

Σημειωτική

Marina Grishakova

**The Models of Space, Time and Vision  
in V.Nabokov's Fiction:**  
Narrative Strategies and Cultural Frames

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**Ruumi, aja ja vaate mudelid**  
**V. Nabokovi proosas:**  
**Narratiivistrateegiad ja kultuurifreimid**

Marina Grišakova

**Модели пространства, времени и зрения**  
**в прозе В. Набокова:**  
**Нарративные стратегии и культурные**  
**фреймы**

Марина Гришакова

University of Tartu

**The Models of Space, Time and Vision  
in V. Nabokov's Fiction:  
Narrative Strategies and Cultural Frames**

Marina Grishakova

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*In memory of Yuri Lotman,  
the teacher*



# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements .....	9
Introduction .....	11
I. Models and Metaphors .....	20
Possible worlds and modeling systems .....	28
Time, space, and point of view as constitutive elements of the textual world .....	40
Nabokov as a writer and a scientist: “natural” and “artificial” patterns .....	50
II. The Models of Time .....	72
The specious present: time as a “hollow” .....	76
The spiral or the circle: <i>Mary</i> .....	80
1. Involution and metamorphosis .....	95
2. The triple dream .....	98
3. Nietzsche’s circle of the eternal return .....	100
4. Time and double vision in Proust and Nabokov .....	104
5. Bergson’s spiral of memory .....	107
Tempus reversus .....	111
Time and eternity: <i>aevum</i> .....	126
III. The Model of the Observer .....	134
The observer, focalization and point of view .....	141
Vision and word: the seat of a semiotic conflict .....	155
1. H. James: <i>The Turn of the Screw</i> .....	163
2. V. Nabokov: <i>The Eye</i> .....	169
3. A. Hitchcock: <i>Rear Window</i> .....	173
Frame, motion and the observer .....	176
IV. The Models of Vision .....	186
Automatism and disturbed vision .....	186
Inhibition and artistic failure .....	197
Camera obscura .....	203
Nabokov’s visual devices .....	208



V. The Doubles and Mirrors.....	218
VI. Multidimensional Worlds.....	230
The outside and the inside.....	230
<i>Bend Sinister</i> as a multilayer dream.....	249
The worlds of seduction: <i>Lolita</i> .....	271
Conclusion .....	280
Bibliography.....	285
Index.....	314

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## Introduction

The aim of this book is to describe certain types of time, space and point-of-view construction in Vladimir Nabokov's fiction and to explore their modeling role in the artistic, philosophical and scientific discourses of the modernist and early postmodernist age.

There exists a semio-narratological tradition of a single author or a single work research — Todorov's *The Grammar of the Decameron*, Greimas' *Maupassant*, Genette's *Narrative Discourse*, Barthes' *S/Z*, — where the work of fiction serves as a test case for a theory or method. These studies aim at the elaboration of the taxonomies or models of more or less universal applicability. Although Genette's specific focus of interest is Proust, he approaches Proust via the classical narrative tradition from the *Odyssey* to Stendhal. Proustian techniques often prove to be "anomalous" with respect to that tradition.

The present study treats Nabokov's fiction in the vein of postclassical narratology — as both an object and a tool of research. As David Herman argues, (post)modern narratives are "in a sense *theoretically richer* than some of the narratological frameworks that have been used to study them" (Herman 1995: 32). The study of the specific textual forms and strategies may expand currently established models or lead to their revision. Pekka Tammi's *Problems of Nabokov's Poetics* remains the unsurpassed example of the narratological analysis of Nabokov's fiction. Although written in the age of general model-building, Tammi's research is sensitive to the "idiosyncrasies" of Nabokov's poetics and considers them as a potential challenge for general models (see Tammi 1985: 3). Here I pursue a similar line of argumentation, while examining the more specific and narrow problems of time, space and point-of-view construction in a broader semiotic perspective.

The new narratological developments of the 1990s were stimulated by the growing disappointment with a purely immanent

analysis of narrative. Meir Sternberg justly criticized “the established premises, prejudices, practices — all formalist in the sense of reifying and ranking narrative sequences without regard to communicative (generic, historical, ideological, purposeful) context” (Sternberg 1990: 904). For the “new wave” narratologists, narrative meaning is first and foremost a product of complex cultural transaction (see e.g. Hoesterey 1992, Herman 1999, Jahn 1999, Kearns 1999, Nünning 2003, Rimmon-Kenan 2002: 134–149, etc.). The study of the function and transmission of narratives in culture demonstrates that narrative forms and strategies are polyvalent and polysemantic. Narrative semantics becomes the main focus of interest and the initial formalist-classificational inspiration eventually fades out.

Context-oriented research and the method of “thick description” make it possible to cope with new cultural experience and approach complex sophisticated texts of the modernist and postmodernist age. (Post)modernist narratives “feature (and self-consciously exploit) multiple connections with other discourses, other genres” (Herman 1995: 7) and various frames of reading (generic, intertextual, cultural frames; see e.g. Wimmers 1988). In the present study, forms of time, space and point of view construction in Nabokov’s fiction are considered against the most significant cultural frames of the age. Nietzsche’s, Bergson’s and Proust’s philosophy of time, relativity theory and the theory of the “fourth dimension”, the modernist cinema and early narratology (Henry James, Percy Lubbock, Mikhail Bakhtin and the Russian Formalists) provide both typologically similar or contrasting models of space, time and vision, against which Nabokov’s modeling strategies are tested. Polygenetism of Nabokov’s fiction and the broad scope of its referential fields (entomology, chess, popular science, philosophy of time, relativity theory, etc.) make the task especially stimulating.

What also makes Nabokov’s fiction especially interesting for a “postclassical” narratologist is the usage of visual models in his fiction. Early narratology was predominantly logocentric. The success of visual studies in the 1980–90s stimulated narratological research of various hybrid and mutant forms of intermediality as well as the forms of resistance, conflict and complementarity

between media in an emergent variety of multimodal works. Lyotard's theory of the figural, Kracauer's notion of the social hieroglyph, the concepts of *cinécriture*, *iconotext* and *imagetext* (see Lyotard 1974, Rodowick 2001, Mitchell 1994, Wagner 1996) have important implications for narrative theory (see e.g. Ryan 2004). The present work examines Nabokov's fiction in the context of (post)modernist intermediality.

There are a number of valuable works that explore relationships between specific aesthetic strategies and cultural codes (e.g. McHale 1994; Ryan 1991a; Ermarth 1992; Heise 1997; Jacobs 2001 and others). Some of these studies suffer from overly broad generalizations, however. Thus, in her book on postmodern temporality, Ursula K. Heise stresses that the connection between socio-cultural practices and literary strategies is two-sided:

While recent developments in science, technology, media, modes of production and social interaction help to explain the formal experiments postmodern novelists undertake, postmodern novels in their turn help to create the cultural lenses through which we perceive and interpret social and technological developments. (Heise 1997: 6)

Yet in the practical part of her book Heise is guided mostly by the conception of social time — the time of modern technologies and new media, whose distinctive features are fragmentation and acceleration, short-term planning and hyper-present. The postmodernist temporality is defined as the “rhythmical time”, co-extensive with the event and manifesting itself in the constitution of the moment. Heise explores the ways in which these temporal forms function in literature. But the object of Heise's research is early postmodernism: the “new media” culture had hardly begun to spread at the time (the 1960–70s). On the other hand, many critics, starting with Walter Benjamin, consider fragmentation and acceleration typical also of the early modernist culture. A number of various social and cultural practices with their own “chronotypes” (communications, e.g. telephone, train, automobile, plane; technologies, e.g. photography and the cinema; urban and rural life styles; religious or psychedelic practices, etc.) emerge in the 19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> century. There also exists a rich tradition of the philosophy of time, whose development has been propelled by Bergsonism and the theory of

relativity, — with its multiplicity of time models (universal, individual, cosmological, psychological, etc.). The “constitution of the present” was the key issue of the Bergsonian and other turn-of-the-century theories of time and memory.

I would define my own work, in comparison to the aforementioned ones, as micro-scale research. Individual perception and experience always mediate sociocultural construction of time and space. A work of art is a complex, idiosyncratic system of time and space construction: “The text is always one of a kind, unique. And it seems to me that this uniqueness is the simplest definition of literariness that we can find” (Riffaterre 1983: 2). Postclassical narratology sees fiction as a unique form of experiential modeling, i.e. construction and interpretation of individual or shared experience (see e.g. Fludernik 1996, where narrativity is defined as a form of experientiality). Insofar as the narrative is considered a tool for thinking and perception, the innovative storyteller becomes “a powerful figure in culture”. His (her) work opens new ways of perceiving the reality and broadens the possibilities of being-in-the world: “The shift from Hesiod to Homer, the advent of ‘inner adventure’ in Laurence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*, the advent of Flaubert’s perspectivalism, or Joyce’s epiphanizing of banalities” shape not only literary history, but our versions of everyday reality (Bruner 1991: 12; reprinted in Bal 2004; see also Herman 2003). As Jerome Bruner argues, the leading role in the narrative turn belongs to literary studies: the literary text is an especially sophisticated and complex form of modeling.

On the other hand, the storyteller’s activity is restricted (to a lesser or greater degree) by medium-, genre- and culture-specific conventions that mediate narrative synthesis of space and time. Postclassical narratology develops a flexible and inclusive notion of “narrativity”. Instead of “narrative grammars”, it prefers to speak of the narrative “vocabularies”, stocks of narrative conventions and strategies, whose significance changes in the course of every narrative act (see e.g. O’Neill 1994, Sturges 1992). The present book considers the categories of poetics as cultural tools and demonstrates how textual meanings emerge as a result of negotiation between the culture-, medium- and genre-specific conventions and those perceptual-cognitive schemata that Maurice

Merleau-Ponty contemplated as “the background from which all acts stand out” (Merleau-Ponty 1981: xi). On the one hand, fictional time and space patterns are articulations of these perceptual-cognitive schemata (e.g. different types of time and space synthesis). On the other hand, they are components of the complex cultural chrono- and spatio-types, through which time and space assume conceptual significance. Narrative temporality is seen as a complex relationship of different orders of time, which become manifest due to the modernist foregrounding of the subjective time and developments in the phenomenological and cognitive narratology. Likewise, the studies of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Gaston Bachelard on “lived space” stimulated the narratological exploration of space. In the present study, the categories of poetics are seen as forms of cultural encoding, emerging as a result of both the author’s individual sensibility and cultural stipulation.

Any work of art is in a sense a multidimensional and “polychronic” (Herman 1998) whole. In his work on *Bildungsroman*, Mikhail Bakhtin uses the term *raznovremennost’* (heterochrony) to denote co-existence of multiple time layers — biological, historical, social temporality — in the European novel of the 18<sup>th</sup>–early 19<sup>th</sup> century. For Goethe, heterochrony becomes associated with the sense of vision as ability to discern different temporal strata and to make time visible (Bakhtin 1979: 188–236). (Post)modernist art and fiction reveal and consciously elaborate what is hidden *in potentia* in seemingly straightforward realistic works. If the early narratology worked with relatively simple narrative forms (folklore, realist fiction), the postclassical theory goes hand in hand with complex modernist and postmodernist developments.

A more specific and technical term for the fictional modeling is ‘metafictionality’ as “a tendency or function inherent in *all* novels” (Waugh 2003: 5) but consciously employed by self-reflexive types of poetics. Erika Greber points out the connection between self-referentiality (the “poetic” function), as constitutive for literature in general, and self-reflexivity (metafictionality) as a combination of the self-referential and metacommunicative function (Greber 1996: 22). Thus, any literary work is metafictional *in potentia*. Patricia Waugh offers the following definition of metafiction: “*Metafiction* is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and



systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality” (Waugh 2000: 2). The terms “metafictionality” and “self-reflexivity” have been most often used to examine linguistic and fictional foregrounding strategies in (post)modernist fiction to show how these strategies problematize or subvert “classic” realist conventions and draw attention to their artificiality. However, a purely formal description of these strategies as well as their “destabilizing” effects against the background of the realist poetics would get us back to the Formalist “see-saw” picture of literary evolution (“automatization” versus “deautomatization”). From the point of view of contemporary narratology, (post)modernist metafictional strategies (i.e. problematization of the “author-text-reader” relations, destabilization of narrative hierarchy, questioning of spatial and chronological conventions, graphical experiments, etc.) are explorations into the nature of fiction and its relation to reality rather than merely formal exercises.

(Post)modernist foregrounding strategies are often incorporated into a broader conception of “theoretical fiction”. Mark Currie’s concept of “theoretical fiction” (Currie 1998) is attractive, albeit too broad for a practical usage. It unifies various phenomena: (1) popularization of science; (2) conscious use of fictional form to thematize, discuss or explore theoretical notions and concepts, as it happens in Umberto Eco’s, Malcolm Bradbury’s or David Lodge’s fiction — thus, Bradbury’s novel *My Strange Quest of Mensonge* thematizes the Barthesian concept of the “death of the author”; (3) foregrounding of language conventions; (4) foregrounding of fictional conventions. While covering a number of heterogeneous phenomena, the concept of “theoretical fiction” remains vague and heuristically weak.

If “theory” is understood only as a matter of thematic concern, as a thematization or exploration of theoretical notions and concepts in fiction, then “theoretical fiction” may be placed among the other weak generic definitions, such as science fiction, campus fiction, family chronicle, urban novel, etc. The concept seems misleading insofar as it highlights “theoreticity” and disregards “fictionality” as well as the implicit, mediated or figurative character of theoretical elements in fiction. If Proust had been

hesitating between the genre of the novel and the philosophical essay, when starting what would eventually become *Remembrance of Things Past* (see Currie 1998: 48), he, nevertheless, had chosen the fictional form and was to account for its conventions, whatever bold revision of these conventions he undertook. The functional approach employed in this book establishes a relationship between the second and the last two meanings of Currie's concept of "theoretical fiction": the book explores how figurative, thematic or narrative strategies encode, reframe or engender new cultural models and concepts in fiction, or, in other words, how fictional strategies are related to the cultural concepts.

In the present study, semiotics is employed as a methodological tool that provides an interdisciplinary perspective. I adhere to the European tradition (particularly French and Tartu–Moscow school semiotics) that considers semiotics (semiology) as a theory or methodology of interdisciplinary research of signification practices — in contradistinction to the tradition stemming from certain readings of Peirce's work. The latter is prone to see semiotics as the all-inclusive transdiscipline or "superstructure", otherwise as a realization of the Enlightenment and particularly Lockean project (Deely 2005: 3–5). A semiotic ambition to unify "the whole of our knowledge and belief and experience of reality" in a single perspective (*ibid.*, 18) may lead to the disappointing generalizations.

The semiological approach traditionally focuses on the human signification practices that are not limited to the "literature and language-constituted phenomena" (Deely 2005: 9), however, but embrace the whole range of cultural phenomena. The study of sense-making practices does not neutralize the borders of traditional disciplines. The status of "transdiscipline", on the contrary, would dissolve semiotics in logico-philosophical knowledge, of which it was always a part and from which it emancipated recently. The emancipation has been relative, however. There exists the doctrine of signs as a traditional part of philosophical knowledge, on the one hand, and semiotics as an umbrella term for a number of heterogeneous methodologies of interdisciplinary research, on the other. The latter works within the framework of traditional disciplines and is multi-perspectival and multi-focal in principle. In that

quality it has stimulated the interdisciplinary research and has enriched the humanities with interesting conceptual transfers.

“Interdisciplinarity” is a term that has often been questioned, especially by the representatives of science. During the last “two-cultures” debate in the 1970–90s, the representatives of “hard” science rebuked the humanities for the abuse of scientific concepts. In response, David Cordle put forward a distinction between the “professional” science as a monopoly of experts and the “cultural” science as part of popular imagination. Cordle argues that the boundary between the two kinds of science is permeable. Some professional activities, for example reporting and popularizing the developments in the professional science or technological practice stemming from scientific work, already belong to the sphere of public imagination. “Cultural science” also includes representations and misrepresentations of science in literature and media (Cordle 1999: 51). From this point of view, it is the “cultural science” as part of public imagination that makes an object of study in the humanities. Another distinction should be made between the misrepresentation, i.e. a casual and non-reflexive use of scientific concepts, — and the creative “misreading”, i.e. reframing and reassessment of concepts in the domains of knowledge distinct from the domain of their original application. In the second case the concept is employed as a modeling metaphor. In his article “Semiotics and Surrealism”, Paul Bouissac lists a number of cultural factors that fostered the separation of semiotics as an autonomous branch of logico-philosophical knowledge in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The first is “*the semi-random migration of models*, i.e., the transfer of models from disciplines in which they have proved to be successful to other disciplines or fields not previously considered comparable to them in any respect, except metaphorically, e.g. Propp’s morphology of folktales inspired by a botanical taxonomy” (Bouissac 1979: 49–50).

In the following chapters I specify the concept of the “model” as well as the notions of “possible world” and “modeling system” employed in literary theory and semiotics to rehabilitate mimetic aspects of fiction and to develop a more comprehensive approach to the work of fiction as an iconic-symbolic entity. I outline the role of time, space and point of view as the main constitutive

elements of the textual world. Further, the notion of “pattern” as a key modeling metaphor in Nabokov’s fiction and parallels between the “natural” and “artificial” patterns are discussed. Finally a brief description of the key modeling metaphors, which determine the structure of the book, is suggested.

# I. Models and Metaphors

The notion of “model” is polysemantic. Thomas Sebeok and Marcel Danesi have given a most broad and capacious definition of the model as a “form of meaning”. In their opinion, the model covers practically the whole field of semiotic representations, including sign, symptom, text, code and metaphor: “a *model* can be defined as a *form* that has been imagined or made externally (through some physical medium) to stand for an object, event, feeling, etc., known as a *referent*, or for a class of similar (or related) objects, events, feelings, etc., known as a *referential domain*” (Sebeok & Danesi 2000: 2).

A narrower definition of the model in logic includes functional or structural isomorphism, i.e. a nonarbitrary, iconic relationship between the model and the object or phenomenon it represents. The model may reach a lesser or greater degree of articulation and preserve a lesser or greater degree of continuity and iconicity.

The model is usually considered as a simplified representation of an object or phenomenon. Thus, narrative models of plot structure, narrativity, storyworld, time and space are the simplified schemes of the real narratives, abstract representations of the recurrent narrative strategies: “model is an analytical term, a notion that helps one to understand structural properties of the narrative process” (Brockmeier 2000: 61) However, as Max Black argues in his influential book on models and metaphors (Black 1962; see also Arbib & Hesse 1990), besides the well-defined models built for the purpose of prediction, recognition and exploitation of the recurrent regularities, there are theoretical models — imaginative heuristic constructs that help to describe or prognosticate complex or hypothetical objects. The development of a theoretical model leads not to the simplification, but rather to growing complexity and discovery of new objects of description. The theoretical model need not be built or constructed: “the heart of the method consists

in *talking* in a certain way” (Black 1962: 229). The language of a certain domain of knowledge is employed to think and speak of a less known or less definite domain. Interpretation of facts and regularities of the original domain evolves “not *by* analogy, but *through* and by means of an underlying analogy” (Black 1962: 229). Thus, an imaginary incompressible fluid is used as a modeling notion for the exploration of the electric field or the solar system as a model for atom’s structure in physics.

According to Black, the role of the theoretical model in science is analogous to the function of the metaphor in art. What is remarkable is the initially metaphorical character of the models as well as their openness to new interpretations. Theoretical models perform a creative, structuring function in the meaning- and discourse-generating practices. Black mentions that the bold and consistent (“existential”) use of theoretical models has led to important scientific discoveries. What is not stressed enough by Black, is the fact that a model functions as a metaphor at a certain stage of research, when groping for the meaning regularities in the original domain provokes the borrowing of language of description from the other domain. The concepts of the secondary domain are projected upon the original domain, which leads to their reassessment. A new data emerges as a result of the mutual adaptation of the two referential fields. Insofar as the modeling metaphor seems to be successful and ensures the effective organization of the original field, translation and systematization of data occurs (Black 1962: 230). The systematization process eventually turns a modeling metaphor into a theoretical concept or term, which, nevertheless, could be “denaturalized” as a metaphor.

The concept is a “condensate” of a metaphorical construct. The usage of the concept as a metaphor restores its sense-making potency, opens it to the new extensions and semantic modifications and vice versa: metaphors tend to crystallize into concepts and conceptual schemas, which shape our perceptions of time, space and physical reality. Marie-Laure Ryan argues that language expands through figural displacements from

a core vocabulary of etymologically nonanalyzable terms (kinship words, basic commodities, numericals, directional and temporal

terms). Moreover, once a metaphor passes into common language, it becomes for the speakers a literal designation, out of which other metaphors may be developed. (Ryan 1999: 115)

The fact that metaphors are used in science does not mean that the language of science is metaphorical throughout:

They are crutches to help us get up the abstract mountain. Once up, we throw them away (even hide them) in favor of a formal, logically consistent theory that (with luck) can be stated in mathematical or near-mathematical terms [...] The metaphors that aided in this achievement are usually forgotten or, if the ascent turns out to be important, are made not part of science but part of the history of science. (Bruner 1986: 48)

The metaphors are heuristic tools that underlie the logic of discovery and creativity. In his paraphrase of Hanson's *Perception and Discovery*, Floyd Merrell draws a parallel between the three types of icon in Peirce (image, metaphor, and diagram) and the three stages of discovery in Hanson (shapes, diagrams, mathematical models). The stage of shapes is the counterpart to Peirce's images and metaphors; Hanson's graphs and diagrams correspond to the Peircean diagrams. Hanson shows how the analogy of the bird wing and the flying machine leads initially to their rather simplistic identification and then to a more productive principle of structural isomorphism and discovery of the secrets of flight. The final pattern emerges in the course of multiple adjustments and adaptations of the original form. This account

provides for a natural development from relatively imprecise shapes and images to algebraic formula-clusters following natural lines of formalization within that particular framework. Each step in the process is in varying degrees explicit, though like 'language games', the development is context-dependent and the final outcome is available only in retrospect. (Merrell 1991: 263).

The model's oscillation between a lesser or greater degree of articulation or continuity and more or less complete "translation" of image-schemas or continual shapes into discrete forms underlies the logic of discovery and creative thinking. Nabokov's description

of a writer's or a scientist's creative work follows the same logic (see below *Nabokov as a writer and a scientist*).

A number of modern philosophers, starting from Nietzsche, saw the concept as a dead metaphor and metaphor, in its turn, as a result of translating a perceptual trace into the verbal language. The metaphors as translations of cognitive-perceptual experience are tool kits of cultural development. They make the common basis for knowledge in science and the humanities: "Science and the humanities start at some convergent origin", yet "they diverge and specialize with different aims in mind" (Bruner 1986: 50). Both science and the humanities produce and test hypotheses about the world. In science hypotheses have a general character and are context independent; in the humanities they are specific and context sensitive (Bruner 1986: 45–50).

The new signification practices often emerge as a result of parallel developments or exchange of models in art, philosophy and science. Roman Jakobson pointed out some concordances between innovation in physics, developments in linguistics and ideas of artistic, literary and scientific avant-garde of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Einstein admitted that his acquaintance with the "situational relativity" of the Swiss linguist Winteler inspired his future work. The Einsteinian relativity, in its turn, has had an impact on Benjamin Whorf's theory of linguistic relativity. Both physical and linguistic relativity principle imply that observations of different observers, using different frames of reference, result in mutually exclusive and irreconcilable but equally valid pictures of the universe (Heynick 1983).

In the humanities, Black's analogy between theoretical models and metaphors has been successfully used to study interdisciplinary metaphorical transfers as well as the modeling function of metaphors in language and fiction. Philosophers as well as literary theorists have been discussing "migrating models" (Bouissac) or "traveling concepts" (Stengers 1987; Bal 2002) over the last few decades. Peter Steiner examined the role of migrating metaphors in Russian Formalism and demonstrated that the "machine", "organism" and "system" metaphors were borrowed by Russian Formalists from different branches of knowledge to describe and



elucidate artistic phenomena (Steiner 1984). Likewise, spatio-visual metaphors of various origins have been exploited to identify the elements of textual form in contemporary literary theory: *mise en abyme* or the “mirror in the text” (Dällenbach); the “root” or “rhizome” (Deleuze & Guattari); “nodality” or “strange loops” (Hofstadter, McHale); numerous terms to denote narrative spatialization of time listed by J. Hillis Miller: “dénouement”, “resolution”, “ficelle”, “plot”, “subplot”, “the threads of the story”, “break in the action”, “story line”, “turn of events”, “digression”, “interpolation”, “detour”, “frame story”, etc. (Hillis Miller 1998: 50). Despite a structuralist intention to create a universal text grammar on the strict logico-linguistic basis, literary theory resorts to the modeling metaphors as soon as a new, complex textual form is to be scrutinized and described. Marie-Laure Ryan, who has explored narratological terms borrowed from computer language, has also identified other sources of borrowing: geometry, optics, cinema, visual arts, topography, psychoanalysis, mathematics, philosophy of language and formal semantics, game theory, social theory, etc. (Ryan 1999: 114). Ryan has elaborated a complex system of visual metaphors to describe the modes of narrativity in fiction (Ryan 1992).

Lakoff and Johnson examined certain basic metaphors or “metaphorical slogans” (Stern 2000: 177) as the means of cross-domain mapping and modeling. The majority of Lakoff–Johnson’s examples (Lakoff & Johnson 1981) are anthropocentric metaphors, where human primary relations with physical objects are projected upon the domain of mental and spiritual processes. Lakoff has shown that spatial and visual metaphors belong to the core of human experience and are primarily connected with basic orientations in physical space. Sometimes, as, for instance, in the modernist age, the spatio-visual metaphors become especially active as filters of cultural perceptions.

Complex and elaborated metaphors “play a structural role in narrative with respect to arrangement and organization” (Steen 2005: 306). They control thematic and narrative patterns, guide the reader’s attention and shape his (her) perceptions in a subtle and invisible way. Recent developments in the metaphor studies lead to

a broad understanding of metaphor as a generic “figure” or supralinguistic entity: “metaphor is not a linguistic unit but a text-semantic pattern, and semantic patterns in texts cannot be identified with units of syntax” (Hrushovski 1984: 7). The Jakobsonian definition already ranks the metaphor as a generic trope: “In the Jakobsonian ‘reworking’ of the rhetorical heritage, metaphor and metonymy are kinds of super-figures, headings under which other things can be grouped together” (Metz 1983: 169). For Todorov, the figure is a semantic entity, which endows the text with its unique narrative form. Thus, “*l’essence est absent, la présence est inessentielle*” is, according to Todorov, Henry James’ master figure which organizes his works semantically and syntactically, arranges their composition and determines alternation of perspective. It reframes the hierarchy of the linguistic levels and assumes a unique textual form (Todorov 1971: 250).

Frank Kermode argues that narrative “may be crudely represented as a dialogue between story and interpretation”: all narrative

has something in common with the continuous modification of text that takes place in a psychoanalytical process [...] we may like to think, for our purposes, of narrative as the product of two intertwined processes, the presentation of a fable and its progressive interpretation (which of course alters it). (Kermode 1980: 86)

The poststructuralist theory customizes the generic status of metaphor as a “figure” or “trope”: in this capacity, metaphor works as a textual machine of interpretation (Grishakova 2001). “Figurativity” is seen as a pledge of multiplicity of interpretations, which cannot be closed off and never exhaust textual meanings. The figure escapes a strict referential bias: it just re-enacts a basic undecidability, unresolvability of textual meanings (see e.g. Cornis-Pope 1992: 83–120) and a permanent subversion of the story in the fictional discourse (O’Neill 1994: 7).

The model is an intermediary link between meta- and object language (Greimas & Courtés 1982: 196). Insofar as it belongs to both meta- and object language, the model (1) accumulates the text’s metafictional potential and discloses the paradoxical nature of reading as an experience of “immersion” (Ryan 2001) or “sus-

pension of disbelief”, on the one hand, and awareness of construed character of this experience, on the other; (2) is used *ad hoc* as a heuristic tool liable to modification, amendment or extrapolation. In the humanities, the frontier between the metalanguage and object language is especially unstable. The history of semiotic and narratological concepts discloses their metaphorical potential as well as their rootedness in the practice of art, philosophy and science.

According to Paul Ricoeur, the principle of “calculated error” or “split reference” determines the mechanism of the metaphorical sense-making: because of suspension of the primary reference, a new referential network is formed. The systematic and sustained elaboration of metaphorical models introduces new languages of description. The juxtaposed domains are held together in a metaphorical image-scheme despite their difference — the fact that prompted Ricoeur to compare the metaphor with the Kantian “productive imagination” (*produktive Einbildungskraft*) scheme (Ricoeur 1997: 199). Ricoeur employs the term “configurational act” to denote the cognitive operation of mental synthesis or “grasping together” (*prendre-ensemble*) of the heterogeneous elements (Ricoeur 1990, 1: 66). Likewise, Black’s theoretical model functions on the basis of metaphorical identifications.

However, the metaphorical identification or synthesis is always incomplete: juxtaposed elements do not merge into a single mental image or concept. There remains an iconic “gap”, an opportunity of the creative “seeing as” in the metaphorical juxtaposition (see Aldrich 1972; Hester 1972): “The imagery is a crucial mechanism in the production and comprehension of metaphor” (Danesi 1995: 265). For Yuri Lotman, for instance, trope is an equivalence established between a series of discrete units (signs) and a continuous semantic field, such as painting, cinema screen, dream, ritual behavior, where sense is “smeared” over the *n*-dimensional textual space. Discrete (discontinuous) and continuous languages are mutually untranslatable. That is why translation from the discrete language to the continuous one and vice versa (e.g. spatial models of particles in physics or visual schemas of abstract notions) is approximate and may lead to the displacements and

meaningful shifts (Lotman 1981: 9–10). To continue Lotman's thought, trope is not a sum of clearly delimited and conceptualized semantic entities, but a variable entity with fuzzy boundaries.

The present book is organized around several model-metaphors. The second chapter is devoted to the models of time: linear and nonlinear, universal and individual time, *tempus reversus*, and the figure of *aevum* or the “intermediate” time. It explores the meaning of circular and spiral models of time and memory in various cultural frames (Nietzsche's philosophy of life, Bergson's philosophy of time and the artistic practice). In Nabokov's fiction, the circle, spiral or Möbius strip are forms of composition and narrative representation that thematize writing as vision, imagination and memory process and the presence of the author-narrator, blurring the border between the diegetic and extradiegetic textual levels.

The next chapter examines construction of the observer in modernist philosophy, science and arts, the problem of point of view in early (Henry James, Percy Lubbock, Mikhail Bakhtin) and contemporary narratology and thematizations of the narrator-observer in film and fiction. Special attention is paid to tensions and conflicts between the visual and the verbal or the “*ut pictura poesis*” problem. I introduce the notions of the *metaverbal* and *metavisual* text to examine intersemiotic tensions in Vladimir Nabokov's and Henry James's fiction and Alfred Hitchcock's film.

Next the visual “prostheses” and “machines” are explored, especially the “camera vision” metaphor, its thematizations in fiction and its relation to the notion of automatization in Bergson's philosophy. A separate chapter is devoted to mimetic devices, mirrors and doubles as well as mirror structures in film and fiction. The mirror is an object of a huge semiotic potential. Taking into consideration Umberto Eco's and Tartu–Moscow school's works on mirror semiotics, I concentrate on Wolfgang Iser's reworking of Lacan's mirror theory. As Iser shows, there exist different historical configurations of the Real and the Imaginary. The “doubling” models and configures the interplay of the Real and the Imaginary within the Fictive.

The last chapter explores multidimensional worlds, both textual and fictional, as well as the notions of the fourth dimension and serialism. The metaphor of the multidimensional world reveals tension between the “actual” and the “virtual”. It also provides an outlook on the dynamics of actualization/ virtualization in both fictional worlds and the “life-worlds” of human reality.

The topic of the “metaphor” or “figure” as a form of textual organization is central in the emergent rhetorical paradigm over-reaching the formalist-structuralist frameworks. The narrative text is seen as a creative “configuration” of events (Ricoeur); the work of art functions as an iconic sign or a complex metaphor, unifying several frames of reference. In recent years the model of the “possible world” has been actively employed in narrative theory to rehabilitate referential aspects of fiction suppressed by orthodox structuralism and to provide a broader philosophical foundation for the procedure of literary interpretation.

### **Possible worlds and modeling systems**

Please, reader [...] imagine me; I shall not exist  
if you do not imagine me. (*Lolita*, 129)

I had read *War and Peace* for the first time when I was  
eleven (in Berlin, on a Turkish sofa, in our somberly  
rococo Privatstrasse flat giving on a dark, damp back  
garden with larches and gnomes that have remained in  
that book, like an old postcard, forever).  
(*Speak, Memory*, 199)

The concept of the “possible world”, being initially a form of philosophical theodicy, migrated to different fields and disciplines: philosophy, formal semantics, natural science, historiography, etc. (see Doležel 1998: 12–15). The term has different connotations even in philosophical logic, from where it has been borrowed by literary theory. Not surprisingly, it has different connotations also in literary theory.

The ontological and epistemological status of fictional worlds makes the first point of dissension between the possible-worlds theorists. While upholding the autonomy of fictional worlds, Ruth Ronen argues: “in fiction we do not assume that (even ideally) there is a world beyond its fictional projection”; “Fictional time is tied to the nature of fiction which assumes no world beyond the discursive mode of this world construction” (Ronen 1994: 201, 205). Thereby Ronen subscribes to the theory of empty reference (Russell, Frege), where fictional entities are put on the same footing as other nonexistent entities. On the other hand, Ronen is rather critical of a loose deployment of the “possible world” concept in literary studies. She argues that fictional worlds are a special kind of worlds as compared to possible worlds of logic.

Literary theorists are unanimous in that the fictional “possible worlds” are a special kind of worlds. In Lubomír Doležel’s opinion, fictional worlds are incomplete and heterogeneous in their macrostructure and are constructs of textual poiesis (Doležel 1998: 22–24). There are, however, essential discrepancies in the understanding of what the possible worlds of fiction exactly are. Some scholars are prone to see more, others less similarity between the possible worlds of logic and fiction. The “possible world” as a modeling metaphor has not exhausted its heuristic potential.

As compared with Ronen’s radical constructivism, Doležel’s is a more moderate stance. In his opinion, fictional entities are nonactualized possibles (Doležel 1998). Marie-Laure Ryan, by contrast, considers the fictional world to be the actualized world. She refers to David Lewis’ indexical theory to promote her view on the fictional worlds as potentially actualizable: “‘To be actual’ means: ‘to exist in the world from which I speak’” (Ryan 1991: 18). The whole universe of possible worlds may be recentered in respect to the actualized world of the speaker. Ryan suggests a dynamic model of the speaker’s and hearer’s recenterings instead of the structuralist static narrative hierarchy. This rather attractive approach is “user-oriented”: recentering or imaginary relocating is a premise of both fictional representation and reception of the fictional world. In her next book (2001), Ryan contemplates reading as “immersion”, an experience of the virtual reality (see,

however, Poster 1999, for a warning against loose exploitations of the VR concept). Ryan specifies that perception of the fictional world (“the actual world of the textual universe”, Ryan 1991: 23) as the actual one is in tune with the phenomenology of reading, but counterintuitive from the point of view of the “real world” experience: “Once we become immersed in a fiction, the characters become real for us, and the world they live in momentarily takes the place of the actual world” (Ryan 1991: 21). Ryan discusses the dual nature of fiction as a game of make-believe and therefore a provisional reality.

Yuri Lotman also pointed to a kinship between the artistic (secondary modeling systems) and game models (Lotman 1967). In his opinion, the works of art as well as game models synthesize practical and conventional (symbolic) behavior. Whereas practical behavior has pragmatic purposes (e.g. finding one’s way in the forest with the aid of the map), conventional behavior provides a growth of information, which may be further activated and used practically (e.g. tracing an imaginary route on the map). Synthesis of practical and conventional behavior is characteristic of both games and aesthetic experience. Both games and artistic works have a provisional resolution. However, the game’s practical outcome is acquisition of skill and proficiency, whereas the work of art aims at the “world-appropriation” (cf. Heidegger’s *Erkenntnis*).

For Ricoeur, literature practically synthesizes objective, cosmological and subjective, phenomenological time orders and offers a provisional resolution of time aporias (Ricoeur 1990). Another practical aim of literature is imaginary modeling of narrative identity, establishing an unstable balance between identity as “sameness” (*idem*) and identity as “selfhood” (*ipse*): “In this sense, literature proves to consist in a vast laboratory for thought experiments in which the resources of variation encompassed by narrative identity are put to the test of narration. The benefit of these thought experiments lies in the fact that they make the difference between two meanings of permanence in time evident, by varying the relation between them. In everyday experience [...] these meanings tend to overlap and to merge with one another [...]

In literary fiction, the space of variation open to the relations between these two modalities of identity is vast” (Ricoeur 1992: 148). Following in Ricoeur’s footsteps, Richard Walsh defines fiction as an “exercise” of narrative understanding, i.e. its “use” and “development”, which works its way “between the conservative forces of prefiguration and transfiguration, and the creative scope of configuration” (Walsh 2003: 119).

Apprehension of the textual world as the actual world projected onto its own textual reference world implies that there are multiple alternative possible worlds embedded in the textual actual world (Ryan 1991: 109–123): the worlds of knowledge, prediction, obligation, desire, dreams, hallucinations, fantasies, etc. The author’s, narrator’s, or characters’ relations to the fictional world are subjected to modal constraints, forming the author’s, readers’ and characters’ possible worlds. Fictional entities have a different “degree of being” (Pavel 1986: 25, 30).

However, insofar as Lewis’ “speaker” as the center of the actualized world is identified as the narrator, whose perspective determines actualization of the fictional world, a question arises about the role of the reader in this actualized world. In Ryan’s interpretation, both the author and the reader (sender and receiver) are incorporated into the “real world” perspective. The reader projects his everyday experience onto the text, fills the gaps on the basis of the real-world knowledge, checks whether the textual world presents an accurate image of reality and makes adjustments dictated by the text (the “principle of minimal departure”). Insofar as the sender “correctly represents” the actual world, the receiver accepts it as an accurate representation.

From certain viewpoints, the principle of minimal departure has a limited scope of application, however:

(1) From the perspective of contemporary semiotic, philosophical (e.g. Quine) and linguistic (e.g. Lakoff) theory, the meaning of a verbal unit is not a “real thing” (the *denotatum*) but a result of translation or conceptualization. The “sincere and truthful mimetic



discourse” (Ryan 1991: 26) is mediated by perception and conceptualization.

(2) Contemporary literary and art theoreticians agree that narrative comprehension includes real-world knowledge (Eco 1984; Bordwell 1997; Ricoeur’s three types of mimesis adopted in Fludernik 1996, and others). Yet they also admit that cognitive-perceptual frames, schemata and scenarios that encode and organize the real-world knowledge are themselves results of cultural stipulation.

(3) The meaning of a textual unit depends on the cultural, generic, media-specific conventions (frames) and, in a broad perspective, on the whole configuration of the field of culture. The criterion of “verisimilitude” is often irrelevant. As William K. Wimsatt has pointed out, the formal organization of the literary discourse is “counterlogical”, i.e. it is based on the “counterlogical” principles of repetition, punning, sound-patterning, etc. (Wimsatt 1967: 201–217), which evoke respective expectations on reader’s part.

(4) According to Lewis’ theory, the actualized possible worlds are ontologically complete entities. Yet textual indeterminacy and incompleteness often have aesthetic significance (see McCormick 1996: 49). A most obvious example is the detective genre, where indeterminacy is a basic generic convention.

(5) Finally, the textual world may be rather distant from the reader’s world, or, in Eco’s terms, there may exist an essential discrepancy between the sender’s and receiver’s subcoding. “The reader approaches a text from a personal ideological perspective, even when he is not aware of this, even when his ideological bias is only a highly simplified system of axiological oppositions” (Eco 1984: 22). Eco observes that reader’s ideological biases can also serve as code-switchers, when the receiver reads a text in the light of codes different from the ones envisaged by the sender. The reader may totally ignore the author’s “message”.

One should draw a distinction between the logical “truth-value” and the epistemological status of possible world propositions. The latter is a matter of belief: it depends on available cultural frames and is subject to revision (Lyons 1996: 121). Therefore the “principle of minimal departure” has a restricted significance.

In Eco, the possible world is more firmly incorporated into the reader-response perspective. If Doležel and Ronen adhere to the principle of textual constructivism (any textual unit is meaningful as a part of the whole system), Eco adopts the approach of cultural constructivism. First, the reference world projected onto the possible world is an “encyclopedia”, a reader’s cultural thesaurus rather than the generalized “real world”. Second, the reader’s dialogue with the text is an adventure, which opens multiple forecasting opportunities: “to wonder about the next step of the story means to face a state of disjunction of probabilities” (Eco 1984: 31). The inferences by “common frames” (e.g. apprehension of meaning of characters’ actions) are enriched, modified or subverted by different types of (stylistical, rhetorical, generic, intertextual, cultural) overcoding. Eco demonstrates how a story by Alphonse Allais *Un drame bien parisien* can be read in two different ways: “The naive reader will be unable to enjoy the story (he will suffer a final uneasiness), but the critical reader will succeed only by enjoying the defeat of the former” (Eco 1984: 10). Likewise, in his study of film narrative, David Bordwell highlights the paradoxical nature of aesthetic perception and cognition: in the artistic work, situations are constructed “so as to upset the most common assumptions, the most valid inferences, the most probable hypotheses, and the most appropriate schemata”. Moreover, a naive reader may be trapped when going too far with his (her) commonsense hypotheses (Bordwell 1997: 39).

A characteristic feature of Nabokov’s poetics is a parodic exposure of stereotype mental habits, social or literary clichés and schemes of commonsense thinking. Nabokov’s parodic stylistic and intertextual strategies made a favorite object of study for the first generation of Nabokov scholars: “By creating a reality which is a fiction, but a fiction that is able to mock the reader, the author has demonstrated the fiction of ‘reality’, and the reader who accepts

these implications may even have experienced a change in consciousness" (Appel 1967: 120; see also Stegner 1966, Stuart 1978 and others). The "parodic dimension" of Nabokov's fiction has already itself become a scholarly cliché that served a definition of his poetics as postmodernist or "proto-postmodernist". In Alfred Appel's opinion, the effect of *Lolita* (1955) depends on predictable reader's response: "In Nabokov's hands the novel thus becomes a gameboard on which, through parody, he assaults his readers' worst assumptions, pretensions, and intellectual conventions, realizing and formulating through his version of Flaubert's dream of an *Encyclopédie des idées reçues*, a *Dictionary of Accepted Ideas*" (Appel 2000: lviii; first published in 1970).

What is termed "parody" in Nabokov studies involves not only exposure and mocking imitation of stereotypical thinking, however, but also a meaningful absence of cliché, the "minus-device" or the effect of the reader's "betrayed expectation" (Yuri Lotman), in other words, a collision of "fact" (as an element of the textual actual world) and "fiction". The device most often involves a stylistic change-over, e.g. from a playful stylistic register to a serious one or vice versa, as in the case of the implied romantic plot of the unfaithful beloved (Carmen) ironically discarded in *Lolita*: "Then I pulled out my automatic — I mean, this is the kind of fool thing a reader might suppose I did. It never even occurred to me to do it" (*Lolita*, 280). Such stylistic switch-overs are abundant in Nabokov's fiction and his fictional autobiography *Speak, Memory* (published in 1951 as *Conclusive Evidence*, in 1954 in Russian as *Other Shores* and in 1966 in English as *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited*). The death of Nabokov's cousin Juri Rausch von Traubenberg seems to be a continuation of improvised staging of heroic fragments from Thomas Mayne Reid's or James Fenimore Cooper's books and risky entertainments, whose purpose is "trying" the fate. Yet the ending of the episode introduces the tragic dissonance, while switching over to the serious mood: "Three years later, as a cavalry officer in Denikin's army, he was killed fighting the Reds in northern Crimea. I saw him dead in Yalta, the whole front of his skull pushed back by the impact of several bullets, which had hit him like the iron board of a monstrous swing, when having outstripped

his detachment he was in the act of recklessly attacking alone a Red machine-gun nest" (*SM*, 200).

For Eco, the possible world is a succession of textual states of affairs (*fabula*) rather than an autonomous world: the text "is a piece of furniture of the world in which the reader also lives, and it is *a machine for producing possible worlds* (of the *fabula*, of the characters within the *fabula*, and of the reader outside the *fabula*)" (Eco 1984: 246). Eco's attitude is similar to that of Robert Stalnaker's, whom he mentions, while discussing the problem of actuality. Stalnaker's moderate realism is indexical (the "'actual world' is every world in which its inhabitants refer to it as the world where they live"; Eco 1984: 223). Yet, unlike Lewis, Stalnaker advocates the one-world hypothesis: there is one world, which comprises many actual and possible states of affairs. As Eco observes, "it is quite impossible to build up a complete alternative world or even to describe our 'real' one as completely built up" (Eco 1984: 221). He contemplates possible worlds as cultural constructs that are partial in respect to the unattainable whole of the referential universe: the possible world structure is "just a *profile* of it or *perspective*" on this universe (Eco 1984: 228). Insofar as this perspective belongs to a certain encyclopedia (a cultural reference world), accessibility among worlds is not a matter of psychological conceivability or one's own propositional attitude, but "a problem of transformability among structures", i.e. among possible worlds as cultural constructions. Textual possible worlds are accessible to the reader insofar as the latter is able to identify the topic-sensitive properties of the textual worlds and translate them into the statements on his own possible world.

