester perceives the apple as well as the bowler hat in *The Son of Man* as the mask which helped Magritte to disguise himself as a petit bourgeois; he sees the painting as "the self-portrait of someone who hid his personal needs and predilections behind any convenient pretext . . . , someone much of whose life was a performance of seeming not to be there" (32). I would argue here that we could go further than a self-portrait of Magritte, as the apple brings about references to the myth of Creation, so consequently a man in a bowler hat could be seen as a representative of all human beings, whereas the painting could be treated as a reflection on the biblical story of the beginning of the Cosmos. The face which is partially covered confirms such an interpretation. The face is a sign of differentiation among humans; we may look similar to each other but no face is exactly the same as another's. If the face is obscured, the man can be

anybody. The title *The Son of Man*, or in other words the son of the world, can be read as a synthesizer; the viewer sees the material man (the visible), which naturally refers to the myth (the hidden), signified with the apple. I think that a similar interpretation could be justified in the case of other paintings included in the second group of my classification, such as *The Man in the Bowler Hat* (*L'homme au chapeau melon*, 1964) or *Collective Invention* (*L'invention collective*, 1935). They both seem to reflect on the presence of a collective memory and stereotypical thinking. The woman presented as a mute fish may be interpreted as an object of sacrifice. Magritte seems to refer here to the mechanisms of mimicry emphasizing the idea of there being a correspondence between the fish and the woman on the ontological level.

VII. Magritte's Organic and Inorganic Compatibility

The Belgian artist very often tends to experiment with the idea of the juxtaposition of the organic and the inorganic as in case of *The Pleasure Principle* (*Portrait of Edward James*, 1937), where he plays with the convention of the portrait, replacing the head of the man with a self-emitting luminous light. The painting alludes—as Scott Freer points out—to the classic style of Renaissance portraits, in which the inner vision of the sitter was expressed by his or her elegant pose (338). “Traditionally portraiture has been a visual means of representing the self in a contained form of revelation. Magritte, however, frequently evokes the idea of the portraiture in order to deny its possibility by facial obscuration. Portraiture is implicitly claiming to be revelatory but Magritte denies facial revelation to demonstrate that self-disclosure is also self-enclosure” (338). Consequently, this contradiction could be read as a reference to the pre-logical way of thinking, the claim that the mystique or the complex nature of the human character cannot be reduced to the visible and logical, but must stay obscured in some ways, unexpressed or hidden, because exposing the mystery makes it naïve and banal. This remark could inspire further studies aimed at exploring the analogy between the principle noted above and Michel Foucault's interpretations of Magritte's works discussed in his book *This is Not a Pipe*.

The title of the painting—*The Pleasure Principle*—also supports this kind of association because it seems to be a mocking reference to the surrealists' manifesto and Freudian preoccupation with dream hermeneutics. The sitter

stretches his hand towards the object which is lying on the table, being probably a small rock or a piece of volcano. In this vision the stone becomes the counterpoint to the light, and the objects are linked together bringing about the associations with the moment of revelation, which the reading of the stone should result in. In other words, the stone serves as a kind of surrealists' fetish, giving Magritte the opportunity of parodying their literal perception of dreams. The convention of the portrait brings about also the associations with photorealism and the art of photography, which in this context could be understood as simplifying and limited by their two-dimensional ways of representation.