It is easy to notice tension between the 'mimetic' and 'diegetic' elements of the fictional-worlds theory. Its mimetic elements are slightly revised concepts and notions of traditional literary criticism: the metaphor of the "fictional world" that comprises figurative entities (characters, realia, settings, etc.); the concepts of representation (possible world as a mental image), empathy or "suspension of disbelief" that stipulate reader's identification with characters, etc. The diegetic elements of the theory are mainly

borrowed from the structuralist and poststructuralist tradition that had already elaborated sophisticated tools to describe elements of textual rhetoric and narrative form. Thus, the notion of structure remains crucial for Doležel: “Fictional entities are treated as constituents of a higher-order, ‘emergent’ structure, the fictional world” (Doležel 1998: 15). Doležel criticizes “mimetic fallacy” and rejects the opportunity of projecting the real world onto the textual world. Fictional objects and individuals are independent of their real world “prototypes”, yet could be linked to them by transworld identity (Doležel 1998: 16–17). Each component is significant only as part of a system. Thomas Pavel observes that “fictional texts refer as systems” (Pavel 1986: 30). Proceeding from game theory, he propounds the notion of a complex structure, where two or more different worlds are linked in a single structure (Pavel 1986: 56). The main goal of Doležel’s possible worlds project is a description of fictional semantics and possible worlds’ “inventory” (states, actions, forces, persons, etc.). Yet these entities may be either formalized (as motifs, functions, narrative agents, etc.) or naturalized. Doležel chooses the way of moderate naturalization, while introducing such notions as intention (intentional and nonintentional acting), motivation (drives, emotions, practical reasoning), action modes and modal constraints on action, authentication of possible worlds, etc.

One of the recent accounts of the fictional world theory that alleviates the antagonism of mimetically- and diegetically-oriented approaches is Peter McCormick’s essay “Literary Fictions and Philosophical Theories” (McCormick 1996). The author refers to Stalnaker, propounding the one-world hypothesis and challenging Doležel’s multi-world system: “What we call ‘possible worlds’ are not the worlds but properties the one world might have, states it might be in, or ways it might be” (Stalnaker in McCormick 1996: 50). The actual world comprises many possible states of affairs: they all exist, but only one of them is instantiated.

McCormick contemplates “possibility” as a *future* alternative. Fictionality comprises ways things might still be as *yet* unactualized possibles (McCormick 1996: 51), i.e. *virtual* states of the world. Possible states are “intermittently actual and intermittently

possible” (McCormick 1996: 56). In that quality “fictional individuals are to be understood not as the residue of an ontological reduction, but as the ontological configurations that arise from a redescription of certain as yet unactualized states of affairs” (McCormick 1996: 51). Fiction is identified as a virtual *extension* of the actual world, not as its abridged copy.

Similarly, Nabokov toys with the idea of the fictional world as a virtual extension of the real one and vice versa. In his books (e.g. in *Invitation to a Beheading*, *The Gift*, *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* or *Bend Sinister*), characters live fictional life, co-extensive with the time of writing or reading and thematized as a text — a part of the auctorial personal mythopoeia (Lachmann 1997: 282–297). Thus, the text retains a metonymical relation to the extra-textual reality and comprises the signs of its presence. Nabokov used to endow his characters with his own memories, seeds of his own thoughts and personality. In a 1962 interview, he confessed that recollections immersed by the novelist in his book and given away to the characters “are apt to lose the flavour of reality” (SO, 12). They acquire, instead, the status of fictional reality. Textual systems of recentered worlds and forking paths in (post)modernist fiction have been often interpreted as a means to keep the reader in a state of epistemological doubt. However, they also produce the effect of communicating vessels: whereas the reality is partially fictionalized and devoid of its incontestable obviousness, fiction reveals a potency of becoming real and acquires either a miraculous or threatening solidity of a fact (see below on the reversibility of mimetic relation in Nabokov’s novels: the subchapter *The inside and the outside*).

The structure of fictional properties is *relational*. The fictional entities are “simply conjunctions of certain possible states of affairs that could be instantiated in the actual world as novel properties of that world” (McCormick 1996: 51). Being abstract objects, they need the reader’s mediating agency to be instantiated. This means that the identity of the characters and other figurative entities is subordinated to the textual relations. In Doležel’s description, Emma Bovary is a possible individual inhabiting the fictional character — as a possible individual she might have

existed. In McCormick's system, Emma as a mere constituent of a possible state of affairs cannot have an independent existence.

McCormick's placement of fiction into the actual world in a manner different from naive realism of "copy" or "representation" theory challenges the radical diegetic-constructivist stance and has important consequences. Although a relatively autonomous configuration, the work of fiction is also part of general semiosis. The relational structure of fictional properties emerges from the background of cognitive-perceptual operations that we use to orient ourselves in the actual world and to hypothesize about it. McCormick refers to Wittgenstein's late work to emphasize the role of nonpropositional knowledge, e.g. showables, in fiction. In literature the role of nonpropositional knowledge is much more important than in everyday speech. Therefore some theorists identify the work of verbal art as a verbal icon, a complex metaphor or a modeling system. These notions highlight nonpropositional aspects of literary work and are based on the presumption of their active, structuring role in human perception and cognition.

For instance, Lotman considers the artistic text as both a model and an iconic sign (Lotman 1967), an outcome of secondary, linguistic iconization (Lotman 1970: 73). Literary imagery as an example of "secondary iconization" refers to the verbal text's capacity to trigger mental (quasi-sensory) images. These quasi-sensory images may be powerful enough to evoke somatic effects (e.g. Flaubert's symptoms of poisoning during his work on *Madame Bovary*).

From this viewpoint, secondary iconization implies functioning of verbal signs as visuals. Iconism, by contrast to mimetic or referential theories, is based neither on the imitation principle nor on linguistic transparency, but on the relation between the certain formal properties of the signifier and the signified. Iconism, as Eco understands it, is an equivalence established between the form of the content and the form of expression as a result of cultural stipulation (Eco 1979: 191–217). In certain readings of Peirce's work, Eco's definition of the iconic sign is considered reductive, yet it meets the purposes of semiological research, while focusing on "cultural" or conventionalized icons. From the enactivist

perspective, the Peircean view on the iconic representation is applicable in both natural and social environments: the user's sensitivity to the sign vehicle with salient properties establishes that vehicle's representational function by initiating characteristic patterns of response (see e.g. Menary 2006). However, symbolic systems develop their own regularities and norms in social and cultural contexts.

As possible worlds or analogues of the real world, fictional models are iconic signs that interlock "natural" (perceptual, cognitive) and "artificial" (social, cultural) properties. The very form of the model — either scientific or artistic — comprises information about the modeled object. Yet the work of art is the model of a *hypothetical* object that does not yet exist. Lotman lists the following distinctive features of the artistic modeling: (1) the scientific modeling starts from the analytical work and collection of data about the object to be modeled (its function and elements of its structure); the artistic modeling starts, on the contrary, from a synthetic whole that is eventually broken down into discrete elements; (2) the structure is ascribed to the artistic object as a means of interpretation; (3) the artistic model is diffuse and open to further interpretation since the model is an incomplete analogue of an object; (4) a "subject-object" relationship (connection between the hypothetical object and its creator) is inscribed into the artistic model; (5) as such it is also a model of author's personality; (6) the model has a retroactive impact on author's personality; (7) the model incorporates the image of the reader as construed by the author; (8) the artistic model is particular; (9) it is also the "concrete universal"; (10) the artistic modeling is intuitive (Lotman 1964: 31–36).

While speaking of a literary work as a model, Jørgen Dines Johansen points out that literature may iconically represent all other discourses: it appropriates them for its own purposes (Johansen 2002: 152). Alternatively, the literary text as a model retains an analogical (diagrammatic) similarity with a given lifeworld: representations of fictional universes "are construed and understood according to the conventions used in interpreting lifeworlds" (*ibid.*, 165–166). The lifeworld relevant to the literary world is a complex



world of human interaction — “ideas and beliefs, wishes, passions, and norms and actions” (*ibid.*, 167) — the world, already endowed with meaning.

However, insofar as the literary work is not a sheer representation, but also a virtual extension and interpretation of the real world, it is also a theoretical model. The artistic models are partial (metonymic) analogues of the reality (the property which Eco termed “a profile” or “perspective on the reality”), so that the user recognizes the artistic world as both the “same” and “different” in comparison to the real world. The two aspects — recognition and estrangement (defamiliarization) — are the two basic components of esthetical experience. Complete recognition provokes reader’s or spectator’s identification with characters (e.g. a naïve spectator rushing to the stage “to save Desdemona” at the performance of *Othello*). Complete estrangement turns the fictional world into a “strange”, “artificial” or “alien” one (e.g. in late Tolstoy who blames Shakespeare for a lack of verisimilitude in his tragedies). From this perspective, artistic “modeling” is an *open-ended process* similar to the process of scientific discovery (see below *Nabokov as a writer and a scientist*).

### **Time, space, and point of view as constitutive elements of the textual world**

From the radically constructivist point of view, the textual world is a completely autonomous entity. There is a radical difference between the real and the fictional time-space: “Real time-space and fictional time-space belong to different ontologies”; “The time constructed by fictional texts is to be distinguished both from the objective dimension of physical time and from the subjective dimension of experiential time” (Ronen 1994: 198, 203, 205). For Ronen, the textual deictic system is independent of the “real world,” albeit somehow analogous to it.

In a broader narratological-semiotic perspective, as mentioned above, the text is part of the real world — as a machine for producing possible worlds (Eco), a model of a hypothetical object

(Lotman) or a description of virtual state of affairs (McCormick). The narrative is seen as a “kit model” that enables and facilitates human functioning in the world (Bruner). Although a relatively autonomous and idiosyncratic configuration, the textual form is a result of negotiation between certain perceptual-cognitive patterns and certain generic-cultural conventions. Whether “natural” or “artificial”, fictional or nonfictional, narrative interlocks action and perception, time and space synthesis, perspective taking and simultaneous “scanning of centers of interest” (Chafe 1980: 26), metaphorization of the narrated events and deferral of meaning.

From this point of view, narrative activity is a form of corporeal anchoring in the world, “mimesis in action” (Ricoeur 1992: 148). Storytelling is grounded in everyday cognitive-perceptual experience. Processing of a fictional narrative (information store, context updating, time and space monitoring) is different in that the fictional representation is more complex and the immediate denotative context is absent. Therefore information is stored by means of “long-distance links” (Emmott 1997: 11). Yet the same basic cognitive-perceptual operations underlie construction of both the “natural” and the “fictional” narratives.

In a co-authored article “A Personological Classification as a Semiotic System”, Pyatigorsky and Uspensky elaborate a theory of time construction, proceeding from Bakhtin’s ideas on the author’s and character’s relations in fiction (Pyatigorsky & Uspensky 1967). They argue that to work out a personological typology of behavior (for Bakhtin, part of the “philosophy of the act” contemplated by the philosopher in the 1920s, see the posthumous publication Bakhtin 1986) one should select a position, from which the description will be undertaken: the observed, the observer or the ‘metaposition’ (in fiction, the character’s, narrator’s and author’s positions, respectively). In the scientific (scholarly) description, the third position is either fixed or conventional (“model variable”): rules and terms of positioning are explicitly formulated. In the non-scientific description, the third position is variable and may coincide with any of the other two. In the framework of the semiotic typology, the “interior (quoted) monologue” is an outcome of provisional coincidence of the “metaposition” and the

observer's position; "free indirect discourse" a result of identification of the metaposition with the observed.

Another important parameter of the personological description is time construction, i.e. a temporal horizon, in relation to which all actions take on their significance. Pyatigorsky and Uspensky refer to St. Augustine's famous dictum on the paradoxical nature of time ("I know well enough what it is, provided that nobody asks me; but if I am asked what it is and try to explain, I am baffled"), while discussing apprehension of the present as an "asemiotically", immediately perceived flow. In their opinion, semiotization of the present requires distancing or displacement. Certain types of amnesia (e.g. the Korsakoff syndrome), when the patient is incapable of describing the present state of affairs, yet starts talking of it when the present becomes the past, serves as an illustration of the semiotic aspect of time. Cognition is indirect by nature: the present must become an external object in order to be understood (cf. Peirce: "the present can contain no time" and Pelc 1998: 232). Bergson's philosophy of time includes the awareness of the immediate nature of the present; in both Proust and Nabokov (see below) the figure of the *lost and found* present-in-the-past is an artistic elaboration of this awareness. Nabokov often uses optical metaphors of focalization and adjustment to designate temporal distance necessary to discern the objects in the past. The optical-mnemonic metaphors are pervading in his autobiography *Speak, Memory*, yet the motif of distancing oneself from the present in order to see it is prominent also in the novels. Thus, the idea of temporal distance necessary to recognize a "nymphet", i.e. the past-in-the-present, is clothed in a pseudoscientific form by Humbert Humbert in *Lolita*:

...since the idea of time plays such a magic part in the matter, the student should not be surprised to learn that there must be a gap of several years, never less than ten I should say, generally thirty or forty, and as many as ninety in a few known cases, between maiden and man to enable the latter to come under a nymphet's spell. It is a question of focal adjustment, of a certain contrast that the mind perceives with a gasp of perverse delight. (*Lolita*, 17)

Displacement necessary to cognize the present entails duplication of the "self", i.e. the split of the observer into the observing and the

observed “self”, as well as semiotization of the present from the perspective of the past or the future. It is easy to notice an analogy between these semiotic operations and the distinctive features of fictional narrative: the narrative hierarchy (the split between the author and the narrator), the traditional third-person form of narration, and preterite.

In narratology, Augustine’s two types of the present (“the past present” and “the future present”), i.e. recollection and anticipation, are identified as textual procedures (analepsis and prolepsis) or interpretive strategies (the reader’s backward and forward inferences; or, put another way, the *curiosity* and *suspense* hypotheses as provoked by the “surprise gaps”, when the present is seen as the “uncanny familiar”; Sternberg 1978: 244–245; Fludernik 1996: 321–322). Genettean categories of order and frequency correspond to the temporal aspects of foregrounding and backgrounding of events as either more or less significant. The category of duration embraces both universal and individual time forms (the “objective” chronological duration versus time contraction and expansion).

There exist, however, complex, culturally mediated forms of time perception and modeling, or “chronotypes”<sup>1</sup>. Augustinian reflections on the nature of time have been actualized in the modernist philosophy of time where the concepts of “duration” and “specious present” have been used as antonymous to the concept of the abstract point of present in classical physics. “Duration” and “specious present” have been conceived as forms of extension and intensification of the experience of the present, where overlapping and interference of different temporal strata occur.

The fictional narrative is a unique configuration of events where, in Ricoeur’s opinion, a provisional resolution, a “discordant concordance” of time aporias becomes possible, a collision of the universal and phenomenological time takes place, and the pheno-

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<sup>1</sup> “Chronotypes are models or patterns through which time assumes practical or conceptual significance. Time is not given but [...] fabricated in an ongoing process. Chronotypes are themselves temporal and plural, constantly being made and remade at multiple individual, social, and cultural levels”. (Bender & Wellbery 1991: 4)

menological time is liberated from the chronological grid (Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative*). Ricoeur examines different forms of time conceptualization in modernist philosophy (Husserl, Heidegger) and different types of time overlapping in modernist fiction. Chronology and causality are not the only manifestations of the "objective" time ordering, however. The idea of a certain order of things underlies even the apparently "achronic" texts. It becomes manifest in linguistic features of the text (temporal connectives, adverbs, tenses) and its logico-narrative patterns (see e.g. Sternberg 1990, 1992). As Genette has shown in his analysis of *Remembrance of Things Past*, multiple time syntheses occur below and above the surface of chronology — from simple contingency of events unified through discourse sequentiality or syllepsis (temporal, spatial, thematic kinship; Genette 1980: 85) to different types of hierarchization, supralinear connection, perspectivization (e.g. "horizontal" or "vertical" narrative embedding; Nelles 1997: 132). Thus, chronology is only one among a large number of sequencing opportunities. The degree of the "objectivity" or "subjectivity" of time ordering varies depending on the alternation of perspective or point of view. Temporal ordering becomes associated with observer's subjectivity.

In this sense, fictional time ordering is inevitably indeterminate, not unlike the relativist construction of time in the real world: even the realistic narratives supply only partial information on the sequencing and causality of events.

The reader expects a certain vagueness and takes it in stride, is quite willing to conceive of the events as determinately ordered somehow within the merely indicated outline — but the narrator, trading on his innocence, may return to those events later in his narration and reveal a hidden significance that undoes our compliance. (van Fraassen 1991: 31)

Hans Meyerhoff summarizes subjective and objective aspects of time in literature in the following scheme: (1) subjective relativity, or unequal distribution; (2) continuous flow, or duration; (3) dynamic fusion, or interpenetration, of the causal order in experience and memory; (4) duration and the temporal structure of memory in relation to self-identity; (5) eternity; (6) transitoriness, or the

temporal direction toward death (Meyerhoff 1960: 85). Narrative temporality turns out to be a complex combination of various time orders and time-values foregrounded by the modernist poetics and phenomenological narratology (see e.g. Ricoeur 1990; Fludernik 2005; Mendilow 1965: 63–85). On the other hand, the phenomenological works by Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Gaston Bachelard, “which offered the most groundbreaking modeling of the human interface of space” in introducing the notion of the “lived space”, stimulated the “spatial turn” in narrative studies (Buchholz & Jahn 2005: 553).

The notion of textual space has been introduced to describe the double work of text production-interpretation. Thus, Kristeva reconceived the Bakhtinian “double-” or “many-voiced word” as “an *intersection of textual surfaces*”, i.e. as a spatial process (Kristeva 1980: 65). Kristeva’s conception of “language’s poetic operation” is anchored in the notion of the semiotic space, “the volume within which signification, through a joining of differences, articulates itself” (Kristeva 1980: 65). The semiotic space is an (inter)textual formation, where words (texts) function as interfaces of other words (texts), “any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations” and “is absorption and transformation of another”. The evolution of literary genres is understood as “an *unconscious exteriorization of linguistic structures at their different levels*” (Kristeva 1980: 66).

A dynamic conception of textual space was earlier propounded by Viktor Vinogradov. Vinogradov, a linguist himself and much indebted to the Formalists, was at the same time an opponent of purely formal-linguistic approaches to the literary poetics. For him, the text is a concentric whole unified by the notion of the “linguistic personality” and differentiated through the inclusion of its parts into broader (linguistic, cultural, historical, etc.) contexts (Vinogradov 1980: 84). Instead of the formal-linguistic grid, to which the structuralist descriptions subordinate the text, Vinogradov’s model represents the text as a set of mobile interfaces between the synchronic and diachronic, socio-cultural and individual, object-related (*objektnye*) and subject-related (*subjektnye*) speech forms.

Fictional world-making has often been identified as a form of semiotic “en spacement”. As Marie-Laure Ryan observes, textual space is topological: “what matters is the system of relations between nodes, not the exact position of elements” (Ryan 2004a). Following Winfried Nöth’s suggestions (Nöth 1996), I shall use the notion of “metatextual space” as the equivalent for Ryan’s “textual space” to distinguish the space as a result of text production/perception from the represented space.

The metatextual space is *perspectival*, i.e. perspective-bounded. It is *dynamic*, i.e. unfolding in time. It is a projection of the non-linear multidimensional time of reading and permanent updating of information:

For each sentence of a text, the reader’s knowledge of the fictional context will contribute to the meaning of the sentence and, conversely, the content of the sentence will force the reader to update his/her mental representation of the fictional world. (Emmott 1997: vii)

Text triggers long-distance links (Emmott 1997: 11), i.e. backward and forward inferences on the reader’s part. Finally, the metatextual space is *iconic*: it is formed by an “arrangement of largely immaterial semiotic objects”, “a spatialization of non-spatial data” (Ryan 2004a).

Gabriel Zoran distinguishes three levels of space construction in fiction:

*The topographical level*: space as a static entity [...]. *The chronotopic level*: the structure imposed on space by events and movements, i.e. by spacetime [...]. *The textual level*: the structure imposed on space by the fact that it is signified within the verbal text. (Zoran 1984: 315)

All three levels overlap. Zoran’s third level of space representation actually comprises both textual and metatextual elements.

[...] this level encompasses the structure which is imposed on space by the fact that it is formed within the verbal text. [...] the structure under discussion is not that of the text itself as a verbal medium, nor that of its linguistic materials, but rather an organization of the reconstructed world. [...] The objects structured belong to the reconstructed world, but the structure itself is imposed on them by the linguistic nature of the text” (Zoran 1984: 319).

Zoran argues that three basic strategic principles structure the textual level: the principle of selectivity, sequential structure and perspective. Yet these principles apply also to non-spatial objects. Therefore, in my view, they belong to “the text itself as a verbal medium” (i.e. to the metatextual space), not to “the organization of the reconstructed world”. Zoran’s classification revisited would look as follows:

- (1) space (objects and locations) in its static function belongs to the topographical level;
- (2) space (objects and locations) in its pragmatic (practical, goal-oriented) function belongs to the chronotopical level;
- (3) projective (viewer-relative) objects and locations that belong to the textual level: “Projective locations are ones that ‘vary in value and interpretation depending on how they are viewed’, thus relying on an orientative framework projected by the viewer” (W. Frawley’s *Linguistic Semantics* cited in Herman 2002: 280).

To separate the represented space from the space of text production, the fourth, *metatextual* dimension should be added to Zoran’s classification. The metatextual space is a form of organization of the three aforementioned types of textual space. It includes various types of patterning and segmentation, such as mimetic patterning (linguistic and metalinguistic iconism), spatiotemporal unfolding, alternation of perspective and a system of “context shifts” (Emmott 1997). The text consists of groups of sentences, each group with its immanent organization, nuclei and satellite sentences, keywords and linkers (Emmott 1997: 76). Further, text segmentation may be subjected to discursive, rhetorical, narrative or thematic criteria. Different interpretive frames have been used to describe text segments: theatrical (episodes, scenes), musical (leitmotifs, composition), visual (point of view, perspective), etc. In each case a specific iconic equivalence (partial similarity) has been established between the verbal textual form and its analogue in arts. Metatextual framing and patterning are forms of textual



modeling process. Thus, in Boris Uspensky's description (*The Poetics of Composition*, 1970), textual architectonics is based on patterning, not on a strict taxonomy, which would determine the structure of the metatextual space in advance. In his typology of textual "architectonics", Uspensky draws a parallel between the textual and the pictorial forms. The term "architectonics" is borrowed from Bakhtin: the latter uses it as an antonym for the abstract "system" (Erdinast-Vulcan 1997: 255).

Frank Kermode argues, however, that what is called the "spatial form" is actually a special order of time (likewise, space is an aspect of time in modern cosmology). He refers to this form of space-time as *aevum*, the intermediary time that partakes in both earthly (spatialized) time and the timeless eternity (Kermode 1968). It is possible to subvert the metaphor to see the textual time as a form of spatial ordering, i.e. the metatextual space. Insofar as time *per se* does not exist or is not imaginable without space, it could be reduced to the cognitive or logical space, the space of patterning: "The color spectrum is the logical space for colored things [...]. Porphyry's tree is the logical space for everything, the Library of Congress classification is the logical space of all books". "But it does not follow that the time order of real events is definite any more than that of narrative events in the *Recherche* [*À la recherche du temps perdu* by Proust. — M. G.]. For although books are individually located in LC, only the structure of all events taken as a whole is set in time, since correct 'placing' of events is determined by their mutual relations. And there may remain in principle more than one way to determine the placing" (van Fraasen 1991: 34).

Metatextual configuration depends on both textual cueing and reader's interpretive effort: it is subject to constant transformation and metamorphosis and thus relies on the time parameter. There are invariables of enspacement, textual signals and isotopies (Greimas) that control and guide interpreter's attention. Nevertheless, insofar as reader's and author's "knowledge frames" are different, the reader always forges an alternative world on the basis of textual frames (see e.g. Werth 1999).

Spatio-temporal elements of different levels are brought together into meaningful iconic patterns guided by alternation of point of view or perspective. In her interesting article, Karin Wenz describes some basic principles of textual enspacement (Wenz 1996). The “egocentric coding” not only makes the speaker the vantage point of the description, but determines the order of speech linearization and emphases, e.g. a theme/rheme distribution: the more important the object is for the speaker the more salient its place in the discourse. The same applies to the social and axiological coding, figure and ground, center and periphery, top and bottom position of fictional entities — it is defined in respect to the center of orientation.

The verbal text has its own “focalization” and “occultation” strategies, i.e. the principles of organization of information. Cognitive linguistics and poetics consider them as projections of perceptual-cognitive patterns onto the realm of language: figure and ground relations (e.g. the source domain and the target domain; the given and the new or theme and rheme; implicit knowledge or presupposition and the explicit knowledge or reference; the “own” and the “alien” word, etc.); lexical perspective or deixis; the “offstage” and “onstage” (or external and internal) construction of events; finally, scope and prominence of entities (see e.g. Langacker 2000; Gavins & Steen 2003).

Spatiotemporal transformations are guided by the alternation of perspective or point of view (*mise en perspective*) as distinguished against a continuum of the textual world:

[...] the elements constituting the world can change from the status of discrete elements to that of continuum and vice versa, depending on shifts in point-of-view or perspective; the continuum could also be defined as the set of possible discrete elements and locations. (van Baak 1983: 129)

Different forms of iconic semantization form textual isotopies, patterns and chronotopes (van Baak 1983).

To sum up, forms of narrative temporality and spatiality become associated with subjective time and space and considered as forms of subjectivity. The observer and the observed, the subject

and its perceptual world make a virtual mobile unity (Kristeva's "abjection", Merleau-Ponty's "chiastic" structure, which precedes the subject-object separation: Kristeva 1982, Merleau-Ponty 1987). In *The Visible and the Invisible* Merleau-Ponty considers the chiastic reversibility of the perceiving/perceived, touching/being touched as a manifestation of the primordial synthesis between consciousness and the world, in which the subject and object distinction originates (Vasseleu 1998: 26). The possible world of fiction as a semiotic phenomenon is a result of this double articulation. On the one hand, it encodes text in respect to the extralinguistic reality and thus consists of the "semiotic chains of every nature", which "are connected to very diverse mode of coding (biological, political, economic, etc.) that bring into play not only different regimes of signs but also states of things of different status". "A semiotic chain is like a tubber agglomerating very diverse acts, not only linguistic, but also perceptive, mimetic, gestural, and cognitive" (Deleuze & Guattari 1988: 7). On the other hand, it assumes a unique textual form that, in its turn, stimulates the reader to built imaginary alternative worlds. (Post)modernist self-conscious fiction makes these ontological and epistemological paradoxes part of literary representation.

### **Nabokov as a writer and a scientist: "natural" and "artificial" patterns**

Nabokov's fiction is in many respects a borderline phenomenon. The author's experience of writing "between" languages and cultures and positioning himself as both a writer and a scientist is rather unique. The volume *Nabokov's Butterflies* (Boyd & Pyle 2000) testifies that Nabokov's lepidopterological research has been serious and ponderable enough. In the 1966 interview with *The Paris Review*, Nabokov ranked "the rapture" of a lepidopterological discovery higher than "the pleasures and rewards of literary inspiration" (SO, 100). On the other hand, fellow-entomologists named some new butterfly species after the characters of his novels

(Boyd & Pyle 2000: 25), which is acknowledgement of both his literary and entomological high reputation.

There is no reason to consider Nabokov a devoted theoretician (nor a metaphysician or a moral philosopher) and to look for any complete and articulate theoretical system in his work. Nevertheless, it is possible to view certain elements of his fiction as manifestations of an idiosyncratic theoretical language.

One can anticipate objections, while speaking of Nabokov as a “theoretician”. There are the two radical, although implicit, trends in Nabokov studies: one treats Nabokov as a parodist, ironist and cerebral experimenter, another views him as a highly original artist, whose creation resists any “generalities”. The latter approach relies on the Romantic-Symbolist mythopoeia of the artist and “original creation” cultivated by Nabokov himself (see the chapter *Inhibition as artistic failure*). The two Nabokov’s hypostases are not mutually exclusive. A rather shy and imitative poet, Nabokov is also the author of the bold self-reflexive fiction, which makes an organic part of the (post)modernist culture along with Proust’s, Bely’s, Bulgakov’s, Gide’s, Joyce’s, Kafka’s and other writers’ work.

Critics have repeatedly emphasized that Nabokov’s cultural heritage embraces the 19<sup>th</sup> century classic and Silver Age culture. Yet the main development of his fiction proceeds along the lines of metafiction and fantastic realism. In her astute notes on Nabokov’s literary attitude, Anna Ljunggren observes that such distinctive features of his writing as playfulness, mystification, richness of allusions, parody, irony are, paradoxically, forms of hyperrealism and commitment to the both the Russian and European classic literary tradition, whose heir Nabokov feels himself to be (Ljunggren 1994). Eric Naiman writes about the Nabokovian nostalgia for the “pre-modernist” literature. Hence, on the one hand, Nabokov’s metanarrativity or “allegorism” (Naiman 2002) as a means of intertextual overcoding and connection with classic sources. Hence, on the other hand, richness of “realistic” biographical, historical, philosophical-scientific detail brought together into figurative patterns. Some theorists consider nostalgia for the pre-modernist age (a kind of a Rousseauistic dream of the lost innocence) a

distinctive feature of the 20<sup>th</sup> century self-reflexive fiction. In Linda Hutcheon's interpretation, postmodernism is not "nostalgic" in any traditional sense, however. The postmodernist "nostalgia" does not mean the evasion of the present and idealization of the past. It is an ironical or parodic rethinking of the past and, as such, it is double-edged: parody "paradoxically both incorporates and challenges that what it parodies". It is "repetition with critical distance that allows ironic signaling of difference at the very heart of similarity" (Hutcheon 1999: 11, 26).

In his lecture on *Good Readers and Good Writers* (1942), Nabokov argues that the boundary line between a work of fiction and a work of science "is not as clear as it is generally believed" (*LL*, 4). Having been asked by an interviewer, whether there is any connection between Lepidoptera and writing, Nabokov responds: "There is in a general way, because I think that in a work of art there is a kind of merging between the two things, between the precision of poetry and the excitement of pure science" (1962; *SO*, 10). He blames a vulgar understanding of science as the "cleverness of an electrician" and speaks of "the study of visible and palpable nature, or the poetry of pure mathematics and pure philosophy", advocating the right to a nonapplied research (1963, *SO*, 44–45). An ironical treatment of utilitarian materialism is a key-note of Nabokov's writings starting from the 1920–1930s, especially in *The Gift* (1937–38, in English in 1963) and the short story *Circle*<sup>2</sup>: "Godunov was rebuked for showing more interest in 'Sinkiang bugs' than in the plight of the Russian peasant" (*Stories* 376).

In a 1966 interview, Nabokov seems reluctant to discuss or even take seriously the issue of "two cultures" (science and humanities), suspecting that the science and literature to be discussed are

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<sup>2</sup> The author calls the story the novel's "small satellite" and dates it back to 1936 in the English edition — mistakenly, as Yuri Leving presumes (Nabokov 3, 820). Actually the story was written in 1934. I think it is a conscious employment of the poetics of dates that establishes the intertextual connection and unifies the texts into a cycle. Pekka Tammi refers to Zara Minz's study "The Poetics of Date and A. Blok's Early Lyrics", where the first time "more systematic attention was afforded to literary dates as a specifically semiotic question", to show that this sort of semiotization is typical of Nabokov's fiction (Tammi 1999: 91).

not the genuine science or genuine literature. Yet further, while answering the question on Lepidoptera, he adds some remarks pertaining to the previous question and highlights “the artistic side” of scientific research:

The tactile delights of precise delineation, the silent paradise of the camera lucida, and the precision of poetry in taxonomic description represent the artistic side of the thrill which accumulation of new knowledge, absolutely useless to the layman, gives its first begetter. [...] I certainly welcome the free interchange of terminology between any branch of science and any raceme of art. (*SO*, 79)

Nabokov incorporates the elements of scholarly commentary, geographical description or entomological and botanical classification into his fiction. Robert Michael Pyle draws attention to the artistic quality of Nabokov’s scientific style (Boyd & Pyle 2000: 69–70). Likewise, there is every reason to speak of the “theoretical” quality — exactness, self-reflexive and experimental character of his fiction. Nevertheless, while admitting a similarity, Nabokov repudiated a possibility of amalgamation of literary and scientific languages: “...whenever I allude to butterflies in my novels, no matter how diligently I rework the stuff, it remains pale and false and does not really express what I want to express — what, indeed, it can only express in the special scientific terms of my entomological papers” (*SO*, 136).

It is a structural affinity between the work of art and the object of science, which makes a comparison between the art and science possible. The structural affinity manifests itself as a “pattern”. Nabokov repeatedly draws structural parallels between organic patterns of nature, musical, visual, verbal art forms and chess combinations.

He considers an individual style in art as a form of writer’s mimicry. Being asked by an interviewer on the role of “sleight-of-hand” magic in his fiction, Nabokov responds:

A useful purpose is assigned by science to animal mimicry, protective patterns and shapes, yet their refinement transcends the crude purpose of mere survival. In art, an individual style is essentially as futile and as organic as a *fata morgana*. The sleight-of hand you mention is

hardly more than an insect's sleight-of-wing. A wit might say that it protects me from half-wits. A grateful spectator is content to applaud the grace with which the masked performer melts into Nature's background. (the 1969 interview with *Vogue*; *SO*, 153)

Starting from Buffon's famous dictum *Le style est l'homme même*, the style has been seen as an individual expression of writer's *psyche*. In *Le Temps retrouvé* (1927), Proust compares the style in art with individual vision. In *Le degré zéro de l'écriture* (1953), Roland Barthes elaborates the biological metaphor of style as a semiotic correlative of writer's bodily experience and memory. For Nabokov, writer's style is a form of protection and concealment that ensures opacity and inaccessibility of the "real self" of the author. Its action extends beyond a biological necessity (natural selection) into the realm of aesthetics. For Nabokov, mimicry is evidence of the non-utilitarian character of nature and as a modeling metaphor for creative work.

Mimicry produces artificial non-existent objects or simulacra that threaten to replace or displace the originals: the advertising world of "handsome demons" mimicking human existence (*The Gift*, 20); Chinese rhubarb root resembling a caterpillar or the caterpillar copying the root (*ibid.*, 121); dream mimicry: hair clippers, "which took the most unexpected forms — mountains, landing stages, coffins, hand organs" (*ibid.*, 133). As Claude Gandelman shows in his article on mimicry in Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus* (Gandelman 1984), the problem of direction and reversibility of the mimetic relation is as much a cultural and philosophic as it is a scientific problem. 19th century positivism sees mimicry as an effect of natural selection dependent on the arrow of evolution and ascending from the non-organic to the organic forms: organic life imitates the non-organic forms. On the contrary, in medieval and Renaissance esoteric teachings, in German *Naturphilosophie* and Romanticism, the mimetic process descends from the more spiritual beings to the less spiritual ones towards the non-organic forms: the latter are imperfect copies of the former. Reversibility of the mimetic relation may evoke diabolic connotations: the non-organic world is the image of the

self-alienated spirit, whose aim is demonic reproduction or even substitution of its source.<sup>3</sup>

Modern science has difficulties in ascertaining the direction of the mimetic relation and testifies that the positivist belief in the arrow of evolution might have been erroneous: the Darwinian unidirectional determinism may turn out to be just a marginal case of evolution. Thus, although Nabokov's views on mimicry "have not withstood the standard scientific test of time" (Stephen J. Gould in Zimmer 2002: 53), his criticism of 19<sup>th</sup> century positivism has been justified. Nevertheless, his argument was directed against the 19<sup>th</sup> century understanding of evolution, abandoned by the contemporary science (Zimmer 2002: 54).

Nabokov's objections to the Darwinian utilitarian and unidirectional understanding of mimicry in *Speak, Memory* (a fragment of the unpublished article incorporated in the autobiography — Boyd 1992: 37) are well known. As Charles Lee Remington argues, in referring to Vladimir Alexandrov's study (Remington 1995: 282), Nabokov might have found metaphysical arguments against the Darwinian explanations in Hinton's, Pyotr Uspensky's and Nikolai Evreinov's works. For Pyotr Uspensky, theatricality and mimetic forms of the provisional three-dimensional world are just the manifestations of the transcendental intention of nature and a pledge of fuller vision (Alexandrov 1999: 272–273). As Dieter E. Zimmer points out, Nabokov's argumentation in the second appendix to *The Gift* obliquely refers to Uspensky's treatise *Esotericism and Modern Thought* (written between 1912–1929), though emancipated from its mystical-occult connotations (Zimmer 2002: 49). Nabokov's main objection against Darwinism, never mentioned by

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<sup>3</sup> See Yampolsky 1996 on the different types of mimetic reversal, when, far from being a sheer copy of the original, a mimetic double (a "demon") actively influences or moulds it: separation of the body from the "self", bodily metamorphosis, discrepancy between the visual and acoustic "self", separation of the *imago* (mask) from the body, etc. Brian McHale has detected a striking example of separation and reversal of thought and speech (or the character's "inner voice" and his "outer voice") in Nabokov's *Transparent Things*: the character is "hearing himself speak and mentally 'editing' his speech" (McHale 1995: 285).



Uspensky, was the subtlety of mimicry patterns, exceeding the predator's power of discrimination.

For Nabokov, mimicry is also a creative model. The act of false or incomplete imitation, an illusory resemblance is the conceptual kernel of his novels, such as *Despair* (1929–30, in English 1964), *The Eye* (1930, in English 1965) and *Pale Fire* (1962). In *Despair*, Hermann “tries to mirror himself in Felix, making Felix into a double that no one else recognizes. Felix thus becomes — or Hermann’s version of Felix becomes — an inhabitant of Hermann’s mirror world” (Clark 1986: 54). Likewise, Kinbote tries to find his own reflection and reflections of Zembla in Shade’s poem (*Pale Fire*). Humbert’s story is permeated with allusions to Quilty (*Lolita*). Quilty, who initially accompanies Humbert as a shadow, eventually usurps the leading role and displaces Humbert to the role of the shadow. However, the question of an original and a copy remains open: the author is toying with the idea of mimetic reversibility.

Magdalena Medarić (Medarić 2001) pointed out the vast cultural significance of mimicry. She considered mimicry as the “game” and “performance”, in terms of Roger Caillois’ game theory and Evreinov’s theory of theatre. Medarić observes that the phenomenon of mimicry lies in between pure idealism and pure materialism, metaphysics and positive science (Medarić 2001: 215). Her account focuses first and foremost on the cultural aspects of mimicry, such as elements of Romantic and Symbolist mythology of the “double reality”, decadent aestheticism and scientific interest in natural asymmetry and reversibility of mimetic relations in the Nabokovian conception of mimicry.

On the other hand, Nabokov’s foregrounding of the auctorial mask and textual pattern leads to seemingly natural parallels between his creative principles and theoretical ideas of Formalism, structuralism and poststructuralism (e.g. Hyde 1977: 89–90; Tammi 1985: 17–20; Torgovnick 1986; Paperno 1993). Indeed, there are obvious parallels. The knight’s move or a shift of shadows as a metaphor of art, the reduction of characters to the “methods of composition” (*The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, 1941) or the dictum that sound and color would kill the cinema

(*Laughter in the Dark*, published in Russian as *Kamera obskura*, 1932–33) are certainly reminiscent of Formalist ideas. Nabokov's negative response to Michael Scammell's question about a kinship between Formalist theory and his own work was partially political. Shklovsky's leftist avant-gardism and his role as an orthodox Soviet critic in the 1950–60s must have been particularly repulsive for Nabokov. Nabokov's *Glory* (*Podvig*, 1931, in English 1971) is an example of polemics with Shklovsky and the Left Front theory of the subordination of an individual to the "social role" and "artistry" to the documental "fact" Shklovsky propagated at the time (see Grishakova 2001a). The translator of *The Gift*, Michael Scammell, asks Nabokov's opinion of Shklovsky in his letter of April 19, 1962: "I find many affinities between your work and his (the early work, that is) and I can almost see *Dar* as being an illustration of the slogan "Iskusstvo kak priem" [The art as device — *M. G.*]. Similarly, how easily could *Knight's Move* be the title of one of your books instead of his". Nabokov responds on May 2, 1962: "I seem to remember an essay of his on Onegin. Never met him. What is termed "formalism" contains certain trends absolutely repulsive to me" (*Letters to M. Scammell*; first quoted in: Grishakova 2000; see also Scammell 2001).

Besides political alienation, one may suspect theoretical reasons for Nabokov's negative response to Formalist theory, for example, the Formalist principle of the radical avant-garde "deconstruction" of the reality and its reduction to the simple elements (according to Shklovsky's famous dictum, "I don't know how the automobile is made, yet I know how *Don Quixote* is made"). Quite in Bergsonian vein, Nabokov tends to view "reality" as "a kind of gradual accumulation of information; and as specialization". A naturalist and a poet approach "reality" in their own ways:

You can get nearer and nearer, so to speak, to reality; but you never get near enough because reality is an infinite succession of steps, levels of perception, false bottoms, and unquenchable, unattainable. You can know more and more about one thing but you can never know everything about one thing: it's hopeless. So that we live surrounded by more or less ghostly objects" (the 1962 interview for a BBC television; *SO*, 10–11).

Both artistic work and entomological research are guided by the principle of “gradual accumulation of information”. Shifts, displacements and transitions between different layers of reality that devoid the latter of its commonsense solidity and obviousness are prominent in Nabokov’s fiction. Nabokov’s poetics comprises the strong component of “fantastic realism.”

As Åge Hansen-Löve justly argues, the principle of de-automatization or defamiliarization is characteristic of different types of modernist poetics (Hansen-Löve 2001). The device of “making strange” destabilizes the subject/object, the observer/observed positions and discloses pre-rational or “pre-objective” (Merleau-Ponty) aspects of perception. Drawing on the conception of multiple realities and the new understanding of subjectivity, modernists considered an artistic text as an *illusion* of a fixed reality. Hence the modernist definition of art as “deception” or “lie”: “Lying, the telling of beautiful untrue things, is the proper aim of Art” (Oscar Wilde. “The Decay of Lying” in *Modern Tradition* 1965: 23); “Art is a lie that makes us realize truth, at least the truth that is given us to understand. The artist must know the manner whereby to convince others of the truthfulness of his lies” (Pablo Picasso, “Art as Individual Idea” in *Modern Tradition* 1965: 25); “Thus every novel is a game of hide and seek with the reader; and the aim of the architectonics, the phrase is exclusively — to lead the reader’s eye away from the sacred point, the birth of myth” (Andrei Bely. *Notes of an Eccentric*, cited in Alexandrov 1995a: 362). “I discovered in nature the nonutilitarian delights that I sought in art. Both were a form of magic, both were a game of intricate enchantment and deception” (Nabokov *SM*, 125). While discussing the slippage of reference, obscurity and resistance to clarification typical of modernist poetics, Allon White contemplates these phenomena as manifestations of “a legitimation crisis”, i.e. “a refusal to accept the proffered legitimation of the fiction — its “sincere intention” — at face value” (White 1981: 5).

Yet the principle of displacement and defamiliarization has different meanings in various artistic paradigms. The Neoromantic-Symbolist world is based on the “bispatiality” principle: the illusory and deceitful reality of the physical world versus the transcendent world of the other, “true” reality. The terrestrial

reality is seen as distorted and displaced in respect to the “true” reality and theurgic art as a correcting mirror necessary to restore the original truth: “Your mirror, which is set opposite the mirrors of the disjointed centers of consciousness, re-establishes the original truth of that which is reflected, in that it atones for the guilt of the first mirroring, which has distorted reality. Art becomes the “mirror of mirrors” — *speculum speculorum* — everything is, in its mirror — like quality, alone (*v samoi zerkal’nosti svoei*), the one symbolism of unifying being (*edinogo bytiya*), in which every tiny cell of the living, fragrant fabric creates and celebrates its petal, and every petal is shining forth and glory for the glowing center of the unfathomable blossom, of the symbol of symbols, of the flesh of the word” (Vyacheslav Ivanov’s *Zavety simvolizma* in Ivanov 1994: 189; cited in Holthusen 1986: 81–82). Provisional distortion is seen as a means to disclose the “true” reality.

Avant-garde art set the aim of destruction of the habitual modes of perception and concentrated on the deformation of the “automatized” everyday life and language by the artist’s creative will. While aiming at the deformation and destruction of automated perception, avant-garde vision penetrates and tears off a deceitful surface layer of the habitual things. According to Shklovsky, in habitual perception the thing passes as if being “wrapped up”, only its surface is perceived (*Art as Technique*; Shklovsky 1929: 12). Art as fresh, difficult and de-automatized vision is opposed to usual automatic recognition. It offers an experience of a radical deformation and *making* the thing anew (Shklovsky 1929: 13). The Formalist “defamiliarization” has two parallel meanings: (1) the strange, distanced description of a familiar object from the point of view of the outside observer: whereas some ordinary or accidental attributes of the object become irrelevant, its inherent, distinctive qualities are bared and brought into focus; (2) the constructive shift, the “*baring* of the device”.

Fantastic realism rejected the notion of the “predominant” reality altogether: multiple realities manifest themselves within the single reality. In Todorov’s opinion, *hesitation* between the equally viable interpretations of the reality is a basic feature of the fantastic genre (Todorov 1997: 24).

In the Russian literature of the 1920s, the fantastic trend was represented by Evgeni Zamyatin, the literary group of the Serapion

Brothers, Yuri Olesha, Mikhail Bulgakov and others. The Serapion Brothers' theory of the mask was based on the assumption that a "sincere" or "spontaneous" expression of thoughts and feelings is ideologically biased and kills art. The Serapions' collection was published in Berlin in 1922. It features Ilya Gruzdev's essay "The Face and the Mask." Gruzdev contrasts Pushkin with Chernyshevsky: one is a playful ironist; the other is an epitome of tendentious honesty. The contrast between Pushkin and Chernyshevsky is also extremely important in *The Gift* by Nabokov. Gruzdev's article serves as a Serapions' manifesto:

The artist is always a mask. Those who consider art a direct reflection of the artist's soul, his feelings, thoughts and ideals, recall the "naïve realists" believing in the real existence of visible things.

If optical comparisons are inevitable, it would be better to speak of "refraction" instead of "reflection" or a "prism" instead of a "mirror"; [...] as a prismatic refraction depends on the prism's substance, likewise, the realization of the artist's passing intentions depends on the visible and tangible material.

*A thought once uttered is a lie, and only untrue and refracted life belongs to art.*

Any attempt to cognize the artist's soul in its original source is fruitless. His soul is only available to us as embodied in an order or a pattern. Not a truth, but a lie, not a face, but a disguise — which refers to its prototype obliquely, either through an obvious dissimilarity or an affected resemblance.

[...] Honest expression of thoughts and feelings moves hearts, but paralyzes art. (Gruzdev 1922: 207–208; translation mine. — *M. G.*)

In Gruzdev's opinion, there is fundamental "untruth" inherent in art: the subordination of thought to the form. Author's voice and thought are mediated by the whole textual construction. The more perfect the text the more deceitful the auctorial mask. Art is not the "baring of the device", as the Formalists are used to think, but concealment of the device and a perfect illusion of the reality. The work of art as a "scheme of devices" introduces the individual angle of refraction, while the material is put into shape. Thus, the artistic form is a function of the auctorial vision. In his essay "The Form and the Content" (1933), Vladislav Khodasevich echoes Gruzdev while speaking of his own struggle with Formalist and Futurist utilitarianism and of his view on the work of art as an

externalization or objectivation of artistic vision (Khodasevich 1996: 272).

The Serapions' "Western wing" (Veniamin Kaverin, Lev Lunts, Mikhail Slonimsky) contemplated the mastery of the plot and composition, the skill of the "device", as the most vital task of a contemporary writer. Many scholars discussed similarity of the Serapions' and the Formalists' theoretical stance and their mutual influences. The groups were connected by personal ties. Nevertheless, as it is already obvious in Gruzdev's manifesto, there existed essential discrepancies. According to Gruzdev, the "baring of the device" is a mechanical art, a "dead mask" (Gruzdev 1922: 176). Kaverin parodied Shklovsky's "dead mask" in his novel *The Scandalist, or The Evenings on Vasilievsky Island* (see Kostandi 2001: 53). The Serapions were primarily concerned with artistic practice, and Shklovsky's leftist avant-gardism was obviously alien to them. They had chosen E.-T.-A. Hoffmann's story of creative fraternity as their own model and had proclaimed independence from a political ideology. They were indebted for the elements of fantastic realism in their prose not only to Hoffmann but also to Evgeni Zamyatin who was their teacher in the translators' studio of the "World Literature" (*Vsemirnaya literatura*) publishing house and in the literary studio of the House of Arts in St. Petersburg. There are a number of typological similarities between the Serapions' (especially early Kaverin's) and Nabokov's creative method, such as poetics of game, experimentation with space and time, multidimensional worlds, doubling, admixture of realistic and surrealist elements, thematization of mathematical problems and scientific theories in fiction (see e.g. Oulanoff 1976; Kostandi 2001).

Zamyatin's essays and articles, not mentioning his famous anti-utopia *We* translated to English in 1924, were known in Russian émigré circles. Zamyatin's essay "On Synthetism" of 1922 was published in the collection of Yuri Annenkov's *Portraits* reviewed by Nabokov's friend Ivan Lukash in the periodical *Russkaya Mysl*. The essay introduces the concept of "neorealism" as a synthesis of realism and the fantastic. According to Zamyatin, Hieronymus Bosch and Pieter Breughel already anticipated the neorealist synthesis, whereas contemporary authors (Nietzsche, Gauguin, Seurat, Bely and Picasso) carried it out in their works. Modern

reality is fantastic as compared to the “reality” of realism or idealism (Symbolism). The Futurists captured this fantastic “shift”, but, unfortunately, wholly concentrated on it, to loosely paraphrase Zamyatin, “like first year math students who worship the differential without knowing the integral”. The Futurist method decomposes the world or makes it explode (Zamyatin 1999: 79): it entails violent penetration and destruction of surfaces. On the contrary, neorealism is just a shift, a fantastic projection, an “integral displacement of planes” (Zamyatin 1999: 79), which unveils the fantastic within the ordinary.

To illustrate the method of neorealism, Zamyatin employs the metaphor of optical magnification of an ordinary thing such as the palm of a hand turned by the microscope into a fantastic Martian landscape (Zamyatin 1999: 77). For certain opponents of fantastic realism, optical metaphors had negative overtones, though. In his letter of 1921 to Kaverin, Maxim Gorky, the *maître* of the Soviet literature, criticizes Kaverin’s two stories (*The Eleventh Axiom* and *Van-Vezen the Wanderer*) for a lack of the “immediate feeling of life”. In Gorky’s opinion, Kaverin observes life through the “binocular of literary theory” and, moreover, through the wrong side of the binocular (Lemming 2004: 15).

Optical magnification or diminution as metaphors of literary technique have been activated by the popularity of the cinema and cinematic devices. In visual arts, close vision implies not only sharpness of a detail, but a new structure of the perceptual field.

The enlargement of a snapshot does not simply render more precise what in any case was visible, though unclear: it reveals entirely new structural formation of the subject. So, too, slow motion not only presents familiar qualities of movement but reveals in them entirely new ones [...] Evidently a different nature opens itself to the camera than opens to the naked eye — if only because an unconsciously penetrated space is substituted for a space consciously explored by man. [...] The camera introduces us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses. (Benjamin 1992: 230)

Zamyatin depicts the “neorealist” observer as entering into interaction with the world by means of optical extension of vision, which causes the telescoping of reality. The principle of

neorealism is intensive vision: optical devices penetrate the surface without disrupting it.

In his lecture *The Creative Writer* (1941), Nabokov describes the writer's work as a fantastic transfiguration of the surrounding world, "a complete dislocation or dissociation of things, and their association in terms of a new harmony": "The art of writing is a very futile business if it does not imply first of all the art of seeing the world as the potentiality of fiction". The experience of "disconnection" of things from their habitual context is familiar to children or in a state of being:

one-quarter awake, that split second of turning cat-like in the air before falling on the four feet of our diurnal wits, during which instant the combination of details we see, the pattern of wall paper, the light effect on a blind, an angle of something peeping over an angle of something else, are totally severed from the idea of bedroom, window, books on a nighttable, and the world is as strange as if we had been camping on a lunar volcano slope or under the cloudy skies of gray Venus. (*CW*, 26)

The fantastic metamorphosis of the routine reality in both Zamyatin and Nabokov is a result of a special kind of vision.

The artist's or scientist's eye discovers "patterns". Critics have written about Nabokov's love for "precise, unpredictable particulars and intricate, often concealed patterns" (Brian Boyd's article "Nabokov, Literature, Lepidoptera" in Boyd & Pyle 2000: 17; see also Bader 1972, de Jonge 1979 on Nabokov's patterns). "Nabokov's passion for chess, language, and lepidoptery has inspired the most elaborately involuted patterning in his work" (Appel 2000: xxviii; first published in 1970). The very notion of "pattern", however, needs to be specified. A number of patterning strategies that Brian Boyd lists as originally Nabokovian (Boyd 1985: 3–45) are rather typical of modernist and postmodernist fiction in general. While trying to specify the meaning of "pattern", I am aware of its half-intuitive character: it is a creative principle or a modeling metaphor employed by Nabokov himself in metadescriptions and fiction rather than a clearly articulated theoretical concept. There are, nevertheless, three main complexes of meanings related to the notion of "pattern" in Nabokov's work:



(1) The pattern is a meaningful arrangement or combination of elements. The pattern manifests certain recurrences and regularities in the apparently chaotic (meaningless) processes or phenomena.

“It seemed as though his past, in that perfect form it had reached, ran now like a regular pattern through his everyday life in Berlin” (*Mary*, 55). “Only much later did he clarify in his own mind what it was that had thrilled him so about these two books; it was that exact and relentlessly unfolding pattern...” (*Def*, 26). “The following of such thematic designs through one’s life should be, I think, the true purpose of autobiography” (*SM*, 27). Dobuzhinsky “tried to teach me to find the geometrical coordinations between the slender twigs of a leafless boulevard tree, a system of visual give-and-takes, requiring a precision of linear expression, which I failed to achieve in my youth, but applied gratefully, in my adult instar, not only to the drawing of butterfly genitalia [...], but also, perhaps, to certain camera-lucida needs of literary composition” (*SM*, 92), etc.

(2) The pattern, being a structure, a combination of tangible objects or a synchronized cluster of images, comprises a sensuous component. As a heterogeneous entity, the pattern implies “resistance” (Boyd 1985: 4–5, 33–45), e.g. resistance of a text to the reader or a seemingly chaotic reality to the observer. Therefore an intense effort of vision is necessary to discover patterns.

While drawing parallels between Proust’s and Nabokov’s “search of lost time”, Christian Moraru remarks: “At the first level, writing grasps and peruses time, seeking for trans-temporal signifieds of temporal “interpretanda” (as Peirce would put it); at the second, it offers itself to the reader as an “interpretandum”. In other words, it deciphers time, reads beyond contingent temporality, and in the same movement enciphers its revelations in a rich (sensible, temporal) imagery” (Moraru 1995: 178).

For Nabokov, creative work starts from synthetic images: “I don’t think in any language. I think in images. [...] I think in images, and now and then a Russian phrase or an English phrase will form with the foam of the brainwave [...]” (1962; *SO*, 14).

“We think not in words but in shadows of words. James Joyce’s mistake in those otherwise marvelous mental soliloques of his consists in that he gives too much verbal body to thoughts” (an index card read during the 1963 interview with Alvin Toffler; *SO*, 30). Nabokov describes his work on the novel as a wedding of inspiration and pedantic accumulation of the detail — “the known materials for an unknown structure”: “Nobody will ever discover how clearly a bird visualizes, or if it visualizes at all, the future nest and the eggs in it” (*SO*, 31). The real unfolding of the novel starts after an insight (or what Peirce called “abduction”, i.e. a “retrospective insight”) makes the form of the future work visible: “After the first shock of recognition — a sudden sense of “this is what I’m going to write” — the novel starts to breed by itself” (*SO*, 31). The novel’s imaginary unfolding goes on until the entire structure is complete. The further work is delineated as a faithful copying of a “dimly illumined” structure — not in the consecutive order from left to right, but as a sporadic and intuitive filling of gaps: “I pick out a bit here and a bit there, till I have filled all the gaps on paper” (*SO*, 32). To elucidate the logic of writing, Nabokov uses also the metaphor of painting being illumined by a flashlight. Cf. also:

If the mind were constructed on optical lines and if a book could be read in the same way as a painting is taken by the eye, that is without the bother of working from left to right and without the absurdity of linear beginnings and ends, this would be the ideal way of appreciating a novel, for thus the author saw it at the moment of its conception. (*CW*, 29)

Nabokov describes writing as an attempt to make out and take down an imaginary book, already existing in “some other, now transparent, now dimming, dimension”:

The greatest happiness I experience in composing is when I feel I cannot understand, or rather catch myself not understanding (without the presupposition of an already existing creation) how or why that image or structural move or exact formulation of phrase has just come to me. (The 1966 interview with Alfred Appel; *SO*, 69)

Sometimes an instantaneous vision of the whole structure precedes its unfolding, as in the case of *Pale Fire*: “I felt the first real pang of the novel, a rather complete vision of its structure in miniature, and jotted it down — I have it in one of my pocket diaries — while sailing from New York to France in 1959” (*SO*, 55). Thus, an oscillation between a visual and a verbal structure, a sensuous and a schematic pattern determines the idiosyncratic logic of creative work.

Resistance and adaptation between the verbal (discursive) and the visual (iconic, nondiscursive), diegetic and mimetic, articulated and nonarticulated, discrete and continuous, “actual” and “virtual” textual elements as well as their mutual infiltration and creolisation are also key topics of this research. The work of fiction is always both a verbal construction, i.e. “a textual act of representation”, and a mental image, “built by the interpreter as a response to the text” (Ryan 2004: 9). Nabokov, who shaped text fragments and whole texts on visual models, infusing the verbal medium with the visual, and consciously exploited interplay and tension between the virtual and the actual, the verbal and the visual, was extremely sensitive to the proportion of these elements in his own and other writers’ work.

To describe the writer’s ability of perceiving “trillions” of disparate things simultaneously Nabokov resorts to the metaphor of the “organism”: a number of micro-events happen at the same instant, “all forming an instantaneous and transparent organism of events, of which the poet [...] is the nucleus” (*SM*, 218; emphasis mine. — *M. G.*). The metaphor recalls Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s notion of the “organic form”, which the New Critics used to denote the organic complexity of art-work as distinct from the mechanical complexity of modern technology. As Pekka Tammi notes, there is an obvious parallel between Nabokov’s wording and “T. S. Eliot’s well-known dictum about the capacity of poet’s mind to ‘form [...] new wholes’ from logically unconnected elements” (Tammi 1985: 16). Russian Formalists of the “morphological trend” employed the biological metaphor of the “organism” to describe the literary work as a heterogeneous whole, whose elements are functionally interrelated, i.e. form a “pattern” (see Steiner 1984).

Another parallel for the “pattern” is John Crowe Ransom’s notion of “texture” as a specific order of content that particularizes, transforms and, to a certain extent, disintegrates the text’s logical and rational “structure”. As Ransom argues in his polemics with Charles W. Morris’ logical positivism, there are three levels of meaning in the work of art. The artistic work as a “symbolic” object manifests tension between the “sentimental” and “rational” levels: “The work of art symbolizes the reduction of the material world by the power of structure; or symbolizes the power of the material world to receive a rational structure and still maintain its particularity” (cit. in: Jancovich 1993: 93). Tension inherent in the “symbolic” object is a result of mutual resistance and adaptation between the sensuous object and the structure. The former is partially structured in the process, yet maintains its particularity as a specific object. Or, to put it differently, the texture and the structure could never be fully integrated — the argument which, in Jancovich’s opinion, makes Ransom a “proto-deconstructivist”: “For Ransom, the texture constantly acted to disintegrate the rational structure with particularity, so questioning the purposive forms of human activity” (Jancovich 1993: 109).

(3) The pattern is a variable or self-organizing whole: it needs time to manifest itself. The patterns are perceived “by gradual accumulation” (Boyd 1985: 26). The meaning of a jigsaw puzzle, chess combination or butterfly scale pattern depends on the observer and the process of observation, i.e. it is a form of “deferred” or dilated signification. If the second (2) meaning of “pattern” refers to the unique set of events or images constituting the moment of time, its third meaning (3) refers to change as another constituent of time.

To examine the evolutionary changes in butterfly scale patterns, Nabokov planned in the 1960s to publish the catalogue *Butterflies in Art*, which would include reproductions of butterflies represented by old painters (Boyd 1992: 481–482). He discovered that only a few Old Masters had a keen eye for butterflies, whereas certain color plates, illustrating scientific books, were, on the contrary, noticeable for their “artistic magic” (*SO*, 168).

Nabokov's view on patterning as a form of synchronization is reminiscent of structuralist approaches and Joseph Frank's notion of spatial form (Tammi 1985: 17). The latter is a system of supra-linear links and cross-references perceived simultaneously as a spatial totality and considered a dominant principle of modernist poetics. Modernist literature was fascinated by space (Genette 1998: 279). For Genette, "space" means not only the fictional but also textual space, "the space of the book", which is neither wholly passive nor subordinated to the time of consecutive reading but, while growing out from the latter and being rooted in it, steadily twists, reverses and therefore in a sense abolishes it (Genette 1998: 281). Nabokov in his lecture on *Good Readers and Good Writers* propounds a similar view: the laborious movement of eyes from left to right along lines and pages, i.e. the spatiotemporal (linear) process of text perception, is an obstacle for purely aesthetical appreciation. There is no physical organ similar to the eye to embrace instantaneously the whole to enjoy its details later. Nevertheless, at a second, third or fourth reading the reader perceives the book as a painting (*LL*, 3–4). Further Nabokov specifies, however, that it is rather the "mind's eye", to which the book appeals.

However, as some critics tend to think, modernist fiction does not abolish time. On the contrary, time is made visible, e.g. in the Proustian metaphor of the book that has a shape of time. "The spatialization of time that has been an important development in modern fiction [...] has not been a tendency toward stasis, but an effort to fix the space of the page as the location of movement in narration, rather than the illusory space of "reality" as in the mimetic novel" (Sukenick 1985: 9). In Proust, the visibility of time is achieved as a presumed synthesis of writing and visual art, "between the novel as a sequence of events and the novel which achieves the spatial unity of painting, the novel which presents the reader with simultaneous perceptions of various 'layers of time'" (Johnson 1980: 148).

Likewise, in Nabokov's fiction, the process of patterning does not abolish the temporal dimension: the latter is transposed into a

qualitatively new order. The physical time and space *intergrade* (a biological metaphor) into a new species of time and space:

I see it today as a composite portrait of rapture, in which a mountain in Colorado, my translating *Tamara* into English, Bel's high school accomplishments, and an Oregon forest intergrade in patterns of transposed time and twisted space that defy chronography and charting. (*LATH*, 168)

The art offers an opportunity to explore the "individual aberrations" of time and space: "...true art deals not with the genus, and not even with the species, but with an aberrant individual of the species" (the 1969 interview with *Vogue*; *SO*, 155).

This is a reason why a number of scholars willingly apply concepts of chaos theory to Nabokov's fiction (e.g. Werner 1999; Stoicheff 1991). Despite or rather thanks to its metaphorical status in literary studies, the notion of chaos is sometimes heuristically valuable. Some critics are rather skeptical about the application of the exact scientific concept to literary phenomena (e.g. van Peer 1998). As it seems, the concept becomes misleading only when cultivated as a vague and broad notion with ideological or metaphysical overtones, as an emblem of de-stabilizing trends in art in general. Most often, however, it is employed as a metaphor for the specific strategies of patterning and non-linearity. At least it rather exactly depicts Nabokov's literary strategy. The recurrent elements, which form a fictional pattern, play a role of "strange attractors" in self-organizing chaotic systems. Insofar as accumulation of recurrences takes place, a microscopic semantic or syntactical change may lead to the large-scale shifts and displacements. The motif of *overlooked* divergences and the avalanche-like growth of differences, often invisible to the character, is one of the basic plot-construction devices in Nabokov's fiction. On the other hand, Nabokov's keen eye for changes and distinctions had a favorable impact on the results of his entomological research. Entomologists admit that he has reached "a level of taxonomic sophistication beyond that of his contemporaries" and that some of his generic divisions have been reinstated or confirmed much later (Johnson & Coates 1999: 290; Boyd & Pyle 2000: 25).

In his BA/ MA thesis on *Nabokov's Transparent Worlds*, Indrek Grigor has made an interesting observation on the motif of obsessive use of maps and itineraries (the topographical *idée fixe*) by Nabokov's characters as a reverse side of their creator's love for patterns (Grigor 2004). Grigor draws an astute parallel between the topographical obsession and the semantic type of memory in modern psychology. Whereas time is dominant in Nabokov's "émigré chronotope", the topographical obsession leads to the domination of space. Modern psychology (Endel Tulving) borrowed the notions of episodic and semantic memory from Bergson (resp. involuntary memory and memory-habit or productive and reproductive type of memory). Bergson's productive memory, when activated, relies on the time parameter. Reproductive memory (memory-habit or contraction) is a ready-made image (Gestalt) of what has already been learnt. Shklovsky's notion of "automatism" could serve as a theoretical bridge between Nabokov's patterning and Bergsonian philosophy of time.

Nabokov himself willingly employs visuals (schemes, diagrams) in teaching, where an appeal to the reproductive type of memory has a pedagogical aim of "re-territorialization" and grounding the text in the reader's memory. He draws the plan of Mansfield Park, the topography of *Bleak House*, the scheme of "interference" of Jekyll's and Hyde's personalities, the map of Dublin with Bloom's and Stephen's itineraries, the plan of Samsas' house, the arrangement of railway carriage on the Moscow–Petersburg train for his students:

Without a visual perception of the larch labyrinth in *Mansfield Park* that novel loses some of its stereographic charm, and unless the façade of Dr. Jekyll's house is distinctly reconstructed in the student's mind, the enjoyment of Stevenson's story cannot be perfect. (*SO*, 157)

In this case the visuals work as condensed mnemonic schemes of the complex fictional worlds.

For Nabokov the writer, lepidopterology, chess and literature were the sources of multiple cross-fertilizations. Other spheres of his steady attention were academic and popular science (theory of relativity, logical and mathematical paradoxes, serialism), philosophy, visual arts and the cinema (see Blackwell 2003, Grossmith

1991, Hayles 1984, Johnson 1985, Naiman 2002, Toker 1990, 2002, etc.). The “pattern” is Nabokov’s basic modeling metaphor, which brings these different referential domains together. There are also other, derivative patterns, which function as spatio-temporal and narrative constructive models in his fiction. The main goal of my work is a description of modeling patterns of time, space and vision in Nabokov’s fiction, their function as both the categories of poetics and the philosophical or scientific concepts.



## II. The Models of Time

The irreversibility of Time [...] is a very parochial affair: had our organs and orgitrons not been asymmetrical, our view of Time might have been amphitheatric and altogether grand, like ragged night and jagged mountains around a small, twinkling, satisfied hamlet.  
(V. Nabokov. *Ada*)

Science and philosophy of the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century postulated existence of different, often incompatible time models. Psychologists (Ribot, Janet, Minkowski, etc.) discovered a diversity of peculiar pathological types of time organization besides the social time construction (Durkheim) and the temporality of perception and consciousness (Bergson). The study of time embraced physics, philosophy, psychology, psychiatry, sociology, art theory and other fields.

The elements of the philosophy of time are incorporated into Nabokov's fiction. In *Ada* (1969), "terrology" (the science of Terra) has been defined as "a branch of psychiatry" (*Ada*, 20) and might have served as a cover term for the phenomenology of time. Aqua's case is similar to the psychiatric cases depicted by Janet and Minkowski to examine the "aberrant" or alternative types of time in order to explain and describe the "normal" time construction.

In his work *Lived Time. Phenomenological and Psychopatological Studies* (*Le temps vécu*, first published in 1933), Eugène Minkowski cites observations of schizophrenics who suffer from the dislocation of time with a prevalence of the past (this pathology sheds light on the idea of *tempus reversus* as a gravitation towards the past, i.e. the most stable part of human experience): "Today at noon, when the meal was being served, I looked at the clock: why did no one else??? But there was something strange about it. For the clock did not help me any more. How was I going to relate to

the clock? I felt as if I had been put back, as if something of the past had returned, so to speak, toward me, as if I was going on a journey [...] Suddenly it was not only 11:00 again, but a time which has passed a long time before was there and there inside — have I already told you about a nut in a great and hard shell? It was like that again: in the middle of time I was coming from the past toward myself. It was dreadful. I told myself that perhaps the clock had been set back, the orderlies wanted to play a trick with the clock. I tried to envisage time as usual, but I could not do it; and then came a feeling of horrible expectation that I could be sucked up into the past or that the past would overcome me and flow over me. It was disquieting that someone could play with time like that, somewhat daemonic. This would be perverse for humanity.”

The dislocation of time becomes associated with death: “I did not know that death happened this way. The soul does not come back anymore. I want to go out into the world. I continue to live now in eternity; there are no more hours or days or nights. Outside things still go on, the fruits on trees move this way and that. The others walk to and fro in the room, but time does not flow for me. My watch runs just as before. But I do not wish to look at it; it makes me sad. Even if time passes and the hands turn, I am not able to imagine it very well. [...] What should I do when someone brings my breakfast in the morning or someone then comes to examine me? Do I know what and when? When the visit is over, it could very well have happened yesterday. I can no longer arrange it, in order to know where it belongs.

It takes me backward, but where? There where it comes from or where it was before. It goes back into the past. You have the feeling that you are going to fall behind.”

“I am like a burning arrow that you hurl before you; then it stops, falls back, and is finally extinguished as if in a space empty of air. It is hurled backwards. I mean by that that there is no more future and that I am projected backwards. I go much more quickly than before. It is the contact with old things. Strange thoughts come and push me into the past. It is terrible. It pervades everything. I can no longer think; my thought does not “stick” any more in any way. My thoughts are painfully drawn out.”

The inability to manage temporal flow evokes patient’s spasmodic concentration on the clock: “What I should do with the

clock? I have to look at it all the time. I feel forced to look at it. There is so much time, and I am different at each moment. If there were no clock on the wall, I would perish. Aren't I a clock myself? Everywhere, at all places? But I can't do any differently; it changes too much.

Now I am looking at the clock again, the hands, the face, and I see that it is going. It breaks up into pieces by itself and I watch it and can do nothing about it.

I always tell myself that it is a clock but that the parts are not working all together: the arms, the face, and the works. This is a queer impression, as if the clock were apart but remained together just the same. [...]

You get absorbed in the observation of the clock and lose the thread that leads you to yourself — as I am a clock myself, everywhere in me things always go pell-mell. I am all that myself — I lose it when I look at the clock on the wall. It is a flight, a way of getting away from yourself; I am ephemeral, and I am not here. I only know that the clock with all of its many hands jumps all around and can no longer be joined to anything” (Minkowski 1970: 284–288).

The “aberrant” types of time perception are implicitly present in the “normal perception”, i.e. they contain subjective elements of the “norm” displaced or torn from the context and isolated. Therefore the study of the “aberrant types” helps understanding of the standard types and erodes a clear-cut border between the “norm” and deviation. For Nabokov, it is a principle of creative thinking, either artistic or scientific, in general: “...true art deals not with the genus, and not even with the species, but with an aberrant individual of the species” (the 1969 interview with *Vogue*; *SO*, 155).

Aqua's mental disorder includes the inability to tell time, although she remembers dates. Her condition makes her desperate, as her suicidal note reveals. Not unlike Minkowski's patient, Aqua suffers from dislocation and disintegration of time that leads to deep ontological anxiety:

The hands of a clock, even when out of order, must know and let the dumbest little watch know where they stand, otherwise neither is a

dial but only a white face with a trick mustache. Similarly, *chelovek* (human being) must know where he stands and let others know, otherwise he is not even a *klok* (piece) of a *chelovek*. (*Ada*, 31–32)

The bilingual pun (Russian *klok* as a ‘piece’ and as the transliteration of ‘clock’) recalls Minkowski’s patient’s self-identification as “the living clock” that “breaks up into pieces” — the image, which serves as an illustration of dissociation of the idea of temporality.

Personal time always mediates the sociocultural construction of temporality: there are different levels of social and personal meanings involved in the “negotiation of time” (Brockmeier 1995: 116). Thus, a more flexible approach, based on the presumption of co-existence of multiple time scales, replaces a system of binary oppositions, where chronology is seen as the social and thus less interesting type of time construction and achrony as the artistic or poetic type of time (dis)ordering (Sternberg 1990: 902). Bergson’s distinction between the spatialized discrete time (to be grasped intellectually) and duration (to be intuited), or, in other words, “time thought” and “time lived”, has had the most significant impact on the aesthetic axiology of time and served as a source of binary time models. The principle of binarity has been detected also in Nabokov’s fiction (Nabokov’s “bispatiality” in Levin 1998: 323–391; the “double time” in Dolinin 1995). A combination of the universal (clock) time and multiple nonlinear forms of temporality is typical of Nabokov’s fiction. There is, on the one hand, a rather explicit chronological framework of action (6 days in *Mary*, 3 years in *The Gift*, etc.) and, on the other hand, the “spiritual time” of memory and imagination.

In Bergson, the difference between distinct types of time is gradual, however (see below *Bergson’s spiral of memory*). Similarly, the main principle of Nabokov’s temporality is variation of different time scales, their interference and displacement (Levin 1981; reprinted in Levin 1998). The seemingly clear-cut temporal schemes are blurred by various types of indeterminacy and occultation as well as withholding of temporal information (on different cases of occultation and subjectivization of time schemes in Nabokov see Barabtarlo 1989; Boyd 1995; Dolinin 1995; Levin

1981, reprinted in Levin 1998; Tammi 1999; Toker 1989, and others). To describe similar cases of temporal indeterminacy, David Herman propounds the notion of polychrony, “a kind of narration that exploits indefiniteness to pluralize and delinearize itself” (Herman 1998: 75).

On the other hand, Nabokov’s linear chronology itself is not completely identical to the standard historical or calendar time. Nabokov’s dates and numerals carry aesthetic function. As metonymical signs, they are able to activate literary and cultural frames of reference (Tammi 1999: 91; first time published as Tammi 1995). Dates and numerals may refer to the events in the fictional world, the facts of auctorial personal mythopoeia or the real historical events. They also serve as a means of creating intra- and intertextual links.

### **The specious present: time as a “hollow”**

Chronological gaps, resulting in time splitting into double or multiple series are the basic means of producing semantic indeterminacy in Nabokov’s novels. The much discussed discrepancy in Humbert’s timing of the last events of the novel (the last reunion with Dolores Haze, murder of Quilty and writing his confession) lead Nabokov scholars to suspect that these events might have happened only in Humbert’s imagination (Bruss 1976: 145–145; Tekiner 1979; Toker 1989: 209–211; Dolinin 1995).

In *Transparent Things* (1972), Nabokov creates an illusion of the exact chronology based on number 8, the reversed symbol of infinity and a recursive motif in his novels. Person comes to Switzerland at the age of 22; his father’s death follows; he is 32 at the time of his second visit, he meets and marries Armande; he is 40 at the time of his last, fatal visit, therefore exactly 18 years have passed since his first and 8 years since his second visit. It was August when he met Armande 8 years ago. He is apparently back again in August: “there was to be, or would have been (the folds of tenses are badly disarranged in regard to the building under examination) quite a nice little stream of Germans in the second,

and cheaper, half of August” (*TT*, 100). There are a series of clues, pointing to the 8-year interval between the hypothetical murder and Person’s last visit to Europe: the last 8 years, one fifth of Person’s life, were “engrained by grief”; the story of a man who murdered his wife eight years ago in *Transatlantic*; eight as the recurrent and symbolic number. The “real” time spent with Armande (8 months from August to March) is absent in this chronology.

My hypothesis is that this kind of the chronological gap is Nabokov’s version of the “specious present” (called “Veen’s Hollow” in *Ada*), i.e. the Real Time as an interval in time measurement or a durationless presence that is not subjected to measurement.<sup>4</sup> It disrupts the order of the physical time and produces a chronological gap. Chronological gaps usually mark the most significant episodes in Nabokov’s novels.

The fourth part of Nabokov’s *Ada* has a form of a treatise on time, where the author incorporated the majority of notes taken in the late 1950s-early 1960s (*Notes for Texture of Time*, 1957–1968; the NYPL Berg Collection Nabokov Archive) for what supposed to be a separate work of fiction, initially devised as “a scholarly-looking essay on time” and later turned into a story. Brian Boyd cites Nabokov’s 1965 interview with Robert Hughes:

The metaphors start to live. The metaphors gradually turn into the story because it’s very difficult to speak about time without using similes or metaphors. And my purpose is to have these metaphors breed to form a story of their own, gradually, and then again to fall apart, and to have it all end in this rather dry though serious and well-meant essay on time. It proves so difficult to compose that I don’t know what to do about it. (cit. in Boyd 1992: 487)

I shall start from the metaphor of time as a “hollow”.

In *Ada*, Nabokov’s protagonist Van Veen defines Time as a “hollow” (“Veen’s Hollow”), a gap, an interval between the two beats. This line of argument is apparently borrowed from Gerald Whitrow’s *The Natural Philosophy of Time* (1961).

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Deleuze’s definition of the cinematic time-image as the organization of intervals or a form of enchainment of images (Deleuze 1985: 362–365).

According to Boyd, Nabokov got Gerald Whitrow's book from Jane Howard, whom he told of his project in 1964 (1992: 487). The manuscript *Notes for Texture of Time* contain excerpts from different sources written on index cards and accompanied by Nabokov's own comments. The explicit sources indicated in the notes are:

- G. Whitrow's *The Natural Philosophy of Time* (1961)
- S. Alexander's *Space, Time and Deity* (1960)
- Fraser's *Voices of Time* (1966)
- St Augustine's *Confessions*
- Dunne's *The Serial Universe* (1945)
- M. Johnson's *Time, Knowledge and the Nebulae* (1944)

There is also a separate card with a list of books Nabokov might have read or browsed pursuing his purpose of turning an essay on time in a "story". There is the note "get" on the upper line of the card, then the book list follows:

- Bergson *Matter and Memory* 1911
- Whitehead *The concept of nature* 1920
- Pierre Janet *L'Evolution de la mémoire et de la notion du temps* 1928
- Cleugh, M. F. *Time* 1937
- Blum, H. F. *Time's Arrow and Evolution* 1951
- Sturt, M. *The Psychology of Time* 1925
- Robb, A.A. *The Absolute Relations of Time and Space* 1921
- Alexander, S. *Space, Time and Deity* 1920
- Eddington 1. *Space, Time and Gravitation* 1920
- 2. *Fundamental Theory* 1946
- Smart J. J. C. in *Analysis*, 14, 1954
- McTaggart J. M. E. *The Nature of existence*

In his book on time, Whitrow discusses the notion of the "specious present". In the philosophy of time, the "duration" as well as "specious present", i.e. the two types of the personal, "lived time", are opposed to the abstract time measured and described in terms of spatial change. As Whitrow pointed out, it was Clay who first used the notion of the "specious present" (Whitrow 1961: 78). One may

find an implicit notion of the specious present also in William James' *Principles of Psychology* (1890). James noticed that brain-processes overlap at each moment, the amount of overlapping determining the feeling of the duration occupied. Therefore the mental present is not a fixed interval, but a variable stretch of time, a particular case of time synthesis, or as Whitrow puts it, "a certain perspective unification" (Whitrow 1961: 79), where distinct events are perceived as simultaneous. Whitrow remarks that the specious present embraces both memory-images and pre-percepts, as when a doctor sees a patient's blood before the lancet penetrates the skin (Whitrow 1961: 78). The ordering of sensations varies from one observer to another: "In the case of events affecting two different receptor systems, such as sight and hearing, two physically simultaneous events can be perceived as successive and two physically successive events can be perceived as simultaneous — or even in reversed order". Because of the absence of an "objective" ordering of sensations, Paul Fraisse came to the conclusion that "we have no specific time-sense. In other words, we have no direct experience of time, but only of particular sequences and rhythms" (Whitrow 1961: 81), which means time is a mental construction. Experiences associated with different senses become synthesized into a single time-order in the course of human evolution.

Van Veen's definition of time as a rhythm, as "the gray gap between black beats: the Tender Interval" (*Ada*, 572) partially results from Nabokov's reading of Whitrow's book. There are a number of cards with excerpts from Whitrow in the manuscript *Notes for Texture of Time* (1957–68), including card 16 with a reference to Henri Piéron's book (*The Sensations; their Functions, Processes and Mechanisms*. London, 1952): "[...] specious present: may last a few seconds — seldom more than five; it has been defined (by Piéron) as a series of successive events retained in an act of unified comprehension 'like water in the hollow of the land'. This paraphrasis of Whitrow is accompanied by Nabokov's own note: "Find other metaphor". In *Ada*, Nabokov preserves the metaphor of the "hollow", however. The metaphor of time as a "hollow", borrowed from Piéron, refers to the specious individual present materialized as a chronological gap in the temporal structure



of Nabokov's novels. On the other hand, the notion of temporal indeterminacy should be considered against the framework of the turn-of-the-century philosophy of time. Bergson introduced indeterminacy into his philosophy of time to explain a gap between the past and present, memory and perception, experience of the events and the active reaction to these events. Nabokov's early novel *Mary* is, in many respects, an exemplary text that refers to a wide context of modernist culture but also to a young émigré author's attempt to find his own place in the rapidly changing world of social disasters.

### **The spiral or the circle: *Mary***

There is a recursive pattern of resonance in Nabokov's fiction, an event or object resonating in the subsequent events. The pattern has a structure of incomplete repetition or "return" on the different narrative levels. The resonating effect is known to psychologists as a specific memory process: "Resonance is a fast, passive, and easy process by which cues in working memory interact in parallel with, and allow access to, information in long-term memory" (Gerrig & Egidi 2003: 37). Cognitive psychologists consider resonance as an automatic inference process that provides continuity of reading experience, in tying different text components into a meaningful whole.

Insofar as the linkage of resonating events is automatic and sub-conscious, it fills gaps in the causal order of events. If, however, the resonance effect enters consciousness, it may serve as a stimulus for a new series of events, may engender new causalities or trigger new chains of associations. As Paul Ricoeur demonstrates in his fundamental *Time and Narrative*, the overlapping of different time strata is a characteristic feature of modernist time construction in Proust's, Virginia Woolf's, Thomas Mann's novels. In Proust, it is motivated by the narrator's desire to make time visible, i.e. to endow the book with the visible density of painting: "As Proust points out throughout the novel, the feeling of pure sensation, produced by the overlapping of the present and the past,

is similar to feeling induced by works of art” (Johnson 1980: 150). In what follows I explore this type of time construction in Nabokov and apply the method of “thick description”, in placing the pattern into specific cultural frames.

The resonating effect in Nabokov’s novels has been identified as a circular or spiral structure of time, an “anti-mimetic” temporal strategy, which “instead of ending returns to its own beginning, and thus continues infinitely”, representing a singular event as multiple (Richardson 2002: 48). Lawrence L. Lee noticed that the return is incomplete; it involves a shift, a slight asymmetry and therefore a transformation of the circle into the spiral (Lee 1976).

The spiral as a basic symbol of many cosmological and philosophical systems combines expansion, an image of spiritual or biological energy, with contraction, movement towards closure and death (e.g. Botticelli’s illustrations to Dante or Hitchcock’s sinister water spirals). One of the most obvious of Nabokov’s sources is the Symbolist idea of the spiral as a spiritualized circle (*SM*, 275) elaborated in the polemics against the Nietzschean “vicious” circle of the “eternal return”. In Nabokov, however, the vicious circle of logical thinking or the negative meaning of the encirclement as pressure of the material world is counterweighted by the positive meaning of the circle (see e.g. a collection of Nabokov’s dictums on the topic “all good things are round” in Hayles 1984: 124; cf. also: “Commonsense is square, whereas all the most essential visions and values of life are beautifully round, as round as the universe or the eyes of a child at its first circus show”; *CW*, 22).

The Mortus’ “circular method” of critique in *The Gift* has clearly negative connotations. Mortus describes “artificial circles”, perpetually revolving around his critical object, yet never touching the “center”, i.e. the essence of the work (*The Gift*, 162). Likewise, in *The Defense*, the “circle” as “encirclement” or “closure” has a negative meaning of threat or material pressure exerted upon Luzhin by the external world (Naiman 2002). Finally, there is a vicious circle of logical thinking, the thought steadily returning to its starting point. In *Bend Sinister* (1947) the mental work of a “wary logician” is compared to the exploration of an unknown and exotic land, which turns out to be just an excursion for “a carload

of tourists”, “pressing on surmounting all difficulties and finally arriving in triumph at the very first tree he had marked!” (*BS*, 146).

Yet the circle or closed spiral of a falcon’s or boomerang’s flight evokes a parallel between hunting and artistic mastery as an image of energy and self-fulfillment:

[...] for the motifs [...] are now obedient to me — I have tamed [...] themes, they have become accustomed to my pen; with a smile I let them go: in the course of development they merely describe a circle, like a boomerang or a falcon, in order to end by returning to my hand. (*The Gift*, 226)

A similar circular movement is characteristic of the top-level tennis game: “...the momentum begun with an arching swing still continues after the loud twang of taut string, passing as it does through the muscles of the arm all the way to the shoulder, as if closing the smooth circle out of which, just as smoothly, the next one is born” (*Glory*, 47). The protecting “envelope” of love is also circular: “...both of them, forming a single shadow, were made to the measure of something not quite comprehensible, but wonderful and benevolent and continuously surrounding them” (*The Gift*, 171). The envelope of flesh protects the autonomy of human creatures: “Unless a film of flesh envelops us, we die. Man exists insofar as he is separated from his surroundings” (*Pnin*, 17). Thus, the “circle” has both a positive and a negative meaning as either an “infinite” or a “vicious” circle.

Sergei Davydov interprets the structure of *The Gift* as a series of vicious circles such as the fourth chapter “enclosed” in the sonnet: arguably, only the episode of the father’s trip opens the circle and elevates the protagonist to the level of the creator (Davydov 1982: 198). Yet the meaning of the sonnet, which is, in Davydov’s opinion, a version of the vicious circle, is ambivalent: “a sonnet, apparently barring the way, but perhaps, on the contrary, providing a secret link which would explain everything — if only man’s mind could withstand that explanation” (*The Gift*, 203). The sonnet probably grants a secret access to the “full” explanation, i.e. the otherworldly vision (*The Gift*, 203; see Livak 2003: 174–175 on the analogous role of the sonnet in Gide’s *Journal des Faux-*

*Monnayeurs*). As a border, which belongs to both “this” and “other” reality, the circle not only separates but also links them. Further, the circle has a positive meaning as the form of the book corresponding to “the circular nature of everything in existence”, i.e. “Fyodor’s idea of composing his [Chernyshevsky’s — *M. G.*] biography in the shape of a ring, closed with the clasp of an apocryphal sonnet (so that the result would be not the form of a book, which by its finiteness is opposed to the circular nature of everything in existence, but a consciously curving, and thus infinite, sentence)” (*The Gift*, 196). Leona Toker describes the structure of *The Gift* as a spiral, an embodiment of tension between the infinite and incomplete and a striving for the world of infinite consciousness. Each gyre leads to a new transformation of the protagonist’s life (Toker 1989).

In her article on the spiral of time in *Ada* published in *A Book of Things about V. Nabokov* (1974), Nancy Ann Zeller notes that the periods of Ada’s and Van’s separation follow a certain regular pattern: 4 years (1884–1888), 4 (1888–1892), 12 (1893–1905) and 17 (1905–1922). They form a kind of spiral since every reunion restores the “originary” event, i.e. Ada’s and Van’s first summer. The last number (17) seems to be deviant in the scheme (one would expect 16 instead). However, in the hotel, where Ada stays one floor below him (the 4th floor — less one floor or one year), Van must “run down a spiral staircase” to see her. Thereby, as Zeller observes, the rhythm of repetition is restored. Nabokov often employs such deviating schemes: his spiral is a deviating return since time, almost like the Heraclitean river, produces a displacement and never allows one to return to the same place.

Manuscript *Notes for Texture of Time* (1957–1968), partially incorporated in *Ada*, contain some clarifying remarks on the relationship between circles and spirals in Nabokov’s fiction. Card 1 on “Spirals” says: “The spiral is the escape from the cycle.” The dictum is, as further indicated, taken from “Fraser, 1966”, i.e. from J. T. Fraser’s *Voices of Time*. It is accompanied by Nabokov’s own remark in square brackets: “No, the circle is an infinite spiral with the lines of convolution merging — see next card.” Card 2, dated October 28, 1964 says: “If Time can be imagined to have a shape

this shape is a spiral.” “The spiral is a circle (an orbit) that comes apart. A circle (an orbit) is a spiral so tight\* as to seem closed.

\*with the lines of convolution so closely following each other as to seem to merge.”

Thus the circular spiral is an embodiment of the infinite renewal of the convolutions of time. The movement of the human observer is illusory, it is actually time that moves: “the unfortunate image of a “road” to which the human mind has become accustomed (life as a kind of journey) is a stupid illusion” (*The Gift*, 294); “we live in a stocking which is in the process of being turned inside out, without ever knowing for sure to what phase of the process our moment of consciousness corresponds” (*BS*, 161). A simplest parallel to the Nabokovian image of time is the Archimedean spiral. An insect’s movement along the slowly rotating clock-hand from the center of the clock-face usually exemplifies the Archimedean spiral in popular literature. The movement of the insect is spiral, although it might seem straight from the point of view of the insect itself.

Nabokov’s apparently naive and simple first novel *Mary* (1926, in English 1970) already comprises a combination of spatiotemporal strategies characteristic of his future work. The circle, spiral or Möbius strip are thematized as figures of memory, imagination, writing and auctorial presence.

The action is distributed between the six days of the week (April 1–6, 1924). The first episode takes place on the night from Sunday to Monday, the last early on Saturday morning. The reader is informed in advance that the protagonist is going to leave on Saturday. He leaves, indeed. The rather rigid temporal scheme is overdetermined by the numeric isotopies: six bedrooms, six first days of April (the year-old calendar leaves are used to number the doors in the Russian *pension*), the six-columned porch of a closed mansion where Ganin meets his beloved, six years of emigration, the hands of the huge clock showing six thirty-six (“This is a magic number, which reads the same forwards and backwards and, if turned upside down, reveals two nines — the year of Nabokov’s birth”; Dolinin 1995: 7). There are different means of additional

structuring of time: railway timetable, lunchtime, landlady's cleaning habits, regular dates, etc.<sup>5</sup>

Fatalistic horizontal movement (of train, ship, or bus) is a spatial analogue of the movement along the chronological axis. The motif of the stuck elevator that is constantly out of order foregrounds, by way of contrast, the horizontal dominant. The *pension*, where the protagonist rents the room, is a "train" where passengers come together by chance and also a station since it stands by railway tracks, and trains seem to pass, unseen, right through the house. It is not clear whether a train or a *pension* moves — a possible allusion either to the relativist world-picture (*Über die spezielle und die allgemeine Relativitätstheorie*, Einstein 1965, 1: 560) or to the famous train of the early cinema (e.g. in Lumière's films), where spectators were frightened by what they perceived as the train's movement in the "continued" psychological space of the audience. The train's fatalistic motion is also a metaphor of émigré life, where passengers become occasionally united by their common destiny.

Elizabeth D. Ermarth considers the "tracking metaphor" (car, train or tram images in Robbe-Grillet's, Cortázar's, and Nabokov's fiction as well as in modernist painting) to be an emblem of the historical time, "synchronized clocks and collective consciousness".

In *The Gift*, Fyodor — riding one more time on the Berlin tram that takes him along tracks laid out by others and carrying him where he doesn't want to go to do a job he doesn't want to do — makes his major life-defining choice when he simply gets off the train [...]. (Ermarth 1992: 41–42)

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<sup>5</sup> A similar "thick" time structuring is characteristic also of *The Gift*, where the action lasts three years and the tripartite supportive patterning is recursive: three meanings of the "key" (exile; the key move in chess problems alias the "key" of literary design; the source of poetic inspiration; Johnson 1982); three structural parts of the novel (Chernyshevsky's biography as the center and the two lateral mirror parts that form a "double fugue"; Karlinsky 1963); three projects of writing a biography that the protagonist considers (Lee 1976: 82–95) and his three completed literary works (the verse collection, Chernyshevsky's biography, and the future novel, i.e. presumably *The Gift* itself; Waite 1995).

Moreover, after getting off the tram, Fyodor undergoes displacement in time: instead of winter Berlin, he finds himself in summer Russia, which turns out to be the imaginary Russia of his recollection. In *Mary*, the lovers meet “on the six-columned porch of a stranger’s closed mansion” (*Mary*, 67). In the Russian text, the porch is identified as a “platform with columns”, a metaphor of the railway station. In the novel’s final episode, a train is carrying Ganin to the south.