Magritte, using the strategy of the replacement of the expected (the head of the man) with the mechanical adds another dimension to his work of art, making it spherical, encouraging the viewer to read it not linearly, but spirally, metaphorically. As a result, we can see here the parallel to Eisenstein's idea of the spherical book, which should reflect the spontaneous process of thinking, simultaneously connecting all languages and all disciplines as—according to Eisenstein—“everything is related to everything and everything passes over to everything” (Bulgakova 214). Oksana Bulgakova mentions that “Eisenstein sees artworks as reified imprints of the . . . images of pre-logical mentality” (215), which—as I've shown above—is also true in the case of Magritte and could be helpful in the explanation of Gogol's mechanisms of the absurd, and negation. The idea of the walking nose is completely illogical and unreal, and it can be understood only if we refer it to the world of instincts and the primitive. The wandering organ of scent seems to have a very compatible visual image in Magritte's artistic world, namely, the bilboquet adorned with the eye, which lives on its own and shows necessary social skills to interact with similar devices. Magritte uses the strategy of personification to emphasize the dominance of sight in our life, and the image of the eye very often serves Magritte as the tool to epitomize various systems of hierarchy governing reality. The topic of the dominance of the visual in our perception of the world seems to constitute also the center of Magritte's other works, in which he uses the strategy of covering a human head with fabric, e.g., *The Lovers* (*Les amants*, 1928), and *The Central Story* (*L'histoire centrale*, 1928). These paintings present figures in conventional situations, and they seem to touch on the problem of the visual stereotype and various types of matrixes we are used to dealing with in life.

VIII. Gogol's Organic and Inorganic Compatibility

Gogol also seems to play with the visual stereotype and his strategies to turn attention to the abstract and spiritual are not so much different from Magritte's ones. First of all, the author of "The Nose" takes advantage of similarities between the behaviour of people and behavioural patterns of animals. It is particularly noticeable in the story "The Portrait," in which Chartkov's condition, after he wakes up three times after his nightmares, is described as the feeling of a wet rooster, with his way of living in a rented flat compared to the living of a pig, and his manner of walking on the pavement after discovering money resembling the one of the peacock. Similar mimetical gesticulation can be seen in "The Carriage," in which the appearance of two military men are juxtaposed with the image of outgrown potatoes. All these metaphors are based on the simplifying metonymy, as a result of which the character is replaced, similarly as in Magritte's paintings, by the image of the reified object. The dominance of visual thinking in Gogol's works is also emphasized in "The Portrait" in the comparisons of two ladies (a mother accompanied by her daughter) to wax dolls, as well as in the description of the progressive madness of the artist, which is visualized by Gogol with the use of the multiplication of the image of the eyes taking over the walls of Chartkov's room. He finds himself traumatized by these multiplying eyes, which allows us to notice that automatization is an inseparable part of Gogol's visions. Automatization characterizes Chartkov's behaviour when he transforms from a poor unknown painter into a popular portraitist. It motivates also his mechanical manner of work, which is devoid of any kind of contemplation and study of the painted object, resulting in making automated products as if they came from the assembly line, i.e., portraits showing similar pieces of garments, poses and masks (Byron, Mars, etc.) instead of real people and their personality. The focus on the demonic eyes in the striking portrait, which take control of people and in a way live on their own, can be seen not only as a parallel strategy to the one used in "The Nose" with its body segmentation discussed above, but also as a characteristic method of montage used by Gogol.

His way of narration resembles using a virtual camera, whose most common mode of operation is the close-up. The strategy of introducing characters or the space surrounding them with the focus on body details or pieces of furniture has often been mentioned in the research. Here, however, I

would like to emphasize the Gogolian compatibility of the organic and inorganic worlds, the relationship between these two realities, which is often based on symbiosis and iso-functionality. The parts of the body which are often separated and independent constitute integral parts of human beings in the same way as people belong to the space of their homes—they are its inseparable elements. It seems that the same patterns and relationships fascinated Magritte when he imagined bilboquets with seemingly functioning eyes in human-like situations such as conversations. In “The Portrait” we can see Chertkov’s servant whose behaviour and lack of engagement may evoke associations with a piece of furniture rather than a human being. He seems to play a role of a static doll; we don’t really know what he does in Chartkov’s dysfunctional household, his repeated information about the lack of candles proves that he belongs to this space not to his master, he does not care and he does not move with him, and he stays put as a kind of decoration. This symbiosis of the organic and inorganic is visible in the introductory part of the first visit of two ladies at Chartkhov’s house. The mother enquires about his previous portraits and visits to Italy. The negative answer to her questions is provided simultaneously or even somehow replaced with the offer to be seated in the armchairs. The juxtaposition of the wax doll the customers are compared to and the armchair, seems to be a perfect match. The ladies are obviously seen as static objects to be still and admired, and the questions about journeys and professional experience are dismissed as not relevant to the situation because they are linked to life’s dynamics not passivity. In this scene we can notice the clash of life and death—the replacement of the organic (ladies) with the inorganic (dolls). On one hand the idea of this clash is utilized by Gogol to achieve a synthetic unity of the cosmos (Virolajnen, n. pag.); on the other it can be perceived as a reference to the mythological roots of montage, on the basis of which Sergei Eisenstein worked up his theory at the beginning of the twentieth century:

In Eisenstein’s book *Montage* (1937) the connection of montage, body, motion and animation acquires a mystical and mythical status. . . . Eisenstein discovers deep mythological roots in the montage principle: Osiris, torn to pieces that were found and re-assembled by Isis, resurrects and become a life-death-rebirth deity. The same ritual is celebrated during the bacchanalia, when the ecstatic women tear a goat, a totem of Dionysus, to pieces

celebrating his death and the annual resurrection. In this book, Eisenstein looks for correspondences between various arts, and between art, the individual, and the cosmic in the metaphysical global totality. He assumes that the latter is based on an isomorphism between the human body and the cosmos. (Bulgakova 210)

It turns out that the body envisioned as the montage of mechanical and organic parts as well as the idea of the movement based on the coordination of these elements seem to constitute a common ground of the visual system of Eisenstein, Magritte and Gogol, and they also take advantage of suspense as a means of artistic narrative.

IX. Gogol's and Magritte's Use of Suspense

It could be said that it is relatively easy to notice the use of suspense in Gogol's short stories. Actually, it is one of his most common strategies used to cut the story of one character in order to immediately introduce a different one. It can be observed in the way of telling the story of Piskariov in "Nevsky Prospekt" and in "The Nose," when the reader finds out about a nose being tossed into the river by Ivan Jakovlevich only to be left in a limbo and learn the compatible story of Kovalyov's strange awakening in the morning. It is worth noticing that the story is interrupted when the nose, associated with the masculine and phallic (Sokolov 386), is put into water (feminine), which apart from sexual connotations with the male-female encounter can be perceived as the sign of the dominance of the feminine principle (Ivanickij 11). The situation makes the nose totally dependent on water, and the reminiscences of this interconnection can be found later on in the story in Kovalyov's suspecting Madam Podtochina of using magical power to have control of his nose.

As far as Gogolian cinematographic methods are concerned, the opening scenes of "The Calash," describing the arrival of a military garrison in a little town, are also very meaningful:

But on the arrival of the cavalry regiment everything changed. The streets became more lively and wore quite another aspect. Often from their little houses the inhabitants would see a tall and

well-made officer with a plumed hat pass by, on his way to the quarters of one of his comrades to discuss the chances of promotion or the qualities of a new tobacco, or perhaps to risk at play his carriage, which might indeed be called the carriage of all the regiment, since it belonged in turn to every one of them. Today it was the major who drove out in it, tomorrow it was seen in the lieutenant's coach-house, and a week later the major's servant was again greasing its wheels. The long hedges separating the houses were suddenly covered with soldiers' caps exposed to the sun, grey frieze cloaks hung in the doorways, and moustaches harsh and bristling as clothes brushes were to be met with in all the streets. These moustaches showed themselves everywhere, but above all at the market, over the shoulders of the women of the place who flocked there from all sides to make their purchases. The officers lent great animation to society at B. (Gogol, n. pag.)