The initial rigid six-day scheme is further complicated by the story of Ganin’s recollection that embraces nine years, engenders new causal chains and blurs the hierarchy of narrative levels. Likewise, the inertia of the horizontal movement and the intermittent rhyme of encounters and separations is transformed by the vertical motion: the three-step ascension from the “underworld” of the film shooting, where émigrés “sell their shadows”, through the “medium world” of the *pension* to the “upper world” of the angelic workers on the roof as the author’s “agents” (see Toker 1989: 46; Nakata 1999). First the movement, as controlled by the film director and limited by the “underworld” space of the shooting, is illusory; it is impeded in the elevator episode; finally it assumes the form of a free flight, naturally preparing the denouement, i.e. Ganin’s escape.

This ascension corresponds to the three-step descension of recollection — from the paradise lost of the Russian countryside to the Crimea and, finally, to the Berlin “world of shadows”. The Russian countryside is represented as the positive “upper world” on the axiological axis of the novel, the effect of heavenly soaring being produced by the clouds moving behind the window: “...the head of the bed seemed to be pushing itself from the wall”, “any moment it might be expected to take off, across the room, out into the deep July sky where puffy, bright clouds slanted upward”; “all day long the bed kept gliding into the hot windy sky” (*Mary*, 31–32). The recollected movement is synchronized with the stream of memories in Berlin: “all Tuesday he wandered [...], his memories constantly flying ahead like the April clouds across the tender Berlin sky” (*Mary*, 33).

The three *topoi* (the fictional Russian mansion, Crimea, and Berlin), marked and foregrounded, together with intermediary background *topoi* (St. Petersburg, Istanbul, Poland), are the components of the topographical space. The same entities mapped as the landmarks of action belong to the chronotopical space. The axiological value of these locations and imaginary realia demarcates the textual space. The metatextual space unfolds as a figure of the three-step descension-ascension within the metaphorical “spiral of time”. Thanks to the vertical spatio-temporal dimension, re-employment of the story takes place and the meaning of the whole narrative pattern is modified: paradoxically, the predictable ending (the protagonist’s departure) produces an effect of surprise.

The “internal story” that Ganin recollects and thus externalizes plays a central role in this transformation<sup>6</sup>. It has the function of a catalyst: being “recycled” and externalized, it triggers the action. The formal markers of externalization are changes in discourse modality, externalization of interior speech (e.g. psychonarration or narrated monologue, instead of quoted monologue), substitution of introspective verbs for the verbs of action, etc.

At the outset of the novel, the two characters happen to meet in the dark stuck elevator. The elevator, like the train and the telephone, is prominent in Nabokov’s “personal mythology” as a locus of mysterious shifts within the different layers of space-time. These objects are also important as part of the cultural mythology of modernism (Timenchik 1988; Tsivyan 1987; Leving 2004). To “contextualize” the image, the hydraulic elevator in the St.-Petersburg house of his parents, a bright detail of his childhood, may have served as a “prototype” for the recurrent fictional elevators in Nabokov’s novels. In his speech *The Creative Writer* (1941), Nabokov recommends that the writer’s ivory tower be supplied with a telephone and an elevator “just in case one might like to dash down to buy the evening paper or have a friend come up for a game of chess” (*CW*, 21).

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<sup>6</sup> Internal stories are “the stories which are stored in memory and performed in the mental theater of recollection, imagination, and dream”. They are “virtual, private, fleeting” and less articulated in comparison to the external stories, which are “physical, recordable, public, permanent” (Jahn 2003).



For the protagonist Ganin, the elevator accident involves the discomfort of the enforced conversation and physical contact with an invisible interlocutor, an anonymous tiresome “voice”. The episode is constructed to produce an impression of Ganin’s visibility and his interlocutor’s invisibility. From the commonsense point of view, neither Ganin nor his interlocutor is able to see his vis-à-vis in the dark. Yet the distribution of narrative roles produces a semantic effect of Ganin’s “visibility” (“vision” in verbal art is an effect of verbalization; more on this below), whereas invisible Alfyorov maintains the control over the situation. He knows Ganin’s name and tries to define Ganin’s character, i.e. to make him even more “transparent”, by pondering over its etymological meaning. Alfyorov remembers their accidental encounter and, moreover, has been listening to Ganin’s “Russian” cough through the wall, whereas Ganin has hardly noticed the neighbor even entering the elevator. Ganin is frustrated by Alfyorov’s intrusive presence and by his own “transparency”. The situation is rather typical of the modernist fiction (e.g. Andrei Bely’s *Petersburg*; Henry James’ *The Turn of the Screw*; Franz Kafka’s novels), where the fictional world is opaque as seen from the character’s perspective. “The visible domain is under the dominance and control of the invisible domain”: the protagonist is removed “from the action-constructing texture” (Doležel 1998: 190, 193), i.e. placed into a witness’ or observer’s position. It is also typical of other Nabokov novels, especially *Laughter in the Dark* (*Kamera Obskura*, 1932–33, in English 1961), *Invitation to a Beheading* (1935–6, in English 1959) and *Bend Sinister* (1947): tormentors are invisible to their prey or not individualized. Nabokov, however, rules out a mythological or mystical significance of the “visibility – invisibility” dichotomy in Bely’s, Kafka’s or James’ works. That is why the angelic appearance of the “demonic” creature from the dark seems so grotesque when the light comes back.

Alfyorov assigns a symbolic meaning to their chance encounter in the elevator — the uncertainty of Russian émigré life as “perpetual waiting” (“the floor is horribly thin and there’s nothing but a black well underneath it”; *Mary*, 3). In Ganin it evokes only an intensified feeling of the enforced communal life of the pension

demarcated by the details of “common property” (pieces of furniture, separate volumes of the encyclopedia, leaves of an old calendar) distributed among the rooms (Toker 1989: 36–37). The distribution forms a sort of metaphorical “transparent community” under the aegis of their ghostly owner, the late German businessman. Since the landlady is now a widow and “her double bed too spacious for her to sleep in, she resent[s] being unable to saw it up into the required number of parts” (*Mary*, 7).<sup>7</sup>

The meaning of the “transparency” is a lack of privacy. The pension is “a house of glass” (*Mary*, 37). The symbolic image of the “glass house” has a positive meaning in the democratic (Rousseau) and a negative meaning in the anti-totalitarian literature (Karamzin; Zamyatin). In Rousseau’s *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761), Julie’s virtuous husband Wolmar argues that all moral orders come to one main rule: “Don’t do anything you would not dare to make known to everybody” (“Ne fais, ni ne dis jamais rien que tu ne veuilles que tout le monde voye et entende”).

Further he illustrates this virtuous manner of behavior by the example of a Roman, who decided to build his house in such a manner as to let everyone see what was going on inside (Part 4, letter 6; Rousseau 1782: 42; on the semantics of transparency in Rousseau see Starobinski 1971). In his story *My Confessions* (1802), parodying Rousseau’s *Confessions*, Nikolai Karamzin wrote: “Our century may be called the century of frankness in a physical and moral sense [...] There are now light houses and large windows facing the street everywhere: you are welcome to look! We want to live, act and think in transparent glass” (Karamzin 1964: 729).

The recurrent motif of “opacity” as privacy, fragility and uniqueness of the personal world prominent in *Invitation to a Beheading* links Nabokov’s work to the literary anti-totalitarian tradition.

A sudden turn of action occurs when Alfyorov shows a photograph of his wife: the grey world of shadows becomes colored.

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<sup>7</sup> There is a hint of parody of the “collective marriage” in the bed story and probably a reverberation of Lenin’s “Solomon decision” to saw up the piano to divide it among the claimers. The story was mentioned in Nabokov’s “first and last political speech” at Cambridge (Boyd 1990: 168).

Ganin leaves the woman, who has been a nuisance for him, and plunges into memories. The explanation of the impact the photograph has on Ganin is initially withheld: as the “internal story” of recollection becomes externalized, the backstory is eventually disclosed. An optical “event” becomes a metaphor for the narrative transition: a “rearrangement of the light prisms of his life” in the Russian text, a shift of “the entire kaleidoscope of his life” in the English translation (*Mary*, 30). The latter substitution specifies the event as both accidental and necessary: the kaleidoscope combines randomness with pattern. In a kaleidoscope, “a fatal leap ‘from freedom to necessity’ takes place, and utter arbitrariness suddenly reveals itself as providence” (Epstein 1995: 272). In Bergson’s *Matter and Memory*, the metaphor of the “kaleidoscope” is employed to illustrate the fact that the image of the observed world is structured by the observer’s body. The system of images that form the observer’s perceptual universe may be altered by a slight movement of the observer’s body, as though by a turn of a kaleidoscope: “Cette image occupe le centre; sur elle se règlent toutes les autres; à chacun de ses mouvements tout change, comme si l’on avait tourné un kaléidoscope” (Bergson 1910a: 10). Thus, the kaleidoscope serves as an emblem of the multiplicity of perceptual “selves” and their ever changing subjective worlds (see Erman 1988: 37).

The occasional indefinite-personal form (“one lay as though on air”) emerges in the narrator’s speech, which, together with the occasional “we” (see Tammi 1985: 44), diminishes the distance between the narrator and the character and reveals their similarity or even identity. Ever larger fragments of the recollected past are embedded into the external story. One may speak of the auctorial narrator’s and protagonist’s “shared” point of view since the parallel between Ganin’s recollections and the transmuted autobiographical detail disseminated over other Nabokov’s works is obvious.

Recollection unfolds as a re-creation of the world through the visual evocation and localization of separate details: it is a “journey through the luminous maze” of the wallpaper patterns or through “the bright labyrinth of memory” (*Mary*, 32–33). It is compared to

the game of patience, where the apparently random detail organizes the pattern. The details of the past world (the chips from skittles and the spokes of the bicycle) still exist since “matter is indestructible” (*Mary*, 34). Therefore the past world may be restored as the present: its disappearance or re-appearance is only a temporary optical effect. Following in Proust’s footsteps, Nabokov examines how a chance visual or tactile stimulus triggers the involuntary memory process. Psychology and philosophy of the turn of the century (William James, Freud, Bergson, etc.) discovered that the traces of the past continue to exist and shape the present experience. As Pyotr Uspensky puts it in his *Tertium Organum* (1911), “The past and the future can not be nonexistent: if they were, the present would not exist either. They definitely exist somewhere, only we do not see them” (Uspensky 1992: 25). For both Bergson and Freud the past exists in the body and the mind: the self comprises its former states. On the basis of these perceptual or psychological traces full anamnesis, i.e. installment of oneself in the past and restoration of the past experience, must be possible.

The lost world is much more real than the shadow life in the pension, the time of recollection displaces the actual present, and the real woman is superseded by the imaginary one. Three days of recollection are synchronized with nine years, intensified and condensed into a pattern:

Time for him had become the progress of recollection, which unfolded gradually. And although his affair with Mary in those far-off days had lasted not just for three days, not for a week but for much longer, he did not feel any discrepancy between actual time and that other time in which he relived the past, since his memory did not take account of every moment and skipped over the blank unmemorable stretches, only illuminating those connected with Mary. Thus no discrepancy existed between the course of life past and life present. It seemed as though his past, in that perfect form it had reached, ran now like a regular pattern through his everyday life in Berlin. (*Mary*, 55)

Yet the imaginary “more real” reality itself splits into a more real and a less real or external and internal reality (Levin 1998: 283), and assumes a circular form. The rendezvous on the porch of the deserted mansion has already introduced the motif of separation,

i.e. a “future recollection”. The lovers’ privacy is disturbed by a voyeur: “Something dreadful and unexpected occurred, a portent perhaps of all the desecrations to come” (*Mary*, 68). The farewell, “protracted and sorrowful, as though before a long separation” (*Mary*, 68); winter in St. Petersburg; a telephone call interrupted by somebody’s voice; lack of privacy; an unsuccessful date — are external manifestations of the internal fading of love. The discourse modality changes from the hypothetical to assertive one to make the externalization even more clear: “*Perhaps* they truly realized that their real happiness was over” (70); he “fell out of love with her, *as it seemed then*, forever” (72); he “*decided* that it was all over, that he was no longer enamoured of Mary”; “he *knew* that he would never visit her again” (73).

A new rise of love starts from a chance encounter on a train: “he could never forget her” (*Mary*, 75), — then a new separation and recollection of the very beginning of the love story (“Mary, whom he loved forever”, 102). During the revolution and the civil war Ganin moves with the White Army to the Crimea, where he receives Mary’s letters. It is a “memory within memory”: Ganin in Berlin recalls himself in the Crimea recalling himself in the province of St. Petersburg. The narration describes a *circle*: in her letters, Mary already mentions Podtyagin and her future husband Alfyo-rov, who are currently Ganin’s neighbors in Berlin. Alternative states of consciousness (dream, illness, depression, ecstatic sense of happiness, etc.) are related to the most important narrative transitions in the novel: they are externalized and trigger the turn of action.

The internal reality of recollection becomes externalized: it penetrates the Berlin reality and starts filling it with “messages”. Thus, the electric advertising sign exteriorizes Ganin’s own question “Can-it-be-possible” — “hurled into the sky and suddenly getting a jewel-bright, enraptured answer” (*Mary*, 27). Streets become inhabited by the isolated “worlds”: “five sleepy, warm, grey worlds in coachman’s livery; and five other worlds on aching hooves, asleep and dreaming of nothing but oats” (*Mary*, 27).

Jakob von Uexküll described living worlds as *Unwelten* (The Umwelt Institute was founded in Hamburg in 1926). The “other-

world messages" in Nabokov's fiction are analogous to Uexküll's signs translated into subjective experience on the perceptual border of the "outside" and the "inside": their interpretation depends on the individual perceptive "equipment". Uexküll's "Umwelt" denotes the world of lived experience that is opaque for the outside observer and serves as a mediator for any perception and knowledge. The "Umwelt" is both a closed autonomous system and a fragment of the "outside" reality. As Thure von Uexküll argues, while commenting upon Jakob von Uexküll's ideas, "reality, to which all is subjected and from which everything is deduced, is not to be found "outside", in infinite space, which has neither beginning nor end, and which is filled with a nebulous cloud of elementary particles; nor is it to be found "inside" within ourselves and the indistinct, distorted images of this external world created by our mind. Reality manifests itself in those worlds — described by Uexküll as Umwelten (subjective-self-worlds) with which sense perception surrounds all living beings like a bubble — clearly delineated but invisible to outside observers. These "subjective-self-world bubbles" like Leibniz's monads are the elements of reality which form themselves into a synthesis of all subjects and their subjective self-worlds at the same time undergoing constant changes in harmony with one another. The ultimate reality — Uexküll uses the term *Natur* — which lies beyond and behind the nature conceived by physicists, chemists, and microbiologists, reveals itself through signs" (Uexküll 1992: 280). The sign "no longer signifies an object to a subject, but it signifies the reaction of a subject to an object" (Uexküll 1984: 192). Signification is seen as the articulation of the border between the observer and the observed. The participant observation means the observer has to reconstruct the situation while observing its traces in the other observer's reaction and placing himself into the other observer's position (Husserl's "appresentation").

The early Russian Symbolists (decadents) were also pondering over man's relation to the outside world, which was for them the form of imprisonment. The Symbolist interpretation was based upon the Gnostic idea of isolation of the two worlds: arguably, the man is imprisoned in this reality as in Plato's "cave" and is doomed to see only deceitful reflections of the otherworld (Hansen-Löve 1999: 58). A positive sense of "transparency" as a

medium between the two heterogeneous worlds is typical of late Symbolism (Hansen-Löve 1999: 44). In Nabokov's fiction, the metaphors of "transparency" and "opacity" disclose different perceptual and epistemological aspects of vision. As Olga Skonechnaya justly observes, Nabokov's imagery is in many respects indebted to early Symbolism with its obsession with the closed world and the evil artist-creator (Skonechnaya 1999: 134; see also Leving 2001 and Bethea 2004). The metaphors of terrestrial "prison", "deceitful reflections" or illusions of the terrestrial life and any kind of hellish creatures inhabiting this world are inherited by Nabokov from the early Symbolism. However, the Symbolist metaphors are reconceived by him in terms of new cultural sensibilities.

The "other worlds" are embedded into *this*, human reality as readable signs, and their hidden meanings are available for a participant observer. Zoran Kuzmanovich propounds a similar argument in his refutation of the "otherworld hypothesis" as a system of religious or mystical ideas (Kuzmanovich 2002). Kuzmanovich cites the imaginary philosopher Pierre Delalande's dictum in *The Gift* ("the otherworld surrounds us always and is not at all at the end of some pilgrimage") and excerpts from other Nabokov's novels where the "ghostliness" functions as a metaphor of perception ("spectral Germans and Frenchmen in whose more or less illusory cities we, émigrés, happened to dwell" in *Speak, Memory* — or, vice versa, "the pale ghosts of innumerable foreigners flickering among those natives like a familiar and barely noticeable hallucination" in *The Gift*). Likewise, Eric Naiman in his critique of Brian Boyd's "occult interpretation" of *The Defense* demonstrates that Boyd ascribes the functions that belong to the Author to the hypothetical otherworldly figures (Naiman 2002: 199). "Ghostly" interpretations are based not on the textual evidence, but rather on the "unnecessary hypothesis" of ghostly intervention.

The image of the "Umwelten" wandering in the streets anticipates the consolidation of Ganin's interior private "world". He revolts against the "burden of history" and its external purposes alien to his own intentions and desires. Ganin does not want to be just a passive victim of his émigré destiny and maintains the importance of his personal "world". Free indirect discourse incorporated in the

narrator's speech renders Ganin's thoughts and a new feeling of the *strangeness* of the surrounding reality, perceived before as routine and annoying: "Everything seems strange in the semidarkness: the noise of the first trains, the large, gray ghost in the armchair, the gleam of water spilled on the floor. And it was all much more mysterious and vague than the *deathless* reality in which Ganin was living" (*Mary*, 62; emphasis mine — *M. G.*). This image of "deathless reality" indicates once more that the *pension* is a kind of "limbus", a realm between life and death, where Dantesque shadows revolve aimlessly. Ganin is again waiting for adventure, and Podtyagin's heart attack is the first in a series of future changes and catastrophes. Ganin escapes from his beloved Mary minutes before her arrival in Berlin and flees to the south again. The turn is again presented as an optical shift, a rearrangement of shadows in the morning: "the image of Mary [...] remained in the house of ghosts" (*Mary*, 114).

### 1. Involution and metamorphosis

As Leona Toker observes, "the "curiously calming effect" of the sight of workmen building a house stands for the author's feelings upon completing the novel" (Toker 1989: 46). The metaphors of "binding" (in the Russian text) and "book" in the end of the novel indicate that Ganin's affair with Mary is an imaginary "romance": its replay "lasted no more than four days [...] which were perhaps the happiest days of his life". There is every reason to suspect the auctorial presence in the end of the novel: it brings in completeness and the exit from the circle. In the introduction to the English translation of the novel, Nabokov mentions "the relief of getting rid of oneself, before going on to better things" (*Mary*, xi) as his main motivation for writing. The strategy he uses to thematize the auctorial presence is a gradually diminishing distance between the auctorial narrator and the protagonist.

It is the case when "the relationship between the auctorial teller and the hero is made to bear directly on the thematic import of the



narrative” (Tammi 1985: 111). Toker foregrounds the metaphysical and metafictional implications of the strategy:

For Nabokov, as for his contemporary Jorge Luis Borges [...], the relationship between the fictional world and the mind of the author is a tentative model for the solution of ‘the mystery of the universe,’ the mystery of the relationship between the humanly cognizable and the transcendent worlds. The model consists in the rhetorical technique which, taking advantage of geometry, could be aptly termed “involution”: the tangling of hierarchies, the erosion of the border between the “inside” and the “outside”, between the diegetic fictional plane and the extradiegetic mind of the implied author. (Toker 1987: 293)

The protagonist of *Mary* carries the burden of the author’s past: from the auctorial perspective, the circle is seen as a spiral. The main axis is set through the parallel between the film shooting in the “shadow life” and the house building in the “real life”. In the latter “the *lazy* workmen *walking easily* and *nonchalantly* like *blue-clad angels* from plank to plank *high above*”, and in the former a mob of extras is “acting in total ignorance of what the film is about” (*Mary*, 21). In the former, moreover, “[t]he figures of the workmen on the frame showed *blue against the morning sky*. One was *walking* along the ridge-piece, as *light and free* as though he were about *to fly away* [...]. This *lazy*, regular process had a curiously calming effect [...].” (*Mary*, 113–114). The motifs of easiness, nonchalance, freedom, flight and the color blue create the image of an escape and aspiration for the otherworld, fusing the horizons of the auctorial narrator and the character. The workmen-angels are high “above” over everything happening below in Ganin’s world, above ordinary people as extras “acting in total ignorance of what the film was about”: they are in a sense the author’s agents, signs of the “other”, extradiegetic reality (Nakata 1999).

The spiral of time is a form of the narrative “enspacement” (Derrida, Kristeva). In Nabokov, the motif of desperate attempts to escape the “spherical prison of time” is linked with another controlling pattern, that of metamorphosis, both “the evolution of the artist’s self through artistic creation” and “the cycle of insect metamorphosis” (Appel 2000: xxiii). Nabokov’s novels “spiral in

upon themselves and provide their own commentary”. By contrast to the widespread terms, such as the “self-conscious novel” or “metafiction”, the concept of “involution” foregrounds the process of interaction between the protagonist and the author-narrator. The simplest forms of involution are found in cartoons and comic strips:

The creatures in cartoons used to be brought to life before one’s eyes: first, the *tabula rasa* of an empty screen, which is then seen to be a drawing board, over which the artist’s brush sweeps, a few strokes creating the characters, who only then begin to move. Or the convention of the magical ink bottle, framing the action fore and aft. The characters are sucked back into bottle at the end, just as they had spilled out of it at the start. (Appel 2000: xxv)

Proust’s or Nabokov’s novels are modeled on much more complicated forms of involution, which include the multilevel correlation between the protagonist’s and the author-narrator’s point of view.

The degree of auctorial presence ranges from the full identification to the full detachment. Sometimes the distance between the implied author and the protagonist is minimal: the author uses the protagonist to observe his own past. Mobility — identification, splitting, changing places — of the three narrative positions (the author, the narrator and the character or the “metaobserver”, the observer and the observed) blurs the narrative hierarchy. While alluding to fragments where the narrator’s experience is identified with that of the character, Pekka Tammi notes:

Given the smoothness of the transition from one plane of experience to another, it may be finally impossible to decide for certain which of the cited clauses are used exclusively with reference to the hero and which implicate also the auctorial N[narrator] — such indeterminacy being apparently the precise point of this method. (Tammi 1985: 44)

According to Julian Connolly, Ganin’s absorption in recollection entails a split between his consciousness and his physical body, which “continues to inhabit a Berlin *pension*”. The split can be seen as “a forerunner to a central pattern in Nabokov’s work — the division between that aspect of the self which displays auctorial potential and that aspect of the self which functions as a character”

(Connolly 1993: 32). Sergei Davydov considers a series of Nabokov's protagonists as ever more successful artists, until in *The Gift* the protagonist reaches the level of the creator. Yet Ganin does not write and has no auctorial ambitions: he is brought closer to the author through the act of creative vision.

What happens in *Mary* may be identified as the “self-objectivation through the female protagonist” (Bakhtin 1979: 31): the female character is needed to make the protagonist see himself, i.e. to awaken his capacity for self-reflection. Bakhtin observes that the character endowed with autobiographical traits is, in principle, incomplete. The author's consciousness embraces the whole fictional world, yet, on the other hand, the author positions himself as the Other with respect to his characters. In the case of the autobiographical character this detachment is incomplete: the character partakes of a “higher” (auctorial) reality, thereby his image is endowed with an element of mystery (Bakhtin 1979: 20–21). In what follows I shall consider the meaning of the overlapping realities in the novel and the interpretation of time spiral in the most significant cultural frames of the modernist age.

## 2. The triple dream

Yuri Levin noted that Ganin's recollection may be described as a process of the gradual, three-step awakening or multilayer dream (Levin 1998: 282). Such dreams are depicted in *King, Queen, Knave* (1928, in English 1968) and other Nabokov works (see Tammi 1985: 185–188). Furthermore, the whole text, e.g. of *Mary; King, Queen, Knave; Bend Sinister; Transparent Things*, may be modeled on such a dream. The dream, where the top layer cancels the reality of the previous layers and itself assumes the form of the reality, attracted Freud's and Breton's attention. In *Communicating Vessels* (1932), Breton examines a “hashish dream” where “the insertion of a conscious dream into an unconscious dream” occurs, “the dream that offers itself with ‘palpable’ proofs as a lived reality” (Breton 1990: 60). The “conscious” layer of the dream interestingly resembles reality — this is what is described as

communicating vessels”, i.e. the communion of different realities and the absence of a clear-cut border between the dream and reality.

Description of the “dream in a dream” is recurrent in Romantic and neo-Romantic literature. The story *Mitya's Love* written by Bunin a year before Nabokov's *Mary* also comprises a motif of a multi-layer dream: “Сном, или, скорее, воспоминанием о каком-то чудесном сне была тогда его беспредметная, бесплотная любовь” (“His objectless, fleshless love was then a dream or, more precisely, a memory of a miraculous dream”; Bunin 1982, II: 327). Mitya's dream ends, however, in a fatal awakening into the cruel world of eros and death.

Sergei Davydov was the first to refer to the structure of Lermontov's *Dream* (1841) as a model for many Nabokov's texts (Davydov 1982: 1–2). Nabokov interprets the poem as Lermontov's dream predicting his fatal duel with the officer Martynov:

There is an initial dreamer (Lermontov, or more exactly, his poetical impersonator) who dreams that he lies dying in a valley of Eastern Caucasus. This is Dream One, dreamt by Dreamer One.

The fatally wounded man (Dreamer Two) dreams in his turn of a young woman sitting at a feast in St. Petersburg or Moscow. This is Dream Two within Dream One.

The young woman sitting at the feast sees in her mind Dreamer Two (who dies in the course of the poem) in the surroundings of remote Dagestan. This is Dream Three within Dream Two within Dream One — which describes a spiral by bringing us back to the first stanza. (*Congeries*, 248)

Strictly speaking, there is a description of the *double* dream in Lermontov's poem: the *post-mortem* vision of the wounded man who sinks into *deadly* sleep and sees the young woman who dreams of the “familiar corpse” lying in a valley of Dagestan (Lermontov 1983: 79). The poem is narrated in the first person but in the past tense. The first-person form produces the effect of narrator's presence, despite his presumed death, whereas the past tense and the “familiar corpse” produce the effect of distancing from the events narrated. Nabokov reads this narrative paradox as a

description of the prophetic dream or a possible “future recollection”.

If the multilayer dream is a dream with increasing degree of reality, the Lermontov–Nabokov’s dream subverts the effect of virtualization of the previous layers since the top layer repeats, albeit in a different perspective and a more elaborated form, the bottom layer. Due to the double actualization of the initial dream, the latter obtains an increased degree of reality.

“The relations among the world of the narrative system are not static, but change from state to state. The plot is the trace left by the movement of these worlds within the textual universe” (Ryan 1991: 119). While reading *Mary* as a triple dream or a triple recentering of the system of textual worlds, one obtains the following scheme. The lost paradise of the first love eventually becomes virtualized and displaced to the position of a possible world as a recollection or a dream. It is actualized again in the framework of the Berlin “actual reality”, whereas the Berlin life itself becomes virtual. However, the image of the paradise lost and regained also becomes superseded by another actualized reality. The double actualization, in its turn, leads us to the notion of the eternal return and the Proustian figure of a “lost-and-found” memory.

### 3. Nietzsche’s circle of the eternal return

The ending of *Mary* is open: it is not quite clear whether it is a new cycle of the “eternal return” or an exit from the circle. The open ending has engendered multiple interpretations. Nabokov’s text activates a number of cultural frames, which should be scrutinized for a more comprehensive interpretation of the novel.

An allusion to Nietzsche is incorporated in Ganin’s interior monologue: “I once read about the ‘eternal return’” (*Mary*, 34). In John B. Foster’s opinion, this allusion is rather unique and surprising in the context of Nabokov’s later work. Foster interprets it as a means to integrate his personal memories into the cultural past and enhance the reader’s involvement in the fictional world (Foster

1993: 40–43). Yet the significance of the allusion is not limited by its “phatic” function, i.e. establishing a contact between the author and the audience: it affects deep levels of textual meaning and spotlights some “Nietzschean” traits of the protagonist. Ganin’s physical strength and his touch of brutality are combined with sensitivity and capacity for introspection, which is typical of both the Nietzschean *Übermensch* and of the protagonists of the young émigré writers’ fiction (Boris Poplavsky’s Apollon Bezobrazov, Gaito Gazdanov’s Aleksandr Volf). Ganin “could pick up a chair in his teeth. He could break a string by flexing his biceps. His body was always burning with the urge to do something...” (*Mary*, 8).

On the other hand, Foster argues that the notion of the “eternal return” is used in *Mary* only to turn the Nietzschean slogan upside down: “Alongside Ganin’s irrecoverable summer of love, eternal recurrence becomes a hollow slogan” (Foster 1993: 42). Though the protagonist is prone to see the present situation as a complete return of the past, he suspects that this “game of patience” never comes out again and therefore chooses departure as a sort of a “counter-move”. This version of ending would anticipate the denouement of *The Defense*. It is also repetitive, however: Ganin’s love affair with *Mary* has never been complete and has always ended in separation. I would suggest that Nabokov’s treatment of Nietzsche’s “eternal return” is ambivalent. The re-reading of Nietzsche by young émigré writers displaced accents and subverted simple oppositions, such as the Symbolist “spiral” versus the Nietzschean “circle”.

For Nietzsche, the “eternal return” means first and foremost the choice and a joyful affirmation of existence. The weak seeks the “aim” or “meaning” of life; the strong accepts the return. The “eternal return” means acknowledgement of the circular nature of time, as shown in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, where the dwarf persuades Zarathustra that time is a circle (cf. in *The Gift* — “the circular nature of everything in existence”; *The Gift*, 196). The Symbolists sought to reconcile the Dionysian mythological circle with the apocalyptic line of the Christian history directed towards the future, which should have resulted in a spiral movement. Not only the Nietzschean adoption of circularity have been relevant for

Nabokov, but also Andrei Bely's polemics with Nietzsche in his essay "Circular Movement" (1912), where Bely calls for not following a treacherous shadow of repetition and for moving onward and upward since the true time is a spiral or "a circular line" (Maguire and Malmstad 1987: 98–105). The metaphors of the spherical prison of time and spiral as "a spiritualized circle" are prominent in Nabokov's fiction. Yet the Christian or metaphysical "otherworldly" hypothesis neither explains the ending of *Mary* nor provides an interpretation for the spiral of time in his other novels.

Ganin does not want to be just a passive victim of émigré fate and advocates his right to the personal past, a personal "story". That is why he sarcastically reacts to the abstract reasoning on the fate of emigration and the "curse" of Russia. Distinction drawn between "chance" and "fate" as well as the protagonist's conscious construction of behavior evokes again a certain autobiographical parallel:

Nabokov's estrangement from his own emigrant destiny [...] was already contained in his novels and short stories written in Russian. Future biographers and memoir writers will be desperately trying to return, to insert, to squeeze Nabokov into the emigrant fate and, thereby, to equal themselves to him, or put him nearer themselves. However, Nabokov, if we judge him by his own writings, was never a great lover of company, particularly in serious matters. (Pyatigorsky 1979: 5)

The re-reading of Nietzsche in émigré circles displaced accents of the Symbolist reading. For young émigré writers the problem was not so much in reconciling Dionysus with Christ; aesthetics with religion, as in moving on and acting despite the social catastrophe, i.e. the Bolshevik revolution, which produced an abyss between them and the cultural past. An earlier Nietzschean work, *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life* (1874, from the *Untimely Meditations*) might have been especially significant for Nabokov and young émigré writers. This work describes the happiness of forgetting instead of clinging to the past, the ability to appropriate and transform the past into "life and blood". The preliminary title of Nabokov's novel was *Happiness*. The parallels I draw between Nabokov's novel and Nietzsche's work are typolo-

gical. There is no evidence of a direct intertextual linkage, although, according to Boyd's testimony, young Nabokov read Nietzsche in the Crimea (Boyd 1990: 150). The "eternal return" is mentioned in *Mary*. Nietzsche's work is indubitably an important cultural background for young émigré fiction. The idea of the "burden of the past" was common for different thinkers of the turn of the century (Bergson, Freud, and Nietzsche). Nietzsche was the most radical in his discovery of the positive power of forgetting and demand of a transformation of historical energies into personal action.

Nietzsche speaks of "the plastic power" that determines the fate of both a human and a whole culture, i.e. "the capacity to develop out of oneself in one's own way, to transform and incorporate into oneself what is past and foreign, to heal wounds, to replace what has been lost, to recreate broken moulds" (Nietzsche 1988: 62). The first chapters of the Nietzschean essay *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life* are organized by a series of visual metaphors and the spatial metaphor of the circle. There is "night and fog" or "a dark, invisible burden" of the past and the "envelope" or "the vaporous region" of the unhistorical, of the past assimilated and vanished. There is a horizon between the present and the past, "a line dividing the bright and discernible from the unilluminable and dark". The living creature must be capable of "drawing a horizon around itself" (Nietzsche 1988: 63). Separation of the past from the present ensures self-sufficiency, consolidation of vital energy and capacity for action. It evokes "the appearance within that encompassing cloud of a vivid flash of light", "a little vortex of life in a dead sea of night and oblivion". The past serves as a nurturing medium for the present. Thus, a man seized by passion for a woman or for a great idea is blind in respect to the surrounding world, which seems dull and meaningless: "whatever he does perceive, however, he perceives as he has never perceived before — all is so palpable, close, highly coloured, resounding, as though he apprehended it with all his senses at once" (Nietzsche 1998: 64). Similar states of consciousness stipulate existential changes through the extraction of the vital elements from the nurturing darkness of the past and their transformation into the present.



Nabokov's text is modeled on similar figurative patterns: optical shifts, patterns of light and color, darkness and shadow serve as perceptual motivations for action rather than its satellite motifs. They form the novel's narrative program. The internal story of the protagonist's recollection and perception is transformed into action and becomes externalized: it begins in darkness and is eventually imbued with light. A steady feature of émigré life is its "shadowiness". The "shadow" appears in various configurations: in "the house of shadows"; in a movie extra's work as selling one's own shadow; in cinematographic images as "anonymous shadows" which are "sent out all over the world". The description of the film shooting is saturated by the semantics of death: "deathly brightness", "murderous brilliance", "the painted wax of motionless faces", "dying red sunsets" (*Mary*, 9) — according to Yuri Tsivyan, the reception of cinema as "the underworld", the world of shadows, was usual in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Tsivyan 1991: 22). Nabokov toys also with the double meaning of "shooting" ("killing" and "film shooting"): "the huge facets of lamps that were aimed, like cannons, at a crowd of extras" (*Mary*, 9).

The final episode unfolds in the full brightness of a sunny morning. What is initially perceived as the "dark burden of the past" is transformed into the bright present, the "past present" melting in the "actual present". As projected upon the Nietzschean context, the circle in *Mary* is a figure of self-fulfillment. As a positive symbol, it denotes self-sufficiency, self-consciousness, formal perfection — the qualities vital for a young émigré writer. Like the Nietzschean "vaporous region" of the unhistorical it is the space where the past, the present and the future meet (cf. Nabokov's short story *Circle*) and which serves as a medium for the future action. In both Bergson and in Nietzsche the existence of the "virtual past" is a premise for productive forgetting and action.

#### 4. Time and double vision in Proust and Nabokov

Forgetting is a necessary element of the Proustian poetics of memory. In Proust's opinion, the writer needs to invent a new lan-

guage to restore the past. The past impression found and resurrected by involuntary memory is to be translated into the figurative language of writing. Proust was conceiving a “cathedral novel” under the influence of Ruskin’s *The Bible of Amiens*. Ruskin’s ideas of the “truth of impression” and the lost language of figures had the most important impact on the conception of the Proustian work (Carter 2001: 55).

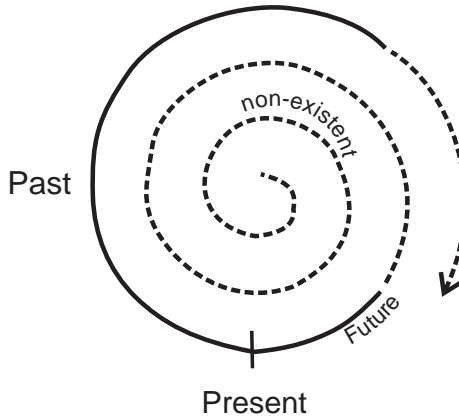
The narrative sequence “lost and found” is recurrent in Proust’s novel. The “lost” is the element of narrator’s consciousness that is temporarily unavailable: the process of involuntary memory gives access to the forgotten part of himself. As Roger Shattuck has shown, in Proust the process of recollection as observation of the lost past changes both the observer and the observed. The observed image of the past becomes a “real”, volumetric object. Shattuck employs the metaphor of the “stereoscope” to describe the process of memory in Proust. The Proustian recollection involves at least double perception, which is necessary to get a full stereoscopic image: a fusion of the two images produces an impression of a three-dimensional object. It is evident already in the famous madeleine episode, but, in Shattuck’s opinion, the whole structure of Proustian work is subordinated to the “lost and found” principle: forgetting, a hole in time or an interval, is a part of memory (Shattuck 1964: 65). In Proust, a sense of time is acquired “against all expectations” (Shattuck 1964: 113). The Proustian narrator proceeds from fleeting and self-sufficient contemplation of the *moments bienheureux* of recollection to artistic creation.

On the one hand, the temporal structure of Mary is analogous to the Proustian “zigzag”, i.e. a system of analepses and prolepses, which form a movement between the past and the moment of recollection, the distance between the protagonist and the narrator eventually diminishing. The eventual fusion of the past and the present occurs thanks to the overlapping of analepses and prolepses (past and future recollections) with the moment of recollection. Later, Nabokov brings this technique to perfection and describes it in *Ada*:

When, in the middle of the twentieth century, Van started to reconstruct his deepest past, he soon noticed that such details of his

infancy as really mattered (for the special purpose the reconstruction pursued) could be best treated, could not seldom be *only* treated, when reappearing at various later stages of his boyhood and youth, as sudden juxtapositions that revived the part while vivifying the whole. (*Ada*, 33)

Yet in Nabokov, ever widening layers of the past are embedded in the present as the motivation for *action*, the imaginary future becoming the past again. Thus, repetition itself becomes the catalyst of change and the means of re-employment. Nabokov learnt a lot from Proust, yet the Proustian project to embrace and “regain” the past is alien to him (cf.: “But beware, *anime meus*, of the marcel wave of fashionable art; avoid the Proustian bed and the assassin pun”; *Ada*, 575). Proust’s protagonist “seeks extratemporality in an identity of past and present that alleviates his fear of the future. Achieving extratemporal equilibrium, Marcel loses his fear of death” (Livak 2003: 93). Likewise, the intention of Nabokov’s protagonists in *Ada* is “to live in the book”, i.e. to reach a pure timelessness of art. Yet the feeling of time as loss is much more acute in Nabokov: memory does not embrace the present, a brief “*Now*” that disappears without leaving a trace and is available only as a “future recollection”. Yet the future does not exist (see Boyd 1985: 53–56 on Nabokov’s dismissal of the future): it is permanently recycled into the past via the brief moment of the present (Figure 1: Notes for *Texture of Time*, Spirals, Oct. 28, 1964). Time has a spiral shape, and only an insignificant part of the spiral is visible and accessible to the human: the immediate past and the present. The dotted line means the ‘non-existent’ part of time: the remote past and the future.

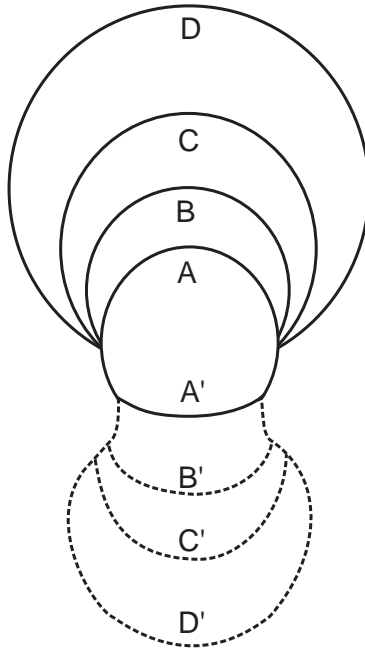


**Figure 1.** The future becoming the past. Nabokov's Spiral (Notes for Texture of Time, Spirals, Oct. 28, 1964).

### 5. Bergson's spiral of memory

Leona Toker draws a parallel between Bergson's conception of *élan vital* and Nabokov's idea of creative consciousness. She argues that perception in both Bergson and Nabokov is "akin to the disinterested contemplation that is involved in aesthetic experience" (Toker 1995: 368). Toker's another valuable suggestion is that the Bergsonian idea of the interpenetration of matter and consciousness or eventual impregnation of matter by consciousness as a result of the "vital impetus" may help to avoid the transcendental "otherworld" hypothesis and to provide a satisfactory interpretation for Nabokov's assertion that he is "an indivisible monist" (Toker 1995: 368).

There is also a typological parallel to Nabokov's iconization of time as a spiral in *Matter and Memory* (1896). Bergson offers the scheme of the "spiral" structure of perception (Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Bergson's Spiral. (Bergson 1910a: 108)

The past experience is steadily incorporated into the present. The signs of “virtual memory” are encrypted into perception, which becomes impregnated with recollections:

En fait, il n'ya pas de perception qui ne soit impregnée de souvenirs. Aux données immédiates et présentes de nos nous mêlons mille et mille détails de notre expérience passée. Le plus souvent, ces souvenirs déplacent nos perceptions réelles, dont nous ne retenons alors que quelques indications, simples “signes” destinés à nous rappeler d'anciennes images. (Bergson 1910a: 20)

Memory is a subjective part of experience, yet it becomes condensed and automated through perception, i.e. memory-habit action. It may even replace perception, while entering inconspicuously a perceptual image or substituting it.

Insofar as perception returns to the same object, it becomes spiral. Bergson shows by means of the diagram that perception, where the past and the present overlap, embraces an ever-wider

system of the virtual interactions between memory and the object perceived. During repeated perception, the interpenetration of the images of memory and the image of the perceived object occurs: memory embraces ever-larger layers of the virtual matter, and matter becomes more and more impregnated by consciousness. The body of the observer serves as a mobile border between matter and consciousness: it both separates and unifies them because of its dual (material-spiritual) nature.

When governed by the pure necessity of action, perception becomes automated. When guided by imagination, it is creative. The relation between the automated and creative perception is gradual: perception is a delayed action, yet its ultimate aim is enabling action and self-actualization (Eric Laursen also touches upon the Bergsonian meaning of “action” in his article on memory in *Mary*; see Laursen 1996). The data of perception becomes encrypted, condensed and automated, i.e. turns into habit memory that imports the past into the new perceptions and facilitates action. Perception is the “master of space”, action is the “master of time”, says Bergson (“la perception dispose de l’espace dans l’exacte proportion où l’action dispose du temps”, Bergson 1910a: 19). When perception is not subjected to the strict necessity of action, it launches the process of involuntary memory that enriches perception, increases the degree of indeterminacy and freedom (Bergson 1910a: 17–18) and creates the object of perception anew.

Gilles Deleuze, who disentangled and developed the thread of Bergsonian thoughts, distinguishes between the productive (intensive) and reproductive (extensive) repetition (see also Rimmon-Kenan 1980). This Bergsonian–Deleuzian topic is a typological parallel to Nabokov’s recurrent plot scheme of return. The “productive” repetition involves an object or event, whose return becomes a source of change and further differentiation: through it the past is created anew from the present. The repetition may serve as a catalyst of the new, production of difference, articulating a tension between memory and perception. It works within the “now”, a brief moment between the past and the future that disappears, leaving no trace and becoming available only as a “future recollection”.

In Bergson's wake, Deleuze distinguishes between learning signs as reproduction and action. The latter takes place in the relation between a sign and a response it elicits. In the course of semiotic interaction one acquires a "practical familiarity with signs" in the form of "sensory-motivity", which involves the Other, i.e. difference (Deleuze 1997: 23). Hence the two types of repetition — reproductive, imitative (representation) and approximative, singular (appresentation). The latter produces a difference within the Order: "Cyclical generalities in nature are the masks of a singularity which appears through their interferences; and beneath the generalities of habit in moral life we rediscover singular processes of learning" (Deleuze 1997: 25). The "difference within similarity" is also a principle of aesthetic innovation that is further deployed by Nabokov in his refutation of the romantic cliché of the "perfect double".

Semantization and iconization of grammatical forms in the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 2<sup>nd</sup> part of *Mary*, i.e. before and after the protagonist recognizes Mary on the photograph, illustrates the difference between the "reproductive" and "productive" repetition.

In the Russian text, imperfective verb forms predominate in the 1<sup>st</sup> part and perfective forms in the 2<sup>nd</sup> part. The iterative constructions, temporal adverbs that denote repetition ("again"), imperfective verbs performing demonstrative-exemplifying functions are characteristic of the 1<sup>st</sup>. Thereby the action designated by imperfective verbs is represented as routine, usual, repetitive. In the English version, again, the iterative verb forms predominate ("would", "used to"), e.g.:

Дом начинал ходить сдержанным гулом. A subdued rumble would start to move through the house.

И Ганину становилось скучно опять. And again Ganin was seized with boredom.

И ей [Кларе] становилось тоскливо и неловко, когда та рассказывала ей о своей любви. She felt distressed and embarrassed whenever Lyudmila told her about her love affair.

И она принималась опять притворяться то бедной девочкой, то изысканной куртизанкой. She [...] at once began putting on her act that wavered between the poor little girl and the subtle courtesan.

[...] подруга [...] начинала ей передавать еще не остывшие, до ужаса определенные подробности, после которых Клара видела чудовищные и стыдные сны. [...] her friend [...] would describe the still warm and horribly exact details, after which Klara would dream monstrous and shameful dreams.

In chapter 3, verbs in the past perfect employed to describe the consequences of Ganin's liason with Lyudmila are suddenly replaced by the present forms referring to the unique, singular event.

In the second part (starting with chapter 4) past indefinite forms predominate. The number of verbs of movement (jumped out, moved, went out, climbed up, marched, walked rapidly, turned sharply, etc.) and nominative sentences suddenly increases.

Grammatical contrasts illustrate the difference between the reproductive and productive repetition. The latter is a source of difference: it entails the re-plotment of the story. The protagonist, who is initially an observer, removed from the sphere of action and decision-making, becomes an actor. In contrast, reproductive repetition, where "sameness overrides difference", "is akin to conservative instincts", "the urge 'to return to the inanimate state', to the 'inertia inherent in organic life'", as Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan says, while citing *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* by Freud (Rimmon-Kenan 1980: 155).

### Tempus reversus

The idea of *tempus reversus*, reversible time, was discussed in philosophy and physics of the late 19<sup>th</sup>–early 20<sup>th</sup> century (see e.g. Uspensky 1988 on Pavel Florensky's analysis of *tempus reversus* in dreams and Dolinin 2004: 323–324 on Florensky and Nabokov). The laws of thermodynamics evoked the idea of the beginning and the end of the universe, which was rather repugnant. Therefore certain physicists (e.g. Boltzmann) started to speculate on the possibility of the two directions of time and thermal equilibrium attained thanks to the two-directionality of time in certain regions of the universe. In philosophy, there was a similar reaction to the linearity of time: the ethos of the regaining of the past and regeneration as



backward motion common to Nietzsche, Freud, Proust and other thinkers.

In *The Natural Philosophy of Time* Gerald Whitrow draws attention to the fact that the past-future relations are predetermined by the conditions of human perception. We can only see incoming light but not outgoing light of the stars: “Consequently, if time were reversed and the stars attracted light from us instead of omitting light to us, they would be invisible” (Whitrow 1961: 12). Whitrow also quotes Norbert Wiener’s description of the hypothetical situation in which we are to communicate with another being whose time runs in the opposite direction:

Communication with such a being would be impossible. Any signal which he might send us would have as consequences from his point of view events which were its antecedents from ours. [...] If he drew us a square, we should not see the square being drawn, but instead we should observe its gradual disappearance line for line. (Whitrow 1961: 12)

Nabokov read Whitrow’s book and copied excerpts from it in his manuscript *Notes for Texture of Time*. In *Ada*, the following description of “America” and “Russia”, the two parts of the split “Amerussia”, contains reverberations of the polemics on the direction of time in physics and philosophy:

[...] a gap of up to a hundred years one way or another existed between the two earths; a gap marked by a bizarre confusion of directional signs at the crossroads of passing time with not *all* the no-longers of one world corresponding to the not-yets of the other. It was owing, among other things, to this ‘scientifically ungraspable’ concourse of divergences that minds *bien rangés* (not apt to unhobble hobgoblins), rejected Terra as a fad or a phantom, and deranged minds (ready to plunge into any abyss) accepted it in support and token of their own irrationality. (*Ada*, 20)

In these imaginary worlds time runs in different directions, but without any regularity. Because of the “bizarre confusion of directional signs” of time, the separated worlds must be only partially visible one to another, i.e. they are “flickering worlds”.

Science in the 20<sup>th</sup> century repudiated the notion of mirror parity, and the idea of two-directional time was put under question. This is the context, where Nabokov's images of false repetition, illusory return and the incomplete identity of the enantiomorphic worlds should be considered. The human body's directionality and polarity of the vertical (up-down) and horizontal (front-back) dimension is asymmetrical: "Upwards and frontwards are positive, whereas downwards and backwards are negative, in an egocentric perceptual and interactional space based on the notions of visibility and confrontation". Dexterity causes a slight asymmetry in the right-left dimension (Lyons 1977: 690–691). Binocular vision is based on slight disagreement of the two versions of reality provided by two eyes. The final blow to the idea of enantiomorphic mirror parity has been dealt by the discovery in physics of a slight asymmetry on the sub-atomic level in the mid-1950s. The consequences of the discovery have been explained to the public by Martin Gardner, the famous popularizer of science. The reverberations of Gardner's book in Nabokov's novel *Look at the Harlequins!* (1974) have been examined by D. Barton Johnson (Johnson 1985). Lewis Carroll is one of the nearest sources for both Nabokov and Gardner (the latter is the editor of the *Annotated Alice*). The space of Wonderland contains innumerable opportunities of contraction, expansion, distortion, reversibility of two- and three-dimensionality. The Looking-Glass world is built upon mirror reversals of asymmetric structures: the arrangement of chess pieces in the beginning of the game, the looking-glass books where "the words go the wrong way", looking-glass milk which isn't good to drink, reversibility of dreams (Alice dreaming of the Red King, who is dreaming of Alice, who is dreaming of the King, etc.) (Carroll 1970: 180, 181, 238).

The invention of the cinema opened an opportunity for a mechanical imitation of *tempus reversus* — rewind, an illusory movement directed beyond the limits of the filmic space-time. The use of *tempus reversus* in film produced an effect of the miracle violating the second law of thermodynamics. Thus, in *The Vanishing Lady* by G. Méliès' (1896), a skeleton becomes a living woman. A link between birth, death and cinematic *tempus reversus*

is provided at the outset of Nabokov's autobiographical narrative *Speak, Memory*. "A young chronophobiac", who watches a home-made movie taken before his birth, sees the "front" (pre-natal) and the "rear" (post-mortem) abyss as identical. Therefore a "brand-new baby carriage" reminds him of an empty coffin, "as if in the reverse course of events, his very bones had dissipated" (*SM*, 19). A description of the cinematic effect of reverse movement, the movement observed through the train window, opens Nabokov's novel *King, Queen, Knave*: "[...] and people, people, people, on the moving platform, themselves moving their feet, yet standing still, striding forward, yet retreating as in an agonizing dream full of incredible effort, nausea, a cottony weakness in one's calves, will surge back, almost falling supine" (*KQK*, 1).

There are the two main types of *tempus reversus* in film and fiction: the physical and the mental one. The physical one reverses the arrow of time and the second law of thermodynamics. In an elementary form, it is the backward movement, imitating the reversed flow of time: "the film being run backward through the projector", "the oddity of walking backward, regurgitating food, seeing a collection of scattered china fragments scramble together into the form of a cup and leap upwards into one's hand" (Sawyer 2002: 57). In an extended form, it is the story time reversed, as, for example, in backward time travel. The mental *tempus reversus* inverts the temporal order of telling, imagining or remembering of the events. *Tempus reversus* either includes the reversal of causality or introduces indefiniteness and ambiguity into the causal ordering. *Tempus reversus* is difficult to sustain for a long time: the logic of narrative construction is based on both prospective and retrospective structuring, i.e. "forward" and "backward" causality. For example, a typical early film, a short melodrama or mystery story, actively exploited the dialectics of the prospective and retrospective plot structuring as "the dialogue between credulity and scepticism" or, otherwise, "naive expectations" and "falsification of expectations" (Kermode 1968: 18).

Apocalypse is a model and a typical instance of the "fictions of the End" (Kermode 1968: 6), where the ending is the dominant of the plot construction. A "readjustment of expectations in regard to

an end” (Kermode 1968: 18) is a characteristic feature of the popular apocalyptic: because of the continuing postponement of the end the new scenarios are permanently offered, yet the role of the ending and retrospective construction remains prevalent. Likewise, the history as “*historia rerum gestarum*” is structured in the reverse perspective in its relation to an “outcome”: the events important from the viewpoint of the present are filtered as meaningful and “historical” (Uspensky 1988: 70–76). Autobiography, as a story of one’s own life is, in principle, incomplete. It might be retrospectively structured, yet its closure is always felt to be provisional, whereas the “real” end is postponed. The paradoxical relation of the beginning and the end is discussed in the opening of Ivan Bunin’s autobiographical book *Arsenyev’s Life* (1929–1933). Insofar as the two are inseparable, the beginning of an autobiography is already an anticipation of its natural end. Bunin’s narrator ponders over the question whether the man would be free of the fair of death if he did not know the date of his birth (Bunin 1982, III: 7).

Tempus reversus is always present *in potentia* in the “temporal arts”, i.e. literature, music or cinema. In physical reality, the experienced time is irreversible: having been experienced, it could not be cancelled or made nonexistent. Yet “the possibility of *going back in time*” is always on offer in fiction or film. In the latter, “the length of time of imaginary event is cancelled out by the duration of the film — during which I have managed, even so, to become involved in all the narrative variations of any potential situation, having ‘quasi-experienced’ it without having to suffer the consequences” (Mitry 2000: 86). The possibility of “going back in time” has a positive meaning as a realization of the Rousseauistic dream of the retrogressive evolution. In Kurt Vonnegut’s novel *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969), Billy Pilgrim, who has become “unstuck in time” and randomly visits different parts of his life, watches war movies backwards to lead humankind back to the perfect time of Adam and Eve. Ralf Norrman considers Vonnegut’s protagonist’s behavior a contemporary reverberation of the archaic magical ritual, where reverse movement is sacred, and an expression of the human subliminal longing for symmetry “as the vehicle for a removal to a state before the beginning of, or a state after the end

of, time” (Norrman 1998: 14). Inversion is a mirror reproduction of the other, “missing” half of the earthly existence through which the wholeness is restored and paradise regained. The nostalgic dream of paradise lost and regained is also one of the basic motifs of Nabokov’s fiction.

No less important is the opposite motif, that of the “false return”, prominent in Nabokov’s autobiography and novels: the place of return is apparently or presumably the same, but it turns out to be different. It is impossible to get back to the same location since the movement of time causes a displacement or a shift. Man is used to spatialize time and equate it with motion in space, yet whereas space is discrete, time and motion are continual and exclude strict repetition. This Bergsonian topic already emerges in Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*, where Zeno’s paradox of Achilles and a tortoise is employed to illustrate a typical approach to the problem of time and space:

Absolute continuity of motion is not comprehensible to the human mind. Laws of motion of any kind only become comprehensible to man when he examines arbitrarily selected elements of that motion; but at the same time, a large proportion of human error comes from the arbitrary division of continuous motion into discontinuous elements. (Tolstoy 1991: 879)

In Zeno’s paradoxes, motion (time) is equated with sections of space being traversed. This is also the source of Vadim’s idiosyncrasy in Nabokov’s novel *Look at the Harlequins!* — his inability to use the same mental route to get back to the place where he started:

In order to make myself imagine the pivotal process I have to force an opposite revolution of the decor: I must try, dear friend and assistant, to swing the entire length of the street, with the massive facades of its houses before and behind me, from one direction to another. (*LATH*, 106)<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> D. Barton Johnson has carefully examined the intersections between Martin Gardner’s study of parity and mirror symmetry in *The Ambidextrous Universe* and the narrator’s inability to mentally transpose right and left in Nabokov’s *Look at the Harlequins!* (Johnson 1985: 170–184). One might, however, add that equation

The sinister meaning of *tempus reversus* as a “regressive return” is elaborated in *The Defense*, where it is also thematized as retrospective narrative hermeneutics. The two meanings of “fabula”, as defined by modern narratology, correspond to the prospective and retrospective narrative construction: fabula as (1) a “true story”, transformed into a specific “syuzhet” (plot); (2) a structure of meaning or a “teleology” recovered retrospectively through backward inferences (Jonathan Culler, Peter Brooks and others), i.e. causal links and significant connections that make the text meaningful. The retrospective structuring sheds new light on the progressive logic of narrative succession as the work of *Fatum*.

There is every reason to believe, as a matter of fact, that the mainspring of narrative activity is the very confusion of consecution and consequentiality, what comes *after* being read in the narrative as *caused by*; the narrative would in this case be a systematic application of the logical error condemned by Scholasticism in the formula *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*, which might well be the motto of Fate, of which the narrative is in fact merely the ‘language’; and this ‘squeezing together’ of logic and temporality is achieved by the armature of the cardinal functions [...] the cardinal functions are the moments of risk of the narrative. (Barthes 1994: 108–109)

The temporal succession turns chance into necessity: within the temporal succession of the character’s life an event acquires the meaning of destiny.

Leona Toker applies the metaphor of Fate to Nabokov’s narrative strategy and identifies the authorial narrator’s work as the work of *Fatum*, which entwines the anticipating, meaning-generating signs into its web (see Tammi 1985; Toker 1989), i.e. when Hermann’s often mentioned stick becomes a fatal evidence against himself in the end of *Despair*. A character usually has no access to these signs. Toker (Toker 1989: 48–49) discloses the meaning of the implicitly present signs as a form of authorial intrusion into storyworld affairs under the guise of the metaphorical mechanism of *Fatum*. This type of narrative hermeneutics is typical of the

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of time with space became an apple of discord for Parmenides and Heraclitus as well as for their twentieth-century heirs (e.g. Bradley and Bergson).

detective or mystery story where the effect precedes the cause (the latter to be discovered later) and thus a causal relation is subverted (Shklovsky 1925). In Nabokov, the strategy has a metafictional function.

Whereas structuralists concentrated on temporal ordering of events (i.e., the difference between *fabula* and *syuzhet* or *story* and *plot*), poststructuralist narratology attacked the idea of the chronological ordering as such to prove that the order embodied by *fabula* may be subverted (Culler 1980). Borrowing his argument from Nietzsche, Culler points out that the causal structure of the narrative is a result of a tropological operation, i.e. of a substitution of the cause for the effect.

Actually both types of ordering, prospective and retrospective, are present in narrative structure: the prospective one as expectation and anticipation, the retrospective one as explanation and interpretation, i.e. narrative hermeneutics. As Jon-K. Adams argues, “causality is not part of the perceptual level of experience but part of the interpretive level”, or, in other words, “causality is not part of events as experienced, but only of events as described” (Adams 1989: 151). These two levels correspond to the character’s and narrator’s perspective on the events. The meaning of the narrative structure depends on the relationship and the degree of discrepancy between the two perspectives. In *The Defense*, Nabokov explores a gap between the narrator’s and character’s vision, making the character aware of the insufficiency of his knowledge. The protagonist of *The Defense*, the chess Wunderkind Luzhin, discovers a recurrent pattern of events in his life and commits suicide as a sort of counter-move to disrupt the repetition.

The narrative is time-bound because of the structuring presence of the end and, on the other hand, a permanent postponement of the ending. The “narrative desire” works its way through the resistant “dilatatory space” of emplotment, where the dénouement is steadily suspended and deferred (Brooks 1984). Thus, according to Brooks, narrative logic is not dissimilar to the Freudian logic of adaptation between the pleasure principle and the death instinct or the Lacanian slippage of the signified. From this point of view, the ending of *The Defense* is ambivalent: if causality is a result of

retrospective patterning (cf.: “recurrent combinations are perceptible as such only when they cannot affect us any more — when they are imprisoned so to speak in the past, which is the past just because it is disinfected”; *BS*, 46), the pattern imagined and imposed by the protagonist on his life may become a means to turn the life into “the past”, i.e. a manifestation of death instinct.

In the foreword to *The Defense*, Nabokov mentions a basic modeling metaphor of the novel. It is “retrograde analysis”, where the chess problem solver is supposed to restore the logic of the game from a “back-cast study” (*Def*, 9), i.e. the development leading up to the present board position. D. Barton Johnson finds this parallel irrelevant and deliberately misleading since a strict structural analogy is missing (Johnson 1985: 88). Yet despite the absence of a strict analogy, the Nabokovian “archetypal” pattern of incomplete or partial return together with the recurrent motif of retrospection and backward movement are sufficient reasons to consider “retrograde analysis” as the basic modeling figure of the novel. The chain of sinister repetitions leads Luzhin to his pre-chess life, i.e., to disappearance and death. The solution of a problem is its “mirror reflection” (cf. Nabokov’s statement that *Lolita* “was like the composition of a beautiful puzzle — its composition and its solution at the same time, since one is a mirror view of the other, depending on the way you look”, *SO*, 20). Likewise, Luzhin’s participation in the “simulated” filmic chess party would be a mirror reflection of the “primal scene” of his involvement with chess. The episode, when the violinist introduces chess game to Luzhin, unfolds as a movie in full darkness with the “lit island” of the table with chess pieces as an equivalent of the screen: “when the whole world suddenly went dark, as if someone had thrown a switch, and in the darkness only one thing remained brilliantly lit, a newborn wonder, a dazzling islet on which his whole life was destined to be concentrated” (*Def*, 30).

Luzhin senior’s novel about the young chess genius, which starts from the end (the early death of the genius), serves as a *mise en abyme* for Nabokov’s own text: “He started to guide his thought backwards — from this touching and so distinct death back to his hero’s vague origin” (*Def*, 61). In Nabokov’s novel, the retrograde



motion is realized in various forms: (1) flights and escapes; (2) “groping for the past” (e.g. the search for the “right door” after entering the wrong door); (3) the involuntary return of the past (the return of the repressed); (4) the motif of entering life “from the other end”. There is, finally, the steady complex of motifs (the “averted face”, “back”, “turning one’s back”, “turning away” or “looking back”), which creates a perspective of the receding motion:

Luzhin “turned away as if he had not seen his father” (*Def*, 21); he “hunched himself up still more” (21); a schoolmate, “when trying to recall [...] what Luzhin had been like in school, could not visualize him otherwise than from the rear, either sitting in front of him in class with protruding ears, or else receding to one end of the hall as far away as possible from the hubbub, or else departing for home in a sleigh cab — hands in pockets, a large piebald satchel on his back, snow falling... He tried to run ahead and look at Luzhin’s face, but that special snow of oblivion, abundant and soundless snow, covered his recollection with an opaque white mist” (23–24); Luzhin “turned his face away” (24); the gentleman “turned in such a way that Luzhin could see nothing from behind his black shoulder” (32); mother’s “fat helpless back shook with sobs” (46); father “sat there with his eyes closed, and then went away” (61); “she said and walked away, feeling his glance on her back” (69); “he gave no answer and turned away” (69); he “turned around and again was lost in thought over the chessboard” (75); she “averted he face pretending to look at the sheets of paper” (86); “he constantly contrived to sit with his back to her. “He even talks with his back”, she complained to her daughter” (89); he was “trying to distinguish the board between the narrow, black backs bent over it” (110), etc.

The effect of the retrograde motion is produced also by the displacement of the meaning of “chess”, which generates a series of chess substitutes with positive meanings prevalent at the beginning and the negative meanings dominant at the end of the novel, when sinister symptoms of the regressive return recur. Chess serves as a substitute for

1) the “mystery” of the unique individual experience (or, in other words, a “perceptual self”), invisible and incommunicable to the others. “It was impossible to express his recollections in words — there simply were no grown-up words for his childish impressions — and if he ever related anything then he did so jerkily and unwillingly — rapidly sketching the outlines and marking a complex move, rich in possibilities, with just a letter and a number” (*Def*, 128);

2) a pattern, whose unfolding depends on a break or a deviation from the regular laws of logic, space and time (a “fantastic” development, an “impossible” combination). “Merry Mathematics” (non-Euclidean geometry) as a metaphor of lawlessness (“the fantastical misbehavior of numbers and the wayward frolics of geometric lines” as distinct from a “normal”, school mathematics, *Def*, 28) is a chess substitute in Luzhin’s pre-chess life. Young Luzhin’s chess style is bold: he shows “proclivity for fantastic arrayals” and astounds the experts with “disregard for the basic, as it seemed, rules of chess” (*Def*, 76–77).

3) *erotic drive*. The unconventionality is associated with eroticism, e.g. Luzhin father’s affair with the aunt, a source of other chess “secrets” (see Vladimir Alexandrov on the connection between chess and eros: Alexandrov 1995: 76–78).

4) *order as a form of defense and control over the chaotic and the “incompletely intelligible” surrounding world* (*Def*, 105). Chess is a form of power over the reality: “Real life, chess life, was orderly, clear-cut, and rich in adventure” (*Def*, 105).

Luzhin’s favorite book type, adventure or crime fiction, is a metaphorical equivalent for the chess party — an “exact and relentlessly unfolding pattern”. The description of Luzhin’s favorite stories borrows from the chess vocabulary: “wending his complex elegant way with its *justifiable sacrifices*”, “progressing through a crystal *labyrinth of possible deductions to the one radiant conclusion*”, “an elephant” (the name of the chess bishop in

Russian), “a ship” (associated with *ladia*, the “castle” in Russian) (*Def*, 26). The “puzzle” is again a spatial metaphor for the chess game: “the precise combinations of these vari-colored pieces that formed at the last moment an intelligible picture” (*Def*, 29).

These games give Luzhin only “an illusory relief”, i.e. they are metonymically related to chess as its partial substitutes (*Def*, 28). Detective fiction, the conjuror’s focus, non-standard mathematical problems and puzzles are patterns, whose unfolding depends on a successful conclusive point or solution. Paradoxically, the solution generates a problem: to see an unfolding pattern the observer must be able to see it also from the “other end”, i.e. to know its solution. The metaphor of the “end”, i.e. a hidden meaning or solution, sheds a contrasting light on the situation of the “last moment” escaped, the “last push” lacking or a key slipping away as variants of the invariable “defense” attitude taken by the protagonist.

5) *music*; Luzhin’s last party with Turati is described in terms of a musical performance (*Def*, 107–108);

6) *the action of electric or occult powers*: “... he felt quite clearly that this or that imaginary square was occupied by a definite, concentrated force, so that he envisioned the movement of a piece as a discharge, a shock, a stroke of lightning — and the whole chess field quivered with tension, and over this tension he was sovereign, here gathering in and there releasing electric power” (*Def*, 73).

7) *criminal* or 8) *freemasonic activity*; 9) *gambling*. A number of Nabokov scholars pointed out the analogy between the chess game and the occult struggle of light and darkness or good and evil, especially in connection with Luzhin’s manager Valentinov, a person of dark origin involved in masonic activity. An interpretation of the novel in terms of the occult or mystical knowledge would place it into the Symbolist paradigm of the “doubleworldness”. Symbolism, with its apology of the autonomous artist as either an evil demiurge/ magician or a divine Apollonic “theurge”,

was both Khodasevich's and Nabokov's literary "soil", but their work also presents a "re-writing" of Symbolism.

It is evident that "occult" interpretations of *The Defense* have been anticipated by the author who turned trite characters into its spokesmen. Thus, Luzhin wife's relatives see chess as suspicious and spectral activity. As Germann in *The Queen of Spades* seeks "the right cards" so Luzhin's father-in-law asks him about "the right move", thus equating chess with a hazard game as "the game of fate". The occult interpretation is also offered by the "famous psychiatrist", a simple-minded professor who hopes to cure Luzhin by awakening his childhood memories; this character, who proclaims chess a dangerous delusion or spiritual blindness and calls Valentinov "an evil spirit", is treated ironically. Freemasonry and its mystical order based on mutual surveillance, i.e. transparency and visibility of members, as another version of the leveling order superimposed on the chaos of life, is a realistic detail of émigré life with its constant expectation of conspiracy and espionage.

10) *sports* — as in Luzhin's future mother-in-law's grumbling: "Luzhin's profession was trivial, absurd... The existence of such professions was explicable only in terms of these accursed modern times, by the modern urge to make senseless records (these airplanes that want to fly to the sun, marathon races, the Olympic games...)" (*Def*, 88).

11) *cinematography*. The film as a combination of light and darkness (black and white) is the key metaphor of *The Defense*: Luzhin is watching a film of his life until a retake starts. The early cinema was called "the battle of black and white" (Abel Gance's 1927 article "Le temps de l'image est venu!" translated in Kino 1988: 65). Jacques-Bernard Brunius founded the League of black-and-white in Paris to defend the black-and-white cinema (Kino 1988: 290). Cinema, as related to chess, is seen by Luzhin as a "trap", as the final move, which would return him to pre-chess existence and death.

The connection between cinema and chess is established through the polysemic notion of “playing”. Luzhin’s first encounter with chess is erotically tinged: he happens to be a chance witness of a violinist’s and his girlfriend’s telephone conversation. “I’ve already played”, says musician, who later will show chess pieces to Luzhin. The episode is structured by the motifs of contrasting light and darkness as a film performance: “the whole world suddenly went dark, as if someone had thrown a switch, and in the darkness only one thing remained brilliantly lit, a newborn wonder, a dazzling islet on which his whole life was destined to be concentrated” (*Def*, 30). Erotic as well as cinematographic motifs are prominent also in the final episode of Valentinov’s visit: the episode proves to be a retrieval of the first chess experience. It is anticipated by a polysemic usage of “play” in Luzhin’s and his wife’s dialogue after they see a movie (*Def*, 151). In *The Defence*, chess is endowed with a series of connotations typical of the cinematographic mythology of modernism: black magic, pornography, crime. The “cinema-chess-trap” figurative pattern involves other metaphorical connotations as well: retrograde analysis and running a film backwards, a passage from invisibility to visibility, from three-dimensionality to flatness of the “pictorial framing” (Connolly 1993: 97) or illusory depth (screen, chessboard), from character’s seeming “freedom” to the controlling invisible pattern.

12) *the sinister metamorphosis (the materialized world of “shadows”, thickening mass of matter, “stiffening”, petrification, death).*

Luzhin’s playful signature “Busoni,” an alias of Monte-Cristo, when he indicates the place in the garden where the box with the new-born child had to be buried, sheds a sinister light on the meaning of the chess “box” as a “coffin” (his father’s “box of chessmen” is buried by little Luzhin behind the garden; “a phantom” begins “to stow the pieces away in a tiny coffin” after the tournament, *Def*. 110).

Luzhin rejoices over the tasteless wooden varnished souvenirs in his fiancée’s house as a bright colorful manifestation of the materialized idea of order (cf. similar connotations of Luzhin

senior's "handsome red and gold books" (*Def*, 23). Yet a feeling of his brain going "numb and been varnished" (*Def*, 78) as well as his "wooden jollity" after the illness (*Def*, 169) are ominous signs of Luzhin's creative degeneration. Likewise, chess pieces, "invisible" during the game, re-appear as heavy wooden figures in the physical reality after their "death" on the chessboard.

Reality resists control and order. While trying to guess the combination to upset fate's moves, Luzhin gets only further entangled into its web and becomes a piece in the alien game. His last game of life is a beginning of a "retake" or a consecutive repetition of slightly modified or disguised details of his previous life, "as some combination, known from chess problems, can be indistinctly repeated on the board in actual play" (*Def*, 168).

The last unfinished match with Turati is the conceptual centre of *The Defense*. *Tempus reversus* leads the protagonist back through his life: "he returned to life from a direction other than one he had left it in" (*Def*, 126). Luzhin is displaced to the position of a player under attack or an observer of the unfolding pattern of his own fate and is finally dislodged from the chessboard;

13) *the regressive return*. Insofar as Luzhin's attitude to the physical world is repressive-defensive, and the physical objects reach his consciousness only sporadically, his contacts with reality assume uncanny forms. Places, faces and situations acquire significance only through repetition and association with already experienced things. Therefore the potential for doubling or disruption (an "unpleasant split" between the real and the imaginary, *Def*, 99) and the regressive return, discovered by Luzhin *post factum*, exists in his consciousness from the very beginning.

Alfred Appel points out that the episode of Luzhin's suicide might have been projected upon Harold Lloyd's film *Safety Last* (1923), where Lloyd hangs on the wall of a skyscraper clinging to the clockhand of a huge clock:

[...] a still photo from one of those Lloyd films, lying on Valentinov's table amid other shots of "frightened women and ferociously squinting men", suggests to ex-Grandmaster Luzhin his means of suicide: 'a white-faced man with lifeless features and big American glasses [was]

hanging by his hands from the ledge of a skyscraper — just about to fall off into the abyss'. (Appel 1974: 161)

The episode with the clock seems to be an emblem of Luzhin's desire "to stop the clock of life, to suspend the game for good, to freeze" (*Def*, 168). Time provides a false causation, where "chance mimics choice", disguising itself as destiny (*post hoc, ergo propter hoc*). Therefore stopping time means breaking the chain of false causality.

In *Ada*, the most hermetic of Nabokov's novels (Karl 1983: 155), the protagonist's desire to stop time and to make sure that "nothing has changed" as well as the fear of finding *Ada* changed assume the form of obsession. The motif of the reversal or reverse movement recurs:

Ada, spurning decorum, was hurrying toward him. Her solitary and precipitate advance consumed in reverse all the years of their separation as she changed from a dark-glittering stranger with the hair-do in fashion to the pale-armed girl in black who had always belonged to him. (*Ada*, 542)

The reversal or "eversion" ("a double reversal or a turning-inside-out", Swanson 1975: 76) becomes a means to avoid the fixation of changes and keeps an infinitely expanding, but self-enclosed universe of the novel in eternal motion.

### **Time and eternity: *aevum***

In the first chapter of his book on Nabokov's otherworld, Vladimir Alexandrov examines the "metaphysics of the otherworld" in *Speak, Memory*. The "brief crack of light between two eternities of darkness", the "fissure" in time texture, the "spherical prison of time" and the free world of "timelessness" are considered the elements of Nabokov's philosophy. In the conclusive chapter of the book Alexandrov suggests that the "timelessness" of the fourth dimension, where the past, present and future co-exist, as well as the "fissure time" of the three-dimensional world are apparently reverberations of the Hinton–Uspensky's philosophy of the fourth

dimension (Alexandrov 1999: 273–274). One might add that the metaphor of “the spherical prison of time” also refers to Pyotr Uspensky’s terminology in *Tertium Organum*: for Uspensky, the three-dimensional space is a sphere. The excerpt from Nabokov’s interview cited by Alexandrov, is a loose paraphrase of Uspensky’s *Table of four stages of mental evolution*: “Time without consciousness — lower animal world; time with consciousness — man; consciousness without time — some still higher state” (cit. Alexandrov 1999: 36; *SO*, 30). Uspensky’s table includes the lower and the higher animals, man and the “superhuman” (*sverhchelovek*) (Uspensky 1992: 238–241). The last stage of mental evolution is timeless: the sensation of time is spatialized as the fourth dimension, where the past, the present and the future co-exist. The superhuman beings enjoy the fullness of time. Yet *Speak, Memory*, especially its first chapter, is an example of implicit overcoding that subverts the explicit conventional frames of reference.

D. Barton Johnson was the first to notice the Pascalian subtext in the first chapter of *Speak, Memory* (Johnson 1993: 51, 62). Being “inside”, i.e. in the “spherical prison of time”, means also being between the two “eternities”. The “two eternities” is a Pascalian metaphor for the time of the Universe, immense in comparison to the infinitesimal human life. The very comparison evokes existential anxiety and panic. In Pascal’s work there is a recurrent image of “the finite between two infinities”, i.e. man lost in infinite spaces and peering in horror into two abysses — one before his birth, another after his death:

When I consider the short duration of my life, swallowed up in the eternity before and after, the little space which I fill and even can see, engulfed in the infinite immensity of spaces of which I am ignorant and which know me not, I am frightened and am astonished at being here rather than there; for there is no reason why here rather than there, why now rather than then. (Pascal 1952, fragment 205; 1963, f. 68);

Since he is infinitely removed from comprehending the extremes, the end of things and their beginning are hopeless hidden from him in impenetrable secret; he is equally incapable of seeing the Nothing



from which he was made, and the Infinite in which he is swallowed up. (Pascal 1952, f. 72; 1963, f. 199)

Pascalean *Thoughts* might have reminded young Russian émigré writers of their own experience of being strangers to both their own homeland and the countries where they settled in emigration. The text was often cited (e.g. Adamovich 1955: 35; Varshavsky 1956: 186). Pascal's dictum serves as the epigraph to Part 4 of Vasili Yanovsky's novel *The Portable Immortality* (published in 1938). Traces of Pascal's language and thought can be found in a number of Nabokov's works.

Pascal's existential pessimism, his idea of the "anomalous" or "absurd" condition of man, as well as his intuitivism were attractive to a number of modern philosophers, e.g. Husserl, Bergson and Merleau-Ponty, who conceptualized everyday perceptual experience in their teachings (see Geertz 1993: 103–104). Bergson drew on the two Pascalean types of infinity, mathematical and intuitive, to disentangle time from space. Pascal opposed "infinite movement, the point which fills everything, the moment of rest" to the "infinite without quantity, indivisible and infinite" (Pascal 1952, f. 232; 1963, f. 682), the latter being a proto-type of the Bergsonian duration. The first type of infinity does not allow a qualitative definition of movement and separation of space from time (or, in other words, "rest" from "movement", as in Zeno's paradoxes): the movement is measured by a purely quantitative accumulation of discrete spatial units, "points" or the "moments of rest". The Pascalean ontology is spatial: a miserable human being is imprisoned in the spatial world between the two "eternities". Bergson, however, concentrates on the indivisible "*qualitative*" infinity to separate time from space and to prove the existence of a special kind of time — duration. Duration is the experience of the "qualitative" infinity, i.e. the "lived time" of human consciousness.

*Speak, Memory* has a spatial motif — a search for the timeless "patterns" in the texture of time illustrated by the image of the "re-territorialized" author among butterflies and plants:

I confess I do not believe in time. I like to fold my magic carpet, after use, in such a way as to superimpose one part of the pattern upon

another. Let visitors trip. And the highest enjoyment of timelessness — in a landscape selected at random — is when I stand among rare butterflies and their food plants. This is ecstasy [...]. (*SM*, 139)

In a 1968 interview Nabokov confessed that he neglected the difference between the “text” and the “texture” of time in *Speak, Memory* and “was mainly concerned with being faithful to the patterns” of his past (*SO*, 121). The details of the past “stored” by Mnemosyne are conflated “with later recollections and inventions”: “in this sense, both memory and imagination are a negation of time” (1966; *SO*, 78). Otherwise, both time and space are transposed into “another dimension”:

[...] for every dimension presupposes a medium within which it can act, and if, in the spiral unwinding of things, space warps into something akin to time, and time, in its turn, warps into something akin to thought, then, surely, another dimension follows — a special Space maybe, not the old one, we trust, unless spirals become vicious circles again. (*SM*, 301)

Time becomes the active medium for space, and consciousness is, in its turn, the active medium for time. The Pascalian opposition is subverted. It is not the human that is small — it is the Universe: “How small the cosmos (a kangaroo’s pouch would hold it), how paltry and puny in comparison to human consciousness, to a single individual recollection, and its expression in words!” (*SM*, 24). The Pascalian subtext (prominent also in other Nabokov’s works: see, e.g., Tammi 1992), is subjected to subversion and ironical contamination:

In those years, that marvelous mess of constellations, nebulae, interstellar gaps and all the rest of the awesome show provoked in me an indescribable sense of nausea, of utter panic, as if I were hanging from earth upside down on the brink of infinite space, with terrestrial gravity still holding me by the heels but about to release me in any moment. (*SM*, 225–226)

Different ways of imagining life beyond the limits of personal existence and the experience of the “unborn observer” are discussed in the first chapter of *Speak, Memory*: mystical insights, the soul’s eternal life in numerous bodies (metempsychosis), and the Freu-

dian “primal scene” (“little embryos spying upon the love life of their parents”; *SM*, 20). The narrator admits his inability to accept the two impersonal “eternities of darkness” on both sides of his existence. According to the Hinton–Uspensky hypothesis, at least some inhabitants of the three-dimensional world have access to the fourth-dimension thinking: intelligence, training and the will to reach beyond the three-dimensional reality grant access to the fourth dimension. The fourth dimension is just another dimension, a new level of reality rather than a transcendental world. Uspensky is skeptical about Helena Blavatsky’s attempt to see the fourth dimension as a new condition of matter, to relate it to material evolution and occult cosmology. Yet he shares Blavatsky’s belief in the spiritual evolution of mankind, the future triumph of cosmic consciousness and suprapersonal spirit.

The narrator of *Speak, Memory* is, on the contrary, desperately looking for a “personal glimmer” in the impersonal darkness behind the wall of time. He ironically distances himself from the conventional methods of transcendent rebirth and mystical vision, practiced by theosophists:

I have doffed my identity in order to pass for a conventional spook and steal into realms that existed before I was conceived. I have mentally endured the degrading company of Victorian lady novelists and retired colonels who remembered having, in former lives, been slave messengers on a Roman road or sages under the willows of Lhasa” (*SM*, 20)

No doubt, Nabokov alludes to the theosophical teachings of Helena Blavatsky and her successors Annie Besant (“Victorian lady novelists”) and Rudolf Steiner, who drew on Indian, Tibetan and Kabalistic sources. In this connection, another allusion becomes activated in the context of Nabokov’s autobiographical writing — Andrei Bely’s autobiographical novel *Kotik Letaev* (published in 1922) written under the influence of Steiner’s anthroposophical teaching as an attempt to restore pre-conscious, mythological experience, “to steal into the realms that existed” before the protagonist’s birth. This is, again, the mode of remembering unfamiliar to the author-narrator of *Speak, Memory*. Nabokov’s narrative alter ego finds only darkness behind the walls of time: his

first recollections coincide with the first flashes of consciousness. In this case it is a triple allusion, which activates not only theosophical teachings and Bely's autobiography but also the text of the *War and Peace* by Tolstoy. A fragment from the *War and Peace* serves as the epigraph to *Kotik Letaev* and illuminates the main intention of Bely's book — restoration of the mythological prenatal experience: “‘Do you know,’ said Natasha in a whisper, [...] ‘that when one goes on and on recalling memories, one at last begins to remember what happened before one was in the world...’”. Nabokov's first chapter activates a more extensive Tolstoyan fragment, the dialogue between Natasha, Sonya and Nicholas on metempsychosis, time, death and eternity:

‘That is metempsychosis,’ said Sonya, who had always learned well, and remembered everything. ‘The Egyptians believed that our souls have lived in animals, and will go back into animals again.’

‘No, I don't believe we ever were in animals,’ said Natasha, still in a whisper though the music had ceased. ‘But I am certain that we were angels somewhere there, and have been here, and that is why we remember....’

‘May I join you?’ said Dimmler who had come up quietly, and he sat down by them.

‘If we have been angels, why have we fallen lower?’ said Nicholas. ‘No, that can't be!’

‘Not lower, who said we were lower?... How do I know what I was before?’ Natasha rejoined with conviction. ‘The soul is immortal — well then, if I shall always live I must have lived before, lived for a whole eternity.’

‘Yes, but it is hard for us to imagine eternity,’ remarked Dimmler, who had joined the young folk with a mildly condescending smile but now spoke as quietly and seriously as they.

‘Why is it hard to imagine eternity?’ said Natasha. ‘It is now today, and it will be tomorrow, and always; and there was yesterday, and the day before...’ (Tolstoy 1998: 556)

Natasha's “eternity” is an eternalized (as *always*), infinitely extended “now”, which overwhelms the past, the present and the future. There is an allusion to Natasha's words in Chapter 3 of *Speak, Memory*, in a nostalgic “still” of Nabokov's own childhood paradise, a domestic image of eternity where nothing changes. The sentence

reproduces the three-step rhythm of the Tolstoyan phrase: “A sense of security, of well-being, of summer warmth pervades my memory [...]. Everything is as it should be, nothing will ever change, nobody will ever die” (*SM*, 77).

Thus, in an oblique way — via Uspensky’s fourth dimension, via Bely and theosophists to Tolstoy — Nabokov suggests that the fullness of time and eternity are available for human consciousness “here” and “now”. The hidden intertextual frame introduces the auctorial perspective and subverts the confessional story of the first-person narrator (i.e. the fictional “self”), who desperately seeks for a meaning of “first” and “last” things.

The Tolstoyan motif of the expanded “now” refers to the theological notion of *aevum*, the medium time, which partakes of both terrestrial time (the time of “before” and “after”) and timeless eternity (the angels’ time). Thomas Aquinas’ *aevum* is the “actualized potentiality”, intermediate between the pure actuality of God and the pure potentiality of matter. The changes, which occur in *aevum*, are accidental: nothing changes substantially. Frank Kermode deploys the metaphor of *aevum* as a model for the time of fiction, formed by the mental syntheses of “backward” and “forward” memory — becoming itself the “third kind of memory” (Kermode 1968: 53–54, 70–72), i.e. a kind of suspended temporality exempt from ordinary time conditions. Similarly, Nabokov describes the creative experience as the perception of “the entire circle of time”, when “the past and the present and the future [...] come together in a sudden flash” (*CW*, 28): intensely lived moments embrace the full circle of time and make possible immediate experience of eternity.

The principle of the “tripartite” present or timeless “now” is at its most obvious in Nabokov’s figurative patterns. In referring to Nabokov’s metaphorical constructions, Susan Elizabeth Sweeney uses the term “amphiphore” (Sweeney 1987). The “amphiphore” is a “portmanteu word” borrowed from *Bend Sinister*. It highlights the capacity of a metaphor to activate different, often contradictory referential frames. The metaphorical entity “letters-butterflies” from *Speak, Memory* serves as an example of the “amphiphoric gesture”:

[...] the sense of leaving Russia was totally eclipsed by the agonizing thought that Reds or no Reds, letters from Tamara would be still coming, miraculously and needlessly, to southern Crimea, and would search there for a fugitive addressee, and weakly flap about like bewildered butterflies set loose in an alien zone, at the wrong altitude, among an unfamiliar flora. (*SM*, 251)

As Sweeney shows, the “alien zone”, where butterflies fly, subliminally evokes the image of the “native space” and implicitly refers to Russia. This implicit reference refutes the narrator’s assertion that the sense of leaving Russia was totally eclipsed in his memory. Thus the amphiphore embraces the past, present and future tenses by indicating what is anticipated as the “future recollection” within the actual perception.

### III. The Model of the Observer

The notion of the “observer” is a basic modeling metaphor of the modernist age. It has different meanings within different cultural frames: “observation” as a scientific procedure; a model of behavior (Crary 2000: 29); a model of perception; the cognitive function of discourse, etc. The issue of the “observer” is part of a broader set of epistemological problems, which become central in relativist physics, Gestalt psychology, and the theory and practice of art and fiction. That is: how separate observations are related to the general system of knowledge and whether such an integrated system of knowledge exists at all if observation influences and shapes the observable. The crisis of the Cartesian subject entails a necessity of permanent reflection on the observer’s relation to the world (see e.g. Yampolsky 2000).

The relativity theory modified the whole paradigm of knowledge and stimulated new forms of interdisciplinarity. Bakhtin’s idea of “chronotope”, i.e. the fusion of time and space in fiction, is borrowed from relativity theory (on the meaning of the “observer” and its connection with space-time construction in Bakhtin see Holquist 1990: 20–23). Physics is, in its turn, indebted to linguistics for the notion of “relativity”. Einstein found in the work of the Swiss linguist Winteler “the indissoluble interconnection of the concepts *relativity* and *invariance*” (Jakobson 1985), which would become the cornerstones of relativity theory, modern linguistics and semiotics.

The difference between invariance and variability overcomes the antinomy of the internal and external experience, the intelligible and the sensible: it “does not separate two domains from each other, it divides each of them within itself” (Derrida 1997: 64). Under the influence of Platonic tradition, the sign, (as the unity of the idealized material form and sense), has been seen as an invariable inner copy of the variable external reality. In Derrida’s

opinion, this naturalizing metaphysical understanding of sign is peculiar even to Saussure despite his notion of arbitrariness. On the contrary, in the Peircean triadic scheme:

the so-called “thing itself” is already always a *representamen* shielded from the simplicity of intuitive evidence. The *representamen* functions only by giving rise to an *interpretant* that itself becomes a sign and so on to infinity. The self-identity of the signified conceals itself unceasingly and is always on the move. The property of the *representamen* is to be itself and another, to be produced as a structure of reference to be separated from itself [...] The *represented* is always already a *representamen*. (Derrida 1997: 49–50)

The sign is an articulation of the border between the “internal” and the “external”.

The observation is “pre-rational” or “unconscious”, in the sense given by Derrida while speaking of “the fundamental *unconsciousness* of language (as rootedness within the language)” (Derrida 1997: 68). Likewise, the ordinary observer is immersed in the world, in its “sign medium” (Bakhtin alias Voloshinov 1993: 17). He is “unconscious” of his own observation and involved in the process of signification as the articulation of “différance”, i.e. the inscription of the “outside” into the “inside” and vice versa. Merleau-Ponty underscores asymmetry and split between the spontaneous experience of the world and consciousness as “the absolute certainty of my existence for myself”. As far as reflection returns to the subject, “it ceases to remain part of our experience and offers, in place of an account, a reconstruction” (Merleau-Ponty 1981: ix). The notion of the “unconscious” is, of course, polysemantic. It might be understood as either suppressed and inaccessible or as an semiactive and accessible part of experience. If Freud is inclined to use spatial metaphors and defines the “unconscious” as a locus, e.g. an ancient city or a dark chamber, William James in his *Principles of Psychology* introduces the notion of the “fringes” of attention, in contradistinction to its “focus,” to underscore the mobility of the perceptive field. Similarly, the Lacanian definition highlights both elusiveness and the constitutive function of the unconscious as a gap between perception and consciousness, as “the place of the Other, in which the subject is constituted” (Lacan



1994: 45). The Lacanian unconscious is “not so much a position as an *edge*, the junction of division between subject and Other, a process interminably closing” (Heath 1981: 78). The observer is permanently constituted in relation to the Other.

Insofar as perception and perceptual knowledge are not fully rationalizable and explainable, the irreducible unconscious part of perception may become a part of the Other’s conscious experience: the self needs the Other to be actualized. The modernists actively exploited the dialectics of the “self – Other” relationships in their work. Moreover, fiction provides an opportunity of exploring these relationships. The thematization of the Other as the author or the narrator, the character’s “unconscious” becoming the Other’s consciousness (the “surplus of vision”), became the cornerstone of Bakhtin’s theory of fiction.

Voloshinov (alias Bakhtin) argues, quite in the Peircean spirit, that the sign does not belong to the internal, intuitively grasped sameness of consciousness: it is identified through correlation with other signs. The “sign material” is a medium, in which individual consciousnesses interact (Voloshinov 1993: 17). Bakhtin’s treatment of the author–character relationship as a kind of intersemiotic translation, (see Bakhtin’s manuscript of the 1920s *The Author and the Character in Aesthetic Activity*; Bakhtin 1979: 7–180), recalls the Husserlian notions of “intersubjectivity” and “appresentation”. For Bakhtin, the self, situated on the threshold between the visible world of objects and the world of its inner experience, is invisible to itself: the totality of my own body is outside of my field of vision. To translate myself from the language of inner experience into the language of external expression I need to project my interiority onto a transparent screen of the other person’s reactions (Bakhtin 1979: 26–29). The other’s role is that of the author: thanks to his “surplus” of vision with respect to myself I am placed into the world as a character among other characters (Bakhtin 1979: 30). Likewise, thanks to my “surplus” of vision, I am in the author’s position with respect to others. The other is given to me as an opaque body: it is my own inner experience, which turns him into a meaningful entity. The self is always incomplete: the other becomes part of my self-experience (Bakhtin 1979: 22–24).