The above Gogol's text allows us to agree fully with Simon Karlinsky's remarks who notes that "using the synecdochal [sic] method that was so effective in 'Nevsky Prospekt,' Gogol causes the military men to materialize on the scene gradually, bit by bit, one moustache or cap or scrap of conversation at a time, with a technique that partakes both of cubistic painting and of cinematographic montage" (132-33). This visual operation seems to be connected with the noticeable lack of connectivity in this story, "characters take their leave as they sit down for a long visit, card players throw out jacks when queens are required," and interlocutors ask questions completely irrelevant to the flow of conversations (Popkin 171). Although Karlinsky in his book *The Sexual Labyrinth of Nikolai Gogol* examines Gogol's works from a completely different angle, one of his marginal remarks remain very close to our way of argumentation:

Gogol sets up several traps for readers who may be expecting familiar situations and logical motivations. Kovalyov's visit to the police official's apartment may easily enough be taken for a satire directed against corrupt and bribable policemen. They were indeed a frequent target of Russian satirical writers throughout

the nineteenth century. But what looks like satire actually resembles a painting by René Magritte more than it does any kind of pointed social commentary, for the policeman in question has a mania about loaves of sugar: “In his home, the antechamber, which also served as the dining room, was piled high with sugar loaves supplied to him by merchants out of pure friendship.” (127)

As far as suspense is concerned, in the case of Magritte we could turn attention to the tension between the static and the dynamic. The Belgian artist considered his paintings as static (ones) but, as Robert Short mentions, movement is implied in his works (95). Magritte was fascinated by the possibilities of the cinema, which was common for surrealists, who were intrigued by the mechanisms of editing, bringing together the most improbable events or distant locations, and making people magically appear and disappear in one single shot. There is a number of Magritte’s works which resemble film stills, giving the viewer the opportunity of looking at a crime scene or a social event from an omniscient perspective, for example *The Clumsy Dancer* (*Le danseur maladroit*, 1926), *The Murderer Threatened* (*L’assassin menace*, 1927), *Golconda* (*Golconde*, 1953), and *The Art of Conversation* (*L’art de la conversation*, 1963). In all aforementioned works the viewer can capture the scenes from a privileged position, and it is implied that he or she knows more than the participants of the presented event, which is a direct analogy to a film narrative. The events are often shown as if in suspension, the viewer can take advantage of the opportunity of looking at the situation from various angles predicting its development. The impression is created that he or she has the insight beyond the presented milieu, off stage, into the invisible and inexpressible reality.

X. Conclusion

Our case study of selected works of Nikolai Gogol and René Magritte shows that they both used similar montage strategies of narration and methods of visualization. Their interest in the physical and material was strongly connected with the spiritual and mystique, which can be seen in different variants of their constant juxtapositions of the organic and inorganic. The analysis of these clashes allowed us to notice three types of juxtapositions

characterizing Magritte's works of art and turned our attention to the isomorphism and iso-functionality of Gogol's world. The technique of body segmentation which is widely used by both artists is deeply enrooted in the mythical origins of montage and the primitive. We argued that Gogol and Magritte both take advantage of cinematographic methods of narration (e.g. suspense, counterpoints, metonymy, synecdoche, close-up) and surrealist strategies of visualization, which in the case of Gogol were obviously not known during his time. The comparative interpretation resulted also in finding out analogies with the avant-garde fascination with mechanical prostheses and automated movement.

It turns out that both Gogol's and Magritte's artistic strategies are very close to Sergei Eisenstein's idea of montage, which was understood as the phenomenon based, first of all, on the spherical and spontaneous interconnectivity of opposite elements in the process of thinking. Consequently, within a broader perspective, it can be said that similar strategies used in Magritte's and Gogol's works turn the recipient's attention to the opportunities of transmedial integration of the meaning, oppositions which may be treated as the metaphors of culture striving for its spiritual ethos, overcoming the boundaries of scientific disciplines and fields of human creative activities. The studies conducted allow us to assume that both authors tried to define a new formula of being in the face of new epochal challenges; they searched for a new paradigm for the literature and art. It seems that the core value, so-called zero point in this process on the Russian ground should constitute the eternal problem of being trans, struggling, which is not measured by the value of reaching the final destination but rather by the continuous being on the road, fighting, suffering and surviving. This feature constitutes also one of the central issues of the Western culture, which could make another point of reference in further research of Gogol's and Magritte's texts in the future, in particular in the studies aimed at understanding their conceptual framework.

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