Bakhtin uses author–character relations as a model for interpersonal communication in general.

Merleau-Ponty also highlights the partial opacity of the “private worlds” or the worlds of lived experience. Communication, i.e. the overlapping of perceptual horizons, occurs on the borders of private worlds:

[...]another private world shows through, through the fabric of my own, and for a moment I live in it; I am no more than the respondent for the interpellation that is made to me. To be sure, the least recovery of attention persuades me that this other who invades me is made only of my own substance [...] But at least my private world has ceased to be mine only; it is now the instrument which another plays, the dimension of a generalized life which is grafted onto my own. (Merleau-Ponty 1987: 10–11)

To summarize: human behavior and mental acts are rooted in the individual or shared “worlds”, i.e. biological, perceptual and linguistic cognitive spaces. Merleau-Ponty considers “being-in-the-world” as the “situation” where external objects are not immediately present to consciousness but invested with meaning or, otherwise, put into a cognitive relation to the subject’s whole being: “Man taken as a concrete being is not a psyche pinned to an organism, but the movement to and fro of existence which at one time allows itself to take corporeal form and at others moves towards personal acts” (Merleau-Ponty 1981: 88). Within the inter-subjective realm of communication, the borders of the subjective world are unstable, they are continually displaced and transgressed. In the fictional text, the function of the “observer” is *variable* in relation to the *invariable* functions of narration–enunciation.

The problematics of the “subjective worlds” may be traced in modernist literature, as the latter takes the “perspectivalist” turn and focuses on the representation of the other’s consciousness and perceptual world. Some of Nabokov’s novels are akin to the semiological experiments in the Bakhtinian spirit: relations between the author, narrator and character, i.e. the “observers” and the “observed” are explored through the foregrounding of the narrative conventions. Thus, in *The Eye*, the narrator’s personality is projected onto the “screen” of other characters’ reactions: the narrator is

placed into the fictional world as a character among other characters who are expected to mirror his “real image”. However, as the narrator’s functions are divided between those of the author and those of the character, he himself turns out to be the creator of the imaginary “screen” of the characters’ perceptions and is only able to see himself as a character in the fictional world.

The protagonist’s illness in Nabokov’s short story *Signs and Symbols* might be understood in the light of the “Umwelten” theory as a case of expansion of the “subjective-self-world” to the limits of the physical world. The young man is given a diagnosis of “referential mania” since everything that happens in the physical world seems to him “a veiled reference to his personality and existence”:

Phenomenal nature shadows him wherever he goes. Clouds in the staring sky transmit to one another, by means of slow signs, incredibly detailed information regarding him. His inmost thoughts are discussed at nightfall, in manual alphabet, by darkly gesticulating trees. Pebbles or stains or sun flecks form patterns representing in some awful way messages which he must intercept. Everything is a cipher and of everything he is the theme. (*Stories*, 599)

He feels absolutely transparent, as if his inner movements were observed and repeated in the external world.

In Nabokov’s novel *Glory*, opacity of the private world is camouflaged by a social mask, which erases difference: the words in the obituary about the “true toiler”, who “burned with love for Russia” and “always held high his pen”, are applicable to the whole generation of “fathers”. What makes a person unique is a *perceptual image* which is part of the other private worlds: “...his gestures, his beard, his sculpturesque wrinkles, the sudden shy smile, the jacket button that hung by a thread, and his way of licking a stamp with his entire tongue before sticking it on the envelope and banging it with his fist” (*Glory*, 143). In the beginning of Proust’s *Du côté de chez Swann* the narrator depicts the process of adaptation the body undergoes to accommodate the borders of the perceptual self to the room until the objects, (clocks, mirrors, door-handles, etc.), become invisible as the space of inhabitation coincides with the inhabitant’s inner space.

Voloshinov labelled modernism as “relativist individualism”, according to the degree and forms of incorporation of the “other’s word” into the author’s speech or, otherwise, speech interference (Voloshinov 1993: 31). As is shown in Käte Hamburger’s *Logic of Literature*, the representation of consciousness and a person’s inner life is a distinctive feature of narrative fiction in general and produces the illusion of “another” reality. Just as modernist painting explores the means of representation of the illusory depth of pictorial space, modernist fiction focuses on the exploration of the illusory depth of represented consciousness. It assumes that individual worlds of consciousness are opaque and inaccessible to the outside observer; the omniscient narrator is rejected as an artificial device. Modernist fiction thematizes an insistent, almost paranoid desire to know “what is inside”. It either hands the narration over to the Dostoevskian suspicious narrator who constantly tries to imagine and prognosticate other people’s thoughts and intentions or introduces multiple perspectives without a complete synthesis of the auctorial omniscience. As Karen Jacobs puts it, “the modernist observance of the embodied and partial nature of vision takes the form of multiperspectivalism, with its implicit acknowledgement of the limits of isolated points of view” (Jacobs 2001: 9). As if summarizing the modernist quest for the object of knowledge, Merleau-Ponty writes about a hypothetical “absolute object” which “will have to consist of an infinite number of different perspectives compressed into a strict co-existence, and to be presented as it were to a host of eyes all engaged in one concerted act of seeing” (Merleau-Ponty 1981: 70). By contrast, the *nouveau roman* explores the point of view sliding along the surface of the fictional world and the latter’s optical resistance to the observer.

The modernist construction of subjectivity based on the notion of the opaque private world stimulates the development of the “hermeneutic poetics” and a conscious use of obscurity as a constructive device (White 1981). Obscurity as occultation or blockage of meaning, by contrast to ambiguity as complexity of meaning and polysemy, is a sense-generating principle of modernist poetics: in this case the clarification and elucidation of the message would destroy the structure of textual meaning (White 1981: 17–18).

Philosophers and art theorists relate the modernist turn to the crisis of the Cartesian observer. Subjective and bodily aspects of vision become central within the new paradigms of knowledge that emerge in the late 19<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> century and are interpreted and elaborated by artists, scientists and philosophers, e.g. H. Bergson and Merleau-Ponty. In his preface to a translation of Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies* (1906), Proust writes of “‘the optics of minds’ which prevents us from absorbing knowledge from others” (Shattuck 1964: 11). Thus, knowledge is seen as an outcome of the subject's perceptual experience. As compared to the Cartesian rational, detached and disembodied subject, the modernist observer is actively involved in the interaction with the world. The observer is seen as part of reality, the part through which reality manifests itself. Therefore his status is ambiguous — he is, paradoxically, both an autonomous individual unity and a mobile perceptual field. Mobile strategies of observation are guided by the constant exchange of information between the observer and the observed. The whole “matrix of identity, predicated on the separation of the interiority of the observer from the exteriority of the object world” (McQuire 1998: 18) is called into question.

Nineteenth century empiricist psychology studied the role of perception in the constitution of the self and worked out the philosophical grounds for sensory perception. Ernst Mach's famous picture of himself in his studio equates the subject with a particular field of vision: the self is what it sees (Ryan 1991a: 9–12). Judith Ryan points out that the empiricist construction of subjectivity is a challenge for modernist writers (Huysmans, Kafka, Schnitzler, Joyce, Proust, Woolf, Musil, etc.) and therefore a stimulus for new linguistic and literary practices. The progress of physiological optics in the 19<sup>th</sup> century demonstrates that the world is to a certain extent “created” by the observer: such phenomena as colors or mirror reflections are devoid of autonomous physical existence and are evoked by the observer's interaction with the external world. Every act of perception changes the world:

Every movement of the head produces a *deformation* of the visual field. This effect is not a sweeping shift such as occurs when the eyes alone move, but is rather a change in the pattern of projected shapes,

somewhat analogous to the shifts and distortions of one's image in amusement-park mirrors. (Gibson 1950: 40)

Therefore, to continue the thought, every observer is a creator of an imaginary world and thus an "artist" in its own right. Merleau-Ponty highlights the creative aspect of attention: attention "is neither an association of images, nor the return to itself of thought already in control of its objects, but the active constitution of a new object which makes explicit and articulate what was until then presented as no more than an indeterminate horizon" (Merleau-Ponty 1981: 30).

Notions such as Walter Pater's "moment" or Joyce's "epiphany" refer to a creative perceptual act, "a particular intensity of perception in which the vanishing away is temporarily stayed", i.e. vision, which is akin to art (Ryan 1991a: 28). The usage of creative and sense-generating aspects of perception is part of Nabokov's artistic credo. The pre-rational, non-interpretive vision of the attentive observer is a model of the creative work, as Nabokov himself points out in his autobiography while speaking of the detail that "the finder cannot unsee once it has been seen" (*SM*, 310).

### **The observer, focalization and the point of view**

The notion of the "point of view" combines two basic meanings: perception and judgment. In narratology, the former becomes associated with the mimetic, ("showing"), the latter with the diegetic ("telling") aspects of verbal representation. David Bordwell defines the two major trends in narratology as the mimetic and diegetic approach: "Henry James and Percy Lubbock proposed that the novel be analyzed as a theatrical or pictorial representation"; "Slavic theorists began to rethink fictional prose in linguistic terms". The latter tradition persists in continental structuralism and semiotics (Foreword in Branigan 1984: XI). "*Diegetic* theories conceive of narration as consisting either literally or analogically of verbal activity: a telling. This telling may be either oral or written," whereas "[*mimetic*] theories conceive of narration as the presentation of a spectacle: a showing" (Bordwell 1997: 3; 1<sup>st</sup> ed.

1985). Manfred Jahn argues that Jamesian poetics and structuralist narratology are antithetical as “vision-centered poetics” and “text-centered” narratology (Jahn 1996: 262).

However the “diegetic” and “mimetic” types of analysis have never been totally separated. Thanks first to the insufficiency of either a solely spatio-visual or a solely linguistic analysis of a work of fiction and, second, to the tropological constituent of literary terminology. The notion of the “point of view” in narratology is part of the broader problem of the relation between knowledge and perception, discussed in philosophy, physics and art theory. Narratology has not always been conscious of the relationship between its narrow technical problems and a broader cultural context. The history of the theoretical notion of the “point of view” as well as the parallel history of the usage of different point-of-view techniques in fiction reveals multiple convergences and divergences between artistic practice and narrative theory.

Visual connotations present in narratological terminology may link “point of view” or “focus” with physical vision. In Henry James’ prefaces — for example, in his famous description of the “house of fiction” in the preface to *The Portrait of a Lady* — the laws of narrative representation are illustrated by visual metaphors that may provoke anthropomorphization of the narrative instances:

The house of fiction has in short not one window, but a million — a number of possible windows not to be reckoned, rather; every one of which has been pierced, or is still pierceable, in its vast front, by the need of the individual vision and by the pressure of individual will. These apertures, of dissimilar shape and size, hang so, all together, over the human scene that we might have expected of them a greater sameness of report than we find. They are but windows at the best, mere holes in a dead wall, disconnected, perched aloft; they are not hinged doors opening straight upon life. But they have this mark of their own that at each of them stands a figure with a pair of eyes, or at least with a field glass, which forms again and again, for observation, a unique instrument, insuring to the person making use of it an impression distinct from every other. [...] The spreading field, the human scene, is the “choice of subject”; the pierced aperture, either broad or balconied or slit-like and low-browed, is the “literary form”, but they are, singly or together, as nothing without the posted presence

of the watcher — without, in other words, the consciousness of the artist. (James 1962: 46)

James employs a complex theoretical metaphor: the “window” is “the viewer’s “consciousness” and its construction of reality” (Jahn 1996: 252). For the Anglo-American tradition, the problem of the point of view is connected with epistemological issues of the accessibility of knowledge, its relation to perception and a possibility of its verbalization.

Following in James’ footsteps, Percy Lubbock compares the book with a building, statue or picture. In comparison to these “visible and measurable” artefacts, the book is elusive: “a cluster of impressions, some clear points emerging from a mist of uncertainty”, “a cloud”. “The form of a novel [...] is something that none of us, perhaps, has ever really contemplated. It is revealed little by little, page by page, and it is withdrawn as fast as it is revealed; as a whole, complete and perfect, it could only exist in a more tenacious memory than most of us have to rely on”. Some characters, scenes and episodes “remain with us as vividly as though we had known them in life”, yet other parts of the book subside into obscurity, which means that only the “life-like effects”, not the novel itself, are “solidified” and remembered (Lubbock 1935: 1–4). The experience of reading is not unlike the everyday “rounding” and “molding” of the world. Our perspective on the world forms a “durable image” and pieces together our fragmentary experience in both life and fiction: “It is the way in which we make our world; partially, imperfectly, very much at haphazard, but still perpetually, everybody deals with his experience like an artist” (Lubbock 1935: 7).

As Lubbock argues, literary criticism usurps the languages of other arts due to the elusive nature of fiction. The ideal condition of fiction is to be shown (cf. Mary Louise Pratt’s definition of literary works as belonging to the class of “display texts”: “a speaker is not only reporting but also verbally displaying a state of affairs, inviting his addressee(s) to join him in contemplating it, evaluating it, and responding to it”, Pratt 1977: 136). Yet in fiction, says Lubbock, the pictorial and dramatic presentation alternate,



whereas the author talks in his own voice and sometimes uses the eyes and the mind of the character.

Here we have, then, the elements of the novelist's method — essentially few and simple, but infinite in their possibilities of fusion and combination. They are arranged in a new design to suit every new theme that a writer takes in hand; we see them alternated, united, imposed one on another, this point of view blended with that, dramatic action treated pictorially, pictorial description rendered dramatically. (Lubbock 1935: 68, 75)

Early Anglo-American approaches to the point of view have been summarized in Norman Friedman's 1955 article. Friedman's major distinction "regarding the modes of transmission of story material" (1955: 1169) is between telling and showing, i.e. direct and indirect presentation. He specifies eight types of point of view according to the number of channels of information available for the narrator: (1) editorial omniscience; (2) neutral omniscience; the first-person narration, where the "I" is either (3) the witness (witness-narrator, witness-protagonist), or (4) the protagonist; (5) multiple selective omniscience; (6) selective omniscience; (7) the dramatic mode; (8) the camera mode. Friedmann's "channels" as well as James' and Lubbock's accounts of the point of view include both "knowledge" and "vision", i.e. diegetic and mimetic modes of presentation, although the mimetic aspect clearly dominates. Despite some logical inconsistencies (see Lanser 1981: 34), such more or less *ad hoc* classifications based on textual evidence are helpful as part of a broader process — a search for epistemological foundations of narrative theory.

The epistemological search is noticeable also in the early Slavic tradition. It may seem that Bakhtin's notions of "dialogue" and "heteroglossia" as well as his subtle classification of dialogic forms of discourse in fiction (Bakhtin 1999: 199)<sup>9</sup> unequivocally place him in the "diegetic" camp of the narrative theory. However, as mentioned above, the phenomenological topic of seeing oneself as

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<sup>9</sup> According to Bakhtin, auctorial narrator's "objectified" discourse is relativized by different forms of "subjective" discourse and objectification is eventually reduced.

another or seeing the other in oneself refers to essentially mimetic categories in Bakhtin's work. Bakhtin approaches "other's speech" as a site of intersubjectivity. In his opinion, a word is originally dialogical or "double-voiced", responsive to other's word or *reflective* of it. In the work of fiction the dialogic nature of the word is disclosed through the interaction of different centers of subjectivity (Bakhtin 1994: 396–399). The specific Bakhtinian meaning of the "other" includes the mutual relationship of two or more consciousnesses.

Bakhtin's early works seem particularly intriguing in the age of the radical reassessment of the notion of mimesis. Modern theories of mimesis highlight the transformational and performative character of the mimetic act. Mimesis is rooted in the archaic strata of culture and implies participation. Therefore it eludes full theoretical grasp: "In this involvement of the body, in this reference to the I of the actor and to Others, lies the essential difference between mimesis and purely cognitive ways of knowing" (Gebauer & Wulf 1995: 315–316). As a practical activity, mimesis always involves re-making or re-creation. It always produces something new. A paradoxical connection between reproduction and re-modeling is inherent in mimesis:

Mimetic processes are not founded on similarities. [...] Similarity is an outcome of mimetic reference. Imitation is only a special case of mimesis. [...] an object or event can only be regarded as an image, replica, or reproduction of another one when there exists between the two a mimetic reference. (Gebauer & Wulf 1995: 317)

In this broad interpretation, mimesis is far from a sheer reflection or copying of the "reality". It is understood as an anthropological component of literature, "a specifically human ability, which is characteristic of action in the world, of observations and representations of the world, whether the activity takes place in empirical life or in a fiction" (Gebauer & Wulf 1995: 22; see also Taussig 1993).

It is true that the Formalist theory relied upon linguistic criteria: poetic speech was seen as a function of ordinary language, its "creative deformation." For Shklovsky, a new work of art was first

and foremost a new form (Shklovsky 1929: 31). However, to account for the “content” the Formalists took use of the mimetic criteria: the “content” is determined by a generic choice (*ustanovka*) and transposition of non-literary generic features (e.g. rhetorical or documentary) into the literary system.

Thus, in his celebrated essay “How Gogol’s ‘The Overcoat’ Is Made”, Boris Eikhenbaum examines Gogol’s *skaz* as a system of “mimetic-articulatory gestures”, i.e. as a transfer of oral speech forms into the written text (Eikhenbaum 1986: 46). Viktor Vinogradov, who, himself a linguist, occupies a middle position between the formal-linguistic and phenomenological approach, defends poetics from the formalist linguistic “totalitarianism” and criticizes Eikhenbaum’s formal analysis of Gogol’s *skaz*. Vinogradov considers the text as an integral “whole”, despite involvement of its elements in various (linguistic, cognitive, cultural, historical, etc.) contexts:

The structure of the artistic work is continuous. However, its parts are defined not only through the dynamics of spatiotemporal links but also through the semantic intersections in various planes. In entering the structure from different planes of verbal semantics, they form different levels of semantic relations. (Vinogradov 1980: 94)

The artistic text is based on the principles of continuity, dynamics and interference.

Despite his interest in Husserl and Vossler and the problems of linguistic consciousness, Vinogradov was sure that poetics should rely upon formal expression. Therefore, while highly appraising Bakhtin’s analysis of the “double-voiced speech” in fiction, he criticized his notions of “polyphony” and “dialogism” as applied to the relations between the narrative instances, i.e. the author/narrator/character (“plurality of equal consciousnesses with their own worlds” — Bakhtin 1994: 14). In Vinogradov’s opinion, neither the character nor the narrator is ever equal to the author or able to enter the full-fledged “dialogue” with the latter: the forms of “other’s speech” are manifestations of authorial “masks”, “agents” or “actors”, which all belong to the authorial consciousness. For Vinogradov, narrator is only a metaphor, a manifestation of the

relationship between the authorial image and the fictional world (see Aleksandr Chudakov's commentary in: Vinogradov 1980: 302–303, 327). "...the author's artistic world is presented not as objectively represented in the verbal medium [*v slove*] but as peculiarly *mirrored* on the plane of narrator's subjective perception or even transfigured within a series of strange *mirror reflections*" (*ibid.*, 42; translation and emphasis mine — *M. G.*). Therefore, the first-person narrator of *skaz*-form is a unique blending of subjectivity and objectivity. Its narratorial and characteral aspects are insufficiently differentiated or personified, serving at the same time as "shadows" or manifestations of the higher-order subjectivity (Vinogradov 1980: 328).

To avoid visual and hence anthropomorphic connotations, structuralist narratology worked out several formal typologies of narrative instances. Seymour Chatman, for example, emphasizes that the narrator is not contemplating the scene that he is reporting: the narrator is "a reporter, not an "observer" of the story world in the sense of literally witnessing it" (Chatman 1990: 142). In introducing the notions of "slant" and "filter", Chatman makes an attempt to differentiate between a conscious choice and a mere mediating perception or, in other words, the "narration" (as "knowing" and "telling") and "focalization" (as "seeing" or "perceiving"). The "slant" amounts to "the narrator's attitudes and other mental nuances appropriate to the report function of discourse", to "the psychological, sociological, and ideological ramifications of the narrator's attitudes, which may range from neutral to highly charged", the "filter" embraces "the much wider range of mental activity experienced by characters in the story world — perceptions, cognitions, attitudes, emotions, memories, fantasies, and the like". Thus, the "slant" "delimits the mental activity on *this* side of the discourse-story barrier" whereas the "filter" is "a good term for capturing something of the mediating function of a character's consciousness [...] as events are experienced within the story world" since it "catches the nuance of the *choice* made by the implied author" (Chatman 1990: 143–144). The value of Chatman's distinction is limited by its dependence on a strict "distribution of labor" between the narrator who "tells" the

story and the character who only “sees” it: if a character started to “tell” the story, he would at once become a narrator, and, vice versa, if reduced to the observational-perceptual instance, the narrator could function only as a character within the fictional story.

The separation of “narration” and “focalization” (in Genette’s terminology) as the narrator’s and character’s point of view is already apparent in Henry James’s, Lubbock’s and Bakhtin’s works. However, early narratology was sensitive to the paradoxical relationship between the “mimetic” and “diegetic” aspects of narrative presentation. Fictional perception is verbalized: the reader detects the borders of speech forms (e.g. the narrator’s discourse as well as narrator’s rendering of the character’s real or virtual discourse) as borders between verbalized perceptions. Käte Hamburger “adopted Bühler’s influential theory of the deictic centre, or *origo* [...] to demonstrate how in fiction alone the *origo* of a person other than oneself or the SPEAKER’S I is presented from within that other person’s I-originary” (Fludernik 1998: 198). It is the phenomenon called in Slavic tradition discursive interference (Bakhtin); alternation of object-related (*objektnye*) and subject-related (*subjektnye*) speech forms (Vinogradov), intersection of the speaker’s and the hearer’s discursive “spheres” or “interlinguistic bilingualism” (Uspensky). If the narrator’s discourse does not comprise verbal traces of other’s subjectivity, perception is apprehended by the reader as the narrator’s own or as the narrator’s “seeing together” with the character, the latter being a pure function of perception (see Jahn 1996). A purely external description of perception has merely a thematic value as any other physical action in the fictional world. The interpretive value of perception depends on the narrative agency (enunciator) that renders it. An Italian film theoretician Francesco Casetti came to a similar conclusion: “Thus instead of interpreting the questions ‘who sees?’ and ‘who speaks?’ as opposed to one another, it would be preferable to ask first, ‘What is the enunciation?’ and then, ‘Who manifests it?’” (Casetti 1998: 32). Thereby, focalization is defined as the narrative realization of subjectivity (*subjectivization*).

From this perspective, narration and focalization are inseparable. Genette separates them into independent categories of mood

(distance, focalization, perspective) and voice (the narrating instance, the narrative level and time of narration). In Genette's description, the whole "package" of narrative information belongs to the author/narrator and is unevenly distributed among the lower-level narrative instances. The information is channelled through zero-, internal or external focalization (Genette 1980: 189). The linguistic term "mood" is employed to define a "degree of affirmation" corresponding to each narrative agency as compared to the indicative mood of the "full" story. Genette retains visual and spatial metaphors, despite his preference for a stricter linguistic terminology, and links focalization with perception. The smaller the distance, the broader the perspective, the more information is available: "the view I have of a picture depends for precision on the distance separating me from it, and for breadth on my position with respect to whatever partial observation is more or less blocking it" (Genette 1980: 162). Thus, while using the term "focalization" "to avoid visual connotations", Genette loosely exploits visual and spatial connotations to elucidate the concept. He also does not make a clear distinction between the "point of view" (the observer), "field of vision" (the observed) and "focus". If internal focalization is equal to the description of what the character sees (Genette 1980: 192), any difference between the internal and external focalization is erased (on these and other inconsistencies see Bal 1991: 83–86; Jahn 1996). Further, Genette digresses from his intention to equate focalization with the observed and defines it either as an act of physical perception or as an emotional attitude.

Genette's ultimate aim is separation of "information" from "interpretation" (Genette 1980: 197).<sup>10</sup> If focalization is reduced to the fact of observation and the amount of information available, its value is purely thematical: it tells us nothing about the observer (Johnatan Culler questions the validity of attributing every description of a fictional scene to a character related to the scene, Culler (1974) 2004). Yet focalization as perception includes a subjective

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. also in Chatman: "Perception, conception, and interest points of view are quite independent of the manner in which they are expressed" (Chatman 1989: 154).

organization of a cognitive space. Modernist psychology and philosophy (William James, Bergson, Peirce and Merleau-Ponty) challenged the notion of simple, “innocent” perception: any perception is already “the meaning, the structure, the spontaneous arrangement of parts” (Merleau-Ponty 1981: 58). Insofar as focalization embraces cognition and attitude (as in Uspensky 1970 and Rimmon-Kenan (1986) 2002), a border between the point of view and focalization becomes blurred: there are no non-interpretive focalizations. What matters is an arrangement of points of view, i.e. centres of subjectivity structuring textual space. The shifts in perspective, which make the basis of textual architectonics, are not identical to Genette’s hierarchy of narrative levels. A description of the *system of relationships* between different points of view, in other words, “structures of composition” (Uspensky) or “narrative patterns”, becomes more important than the problem of holding focalization and narration apart. Genette’s system “does not take account of all the modes of the observer’s presence [...], nor does it explain the constituting of partial cognitive spaces, characterized by the presence [...] of two cognitive subjects in communication with each other” (Greimas & Courtés 1982: 121).

Uspensky was probably the first to describe the function of the “empty” centers of subjectivity in fiction (his *Poetics of Composition*, 1970). His work anticipates Ann Banfield’s conception of the “empty centre” and Herman’s conception of “hypothetical focalization”. According to Stanzel, it is the omniscient narrator, who is provisionally located or “figuralized” in the fictional space. On the contrary, Monika Fludernik argues that it is the reader who “takes an internal position on events (as if through a witness)” (Fludernik 1998: 390–391). Uspensky characterizes these “empty centers” of subjectivity as positions provisionally taken by the author-narrator. Mieke Bal (1991) also admits that “focalization” is to be understood in the broad sense as cognitive “orientation”.

Jacques Fontanille (1989) overtly refers to Uspensky in his work, where the semiotic theory and narratological developments are combined to turn the “point of view” back to its cognitive roots. He criticizes Genette’s “focalization” as a purely technical or

rhetorical device. Fontanille proceeds from Greimas' distinction between the cognitive, pragmatic and thymic agents delegated by the enunciator to control operations of the enunciatee. The enunciation is then both a space of the realization of the semionarrative or "mise-en-discourse" structures and an intersubjective space of communication between the enunciator and the enunciatee (Fontanille 1989: 6). The observer as the enunciator's agent is, according to Greimas, a cognitive subject "to exercise the receptive and [...] interpretative doing" (Greimas & Courtés 1982: 217). Fontanille introduces the notion of the subjective space of observation, which is oriented and stratified with respect to the observer (Fontanille 1989: 7; see also Bertrand 2000: 78–93). While avoiding anthropomorphic connotations (i.e. the equalization of the observer with a person), Fontanille retains the cognitive aspect of vision. He suggests the following semiotic typology of observers or narrative agents (in Fontanille's scheme, the first term denotes the pure cognitive actant and the second the same actant in its pragmatic function, i.e. the actant responsible for the material realization of the enunciation or *a performer*): 1. Focalizer/ narrator: a (non-localized and non-personified) cognitive filter. 2. Spectator/relator: the focalizer turned into the spectator endowed by a minimal spatiotemporal localization, a deictic centre or a centre of subjectivity. 3. Assistant/witness (e.g. the classical *chorus*): a personified non-participant. 4. Assistant-participant/witness-participant (e.g. a detective in crime story): the thematized observer. 5. Assistant-protagonist/witness-protagonist.

Thus, semiology takes the metaphor of the point of view at its face value to employ it as a *theoretical* model to draw all possible heuristic consequences and to explore parallels between observation and conceptualization. Likewise, cognitive linguistics works with the notions of figure and ground, scope and focus as well as other spatio-visual theoretical metaphors. Wallace L. Chafe draws an analogy between visual and mental information processing:

the hypothesis is, then, that similar principles are involved in the way information is acquired from the environment (for example, through eye movements), in the way it is scanned by consciousness during recall, and in the way it is verbalized. (Chafe 1980: 16)



In fiction, the semantic stratification of the observational space or “the clustering of intonation units into larger segments that express larger coherences of information” (Chafe 1994: 29), i.e. discourse topics and figures, determines textual architectonics. As Chafe argues, fictional representation appears in double perspective: it involves a *dissociation* of the represented or extroverted consciousness and the representing or introverted consciousness, the latter epitomizing the process of remembering and imagining of the data present in the extroverted consciousness.

Ronald Langacker points out a parallelism between perception and conception, on the one hand, and, respectively, the “*observer*” and the *speaker* “whose “observational” experience resides in apprehending the meaning of linguistic expression” (Langacker 2000: 204), on the other. For Langacker, certain aspects of visual perception constitute conceptual capacity. The minimal meaning-generative unit consists of two observers or interlocutors, who “accommodate their divergent perspectives, and negotiate the adaptation of conventional patterns to the idiosyncratic complexity of the immediate context” (*ibid.*, 389).

The “observer” as a metaphor for the “centre of subjectivity”, either personified or non-personified, embraces both the mimetic and the diegetic aspects of narration. The notion of the subjective cognitive space may prove to be helpful in the study of various mixed forms of representation, such as free indirect discourse, psychonarration and other intermediary forms where separation of narrator’s and character’s discourse may turn out to be difficult or impossible.

Genette’s system has been very influential and rather confusing at the same time (see critique of Genette and Chatman/Prince in: Bal 1991; Lanser 1981; Fludernik 1998; Jahn 1996; Phelan 2001, etc.; Fludernik’s “natural narratology” also breaks down the radical separation of narration and focalization, see Hägg 2005: 87–90.). The main point of the critique is the radical separation of “telling” from “perception” as embodied in the categories of narration and focalization. The radical separation contradicts a cognitive interpretation of fiction that builds on reader’s perceptual and cognitive uptake. The notion of the “point of view” refers to the deep

connection between perception and knowledge as expressed in the traditional likening of “knowledge” to seeing or perception.<sup>11</sup> These facts challenge Genette’s understanding of “focalization” as pure perception, on the one hand, and the existence of the “non-focalized” narration, on the other. In *Narrative Discourse Revisited* Genette admits that focalization involves perception in general, which opens the door for cognition and interpretation.

Even a seemingly neutral non-personified actorial narrator’s discourse contains mimetic signs of the narrator’s (imitative, imaginary) “presence” in the fictional world, signs such as deictic expressions, the distribution of “given” and “new” information (rheme and theme); modal and evaluative words (see e.g. Uspensky 1970; Boldyrev 2000; Lenz 2003 and others); and descriptions of optical and other perceptual effects, despite the fact that there is no one in the fictional world to perceive them. These signals of observer’s presence trigger reader’s response and guide the interpretation.

Thus, in Nabokov’s short story *The Potato Elf* (1924, the English version in 1973) the author-narrator (enunciator) is endowed with both the focalizing and spectatorial functions. The narrator-focalizer functions as the structuring and selective discursive agency. As a spectator, it becomes situated in the fictional world and endowed with a minimal spatio-temporal localization:

Like friend Zimmermann, Fred was extremely well built, and had there not been *those* wrinkles on his round forehead and at the corners of his narrowed eyes, as well as a rather eerie air of tension [...], our dwarf would have easily passed for a gentle eight-year boy” (*Stories*, 230); “a long frock coat that *looked* carved out of ebony” (229); “...he grabbed the dwarf by the scruff of the neck (*all you heard* was the snap of Fred’s wing collar as one side broke loose from the stud), lifted him in the air, and threw out *like a monkey*. (231) (emphasis mine — *M. G.*; the modal, evaluative or deictic expressions, indicating the observer’s simulated *presence*, are emphasized).

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<sup>11</sup> In her article on propositional attitudes, Nina Arutyunova argues that there is no clear-cut border between belief, desire, perception and other attitudes. The verbs of vision and other perceptual predicates always have epistemic and taxonomical connotations (Arutyunova 1989).

Moreover, a discrepancy between the narrator's and protagonist's point of view, rendered by the narrator, becomes sense-generating. Thus, the following perception might have belonged either to the narrator or the protagonist: "His life, like a circus horse's, went round and round with smooth monotony" (*Stories*, 229). The next sentence indicates that it is a narrator's judgment. The Potato Elf himself is accustomed to the monotony of his life insofar as a most insignificant incident may seem extraordinary and leave a deep trace in his memory: "One day in the dark of the wings, he tripped over a bucket of house paint and mellowly plopped into it — an occurrence he kept recalling for quite a long while as something out of the ordinary" (*Stories*, 229).

Another example of a "vague" focalization is a description of the London morning, which the dwarf might have observed from the ledge of the window:

A melting, enchanting mist washed London's grey roofs. Somewhere in the distance an attic window was thrown open, and its pane caught a glint of sunshine. The horn of an automobile sang out in the freshness and tenderness of dawn. (*Stories*, 233)

The reader is informed, however, that the dwarf's thoughts "dwelt on the previous day", when he was caressed by "real" women and suffered. Erotic arousal is mixed with disgust evoked by the recollection of a female dwarf. It is logical to suppose that the morning life of the city escapes the dwarf's attention: the perception belongs to the spectator. The discrepancy between the two types of subjective vision produces a tragic effect in the end of the story, when the narrator associates the cruel boys pursuing the dwarf with the circus crowd (the "faceless abyss laughing at him", *Stories*, 229), but the dwarf himself sees them as his sons, "merry, rosy, well-built sons" (*Stories*, 247).

Insofar as for Nabokov "writing" is akin to "vision", he actively employs signals of the observer's presence in the impersonal narration, e.g. in *The Gift*, written, according to Véra Nabokov's testimony, by the author as an "invisible observer" (see below *The inside and the outside*). Sometimes the function of the "invisible observer" is delegated to the camera, mirror, sunglasses or a

voyeur. In Nabokov's novels, especially in *Transparent Things*, the narrator's ability to perceive successive strata of time and space simultaneously is laid bare and thematized. The very quality of the transparency of the world depends on the position in the narrative hierarchy. Thus, the prostitute takes Hugh Person to the hotel "number", where 93 years ago a Russian novelist stayed, — and we, i.e. the narrator and the reader, can see the traveler "in the act of deciding what to take out of the valise":

As he sits at that deal table, the very same upon which our Person's whore has plunked her voluminous handbag, there shows through that bag, as it were, the first page of the *Faust* affair with energetic erasures and untidy insertions in purple, black, reptile-green ink. (*TT*, 18)

The function of the "observer" may be ascribed to the auctorial heterodiegetic narrator obliquely, through the thematization of the homodiegetic narrator's incomplete vision. In the next chapter I introduce the notions of the "metaverbal" and "metavisual" text to examine the narratives, where the conflation of knowledge and perception is thematized and used as a mechanism of narrative representation in cases where either verbal or visual evidence is incomplete.

### **Vision and word: the seat of a semiotic conflict**

The definition of painting as "mute poetry" and poetry as "speaking picture" naturally leads to the idea of complementarity and synthesis of verbal and visual media. In contrast, Leonardo da Vinci's dictum on painting as mute poetry and poetry as blind painting brings forward the separation of the two arts and makes their synthesis problematical. The presence of poetry in painting and vice versa presupposes a *tertium comparationis* — mental imagery, which underlies both visual and verbal forms of expression. From this viewpoint, poetry and painting are substantially similar. In the second case (Leonardo's dictum from the *Treatise on Painting*) a "defect" or "deficiency" of each art in respect to its "second half" is seen as its distinctive feature. Verbal art aspires to

a state of visuality, hence the topos of writing as “seeing” — as a mere aspiration or unattainable goal (Steiner 1982: 42). The “failure” of the verbal to embrace and capture the visual is used as a constructive principle and steadily thematized by different schools and authors. There is an interesting observation on the ontological “incompleteness” of fiction in C. Emmott’s book *Narrative Comprehension*: “The reader of fiction is in this respect similar to a blind person for the reader receives only intermittent signals of the presence of the characters from the text and must therefore monitor the fictional context mentally” (Emmott 1997: 118). Verbal art comprises an appeal to the visual, to its sensory presence, which make the verbal form “disappear”. “Verbal art achieves whatever iconicity and presence it can claim through relational, diagrammatic means, or, problematically, through metaphors” (Steiner 1982: 22). Likewise, the visual art resorts to the relational or symbolic means to be articulated. Verbal art aspires towards the condition of visuality and sensory presence, whereas visual art aspires towards the full articulation.

Over the last four decades there have been emerging, as an alternative for “logocentric” iconology in Panofsky’s vein and to comparative studies which focus on the complementarity or structural analogies and contrasts of different media, a number of theories of vision that take the meaning-generating gap between vision and word, “the rift between [...] the seeable and the sayable” (Mitchell 1994: 12) as their starting point. These theories proceed from media heterogeneity, i.e. resistance of the visual to the verbal or vice versa within the same text, an admixture of iconic and symbolic (continual and discrete) elements within the same medium.

The rival “text-image” relations in non-verbal arts are well illustrated by W. J. T. Mitchell and other scholars. Tension between word and vision is especially evident in the case of “metapictures” (Mitchell 1994) or pictorial paradoxes, where the very conditions of visual representation and perception are called into question. The destabilizing effect of the metapicture, its “wilderness”, its resistance to interpretation, demonstrate both “the impossibility of a strict metalanguage” and “the imbrication of visual and verbal experience” (Mitchell 1994: 83). The “metapictorialism” is cha-

racteristic of modernist and avant-garde art in general. Yet localization of the conflict between word and vision within the verbal medium remains somewhat unclear. Verbal imagery is much more elusive than pictorial imagery: it involves mental images, which are unstable by their very essence (see Mitchell 1986; Esrock 1994). This is the reason why rhetorical imagery is sometimes compared to the Wittgensteinian Rabbit-Duck picture (or a “metapicture” in Mitchell’s terminology): trope is considered a form of “aspect seeing” (see Hester 1972; Aldrich 1972). On the one hand, instability and sense-generating effect of the verbal imagery makes the study of it especially fascinating and fruitful. On the other hand, the elusiveness of the object and its resistance to strict formal analysis gives rise to either impressionistic thinking or general model building which often serves as a new filling for the old taxonomies.

That is why, while approaching the “text-image” problem, I shall start from texts, not from images. Obviously there exist verbal analogues for Mitchell’s “metapictures” — self-referential “meta-texts”, where conditions of verbal representation and perception are laid bare or called into question. Or else, one may speak of the “*metavisual*” and “*metaverbal*” texts (sometimes unified under the title of “iconotexts”, see Wagner 1996). If the metavisual text or Mitchell’s “metapicture” appeals for the verbal support, the metaverbal text demands the visual one. Both disclose the heterogeneity of the medium and reflect on its nature: the metaverbal as well as the metavisual text presents an organized and surfaced conflict between the iconic and symbolic component of the medium. As Mitchell argues, any verbal or visual text is an “imagetext”, where iconic and symbolic elements are in a state of more or less hidden mutual tension. Yet it is only the “metatext” (in the narrow specific sense as explained above), which makes their mutual resistance the object of representation. Visual poetry, the cine-novel and ekphrastic texts belong to the category of metaverbal texts. Here the visual part of the text, be it real or virtual (the graphic form, page design, real or virtual film, work of art, etc.), supports or undermines the verbal one. Yet what I am interested in are the “metatexts” where the conflict of the verbal and the visual

is part of the narrative presentation and (de)construction of the narrative identity.

The first possible source of tension between the verbal and the visual within the fictional text is the twofold nature of the fictionalizing act, a discrepancy between the mimetic and diegetic aspect of the narrative presentation and perception, between “what is shown” and “what is told”. Any work of fiction is both a text and a fictional world. Reading involves a series of adaptations between two modes of perception —the verbal and the visual (see Esrock 1994). The reader (the author) is in a privileged position in comparison to the fictional character because of his “surplus” of vision, which embraces multiple perspectives and produces an image of the fictional world. There is a gap between the virtual, synthetic images of the fictional world and the separate verbalized references or descriptions of it. What I call the “image of the fictional world” roughly corresponds to Roman Ingarden’s “concretization”. According to Ingarden, the work of art is a “schematic formation”. It contains numerous “places of indeterminacy”, which are partially filled or fleshed out (“concretized”) by the individual reading. Reconstruction of imaginary scenes is especially active on the level of “schematized aspects” and on the level of “represented entities”. The “schematized aspects” are “visual, auditory, or other aspects via which the characters and places represented in the work may be ‘quasi-sensorially’ apprehended”. The “represented entities” are objects, events, and states of affairs which form the characters and plot of the literary work (Stanford Encyclopedia 2004; see also Ingarden 1973). Manfred Jahn introduces the analogous distinction between the verbalized (“external”) and the imagined, virtual or partially verbalized (“internal”) stories (Jahn 2003).

The second source of tension is a discrepancy between the narrative functions of speaking and observation, or in Greimas’s words, the performative and the cognitive aspect of narration. “The curious hybrid, part actor, part reporter, the narrator is one of the points where fiction and narration strangely intersect” (Ricardou 2002: 182). The discrepancy is at its most obvious in the first-person narration. The first-person homodiegetic narrator (witness-participant) has the privilege of seeing others in the fictional world

while remaining himself partially “invisible”, inaccessible for investigation and hidden under the pronoun “I”. He is seen from the outside only as the Other’s “Gestalt” and from the inside only as the “language of inner experience” (Bakhtin). The phenomenological (Husserlian) problematics of perception of the Other was developed by Bakhtin, Lacan and other theoreticians of modernity, who applied Husserl’s philosophy in the study of literature or psychology.

The notion of auctorial omniscience and the traditional likening of knowing to seeing have sometimes led to the naturalistic reading of the metaphor of auctorial vision. Some Foucault-influenced critics have even scolded the realist author for the “police control” he exercises over the characters by means of “panoptical vision”. Thus, in her interesting book *The Eye’s Mind*, Karen Jacobs draws, in my opinion, too straightforward a parallel between the auctorial narrator’s “panoptic powers” and the “institutions of supervision”. She reads Nabokov’s novel *The Eye* as an example of critique and deconstruction of the realist narrator’s power of supervision:

The narrator of *The Eye*, then, by obsessively trying to situate a man who turns out to be himself, unquestionably participates in the “fantasy of surveillance” said to characterize the realist narrator’s position; but his failure to do so derails the easy equitability between his own panoptic powers and those of the “institutions of discipline, regularization, and supervision” narrative authority is thought to represent in realism. (Jacobs 2001: 74)

As Dorrit Cohn justly observes, Foucault’s power relations exist only between acting subjects or “ontological equals”. Their application to narrative agencies is unmotivated. Further she points out that panoptical vision is a means of *external* manipulation: “The guardian [...] can only perceive his subjects’ manifest behavior, which he can punish or reward” (Cohn 1995: 9, 13; the article is reprinted in Cohn 1999). However, external manipulation or physical coercion is for Foucault part of the broader process of “normalization”: power structures not only control the body but are interiorized in the subject’s mind as well. Cohn’s attempt to refute the notion of auctorial/narratorial “omniscience” to show, with the aid of Genette’s theory, that narration is, on the contrary, a process



of “restriction” of omniscience, is not fully convincing. Genette proceeds from the idea of “complete information” (Cohn 1995: 12), i.e. diegetic information or knowledge of the fictional world as the author’s/narrator’s property, which is eventually restricted through the acts of focalization, i.e. fictional characters’ perception. The scheme is naturalistic and indeed resembles the Foucauldian picture of control, the more so that novelists themselves often playfully underscore the characters’ dependence on the auctorial will. Nabokov willingly tries on the Romantic mask of the “cruel Puppenmeister” whose power over the characters-marionettes is unlimited. If, however, one placed the text into a broader author/reader cognitive perspective, the fictional world as an effect of “a revelatory vision that provides imagined beings with an imagined inner life” (Cohn 1995: 13) would be a means of “appresentation”, participant observation or constitution of the Other as part of the self, which should lead to the extension of the cognitive perspective and the growth of knowledge.

It is *physical* surveillance as a means of external control, discipline and its interiorization, that is the object of Foucault’s critique. In fiction, the function of physical vision, i.e. vision within the fictional world, is delegated to the homodiegetic narrator or character. Classical narratology (Genette, Chatman) has always tended to separate verbalization from vision. Genette’s distinction between “narration” and “focalization” supports this separation. It seems, both approaches — the straightforward identification of auctorial omniscience with vision and the strict separation of auctorial verbalization from the character’s vision — need further refining.

Obviously, the author-narrator is not able to (physically) “see” the diegetic world. He exercises the control over verbalization, i.e. “simulates”, imitates, renders, or reports characters’ real or virtual (hypothetical) thoughts and speech. However, the logic of “possible worlds” and different “visions” (points of view, perspectives), which are anchored in different contexts and configure the fictional world, impose constraints on the auctorial verbalization. To use the Lacanian terminology, the author’s speech becomes invaded with the Other. Hence the effect of surprise, which the

work in progress may evoke in its author, e.g. when Tolstoy is astonished at Anna Karenina's "surprising" behavior. The author-narrator's speech becomes saturated with the character's speech, becomes "double-voiced" (Bakhtin). Thus, sentimental and Romantic clichés, which Emma Bovary might have met in her favorite books, emerge in the Flaubertian narrator's speech; Gregor Samsa's real and virtual thoughts penetrate the narrator's speech in Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, etc.: what is termed "free indirect discourse" in classical narratology includes many intermediary and mixed speech forms.

On the other hand, as early narratology (cf. Henry James' "house of fiction") puts it, the author may see "together" with the homodiegetic narrator/character and may adopt his vision. He may also "simulate" vision from the deictic center, i.e. from an imaginable point in the fictional space ("hypothetical focalization" in Herman's terminology — Herman 1994). Hence the author-narrator's "simulated" or "quasi-sensoric" perception does not differ in principle from the "physical" vision of the character. Any "verbal icon" is just a scheme to create images, not the image itself. It is a sign of *verbalized* perception, which has at least a minimal spatio-temporal localization *within* the diegetic world (not outside of it, as Chatman argues, while drawing the border between the "slant" and the "filter" — Chatman 1990) and therefore is limited and specified, even in the case of "panoramic vision". Thus, the beginning of the second chapter of *The Pickwick Papers* (cited by Thomas Pavel in his *Fictional Worlds*), which Genette would describe as a combination of zero focalization and focalization through Mr Pickwick's eyes, is actually configured by the two points of view: vision from below, from the imaginary point in the street (from this point the imaginary observer would see the "two suns" above) and Mr Pickwick's glance from above:

The punctual servant of all work, the sun, had just risen and begun to strike a light on the morning of the thirteenth of May, one thousand eight hundred and twenty-seven, when Mr. Samuel Pickwick burst like another sun from his slumbers, threw open his chamber window, and looked out upon the world beneath. Goswell Street was at his feet,

Goswell Street extended on his left; and the opposite side of Goswell Street was over the way. (cit. in Pavel 1986: 11)

Thus, there is always an asymmetry and discrepancy between vision and word in the work of fiction: mimetic aspects of the fictionalizing act impose constraints on diegesis (verbalization). The first-person homodiegetic narrator, who occupies an intermediary position between the author and the character, embodies this tension. The narratives I have chosen as examples — Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), Vladimir Nabokov's *The Eye* (1930) and Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954) — are built on the thematization of the narrator's function of "observation". The narrator-protagonist is an observer par excellence; observation, i.e. the interplay of the viewer and the viewed (the mirror structure), is the basic narrative function of each story. Moreover, the modes of narrativity (Marie-Laure Ryan), i.e. the plot combinations or plot lines, are also organized into mirror structures. Yet the narrator's "specular desire" for "full vision" turns out to be narcissistic self-reflection and stimulates the resistance of the visual to the verbal, a suspense or blockage of verbalization. The latter means an increasing degree of textual "indeterminacy". As it seems, these narratives are so *effective* (Felman 1977: 96) — in terms of the reader's (viewer's) response — not only because of the elements of the ghost, mystery or detective story they comprise, but also because they provoke the reader's active support, concretization and desire to examine the story "from the obverse side of the narrative", as Edmund Wilson puts it (Wilson 1969:121), to see what is on the other side of the mirror or "on the back of the tapestry" (James 1996: 689). The homodiegetic narrator's restricted capacity to see and desire for the full vision and knowledge of the heterodiegetic narrator is brought into conflict with the necessity to narrate and to act in the fictional world. The higher narrative authority, the object of the homodiegetic narrator's aspiration, is also thematized as the privilege of full vision.

### 1. H. James: *The Turn of the Screw*

The discussion on *The Turn of the Screw* initiated by Edmund Wilson is rather symptomatic. Whereas Wilson himself presumed that Jamesian ghosts were “mere hallucinations” and projections of the governess’ hysterical sexual frustration, other critics viewed Wilson’s reading as reductive and insisted that the ghosts were “real”, which is, of course, in itself an oxymoron.<sup>12</sup>

As Christine Brooke-Rose observes, James’ text “invites the critics unconsciously to ‘act out’ the governess dilemma” (Brooke-Rose 1981: 128). She shows how critics start re-writing the story and adding missing details. I shall try to trace the same process in the governess’ narrative: the governess verbalizes the story to compensate for the impeded visualisation.

The governess is very sensitive to the influence her facial expression has or might have had on other people. She is looking for the “mirror contact”, i.e. exchange of glances, which would permit the subject to recognize the Other as the “self” and thus to regain visual control over the Other, which, roughly speaking, corresponds to the second (narcissistic) stage of the Lacanian “mirror phase”. Shoshana Felman and Christine Brooke-Rose underscore the role of vision and “Lacanian” mirror structures in James’ story (Felman 1977; Brooke-Rose 1981). Here I am going to make some additional remarks to show how vision is related to verbalization. On the one hand, looking is the most reliable source of information: “to see” means “to know” and thus to verbalize (e.g.: “I only asked that he should *know*; and the only way to be sure he knew would be to see it” — James 1996: 652). On the other hand, there is a “surplus” of vision, which is beyond the governess’ control and therefore resistant to verbalization. As it seems, there is, besides the psychoanalytical reading suggested by Edmund Wilson (the Freudian) and Shoshana Felman (the Lacani-

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<sup>12</sup> In Nabokov’s *Ada*, Van Veen, who was invited to make a *tour du jardin* upon his arrival to Ardis Hall, “came upon a person whom he recognized with disgust as being his former French governess (the place swarmed with ghosts!” (*Ada*, 39) — a probable hint at the “ghosts controversy” started by Wilson, Nabokov’s friend and later his opponent in the polemics about the translation of *Eugene Onegin*.

an), another means of interpretation of the tension between vision and word in James' tale — via the distribution of narrative functions.

James' critics have pointed out a series of *mise-en-abyme* devices or structural “mirrors” within the text. Thus, the main story includes reverberations of the events mentioned in the frame: several motifs of the frame are repeated in the main narrative. I would say that the main narrative evolves as a “regression” and “reversion” of the frame motifs. A number of perfect mirror contacts, i.e. recognitions of the self in the Other, are established in the frame. The mother sees what the child sees; the first person narrator “reads” Douglas' thoughts in his gaze; the governess sees what Douglas sees and he sees that she sees it, etc. The main story, on the contrary, comprises more and more dubious mirror reflections and lack of the mirror contact. According to the governess' “mirror theory” (which is also a kind of “contagious magic” belief), contact with ghosts should have left a visible “imprint” or a “trace” on the children (James 1996: 657). Yet the children are mirrors, which do not reflect anything (“I should have found the trace. I found nothing at all [...]” — James 1996: 657); the ghosts most often avoid direct visual contact with the governess; the housekeeper Mrs Grose is an imperfect mirror. Thus the reader is left in uncertainty: he (she) does not know whether there is anything “on the other side of the mirror”, i.e. the governess.

The comparison of the ghosts with “letters”, i.e. the letters of the story the governess herself is writing (“I saw him as I see the letters I form on this page” — James 1996: 654), points at the metafictional meaning of the story as a thematization of the narrator's functions of narration and observation and the way in which her limited point of view restricts her control over narration as well. There is the Master beyond the narrator's competence, whom Shoshana Felman equates with the psychological Censorship metonymically embodied in the employer and the schoolmaster. Yet the Master is also the Author of the story, to whom the narrative control belongs and with whom the narrator is prevented from communicating.

The process of impeded visualization runs parallel to the process of inhibited verbalization. The story is an infinite regress or a series of attempts to catch the viewed by means of verbalization. James himself points at this “regressive” character of the story in the Preface of 1908:

The story would have been thrilling could she [the governess — *M. G.*] but have found herself in better possession of it, dealing as it did with a couple of small children in an out-of-the-way place, to whom the spirits of certain ‘bad’ servants, dead in the employ of the house, were believed to have appeared with the design of ‘getting hold’ of them. This was all, but there had been more, which my friend’s old converser had lost the thread of: she could only assure him of the wonder of the allegations as she had anciently heard them made. He himself could give us but this shadow of a shadow — my own appreciation of which, I need scarcely say, was exactly wrapped up in that thinness (James 1908).

Despite, or rather thanks to, the elusive substance of the story, the governess’ (and the reader’s) desire to “see” and to reach the “full vision” grows in the course of events. As a result, the governess starts verbalizing the virtual speech of other characters herself, i.e. she acts out the story, taking over the role of the author.

The frame of the story with its triple narrative mediation (the governess as the first narrator, Douglas the second and the “I” the third one) already introduces a number of discrepancies between word and vision. Douglas finds it difficult to say what is unusual about the story; he seems “to be really at loss how to qualify it” (James 1996: 636). The beginning of the narration is deferred. Preliminary information is scarce, yet Douglas hints that it will not be much fuller in the future either: “The story won’t tell” (James 1996: 637).

The governess’ first talk with the housekeeper about her pupils assumes the form of “prodigious and gratified looks” and “obscure and roundabout allusions”. The governess’ opportunities of verbalization are restricted by her employer’s (the Master’s) injunction “not to report”, by the reserved manners of the housekeeper (whose laconic speech seems sometimes ambiguous), and by the presumed resistance and rejection of full contact on the children’s part. An

additional restriction is introduced by the housekeeper's illiteracy, her inability to read the letter sent by the schoolmaster and thus to play the role of the governess' mirror double. There are unpleasant letters — from the headmaster and from the governess' home — whose content is withheld or mentioned in passing. The first apparition is metonymically linked to the letter ("letters") in the governess' manuscript. This is also the first case when "to see" does not mean "to know": verbalization is blocked. "Like the letters, the ghosts, too, are essentially figures of *silence*" (Felman 1977: 149). Later the housekeeper's "insight" that Miles stole letters at school and for that reason was expelled, continues the chain of associations between the letters and the secret corruption. Instead, as it turns out, Miles "said things", i.e. verbalized things which are not to be verbalized.

The governess interprets the first apparition as the usurpation of control over vision. She has been observed by a stranger: "some unscrupulous traveller, curious in old houses, had made his way in unobserved, enjoyed the prospect from the best point of view and then stolen out as he came" (James 1996: 656). Further, the feeling of being observed is projected onto the children: their behavior gives the governess the suspicion "of being watched from under cover" (James 1996: 695). The feeling culminates in the lake episode when Flora appears "to read and accuse, and judge" the governess (James 1996: 720). The second apparition shows that it is not the governess that the ghost is looking for. As if to compensate for the absence of the "mirror contact" and lack of control, the governess takes the place of the ghost on the other side of the window and applies her face to the glass as the ghost did before her. Further, the mirror reversal is repeated twice (Miles on the lawn looking at the tower, Flora at the opposite shore of the lake; see Brooke-Rose 1981).

The feeling of the non-verbalized "surplus" of vision intensifies after the new apparition emerges:

I was [...] still haunted with the shadow of something she had not told me. I myself had kept back nothing, but there was a word Mrs. Grose had kept back. I was sure, moreover, by morning, that this was not

from a failure of frankness, but because on every side there were fears. (James 1996: 667)

“I scarce know how to put my story into words that shall be a credible picture of my state of mind [...]” (*ibid.*, 667). “I can give no intelligible account of how I fought out the interval” (*ibid.*, 670). “I scarce know what to call it” (*ibid.*, 676). The governess assumes the role of the “screen” between the children and the ghosts: “the more I saw, the less they would” (*ibid.*, 668). However, she feels she does not succeed in being a screen since she does not see enough. The governess needs to see ghosts, i.e. retain control over visual contacts to reach the “full vision” (*ibid.*, 671). She is worried because the children may see more that she does (*ibid.*, 698): “not seeing enough” produces an impression of obscurity, lying, and “theatralization” on the children’s part. The communion between the children and the ghosts presumably takes place behind the governess’ back, beyond her field of vision: Flora didn’t say anything, but “I saw with my eyes: saw that she was perfectly aware” (*ibid.*, 670).

When the governess finally meets the ghost’s gaze, their mutual gaze does not entail contact and verbalization is completely blocked: “It was the dead silence of our long gaze at such close quarters that gave the whole horror, huge as it was, its only note of the unnatural. If I had met a murderer in such a place and at such an hour, we still at least would have spoken” (*ibid.*, 683). To compensate for the lack of contact and verbalization the governess is tempted to demand full verbalization from the children: “...why not frankly confess it to me, so that we may at least live with it together and learn perhaps, in the strangeness of our fate, where we are and what it means?” (*ibid.*, 685). She suspects that the children imitate the bad servants’ speech without her knowledge and makes guesses about the character of this verbalization. Further the necessity of verbalization plays a more and more significant role. Verbalization is suspended since the governess is not certain of her authority to verbalize: “*They* have the manners to be silent, and you, trusted as you are, the baseness to speak!” (*ibid.*, 698). Finally the desperate governess starts talking with the ghost of the other governess (the scene in the classroom; *ibid.*, 705) and verbalizes



the ghost's hypothetical speech (during the talk with the housekeeper; *ibid.*, 707). Thus the narrator's struggle for visual control is parallel to the struggle for verbal control, i.e. for the "narrative authority": instead of being the full-fledged author-narrator of the story, she is permanently relegated to the role of the helpless onlooker.

The breach of silence is compared to "the smash of a pane of glass" (*ibid.*, 719), which is a rather telling and symbolic comparison: the "window" between the human and the ghost world is broken. Flora's uncontrolled speech, as if coming from the outside source, convinces the governess and the housekeeper that the child communicates with ghosts. Miles breaks the silence and pronounces the names of the ghosts, which presumably extends their straight "influence" on him: Miles dies.

The tension between vision and word in James' story is related to the struggle for narrative authority. As Wayne Booth has pointed out, James often transformed the narrator from a "mere reflector" to the full-fledged actor. In his notebooks James often "develops the reflector until the original subject is rivaled or even overshadowed" (Booth 1983: 341). Some of his stories are double-focused as a result of an incomplete fusion of the two types of narrator (Booth 1983: 346). Yet the situation in the *Turn of the Screw* is more complicated than a mere oscillation between observation and action. The narrator is striving for control over verbalization and the power to "see" the inner life of the characters, thus approaching the author's position. On the other hand, she is looking for her "mirror reflections" in other characters, thus descending to the level of the characters. As is well known, James consciously employed visual and theatrical metaphors to explain his method of writing. For him the act of novel-writing was "a negotiation between the viewer and the viewed" (Hale 1998: 86). Here, probably, lies the source of the tension between word and vision in James' story.

## 2. V. Nabokov: *The Eye*

The “eye” was a favourite modernist metaphor that served as a filter for new cultural experience and perceptions. Visual metaphors were employed as a basic code in fiction (Nabokov, Bataille; see Barthes 1964), painting (Dali, Magritte, etc.) and the cinema (*Le Chien Andaloux* by Buñuel and Dali, Hitchcock’s films, etc.).

Nabokov’s narrator overtly splits into two agents (narrator vs. observer), or in other words, “that aspect of the self which displays authorial potential and that aspect of the self which functions as a character” (Connolly 1993: 32). He performs the movement along the “Möbius strip” of the narrative to look at himself as a character from its “obverse side”. Thus the privileged position of the first-person narrator, who observes others in the fictional world while remaining “invisible” himself, is turned “inside out”. In Nabokov’s novella, the first-person narrator commits suicide, yet his mental self lives on and creates the surrounding world anew. The self (the “I”) has the function of the onlooker, witness, observer, i.e. the invisible “presence” or the mobile point of view in the world created, although it retains some traits of bodily presence, too. The other half of the “I” exists under Smurov’s name as a “body” within the diegetic world. This other half is made visible by means of mirror reflections on the other characters’ “surface”. The “I” is the object of vision in the first part of the story and the subject of vision in the second part, where its alter ego Smurov is detached and placed among the other characters. Then the “I” sees the self as the Other, yet this “visible side” is verbalized in the language of the other characters’ experience. The “I”, the Lacanian subject “that does not function as the center of human thought and action, but which inhabits the mind as an elusive agency, controlling yet uncontrollable” (Nobus 2003: 61), is always pervaded by the Other and becomes visible as the “Other”. The narrator is, to use Mikhail Bakhtin’s words, translated from the language of inner experience to the language of outward expression. The “I” (Eye) conducts an investigation, looking for the “real” Smurov among the multiple copies in the other characters’ minds, i.e. it is the narrator in quest

of his own “real” reflection. The partial fusion of the two halves occurs in the end.

The first part of the story comprises a series of frozen stills, *tableaux vivants*, photos or frescos with the “I” as their empty center (which corresponds to the Smurov cut out, “excluded” from Vanya’s photograph in the second part): I and Matilda, I and the boys, I and the melodramatic villain and jealous husband Kashmarin, etc. Nabokov refers to the principal “incompleteness” of the photographic image as a fragment of life torn from the context, from its live organic texture (the quality to which Walter Benjamin and Roland Barthes pointed as well): impressions “as arbitrary as the raised knee of a politician stopped by the camera not in the act of dancing a jig but merely in that of crossing a puddle” (*The Eye*, 25). The second part consists of Smurov’s Gestalts (“real” or imaginary) in other people’s minds: he is a “parasitic” image, a “tenacious parasite” (*ibid.*, 113), retained by their visual memory. Nabokov was always interested in the “parasitic”, involuntary character of visual images (cf. *Glory*, *The Gift* and other novels). The investigation of the second part unfolds as the reverse movement in comparison with narration from the inner point of view in the first part. It is the observation of the outward traces and signs, a desperate attempt to unveil their “inner” meanings.

The theme of visual “parasitic images” runs parallel to the topic of “mental parasitism”, i.e. the internal invasion of the medium by the spirit. The medium Weinstock’s work of translation and interpretation of signs is another metaphor for the process of investigation. Nabokov’s novel refers to the realia of Berlin life in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when mesmerism and occult sciences were fashionable. The wave of interest in the occult and mystical knowledge arose at the turn of the century. Sometimes passion for the occult balanced on the border between popular science and mysticism. Thus in Conan Doyle’s story *The Parasite* the mind of the young professor of physiology is invaded by the Indian medium Helen Penclosa’s mesmeric influence. What starts as an innocent scientific experiment, an investigation of hypnosis, ends in almost total hypnotic dependence. Nabokov depicts the fashionable, everyday aspect of occultism (turning tables, communica-

tion with spirits) as close to popular science. Another aspect of this topic is the infiltration of the émigré community by Soviet agents and spies (see Jacobs 2001: 71–73).

The identity of the protagonist and the narrator is fixed through the mirror reflection. The “I” observing and the “I” acting or observed are always different. The difference is supported grammatically as the first and the third person positions. The first-person narrator is the auctorial agent to the same extent as it is the protagonist’s alter ego. As Ricoeur argues, every narrative act already involves reflection upon the events narrated: “...narrative “grasping together” carries with it the capacity for distancing itself from its own production and in this way dividing itself in two” (Ricoeur 1990, 2: 61).

The “I” (the first-person narrator) placed within the diegetic world could be seen only from the inside — in the language of inner experience — and is thus partially disembodied. It is always an appeal to the reader’s participatory empathic observation. By contrast, the outside “I” is seen within the fictional space as the Other alienated from its inner experience.

The European novel of consciousness is an object of Nabokov’s experiments: Smurov is a parodic echo of Proust’s Swann. Indeed, Proustian characters are seen through other people’s eyes in different contexts and circumstances: they are mysterious and devoid of a stable “substance”. Swann of Marcel’s childhood resembles the people whom the latter is used to seeing at home: his bodily envelope is indistinguishable from the Combray environment. The second Swann, “un être complet et vivant” (Proust 1954: 28), is a totally different person in comparison with the first. This Swann, despite his bourgeois origin, is accepted in the highest aristocratic circles and is at the same time the chance lover of kitchen maids and female workers. Swann alleges that his life is full of prodigious adventure. He spends time in the pretentious bourgeois circle of the Verdurins because of his love for Odette, whose image is vague and vacillates between that of a nice and honest young woman and that of a deceitful coquette. Swann, obsessed by jealousy, spies on her through her window and opens her letters.

Another literary tradition to which Nabokov's novella undoubtedly refers is that of confessional prose (Rousseau, Dostoevsky and their followers). In *The Eye* the cliché notion of the author-narrator's "sincerity" is dramatized. The "I" of the story, the protagonist and the unreliable narrator is, as usual in Dostoevsky, diffident, hesitating between megalomania and an inferiority complex, anxiously looking for his "reflections" in other people. He is also the cool-blooded author of the story who "can accelerate or retard" the motions of characters, "or distribute them in different groups, or arrange them in various patterns": "for me, their entire existence has been merely a shimmer on a screen" (*The Eye*, 100). Thus the narrator's metafictional task is translated into cinematic language. The narrator observes the events from the outside, but also enters the fictional world either as a character or as a ghost ("my disincarnate flitting from room to room" — *The Eye*, 69); he may "recruit" characters as his agents, merge with a character, detach himself from the character or stop watching him altogether. Finally, he is the author's alter ego: it is the author who can not speak out "sincerely" and has to be shielded by his oblique "reflections" within the text.

Although the final fusion of the protagonist and the narrator never takes place in *The Eye*, at least grammatically, and the mutual mirroring of the two stories is still partial and distorted, there are multiple signs disseminated over the text indicating the relative symmetry of the two stories, that of the "I" and that of Smurov, and therefore pointing at the implied identity of their protagonists. Pairs of characters standing like atlantes on either side of the door steadily form the "frame" for the protagonist: the boys in the first story, Khrushchov and Mukhin in the second one (*The Eye*, 24, 42). The book *Ariane, Jeune Fille Russe* appears in both stories. The most striking is, perhaps, the reverberation of the jealous husband's attack provoked by Matilda, a mistress of the narrator (a plump lady with a large mouth which gathers "into a crimson pucker": *ibid.*, 14) in the Smurov's story about the jealous maid ("her obesity and her carnal lips": *ibid.*, 58) who surrendered him to the communists. Even if the reality of the shot in the first part remains hypothetical, the wound makes itself felt in the mirror

world: “For several days already I had felt a strange discomfort in my bullet-punctured chest, a sensation resembling a draft in a dark room, I went to see a Russian doctor” (*ibid.*, 72).

Thus, in Nabokov’s novella, the “chatting”, the “voluble”, loquacious style typical of confessional prose aimed at maximum self-exposition, and the image of the protagonist as a poseur, a prattler are in contrast with the elusiveness of his “real” image shielded by the “I”, the “empty center” of the story. The text is built as a system of mirrors aimed at catching this elusive image and unable to catch it.

### 3. A. Hitchcock: *Rear Window*

As Hitchcock’s critics have already noted, the “window” in Hitchcock’s film is actually a “mirror” (Fawell 2001; Wood 1991). All the events or rather different stories in the opposite apartment house reflect, to a greater or lesser extent, the “hidden” story of the protagonist and his fiancée Lisa — the story, which unfolds on the level of subconscious impulses and drives. Thus the life seen through the “rear window” reveals what is hidden or suppressed in the rather conventional or ambiguous conversation of the characters — the “creatures trapped in the habits of their existence” (Fawell 2001: 2).

The visual pattern is in overt conflict with the verbal web being weaved by the women who are trying to divert Jefferies’ attention from an almost paranoid looking through the window at other people’s lives. If, in the film, the sound track competes with the images or even “steals the show” (Fawell 2001: 5), then the dialogue has its own function within the sound track. The speech reveals inner disharmony: it is strained, hostile or ambivalent; harsh or anxious intonations are prevalent. On the whole, the voice stands out against the background of natural sounds and music, which support and emphasize the images or are contrapuntal to them.

The observation, the role of the witness or the “eye,” is a natural thematization of the protagonist’s professional functions.

Many critics have pointed to Hitchcock's obsessive use of the camera throughout the film:

Jeff uses it to peep on the Thorwalds when he become more obsessed with the case, thus strengthening the idea that Jeff's voyeurism is an extension of his career as a photographer. Jeff uses the camera to help break the case, comparing Thorwald's garden below with how it was in a picture he took weeks before to deduce that Thorwald has buried something in his garden. He readies his camera to flash warnings to Lisa when she is rummaging through the Thorwald's apartment. And he uses the camera to defend himself when Thorwald comes to murder him. (Fawell 2001: 22)

The protagonist himself plays the role of the camera while observing the life stories in different windows. If we accept the identification of the film narrator with the camera (there are other alternatives, too: the filmic composition device [M. Jahn], shower-narrator [Chatman], etc.), then Jeff may be identified as the "narrator" of the embedded stories, whose development is given almost exclusively through his eyes. Even while using the "objective camera", Hitchcock gives additional information to the viewer from the point of view of Jefferies' window, which thus serves as the main point of reference (Fawell 2001: 46).

Jeff (played by James Stewart) is a reporter-photographer who is unwillingly placed in the witness' position: he is practically immobile due to his broken leg. To compensate for his immobility Jefferies is compelled to increase the intensity and time of observation. He also uses women, whose curiosity he manipulates, and optical devices such as prostheses to interact with the observable. For this reason Hitchcock's film was often considered self-reflexive, modeled on filmmaking or film viewing. However, the women are initially presented as an obstacle for Jefferies' observation: they divert his attention by means of conventional talk and interrupt him when he himself is trying to speak out. The protagonist's twice repeated exclamation "shut up!" and his remark "Let's stop talking nonsense" are provoked by the women's eloquence, which does not leave space for Jeff's remarks in the dialogue. Jeff reacts to the women as "conventional" and rather aggressive creatures (critics and biographers sometimes refer to

Hitchcock's misogyny, see e.g. Spoto 1983). Only after Lisa stops talking and starts acting "within the picture" (i.e. the metaphorical "film") observed by Jefferies, i.e. when she climbs to the criminal's apartment to find out what is hidden in it, does Jeff change his mocking and defensive attitude. Yet what she finds — the wedding ring — ironically refers to Jefferies' marriage problems and the closed space of his apartment, which has become a nuisance to him.

On the other hand, the woman is a "reflexive" creature and serves as a mirror for the man. Stella, who blames Jeff for his paranoid watching, describes his situation of immobility and involuntary voyeurism as typical: "we've become a race of Peeping Toms. People ought to get outside and look in at themselves". Ironically, Jefferies is only able to get outside and to look at his own window after being thrown out by Thorwald. Critics have tried hard to find the cause of Jefferies' "strange" behavior, which includes "peeping" and an unwillingness to marry. They have referred to his egoism, repressed homosexuality, impotence or even melancholy and neurosis. Yet hypothetical signs of his latent homosexuality or impotence may be actually read in many different ways, though I do not deny that the film abounds in sexual puns and hints. The women, Stella and Lisa, judge Jefferies from the commonsense point of view. They hint at Jeff's "abnormality", at "something frightful" he hides from them, etc. Yet soon they themselves become involved in the game of looking and stop talking. The poetics of mystery and silence is used by Hitchcock to break everyday patterns of life and stereotypical behavior. The function of the "primeval" power of vision is central in this breakthrough. There is always a hint of professional passion in Jefferies' observations. Thus the question about the ways of cutting up a body (read by critics as a parallel between sex and violence) is not devoid of cinematographic interest: it is essentially the problem of montage.

Therefore I think that a reading either from the feminine or from the masculine point of view unbalances the subtlety of Hitchcock's film: the conflict of vision and verbalization is the main axis of the film, onto which other oppositions and patterns are



superimposed. Hitchcock has learned a lot from the early silent films, especially from the German expressionists. In *Rear Window*, the film strategy of supplying visual information and then its confirmation or disconfirmation through verbal comment (Bordwell 1997: 41) is modeled upon the silent film structure (alternation of scenes and intertitles). On the other hand, the linkage between the film and photography is made evident: it reminds the viewer of the secondary nature of the “talkies” and the principal discrepancy between vision and word inherent in the cinema text.

It is evident that the excess of verbalization in James’ and Nabokov’s *metaverbal* texts is meant to compensate for the hypothetical visual counterpart of the story — what the narrator and the characters are trying but are unable to see. Moreover, in Hitchcock’s *metavisual* text, there is a suppressed verbal counterpart, i.e. the words, which remain unsaid. This verbal counterpart is brought to the surface by hints and harsh intonations as well as screams, sighs and mysterious sounds in the surroundings of Jefferies’ apartment. The viewer has every reason to suspect that this “invisible speech” is in principle not amenable to full verbalization. All three texts have something in common: they disclose a tension between the verbal and the visual inherent in different media and make it part of the narrative presentation.

### **Frame, motion and the observer**

Traditional interart studies mostly focus on the transposition or translation of visual languages into verbal language and vice versa (ekphrasis, the verbal transposition of montage, the camera eye, close-up etc.). However, as it is well-known, “cinematographic” devices such as montage or close-up existed in literature long before cinema was invented. Eisenstein borrowed the idea of montage from *Madame Bovary*. “Sergei Eisenstein’s essay, *Dickens, Griffith, and the Film Today*, demonstrates how Griffith found in Dickens hints for almost every one of his major innovations” (Bluestone 1971: 2). Often it is difficult to distinguish between the conscious verbal transposition of cinematographic devices and the

visual transposition of literary devices, on the one hand, and “the impressions left by thought structures” (Mityr 2000: 17) in both visual and verbal media, on the other hand. In Mityr’s opinion, there exist mental structures or operations underlying verbal and visual representation. However, the ways in which they are translated into the verbal and visual media are different.

For in literature we see tracking shots, pans, close-ups, and dissolves when we observe quite simply the expressions of these same forms of thought, the same rhythmic associations and the same descriptive sequences — except that the means are different, means which try to give, in a roundabout fashion, what the cinema achieves directly. (Mityr 2000: 18)

Therefore the discovery of pre-cinematic expression “in the works of Virgil, Homer, Livy, Racine, Victor Hugo, Byron, Shelley, Dickens, Coleridge, or Pushkin” is devoid of interest not only from the point of view of film theory but also from the perspective of literary studies: “the basic characteristics of film expression derive from the thought processes to which language has accustomed us” (*ibid.*, 17). The scholar is taking certain risk while speaking of the impact of the cinema on literature even during the cinematic age unless there is a conscious rendering of the visual elements in the verbal media, for example in works of those writers who were actively involved in cinematography and screen adaptation. However, even in this case it is sometimes difficult to separate “cine-mimetic” and literary devices. According to Alfred Appel’s testimony, *Camera Obscura* was written as a film imitation: “‘I wanted to write the entire book as if it were a film,’ says Nabokov. [...] ‘On the whole it was a general idea. I wasn’t thinking of the form of a screenplay; it’s a verbal imitation of what was being termed a ‘photoplay’” (Appel 1974: 258). However, a number of the novel’s devices classified by Gavriel Moses (Moses 1995: 74) as cinematic (e.g. “the articulation of settings by means of camera position”, “eyeline-shots”) are identical to the usual literary techniques (description, alteration of point of view, etc.).

The montage principle in literature is the classical locus of interart studies (e.g. Timenchik 1989, Ivanov 1988; Schreurs 1987, etc.). There are also a number of less explored or even unnoticed

devices of transposition, such as reproduction of the filmic mechanism of connotation. A film pattern may be organized by a prominent recurrent visual or acoustic detail whose meaning “extends over the denotative meaning, but without contradicting or ignoring it” (Metz 1991: 110), for example the pince-nez of doctor Smirnov who is thrown overboard in Eisenstein’s *Battleship Potemkin* or the murderer’s whistling in Lang’s *M*. The detail is neither purely conventional nor purely metaphorical. The pince-nez refers simultaneously to the absence of doctor Smirnov and to “the defeat of the ruling class”. According to Christian Metz, the value of such detail is enhanced by the additional meaning it acquires in the film, although what the detail symbolizes is a situation characterized by “partial arbitrariness” and thus by “the absence of total arbitrariness” (Metz 1991: 110). Such are, for instance, the knife and whistling in Lang’s *M*. The murderer whistles a melody from Peer Gynt; the knife is used to peel an orange or to open a letter: the audience could only guess whether the knife has another function as well. The sinister “sardinnitsa” (the sardine-can) in Bely’s *Petersburg* (see interesting remarks upon the linkage between the explosion, food and sneezing in Tsivyan 1991: 217–218), light refractions in Olesha’s *Strogiy yunosha* (Michalski 2000: 224–225), the yellow post in Nabokov’s *Despair*, whistling and the poster in *Laughter in the Dark* (*Kamera obskura*) are other examples of “filmic” connotation. Moses points out Nabokov’s usage of such “film-mimetic devices” as genre formulas, color patterns, freeze-framing and orchestrating of sensory elements: “Nabokov allows the sensory data to “tell the story” just as they are used to tell the story in film” (Moses 1995: 79). Sometimes the characters experience a voyeuristic-narcissistic pleasure of watching a film about their own life and being on “both sides of the screen” (Moses 1995: 119). A number of Nabokov’s texts are cinematographic novels or imitations of screenplays with stage-directions incorporated, e.g. *Despair*, *Laughter in the Dark*; *King, Queen, Knave*.

However, even in the case of intermedial transposition, visual message becomes modified and translated into literary poetics. Therefore some literary techniques are *a posteriori* recognized as

cinematographic ones. The cinematic “Aesthetik des Fiebers” recognized by Russian Symbolists as their own literary technique (Tsivyan 1991: 127–128) could be traced to Gogol’s and Dostoevsky’s work irrespectively of any cinematic experience. Likewise, “the Anglo-Saxon novel with its achronological constructions and variations in time and space”, indebted, in Mitry’s opinion, to Griffith (Mitry 2000: 98), has had such precursors as Sterne and the Romantic writers. There is a permanent dialogue and exchange between visual and verbal practices. Cinematographic “Aesthetik des Fiebers”, accepted by the Symbolists as a reflection of their own idea of illusory and distorted material existence, was reconceived by younger modernist writers as a fantastic aspect of empirical reality.

Technical limitations of the early cinema (trembling, flashing, twinkling) were endowed with aesthetic meanings (Tsivyan 1991: 126). In the cinema of the 1910s, unclear or soft focus was exploited as a sign of sad emotion or vision of a drunk or a short-sighted person who had lost his glasses. Nabokov uses the device to make aesthetic experience available to his trite protagonist (*King, Queen, Knave*): after his glasses are broken, Franz finds himself in a fantastic colorful world of blurred contours, which makes him anxious and uncertain; new spectacles bring back a feeling of comfort and order but also sweep away the fantastic colorful world: “The haze dissolved. The unruly colours of the universe were confined once more to their official compartments and cells” (*KQK*, 45). There is a similar episode in Aleksei Remizov’s autobiographical cycle *Through the Cut Eyes* written in the 1930–40s: the short-sighted boy quits the fantastic sound- and color-rich world and finds himself in the dull, mathematical reality of well-defined, colorless objects after the doctor prescribes him glasses (Remizov 2000: 61–63).

It is clear from the aforementioned examples that modernist visuality is not so much a revolution but rather a re-combination of different cultural elements and their relations, actualization of elements already present in culture (Manovich shows that the elements of “new media” have already been present in “old media”, Manovich 2001). According to Hugo Münsterberg, cinema

is an objectification of processes of consciousness (attention, memory function, anticipation, imagination). The film shows the physical reality “freed from space, time, and causality” and “clothed in the forms of our consciousness” (Münsterberg 1970 (1916): 24). Therefore, it seems, it would be more productive, instead of comparing literature and the cinema in terms of a privileged metalanguage (either literary or cinematographic), to explore them in terms of readerly or spectatorial engagement and to look for the clues that heighten this engagement. Early film was first and foremost a medium of showing and exhibition (Gunning 1992). T. Gunning called it ‘the cinema of attractions’ or ‘exhibitionist cinema’, whose aim was to solicit the spectator’s attention, to incite visual curiosity and to supply pleasure (Gunning 1992: 58). Various cinematic manipulations (magic tricks, slow or reverse motion, strange camera angle or distance, etc.) constituted film as a unique performance. In the storytelling cinema, this function does not disappear, it “goes underground” (Gunning 1992: 57), or, rather, it has a continuing impact on film production as an alternative to the strict teleology of storytelling.

In both literature and the cinema readerly or spectatorial empathic identification with the “observer”, i.e. the perspective structuring the (meta)textual space, is the basic means of involvement that opens an opportunity for the reader or spectator to “immerse” in the artistic work and triggers respective response. Movement and frame are the two main cinematic invariables (e.g. in Deleuze 1985), which correspond to the narrative, i.e. the chain of events, and setting as part of the frame of reference (see Ronen 1986) in the work of fiction. In what follows I shall try to define the variable function of the observer in relation to these two invariables.

*The mirror image: identity vs. difference.* The screen world of the cinema is perceived as “another” reality, the world of doubles. Moreover, the directionality of mimesis is reversed in the cinema. Cinematic images combine “‘realism’ with a unique immateriality and mutability” and bring about a re-orientation of the mimetic process: “Cinema increasingly withdraws a perceptible reality as

the referent of its discourse, presaging the wholesale dematerialization of the physical world which televisual culture generalizes” (McQuire 1998: 66, 72).

Hence critics refer to the crisis of representation based on the Platonic notion of “mimesis” (McQuire 1998: 93–95): the cinema is not just a copy of the “true reality”, but rather “another reality”, which threatens to replace “the true reality”. Three-dimensionality of the film space is deceitful:

Nevertheless, we are never deceived; we are fully conscious of the depth and yet we do not take it for real depth [...] we have reality with all its true dimensions; and yet it keeps the fleeting, passing surface suggestion without true depth and fullness, as different from a mere picture as from a mere stage performance. (Münsterberg 1970 (1916): 23)

The same conflict of perception is typical of mirror images, which are actually seen on a flat surface but perceived as being at a distance behind the glass.

Thus the film image is the same as reality and yet different from it, in the same way as the image reflected by a mirror. In fact, the mirror image is the antithesis of reality, because it too seems to occur within a world “on the other side”. And it seems this way because it does not reflect reality but a “duplicate” of reality. (Mitry 2000: 79)

On the one hand, the illusory spatial depth of the cinema is analogous to the illusory depth of consciousness in modernist literature. On the other hand, it is a doubling reality: the literary romantic theme of the double who is both the “I” and the “Other” is optically renewed in the early cinema, e.g. in Méliès’ trick films with doubles. However, elaboration of the “double” and the “another reality” topic in both the cinema and fantastic-realist and science fiction of the 1920–30s is built not on psychological or mystical connotations as in Romanticism but rather upon the properties of space and the structure of incomplete identity. The protagonist witnesses the double, whose story unfolds in the “parallel” space. Thus, in Bulgakov’s *Diaboliad*, space with its multiple identical and communicating cells, duplicating surfaces, mirrors and elevators, which, like magic boxes, are capable of

miraculously changing their content, is a double-generating medium. However, identity of the doubles is incomplete, reverse or false: Korotkov-Kolobkov (referring to “Korobki”, i.e. to matchboxes), Kalsoner the bearded vs. Kalsoner the shaved. Likewise, Nabokov’s mirror texts (*The Eye, Despair*) are structured by the partial or false identity of the doubles. An encounter with a cinematographic unrecognizable double is a leitmotif of Nabokov’s fiction. Ganin can hardly recognize his “sold” shadow on the screen (*Mary*). Magda is unable to make out whether it is her or her mother’s image while looking at her caricature filmic performance (*Kamera obskura*). The child on the screen turns away from his father: the real child is already dead by the time and the film is shown to compensate for his absence (*Bend Sinister*).

*Movement: the natural vs. the artificial, animate vs. inanimate, moving vs. movable.* Movement is another important characteristic of the cinema. Erwin Panofsky and other art theorists argue that the pleasure of motion lies at the core of cine-psychology. The protagonist of Nabokov’s *Laughter in the Dark* (*Kamera obskura*) dreams of bringing a well-known painting to life on the screen. French theorist Elie Faure voiced a similar view on the cinema as animated painting (Yampolsky 1993: 62–63). Portraits and statues coming to life as well as moving automata, somnambulists and the dead are thematizations of cinema as “moving pictures” and also optical actualizations of certain romantic and neoromantic literary clichés. The FEKS studio experimentation with automatic movement is well known. In France, Léger and Murphy set animate as well as inanimate objects to clockwork motion in their *Ballet mécanique* (1924). Such films as *Golem, Homunculus, The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* or such works of fiction as *Carpenters, Shields (and Candles), The Fifth Wanderer* by Kaverin or *King, Queen, Knave* by Nabokov render an ability of artificial objects to function like the animated ones or vice versa and involve analysis of automatic motion.

*Photogenics: statics vs. dynamics.* The problem of movement is closely connected with photogenics. There was an obsessive idea

of static beauty in the early cinema. Greta Garbo's face became an object of worship. In the 1920s, the new understanding of "photogenics" was introduced into the cine-discussion and practice by articles of Louis Delluc and Jean Epstein. Delluc argues that the aim of the cinema is taking life "by surprise", a "theft", a snapshot rather than fixation of an artificial "beauty", a pose, a petrified life of a wax figure. Not a "beauty" is interesting, but expression, unpredictable effects and hidden features of spontaneous life (Kino 1988: 80–88).

The protagonist of Henry James' short story *The Real Thing* encounters similar difficulties while trying to capture the image of beauty: the static beauty has no artistic value. An irreproachably elegant and distinguished woman, the "real thing" with a "positive stamp", suggests her sitting for his story-book illustrations and sketches to earn money. But the painter feels she would better suit for the advertising purposes of "a waistcoat-maker, a hotel-keeper or a soap-vendor" (James 1976: 111). She has often been photographed because of her capacity to be always the same, which is exactly the reason of her uselessness for sketches: she

was capable of remaining for an hour almost as motionless as if she were before a photographer's lens. I could see she had been photographed often, but somehow the very habit that made her good for that purpose unfitted her for mine [...] after a few times I began to find her too insurmountably stiff; do what I would with it my drawing looked like a photograph or a copy of a photograph. (James 1976: 119–120)

By comparison with photographic fixation of the unchanging "essences", it is a unique and elusive "expression" that matters in art. Likewise, for Nabokov, art is always a sleight-of-hand, a metamorphosis, an artistic "theft". Any attempt to fix life results in a dead body (*Kamera obskura*, *Despair*, *Lolita*, etc.). The problem of movement fixation, rendering of the dynamics of the dead versus alive, the animated versus artificial by visual means is a structural parallel to the linguistic fixation in literature. George Bluestone writes about the rivalry of 20<sup>th</sup> century literature with "reality" and its endeavour to escape the limitations of verbal expression, to capture the reality into the net of language: "...our twentieth-century



novels have abandoned the drama of human thought and action for the drama of linguistic inadequacy” (Bluestone 1971: 11).

*The poetics of the contrast: The “saturation” of the frame.* A number of critics draw attention to the “primitive Manicheism” and the mythological character of the early cinema. The contrast of black and white is thematized in melodrama and thriller as the conflict of good and evil. The blossoming of the aesthetics of mystery was stimulated by the color range of early cinema. In Nabokov’s *The Defense*, these contrasts form a dense network of meanings: black and white (chess, cinema), good and evil (freemasonry, detective and mystery fiction). Nabokov’s chess novel may be read as a screenplay. Early cinema was called “the battle of black and white” (Abel Gance’s article “Le temps de l’image est venu!” translated in: Kino 1988: 65). Jacques-Bernard Brunius founded the League of black-and-white in Paris in 1927 to defend the black-and-white cinema (Kino 1988: 290).

*Defamiliarization/the close-up as internal movement or deformation.* One of the narrative parallels to the close-up is “defamiliarization”, or a description of the unusual perception of ordinary objects and phenomena as new and strange. Tolstoy’s or Montesquieu’s “estranged” descriptions of stage performance as seen by children or foreigners are examples of such a perceptual shift: the naïve spectator pays attention to minor and second-order details irrelevant for theatrical poetics. However, in the formalist theory, “the device of making strange” signifies also a new constructive principle which evokes a new perception: either a new visual technique or a new trope, a new type of composition, a new genre principle in literature, e.g. the Sternian novel as a defamiliarization and “barring of the device” as regards the traditional novel (Hansen-Löve 2001: 245–250). The cinematic device of close-up evokes both an illusion of the observer’s movement and an effect of alienation. For the unprepared or conservative spectator of early cinema, the close-up was a monstrous distortion, which turned human figures into aliens (see Tsivyan 1991: 161–163). The French theorists of the “new sensitivity” paid special attention to

the magnification of a detail as a means to intensify its expression and to emphasize its significance (Kino 1988: 204). In the early cinema the close-up was often motivated by the optical magnification, as in G. A. Smith's films:

In *At Last, That Awful Tooth*, he justifies the close-up of a decayed tooth by first showing the patient scrutinizing his tooth through a magnifying glass. This technique was to be copied in many other films, such as *Grandma's Reading-Glass*, *What We See through a Telescope*, etc. (Mitry 2000: 92)

The techniques of enlargement, reduction and mirroring are also prominent in Bely's *Petersburg*. In Castellano's opinion, these procedures are put to use by Bely to show the distortive influence of positive sciences on knowledge of the world (Castellano 1980: 57–58). Nils Åke Nilsson finds multiple parallels of enlargement and diminution effects in Nabokov and Olesha (e.g. the world seen through “the wrong end of binoculars”), which are to testify to their similar understanding of art as a “renewed” vision (Nilsson 1969: 7–8). Owing to a strong visual component in early 20<sup>th</sup> century culture, the visual shift may serve as a metaphor for certain types of perception or certain literary techniques. A “strange” or “shifted” detail plays the role of the “dominant” (in Roman Jakobson's terms) which transfigures the whole construction or the whole field of perception.

## IV. The Models of Vision

### Automatism and disturbed vision

...le cinéma est l'automatisme devenu art spirituel.  
(Gilles Deleuze. *Cinéma 2. L'image-temps*, 1985: 344)

Bergson's investigation into the nature of attention and memory demonstrates that attentive and habitual, that is, creative and automated vision as well as involuntary memory and memory-contraction are two poles of the same process. In modernist art, automated behavior and language, e.g., conditioned perception and linguistic cliché, become transformed by the artist's creative will.

For Bergson, cinema is a highly automated phenomenon, which simulates motion, mechanically gluing together discrete immobile shots (Bergson 1910: 330–333). Bergson uses the cinematography model to describe habitual perception, which unifies fragmentary shots of reality. In Nabokov's novels, optical shifts, polarized or confused vision and other visual disturbances disrupt a predictable course of events and unbalance automatic motion or pre-conditioned behavior of reified characters (see e.g. Burling 1983 on *le trompe-l'oeil* in Nabokov). The vast class of models of polarized vision includes, first and foremost, a vacillation between the two- and three-dimensionality typical of the film perception.

Under certain circumstances, two-dimensional objects are perceived as three-dimensional and vice versa. For example, a "white parallelogram of sky" is actually a dresser with a mirror as a "cinema screen", where the swaying of boughs is produced by a human movement, "by the nature of those who were carrying this sky" (*The Gift*, 14). The dresser is first perceived as a flat geometrical object (parallelogram, screen). Then the mirror reflection (sky, boughs) generates an illusory interior three-dimensional space. However, the illusion is dispelled by a vacillation of the real

world containing the dresser. The cinematographic “screen” metaphor is pertinent here:

It is one of the most important formal qualities of film that every object that is reproduced appears simultaneously in two entirely different frames of reference, namely the two-dimensional and the three-dimensional, and that as one identical object it fulfils two different functions in the two contexts. (Arnheim 1957: 59)

Another example of the polarized vision is confusion or merging of the visual field and the visual world, which produces an optical illusion, e.g. when a butterfly closes its wings and disappears (*The Gift*, 80) or when a footprint is seen as an indexical sign of a human body: “a highly significant footprint, ever looking upward and ever seeing him who has vanished” (*The Gift*, 80). The stroboscopic effect which retains traces of the previous perception also produces a vacillation between the “normal” and confused or disturbed vision: Fyodor “nearly tripped over the tiger stripes which had not kept up with the cat as it jumped aside” (*The Gift*, 16); “the yawn begun by a woman in the lighted window of the first car was completed by another woman — in the last one” (*The Gift*, 308).

Nabokov’s treatment of the cinema is ambivalent, as Barbara Wyllie observes without, however, indicating exactly the form or the origin of the ambivalence (Wyllie 2003: 3). Nabokov’s ambivalent attitude to the cinema as a unique blend of automatism and cliché thinking, on the one hand, and rich visual opportunities, on the other, is evident already in his early poem *Cinematograph* (1928; Nabokov 2: 595–596). From the viewpoint of high modernist culture, the cinema is a cheap entertainment, a show (“balagan” in Nabokov) that attracts the rabble and incites strong primitive emotions. Nevertheless, the poem’s lyrical hero declares love for the “light shows” (*svetovye balagany*). Film’s visual aspects (“races, waterfalls, twirl of mirror darkness”) are beautiful by contrast to its vulgar melodramatic plot. The same combination is typical of Nabokov’s cinematographic novels: adultery, deception and murder, on the one hand, and richness of visual detail and film-mimetic devices, on the other. Alfred Appel lists multiple

allusions to popular cinematic plots and clichés in Nabokov's novels and short stories (Appel 1974).

It has been repeatedly noted that the parodic or negative-critical meaning of film imitation as mental plagiarism and 'poshlost' is an object of Nabokov's mockery (Appel 1974; Stuart 1978; Wyllie 2003). Film clichés invade the consciousness of trite personalities. Yet, on the other hand, Nabokov seems to be attracted by suggestivity and effectiveness of simple archetypal crime, love and adventure plots. The characters involved in film production (Axel Rex, Valentinov, Odon, etc.) are themselves fortunate lovers, adventurers or conspirators, i.e. typical heroes of mass culture. As the Englishman Darwin says after the film show in *Glory*, "it's all unquestionably poor, vulgar, and rather implausible, and yet there is something exciting about all that flying foam, the *femme fatale* on the yacht, the ruined and ragged he-man swallowing his tears" (*Glory*, 83). In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the film show attracted people from different strata of society. Andrei Bely praised the cinema for its ability to incite "simple human feelings" ("the broken piano, old maid, melancholic waltz and the dog, saving the child's life") and opposed it to the Symbolist mysteriums as the "democratic theatre of the future, the show (*balagan*) in a noble, high meaning of the word" (the essay *Cinematograph* of 1907; Bely 1911: 349–353).

Film works as a form of visual seduction, which assumes the form of the spectator's exteriorized perception, i.e. a "mirror". Film plots are presented to the spectator as the archetypal forms of his own consciousness. Nabokov renews and de-authomatizes trivial plots and film devices. Exploring the borders of the two media and "infusing" the verbal with the visual, he broadens the possibilities of fiction.

*King, Queen, Knave* is usually interpreted as an allegory of human "automata" that imitate living reality. The automaton is a Romantic topic *par excellence* renovated in turn of the century fiction and cinema. The interlocking of the fantastic and the empirical and the principle of metamorphosis are the most important features of the literary "Hoffmannism" of the early 1920s (Oulanoff 1976: 25), actively employed also by the early cinema.

The birth and evolution of cinema were stimulated by the exploration of automatic motion. One of the fathers of the cinema Georges Méliès was a professional conjuror and a creator of automata. The cinema fulfilled his dream of the “automatic man”. The Lumière brothers were involved in a number of technological-orthopedic projects, whose aim was to produce imitations of the human body. After WW I Louis invented a mechanical hand that was capable of prehensile movements.

The poetics of Nabokov’s novel recalls *Kammerspiel* films (directed by Lupu Pick, Carl Mayer, Friedrich Murnau and others) with their simple plots taken from newspaper chronicles, prominence of detail, stylized sets and characters under a spell of fate. Alfred Hitchcock employed a similar coding system (Virilio 1994: 3). Nabokov overtly points out the filmic nature of his novel in the English version, where building of the Cinema Palace is synchronized with the progress of the narration and, once the Palace is built, the opening film is *King, Queen, Knave*. As Alfred Appel notes, Martha “avidly poses for several scenarios”, while choosing a means to murder her husband (Appel 1974: 34).

On the other hand, the hypnotized subject was conceptualized as an “automaton” in 19<sup>th</sup>–early 20<sup>th</sup> century court trials that involved the allegedly coercive power of hypnosis (see Laurence & Perry 1988). Since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century hypnosis was associated with the opportunity to implant criminal ideas in the mind of the hypnotized subject. Experiments carried out in laboratories as well as real trials (e.g. the famous Castellan or the Eyraud-Bompard case) proved that the association was not unfounded. The topic of the criminal use of hypnotism is central in the famous film *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919, directed by Robert Wiene) where the somnambulist is trained to commit murders.

A well-known representative of the Nancy school and admirer of hypnosis Jules Liégeois warned against its criminal use. Liégeois’s work on hypnosis and crime was translated to Russian and published by Professor Bekhterev (Liégeois 1893). Speaking of experimental somnambulism, the author depicts the subject hypnotized as an automaton, morally and physically completely subjected to the will of the experimenter. Arguably, the latter has

unlimited power to implant feelings and thoughts in a somnambula's mind as well as to coerce him into commission of criminal actions. Liégeois points to the absence of a clear-cut line between the hypnotic and normal state. The subject may seem awake: his eyes are open, his movements are free, he participates in talk, answers questions and even jokes, all which makes hypnosis even more dangerous. Liégeois also describes some symptoms of the hypnotic condition, such as partial amnesia or "negative hallucination". The latter is a kind of selective blindness: some objects, which the somnambula is programmed not to see, "disappear"; as a result, the hypnotized subject cannot open the door or put on his gloves or coat. The notion of selective blindness rather exactly defines the condition of Franz the live automaton in Nabokov's novel.

The importance of the character's localization and "moves" as well as spatial clues to trigger the reader's (spectator's) inferences is a distinctive generic feature of both the film and crime story, the model genres for *King*, *Queen*, *Knave*. The frame (setting) and motion are the two invariables that produce an illusion of the reality on the screen. Several cinematic means are used to locate the character and its movement within the frame. The first means is the "photogenic" motion as an effect of the tracking shot with the camera fixed on the moving vehicle: the world seen through the train window or the dancing hall seen by dancers.<sup>13</sup>

In the process of usual vision, the illusion of moving landscape and the feeling of dizziness produced by motion are corrected by the body's kinesthetic reactions. In the cinematic vision there are no bodily reactions to indicate the camera position with which the spectator identifies himself:

[...] the camera's position is, for want of other evidence, presumed to be fixed. Hence if something moves in the picture this motion is at first seen as a movement of the thing itself and not as the result of a movement of the camera gliding past a stationary object. (Arnheim 1957: 32)

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<sup>13</sup> In his book *Bonjour cinéma*, Jean Epstein wrote about the photogenic "dance of a landscape", dizziness and rotation (Kino 1988: 98).

Another factor, which supports the illusion, is a frame (screen or window), where objects appear or disappear. Whereas the usual field of vision is continuous, the cinematic field of vision is limited or cut. Thus, camerawork brings into relief and strengthens the illusion of inanimate objects' motion, which is fleeting and often remains unnoticed in usual vision.

In Nabokov's novel the photogenic movement is used to unbalance the automatism of the "clockwork" world. An optical illusion is the starting point of the novel: the world is "wound up" by the station clock. People on the platform are set in a strange somnambulistic retreating motion, "as in an agonizing dream full of incredible effort, nausea, a cottony weakness in one's calves" (*KQK*, 1). Their motion anticipates via *prolepsis* the disordered action of automatons at the end of the novel. Later it becomes clear that the observer of the scene is Franz sitting in the train pulling out of the station. Being deceived by inertia, Franz perceives himself as immobile and the city as moving. Robbe-Grillet has been fond of similar devices that are prominent, for example, in *Le Voyeur* and *La Jalousie*: a character is invisible, yet the visual effect allows locating the observer ("un regard narrateur" — Bernal 1964: 167). The motifs of automatic motion and its illusive-ness mark the beginning of the narration.

Further unfolds a chain of motifs of baring, eruption and nakedness: "photographs of naked beauties"; "a dog vomited on the threshold"; "an old man had fired a clot of mucus into the ticket collector's hand"; "the old ladies sucked on fuzzy sections of orange, wrapping the peels in scraps of paper and popping them under the seat"; "the sun seemed to lay bare her face"; "she yawned: he glimpsed the swell of her tense tongue in the red penumbra of her mouth"; "he bared the shoulders of the woman"; "he slept with mouth agape so that his pale face presented three apertures"; "she smiled, only just baring her incisors"; "Martha looked in a little mirror, baring her teeth and raising her upper lip"; "with a flash of his arm bared to the elbow". The key image in this series is, of course, the strange gentleman's indecently bare face that horrifies Franz in the first episode of the novel: "the pale skin adhered with a sickening tightness to the nose"; "the nostrils like



two sudden holes”; “no lips”; “the absence of eyelashes”, etc. In Nabokov’s early short story *Wingstroke*, “nakedness” of the face is a symptom of death: “her dead, seemingly *denuded* face” (*Stories*, 43; emphasis mine — *M. G.*). In the same story a creature from the otherworld incites a feeling of shame, it seems *indecent*: to hide the huge angel from possible witnesses the hero pushes him into the closet.

The leitmotifs of dead, stiffened bodies (characters “die” and “revive” in turns — the movements later repeated by mannequins in Dreyer’s store and by the automata) and the patterns of rose/red/yellow permeate the whole text and are especially prominent in the first chapter. Rose and yellow are the colors of mannequins and automata, flesh and putrefaction: “...those figures of fashion with waxen or wooden faces in suits pressed by the iron of perfection, arrested in a state of colourful putrefaction on their temporary pedestals and platforms...” (*KQK*, 81). The color range varies from the “ruddy” human faces to the waxen and olive faces of mannequins. The metaphors of flesh and death are especially noticeable in the descriptions of the strange gentleman and a Martha look-alike as if prognosticating Martha’s death. Metaphor is always both the “highlighting” and “hiding”: “The very systematicity that allows us to comprehend one aspect of a concept in terms of another [...] will necessarily hide other aspects of a concept” (Lakoff & Johnson 1981: 10). In artistic work, a strict systematicity is lacking, therefore the reader cannot decide at this stage which aspects are highlighted and which are hidden: it is the reader’s “surplus” of vision, accumulating in the course of reading and enabling the retrospective understanding of the episode. Franz’s imitative yawn establishes an invisible contact between him and Martha: he becomes a “*somnambulium*”, an automaton, whose will Martha takes hold of.

On the whole, the motifs of the first chapter shape the novel’s key figurative patterns: a dreamlike illusion and automatic motion as metaphors for sexual arousal and death. Martha’s and Franz’s first love-making scene is subordinated to the same rhythm: the bed “glide[s] off on its journey creaking discretely as does a sleeping car when the express pulls out of a dreamy station”. The

world immediately starts moving: a cork “roll[s] in a semi-circle” to the edge of the table, “hesitate[s] [...] and jump[s] off”; “the wind trie[s] to open the window but fail[s]”; in the wardrobe “a blue black-spotted tie slither[s] off its twig like a snake”; “a paperback novelette [...] skip[s] several pages” (*KQK*, 97–98).

The mythology of railway travel included easy sexual contacts, flirting and adultery (see Leving 2004: 146–149). A link between the railway and eroticism is established in Tolstoy’s *Kreutzer Sonata*, where traveling by train has a fatal impact on the character’s mood. Pozdnyshv starts the journey by carriage, yet after boarding the train feels an exaltation (*vozbuzhdenie*, the ambivalent word that may denote “sexual arousal” as well) and jealousy and imagines pictures of his wife’s adultery, which incite simultaneously rage and voyeuristic pleasure. The connection between train motion and sexual movement is rather typical of avant-garde literature.<sup>14</sup>

Besides bodily and color symbolics, the first chapters are prominent for their use of focal effects. The first two chapters are built on the alternation of focused and out-of-focus or soft focus “shots” as well as “close-ups” and “long shots”. The point of view is located by means of camera vision and optical effects (e.g. Franz’s vision without eyeglasses).

The eyeglass theme becomes particularly noticeable in the English version of the novel: Franz, stripped of his will by Martha’s imperiousness, wears *two* pairs of glasses when rowing the boat to the site where Dreyer’s murder is to take place. (Connolly 1995: 204)

In *The Gift*, the leitmotif of “glasses” highlights Chernyshevsky’s materialistic short-sightedness, his practical helplessness and inattentiveness to the world’s texture.

Besides focus, a mirror reflection is another important way to localize the character. Mirror is exploited in art as a channel of information or a symptom of presence (Eco 1986). In Nabokov’s

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<sup>14</sup> “The two primary motions are rotation and sexual movement, whose combination is expressed by the locomotive’s wheels and pistons. These two motions are reciprocally transformed, the one into the other” (Bataille’s *The Solar Anus*, written in 1927, published in 1931; Bataille 1991: 6–7).

novel, the mirror is the metaphor of limited space, a solipsistic entrapment. It is a fictionalizing device, which creates the double frame. Instead of being rendered directly, a character's movements are mediated by the double frame that produces an impression of closed, introspective or dreamlike space: "Franz [...] recoiled from the embrace of the clowning mirror and went for the door"; "He turned around quickly as though feeling that someone was watching him, and moved away; all that remained in the mirror was a white corner of the table against the black background broken by a crystal glimmer on the sideboard"; "The looking glass, which was working hard that night, reflected her green dress [...] She remained unconscious of the mirror's attention [...]" (*KQK*, 23, 61, 64). As Christian Metz observes, in the cinema the mirror plays the role of "the frame in a frame": it either multiplies the frame space or opens up a new space (Metz 1992). In *King, Queen, Knave*, it is usually the repeated or illusory space that opens within the mirror.

Yet an optical illusion or an illusory reflection may provoke false localizations. Nabokov employs a "catoptric staging" device, when the audience is expected to mistake illusion for reality or to be involved in an illusory setting (Eco 1986: 231). Thus Franz hurrying to Martha's boudoir is involved in an optical illusion which might be caused by a double reflection:

he pictured how in instant he would push open that door over there, enter her boudoir [...] he pictured it so vividly that for a split second he saw before him his own receding back, saw his hand, saw himself opening the door, and because that sensation was a foray into the future, and it is forbidden to ransack the future, he was swiftly punished. In the first place, as he caught up with himself, he tripped and sent the door flying open [...]. (*KQK*, 85)

The effect becomes associated with the cinematic *mise-en-scène*. The protagonist identifies himself with his receding image in a mirror behind, which he sees in a mirror in front, so the collision with the real door comes as a surprise bringing him back from the mirror world to reality.

Finally, the alternation of movement and stopped movement, freezing and stiffening, is also a means to fix the character's loca-

tion and thematization of both cinematographic techniques and chess strategies. Although it would be natural to see the story of “king, queen, knave” as a metaphorical card game (see Kostandi 2001: 100–113), the significance of the spatial arrangement evokes the chess metaphor. At a Christmas party Franz reproduces moves of a bishop trapped by the queen (cited in Johnson 1985: 80):

Thus a chess player playing blind feels his trapped bishop and his opponent’s versatile queen move in relentless relation to each other. There was a vaguely regular rhythm established in those coordinations. And not for an instant was it interrupted. She [Martha] and especially Franz felt the existence of this invisible geometric figure; they were two points moving through it. And the interrelation between those two points could be plotted at any given moment; and though they seemed to move independently they were nonetheless securely bound by the invisible, inexorable lines of that figure. (*KQK*, 142–143)

The plan of the murder is based on a definite disposition of immobilized figures. Franz had a gift to imagine and coordinate movements “with those concepts of time, space, and matter which had to be taken into account. In this lucid and flexible pattern only one thing remained always stationary, but this fallacy went unnoticed by Martha. The blind spot was the victim. The victim showed no signs of life before being deprived of it” (*KQK*, 180). In *The Gift*, the same “calculating” type of vision, inhibited by a spatial arrangement, is typical of Chernyshevsky’s materialistic thinking. In his memoir,

Chernyshevsky depicted his first meeting with Nekrasov with the meticulousness and laboriousness [...] (giving a complex plan of all their mutual movements about the room including practically the number of footsteps). (*The Gift*, 239)

In *King, Queen, Knave*, each character constantly makes the mistake of underestimating the mobility of the two others. A similar egocentric predilection for seeing the other’s personality as an inert and pliable membrane to be filled is, according to the Proustian narrator, inherent in human nature — while relating his recent admirable adventures to his parents, Marcel could not imagine their negative reaction: “Je m’imaginai, comme tout le monde, que le

cerveau des autres était un receptacle inerte et docile, sans pouvoir de reaction spécifique sur ce qu'on y introduisait..." (Proust 1954: 99).

For Martha, life is a predetermined and predictable combination ("the parquet pattern" — *KQK*, 41). Dreyer's practical jokes and fancies only occasionally break the "neutral film of familiarity" (*KQK*, 106) that covers their existence. At the end of the novel, the motifs of illusory life-likeness and predetermined automatic motion are brought together in a conclusive pattern, negatively mirroring the first scene of the novel. Martha's illness and death produce a disorder in the automatic world: the motion of mechanical figures is broken off, clocks stop, Franz is spared somnambulism. Martha in delirium sees the planned crime being committed, with Dreyer's surrealistic living jacket not wanting to "die", assuming a "human" appearance, and not sinking until Franz reminds her of the watch in the pocket: Martha's death stops time, bringing clocks and automata into disorder.

Fate works through a series of auctorial agents. Nabokov admitted having produced "little imitations" of *Madame Bovary*, but the most important tribute to Flaubert is probably his combination of auctorial detachment and strict aesthetic control as an effect of cinematographic framing. Flaubert argued that the author should be like God in the Universe, both omniscient and invisible. Art is the second nature, where boundless impassivity spreads all over every particle. The beholder has to be stupefied and despondent: how has it all come about? (Flaubert 1984, 1: 235). Flaubert combines "detachment" and "procedures for ironic and guarded but still potent authorial commentary" in his writing. In David Hayman's opinion, he is a progenitor of the modernist technique of "double-distancing" or oscillation between the "overdistance" and "underdistance", indifference and engagement (Hayman 1987: 3, 19–42). Likewise, Nabokovian characters live in the shadow of auctorial presence. "The photographer's shadow" as a figure of auctorial presence is one of Nabokov's "allegories of reading", in Paul de Man's terminology. Early photography was praised for fixing the minutest detail and the most fleeting of all things, a

shadow, and seen as an embodiment of objective truth and impersonality (McQuire 1998: 13–14).

The metaphor of “photographer’s shadow” apparently refers to Bergson’s *Creative Evolution*. Bergson observes that rational knowledge is able to present a rather accurate picture of the dead substance yet becomes inadequate, while trying to represent *life*, i.e. the *clicheur* who made the picture (Bergson 1910: IV; the *clicheur* is rendered as the *photographer* in an early Russian translation: Bergson 1913: 3). The idea of the mediated representation is projected by Nabokov onto the sphere of writing. The author is always more than his creation: he makes himself perceptible by casting his “shadow” onto the text. Vivian Badlook, one of Nabokov’s “shadows”, takes a snapshot of Dreyer who goes skiing to Davos: “on the snow one could distinguish the photographer’s narrow-shouldered shadow”. Dreyer “looked like a real skier” and his “skis were beautifully parallel” in the snapshot, but the real part of his skiing adventure happened beyond the picture:

When the photographer [...] had clicked the shutter and straightened up, Dreyer, still beaming, moved his left ski forward; however, as he was standing on a slight incline, the ski went further than he had intended, and with a great flourish of ski poles he tumbled heavily on his back while both girls shot past shrieking with laughter. (*KQK*, 153)

As Gabriel Lanyi comments, “by means of the photographer’s shadow, the frame is animated” (Lanyi 1977: 76), or, otherwise, the fictional life put into motion. Like Bergson, Nabokov distinguishes between the reality of the “picture” and the reality of the “photographer”, separating the “text” and “life”.

### **Inhibition and artistic failure**

In addition to psychological and criminal reframings, the phenomenon of automated or inhibited motion is thematized by Nabokov as an artistic failure, “Icarus’ fall” that suddenly interrupts spontaneous creative flight. The myth of spontaneous creation is an im-

portant component of Nabokov's poetical mythology, prominent in his autobiographical writing and fiction. Although fictionalized, Nabokov's autobiography claims to be a documentary text. It provides an outlook into family history and the realia of early 20<sup>th</sup> century Russian life. In its final version, it is complemented with family photographs and the foreword, where the author mentions his "advisors" and family reunions, in the course of which certain details and dates have been checked. Yet the story of the artist forms the central plot line: "It is an inquiry into the elements that have gone to form my personality as a writer" (*SL* 1989: 88).

Recent studies of memory development and the narratological analysis of the self-narrative have made it clear that even documentary autobiographical narration includes metaphorical (re)construction of the autobiographer's "proto-selves". The autobiographical turning points, transformed into *tropes*, "serve as generative 'gists' for the life as a whole" (Bruner 1994: 50). Nabokov's autobiography is a compendium of such tropes or trope clusters, forming his individual mythology of the artist. Nabokov's "mythopoeia" (Lachmann 1997: 285) belongs to the broader context of modernist aesthetization of life (see e.g. Ljunggren 1994). Its elements pervade Nabokov's fictional texts from the very beginning of his literary career and are well-known to Nabokov scholars: the "lost paradise" of Russian aristocratic childhood; first love as first loss — the loss of the beloved, language and homeland; the "split" personality (English versus Russian, Sirin versus Nabokov, etc.); insect metamorphosis as an analogue for the author's literary and linguistic evolution ("such multiple metamorphosis, familiar to butterflies, had not been tried by any human before" — Nabokov 1989: 13); the "mythopoetic utopia" of reading and writing (Lachmann 1997: 282–297); the artist as a magician and conjuror, etc. These tropes or mythemes are sometimes perceived as real traits of author's personality or genuine facts of his life, even if fictionalized as elements of thematic patterns and intertextual games. As Pekka Tammi has persuasively demonstrated, "VN's deliberate manipulations of autobiographic motifs in his fiction" are to be understood as a conscious construction of the author's literary *persona* (Tammi 1985: 235–237). A writer's individual

mythology belongs to the realm of “literary *byt*”, a mediating link between everyday life and art, in Russian Formalists’ terminology. As Hansen-Löve has shown, the Formalists, who introduced the term into common usage, were not unanimous in their understanding of the dynamics of the relationship between the ordinary “*byt*” and the literary “*byt*”, i.e. the private or public everyday life and the everyday life aestheticized or included into the sphere of art. If for Boris Eikhenbaum the “*byt*” was a social sphere where aesthetic communication takes place, Yuri Tynyanov considered it as a reservoir of *potential* aesthetic meanings, i.e. the aesthetization, creative deformation and defamiliarization of social and biographical facts (Hansen-Löve 2001: 388).

The second aspect, which includes the auctorial perspective, is the most interesting for us. There are individual cases and whole periods when the author’s self is not supposed to be taken as a “literary fact” (Tynyanov). However, as soon as a writer’s personality enters the sphere of literature, his individual mythology, literary image and aestheticized behavior, sometimes rather different from his “private self”, form constructive principles of his writing. In this sense his whole work becomes “autobiographical”, which means that he consciously and sometimes rather aggressively constructs his literary self as an important element of his works. This strategy is rather typical of Romantic and decadent authors. Even Nabokov’s famous elusiveness and the inaccessibility of his private life are the details of his literary mask. Anna Ljunggren regards Nabokov’s “prepared interview” tactics as part of this literary self-construction: a ready image of the author is offered to the interview reader, who is deprived of the pleasure of observing the author’s spontaneous reactions (Ljunggren 1994).

A typical Nabokov protagonist is an artist, even if an artist “in disguise” (a businessman, a chessmaster, etc.), and the main topic of his novels is artistic creation. There is indeed the whole taxonomy of different artistic hypostases in Nabokov’s fiction. Nabokov’s “mythopoetic utopia” of reading and writing is populated by trickster-type artists, immoral adventurers, conjurers practicing the “vanishing trick,” aesthetes wearing the artist *manqué*’s mask, third-rate literary imitators and mediocre painters, translators,



editors and commentators, i.e. “parasites” of other people’s fame, as well as “genuine” active artists whose work is incomplete or liable to disappear (Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev, John Shade). The Romantic myth of spontaneous creation as well as the motif of the creative act interrupted or artistic failure are the most prominent components of Nabokov’s mythology of the artist. The “Icarus complex”, the motif of the artistic failure, impediment or inhibition, at its most obvious in *The Defense*, is also present in *The Gift* and other novels. It is significant that two Nabokovian artists *manqués* (Hermann and Humbert in Russian *Lolita*) are owners of the *Icarus* cars. In *The Gift*, the image of a toy clown, a comical contrast to the nightingale (“[...] he lifted his legs in white stockings and with pompons on the shoes, higher and higher with barely perceptible jerks — and abruptly everything stopped and he froze in an angular attitude” — *The Gift*, 19) reminds the protagonist of his own verses: “And perhaps it is the same with my poems?”. To describe Sebastian Knight’s illusionistic and parodic art his biographer evokes similar ambiguous images: “a clown developing wings, an angel mimicking a tumbler pigeon” (*Real Life*, 76). Sebastian shares Nabokov’s destiny of the “exterritorialized” (George Steiner) or “deterritorialized” (Deleuze) author. The “celebrated old critic’s” remark (“he really had two periods, the first — a dull man writing broken English, the second — a broken man writing dull English” — *Real Life*, 6) is a variation on Nabokov’s autobiographical topic of the “lost language” or the “lost” gift (the gift of calculation, the gift of hand walking, etc.).

If the work of Nabokov’s artists balances on the verge of parody, his “philosophers” (e.g. Krug or Van Veen) seem to be critical philosophers or Nietzscheans, cultivating philosophy as “discourse critique” devoid of any “positive” substance. Krug is “a slave of images” and a master of “creative destruction”. His philosophy is “not an admirable expansion of positive matter but a kind of inaudible frozen explosion [...] with some debris gracefully poised in mid-air” and he considers himself as “an illusion or rather as a shareholder in an illusion which was highly appreciated by a great number of cultured people.” Nevertheless, “he could not help feeling that in some odd way he did deserve it, that he really

was bigger and brighter than most of the men around him” (*BS*, 145–146). Van Veen’s philosophical work is “impeded by its own virtue”, by the “originality of literary style”: “He knew he was not quite a savant, but completely an artist”. “In his sadder moments”, Van has doubts about the real reasons of his success and wonders why his “suspect sparkle” has been preferred to “an academic mediocrity” (*Ada*, 502).

While drawing parallels between the author and his characters, scholars sometimes refer to Nabokov’s own gift as a parodist or praise his deeply original philosophical thinking. Yet Nabokov’s protagonists are not his self-portraits: there exists “a fundamental non-identity between the author and his fictive agents” (Tammi 1985: 36). On the other hand, these fictive agents are not quite alien to the author either (not only charming Sebastian Knight but also other less pleasant persons). Their central role and empathic treatment, the fact that they are invested with details of the author’s biography (see Tammi 1985: 232–235 and others) or even their function as the author’s spokesmen suggest that they are tropes of Nabokov’s literary self-construction, elements of his individual myth of the artist. The outlined polarity of creative originality and creative failure may be further read as a figurative thematization of tensions between the different aspects of Nabokov’s literary image: the author of rather conventional, imitative poetry vs. the author of distinguished experimental prose; the artist vs. the scientist, entomologist, composer of chess problems and pedantic scholar; the Russian émigré writer vs. the American immigrant writer, etc.

Cinematographic frames in *The Defense*; *King, Queen, Knave*; *Laughter in the Dark* and Nabokov’s other novels thematize artistic failure as inhibition and sudden, seemingly unmotivated interruption or decline of action. In this case the Bergsonian opposition between the “cinematographic” motion as alternation of discontinuous fragments mechanically glued together, and the continuous motion (in dance, music, imagination) as mutual interpenetration and fusion of separate states, forming a qualitatively new whole (Bergson 1911), is particularly illuminating. In psychology, inhibition is a negative effect of narrowed attention and purposeful focusing, accompanied by a shrinkage of the perceptual field. Insofar as

distraction and mobility are constituents of perceptual experience, its sustained restriction may, on the contrary, lead to inhibition and damage (Crary 2000: 37–38). Crary refers to Max Klinger's *Glove Cycle* (1881) that serves as an illustration of kinship between intense perceptual concentration and sociopathic deviations, such as monomania, *idée fixe* or fetishism (Crary 2000: 134). Modern culture produces noncoercive forms of control over perception and thus stimulates sociopathic behavior, while insistently channeling attention by means of different technical devices, including the cinema and advertisement. The opposition of perceptual distraction and contraction is gradual: the automated perception and the creative one are two poles of a single continuum that are balanced in a normal condition. As Bergson has shown, perception becomes automated due to the necessity of action, yet to perform effective actions perception must enjoy freedom and be emancipated from action. The fully automated action either becomes socially dangerous, as in criminals (cf. Nabokov's *King, Queen, Knave or Despair*), or is brought to inhibition through mechanical or subconscious repetition (cf. *The Defense*). In *Time and Free Will*, Bergson pointed to certain proximity of plastic arts and hypnosis. The plastic art is a refined and spiritualized form of fixity imposed on life. The same principle of fixity of attention, although in an intensified and straightforward form, is used to incite the hypnotic state (Crary 2000: 239). Hypnosis, somnambulism, sleep and death are radical forms of such fixity.

The balance between the automated and the creative element is unstable, and different mixtures of the two elements produce different forms of aberration in Nabokov's characters: monomaniacal artists, fake artists, artistic criminals, usual criminals or maniacs, etc. Cf. for example, Nabokov's own description of *Despair*:

[...] nature has endowed my hero with literary genius, but at the same time there was a criminal taint in his blood; the criminal in him, prevailing over the artist, took over those very methods which nature had meant the artist to use. (Letter of November 28, 1936 to Hutchinson & Co. in *SL*, 17)

Nabokov's typical plot of artistic failure activates modernist scientific and philosophical frames, subverting the Romantic-decadent framework of personal myth-construction. The myth of Icarus is recast as a story of modernist sensibility.

### Camera obscura

The "camera obscura" as a modeling metaphor of the novel refers to the elusiveness of the living reality, an illusory world, engendered by camera, and the form of desire. The protagonist of *Laughther in the Dark*, Albinus is obsessed by images of unattainable girls: "...they had just slid past him, leaving for a day or two that hopeless sense of loss which makes beauty what it is: a distant lone tree against golden heavens; ripples of light on the inner curve of a bridge; a thing quite impossible to capture" (*LD*, 9–10). *Lolita* is a further thematization of the metaphor. In Gabriel Josipovici's opinion, Humbert made a mistake in possessing Lolita, who was desirable precisely because she appeared to be unattainable and unpossessable (Josipovici 1971: 204).

On the other hand, the novel thematizes a *conflict* of different modes of vision. In Magdalena Medarić's opinion, the novel's constructive principle is a juxtaposition of a melodramatic plot with semantic isotopies of "sight", the concept of sight "being used both in the meaning of a physical sense (the function of this physical sense in the perception and creation of art and also its role in the sphere of eroticism), and in the metaphorical meaning of "inner sight", that is, sight as a moral category (the sense of "moral blindness" as in the phrase "love is blind")" (Medarić 1985: 314–315).

Albinus' dramatic love story unfolds against the background of the new modernist art. In the Russian version, the scene is set in the year 1925, the age of Greta Garbo, Chaplin, controversies around the nature and the future of the cinema, etc. *The Blind Man* was the title of the magazine published by Henri-Pierre Roché, Beatrice Wood and Marcel Duchamp. The first issue (April 1917) had a caricature by Alfred Fruh on its cover: a blind man guided

through a painting exhibition by his dog. “The cover seemed to say that the public is blind to modern art” (Duve 1996: 105).

Albinus’ mistress Margot is an elusive creature, a “snake” or a “lizard”. The qualities of “suppleness”, “slipperiness”, “rapid motion” are Margot’s distinctive features. She is both a vulgar, seductive, charming girl and an infernal “creature from the dark”, a vamp from the decadent poetry:

“That creature gliding about in the dark... Like to crush her beautiful throat”; “... instead of thinking of his child he saw another figure, a graceful, lively, wanton girl, laughing, leaning over the table...”; “Real life, which was cruel, supple and strong like some anaconda, and which he longed to destroy without delay, was somewhere else — but where? He did not know. With extraordinary distinctness he pictured Margot and Rex — both quick and alert, with terrible, beaming, goggle eyes and long, lithe limbs — packing after his departure; Margot fawned, and caressed Rex among the open trunks and then they both went away — but where, where? Not a light in the darkness. But their sinuous path burned in him like the trace which a foul, crawling creature leaves on the skin.” (*LD*, 14, 98, 154–155)

The talented graphic artist and cartoonist Axel Rex succeeds in capturing Margot’s image in a hasty sketch. The episode anticipates the finale scene where Albinus tries to fix the volatile living reality by killing Margot. Although the link between drawing and shooting is hidden in the English version, the episode retains signs of the metaphorical “murder” through the graphic fixation (*LD*, 21–22).

The “tense”, “strenuous” vision typical of caricature, sketch or cartoon is contrasted with the “soft-focus” vision of the old masters who learnt from the camera obscura (cf. “dark paintings” in Albinus’ house). Ernst Gombrich, while comparing the “brighter, strong and even loud colors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century” with “the quiet gradations of earlier styles”, observes that after Constable the canvases of his predecessors have been perceived as “dirty” (Gombrich 1977: 49). It is easy for Axel Rex to grasp Margot’s charm in a sketch since he is experienced in the practice of “tense vision”. Margot is a *phatic image*, i.e. “a targeted image that forces you to look and holds your attention” (Virilio 1994: 14). She dominates

Albinus' life. By contrast, Albinus' family belongs to "another period, limpid and tranquil like the backgrounds of the early Italians" (*KQK*, 26). In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Pre-Raphaelites drew on the early Italians' pale landscapes as the epitome of naïve sincerity and true authenticity, qualities which are also characteristic of Albinus' wife. The very name Albinus places the protagonist on the pale end of the color scale where his family belongs. Albinus' business consists in "the handling of old somber pictures, amid the cracks of which could be detected the white croup of a horse or a dusky smile" (*LD*, 11). Albinus is a restorer of old paintings, not an artist — he is "blind" to the secrets of art and fails to recognize fakes.

The theme of caricature is elaborated in more detail in the Russian version of the novel, where the story of the cartoon character Cheepy serves as a metaphorical parallel to Kretschmar's (Albinus') story. The following fact testifies to Nabokov's interest in caricature. In March of 1954, the Nabokovs received Ms. Foresta's letter written at the request of the late Russian caricaturist Mikhail Alexandrovich Mad's widow. She asked for Nabokov's consent to republish the book *Chaplin et Jacques* (or *Jacques and Chaplin*) with Mad's caricatures and Nabokov's "fables" (*Letters to and from miscellaneous correspondents*, folder 52). Nabokov responded that he is not satisfied with the book published 30 years ago but could not prohibit re-publishing, particularly if it might support the widow. If Nabokov's time reference may be taken as reliable, his co-authorship with Mad (Mikhail Drizo's pseudonym) should be dated to the mid-1920s.

In the novel, Nabokov defines the caricature as a combination of cruelty and credulity (*LD*, 79). Likewise, the psychoanalytic definition of caricature is a combination of aggression and pleasure (Kris 1952: 174–175). Rex's cruelty or a "cold, wide-eyed curiosity" is a "perverse" artistic quality, which provides him success: "It amused him immensely to see life made to look silly, as it slid helplessly into caricature" (*LD*, 78). The "tense" image, e.g. the caricature, is organized by the "dominant", i.e. a detail, which shapes perception (*Gestaltqualität*) and causes deformation of the other elements. To find the dominant means to possess the

key to the structure of the whole image. Rex proves to be successful in the art of “tense vision”; Albinus does not master the image but is, on the contrary, possessed by it: being obsessed by Margot, he mistakes the corner of the red pillow for the edge of her frock and thinks she is hiding in his house. Axel Rex is involved in cartoon film production. Cartoons are also structured by “tense” vision and stroboscopic effects (traces of rapid movement in the observer’s visual field). “The streaking after-image that trails its path across the field of vision when an object is whizzing past” is a basic element of cartoons and comic strips (Gombrich 1977: 192).

The afterimages are multicolored: “The sequence of colors seen in an afterimage is usually referred to as the ‘flight of colors’” (Vision 1965: 480–503). The *color*, its presence or absence, is also a basic motif of the novel. Colors are lacking in the “camera obscura” of blind Albinus’ mind. They are also lacking in the cinema of the time. Nabokov’s novel anticipates the emergence of color movies. The film, where Margot plays an abandoned fiancée, is a trite melodrama carried solely by Dorianna’s performance as a vamp. Rex is bored: he “closed his eyes, saw the little colored caricatures” (*LD*, 104), i.e. a possible extension of cinematic techniques. The invention of photography and cinema as an effect of the development of the camera obscura demonstrated that camera vision was not identical to live human vision.

Deficiencies of the early cinema evoked disappointment, but, on the other hand, served as stimuli for future developments (see, for example, Deleuze 1985, I: 9–17). Camera techniques developed along two parallel lines of technology and art: the daguerreotype and Talbot’s “photogenic drawing” (McQuire 1998: 3). Photography finally predominated in popularity and influence: “Walter Benjamin often cited the fate of the portrait miniaturist, who either became a photographer or went out of business altogether” (McQuire 1998: 25). It was a shock and, at the same time, the beginning of new relations between art and technique: the camera, a blind instrument, succeeded in the representation of reality better than art. The status of the cinema (is it an art or a technology?) was the subject of heated debates. Film was considered either as a more perfect form of painting or as a triumph of mechanical civilization,

i.e. photography brought to perfection and reproducing reality with maximum exactitude. As an art, cinema was supposed to put its subjectivity to artistic use, i.e. to find its own language distinct from the languages of theatre, painting, or literature (see V. Shklovsky's early essays "On Cinematography", "Semantics of the Cinema", "On the Language of the Cinema", etc. in Shklovsky 1985). As technology, cinema was praised for its absolute honesty and objectivity: the cinematic author was seen as a mere technical device and his subjective impact on the text was supposed to be minimal.

Nabokov was aware of the contemporary cinematographic debates. In *Kamera Obskura*, the protagonist Kretschmar muses over the animation of painting: he has an intention to shoot a film in Rembrandtian or Goyan colors. The idea is given still greater prominence in the English version of the novel (*Laughter in the Dark*):

How fascinating it would be, he thought, if one could use this method for having some well-known picture, preferably of the Dutch School, perfectly reproduced on the screen in vivid colours and then brought to life — movement and gesture graphically developed in complete harmony with their static state in the picture [...]. (*LD*, 5–6)

If considered against the background of fine arts, black-and-white cinema ("light-and-shadow writing") was naturally associated with painting that actively used chiaroscuro effects, e.g. Rembrandt, Goya or Velázquez. Critics discussed, for example, the "rembrandtism" of *The Cheat* (1915) directed by the American Cecil B. De Mille: the film was quite an event in Europe. Another comparison was made between the cinema and Impressionist painting "animated" by illusion of movement. The French theoretician of cinema Elie Faure, not unlike Albinus, prophesied that the illusion of three-dimensionality in cartoons would be eventually achieved by pictorial means (E. Faure's essay *De la cinéplastique* translated in *Kino* 1988: 57).

Dabney Stuart and Gavriel Moses have pointed out that the cinematographic frame in the novel serves as a means to create a series of intratextual cross-references. The poster with a child at



the window that Albinus sees anticipates the moment that leads to his daughter's death (Stuart 1978: 93–93; Moses 1995: 80). Shots witnessed by Albinus in the cinema, where he first meets Margot, are images of the fatal accidents, which will ruin his life: “a girl was receding among tumbled furniture before a masked man with a gun”; “A car was spinning down a smooth road with hairpin turns between cliffs and abyss” (Stuart 1978: 93; Moses 1995: 91, 65). Moses writes also about “directorlike figures” and “spectator substitutes” in Nabokov's novels (Moses 1995: 67). In this respect, Axel Rex is put into a privileged position since his place at this performance is in the “stage manager's private box” (Moses 1995: 69). Finally, the novel synchronizes different effects of sound and color, imitating synchronization of sound and image in talkies: “Gay parasols and striped tents seemed to repeat in terms of colour what the shouts of bathers were to the ear” (*LD*, 62). Albinus resorts to sounds while trying to compensate for the absence of sight: he endeavors “to transform the incoherent sound into corresponding shapes and colors. It was the opposite of trying to image the kind of voices which Botticelli's angels had” (*LD*, 132).

### Nabokov's visual devices

Umberto Eco distinguishes the following types of bodily prostheses used by humans in everyday life: (1) *substitutive prostheses* that “do what the body used to do but for one accidental reason or another no longer does: such devices include artificial limbs, walking sticks, spectacles, pacemakers, and hearing aids”; (2) *extensive prostheses*, which “extend the natural action of the body: such devices include megaphones, stilts, and magnifying glasses, but also certain objects that we do not habitually consider extensions of our body” (e.g. chopsticks, pliers, shoes, clothes), — and, finally, (3) *magnifying prostheses* that “do something that our body had perhaps dreamed of doing but without ever succeeding: telescopes and microscopes, but also vases and bottles, baskets and bags, the spindle, and certainly the sledge and the wheel”. There are also mixed types, such as *extensive-intrusive* (periscope, medical instru-

ments) or *magnifying-intrusive* prostheses (scanners, gamma-ray measuring devices in nuclear medicine, etc.) (Eco 1999: 362). There are also *tools*, e.g. “knives, scissors, flints, and hammers, which not only do what the body could never do but also, with regard to the prostheses that simply help us to interact better with what is there, produce something that was not there before”. “An improvement of the tool is the *machine*. Machines work, but without any need to be guided by the organ whose possibilities they magnify. Once started, they work by themselves” (Eco 1999: 427–428). Eco emphasizes that prostheses, tools and machines “are abstract types to which the various objects can be variably related according to the use made of them and their degree of sophistication” (*ibid.*). What is important is the intimate connection between the human and his prostheses. Cultural meanings and mythologies of the technical devices, scrutinized by Barthes, Eco, Baudrillard and other critics, represent different aspects of the human-technique interface.

Cinematic techniques belong to the magnifying-extensive prostheses; they reverse the “copy-original” relation between represented reality and the physical world. The invention of the camera led to the constitution of the mobile observer: “cinema’s most radical break was not simply projecting moving images but producing *moving fields of perception*” (McQuire 1998: 67). Cinematic images disturbed the stability of the frame:

The edges of the frame/screen immediately became active, as actors could leave the scene, or conversely, emerge from the blind field always lying beyond. These possibilities disrupted established principles of centered composition, and also destabilized the viewer’s accustomed place of mastery.

Because cinema offers

‘real perceptions’ unburdened by the necessarily real referents that Barthes posited as the corollary of the photograph, its mimetic aspect resides far less in plotting direct correspondences between images and objects or events than in the structure of its viewing experience. (McQuire 1998: 68; 72–73)

Moreover, cinema shows a great potential for experimentation with time and space and innumerable opportunities for time and space reversal, extension and compression.

‘The twilight before the Lumières,’ laments *Ada*’s (1969) Van Veen in regard to the dark, muddy tonalities of an old photograph (“a sumerograph,” he calls it, invoking Sumer, the ancient region of Babylonia, and *sumerki*, a Russian word for ‘twilight’) [...] the root meaning of *obscura* survives and persists in Nabokov’s vision of a popular cinema that is dark indeed. (Appel 1974: 29)

There is, however, an essential difference between the camera obscura, a precursor of the modern camera (see Lotman & Tsvivyan 1994: 34), and the photographic mode of vision. The hole of the camera obscura opens into the exterior world. Its aim is to catch living, moving, colorful nature. Art’s ability or inability to catch living reality is the main topic of Nabokov’s novel *Camera obscura* (*Laughter in the Dark*). The camera obscura has been used as a model of human sight: Descartes suggested putting a real human eye into the hole of the camera instead of the lens to construct the model of the mechanism of vision. The metaphors of vision serve as “interpretation machines” in Nabokov’s novel. The “camera obscura” metaphor determines the form of the denouement: the blind protagonist attempts to shoot his mistress. In *The Gift*, the camera obscura is a metaphor for artistic contemplation and meditation (as Koncheev argues, “thought likes curtains and the camera obscura”: *The Gift*, 320). In *Laughter in the Dark*, it is rather a metaphor for a never attainable goal, for the art as *desire* to “possess” reality — the desire embodied in Albinus’ impotent blindness and, finally, turned into the instinct of destruction.<sup>15</sup>

The photograph represents, on the contrary, animate nature turned into the dead, fixed, immobile “surrogate” object. Art theorists draw attention to the fact that the photographic image is removed from its natural context and hence unhistorical. In Nabokov’s

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<sup>15</sup> See Yampolsky 1996: 123–124, on the image of camera obscura in Osip Mandelstam’s *Journey to Armenia* (1933): camera obscura serves as a symbol of static and stiffened images subordinated to linear perspective as well as an antonym for the Impressionist vibrant and expressive use of colour.

*Invitation to a Beheading* it is a metaphor for the banal, predictable, materialistic way of thinking embodied in Monsieur Pierre's photohoroscope. Photography is also related to death: there is a permanently underscored linkage between the photographic flash (lightning) and death in Nabokov (e.g. the often cited "My very photogenic mother died in a freak accident (picnic, lightning)" — *Lolita*, 10; Hugh's father's death in *Transparent Things*, etc.). On the other hand, the author's favorite characters, whose photo-images are unclear, are therefore spared this form of death.<sup>16</sup>

Annabel did not come out well, caught as she was in the act of bending over her *chocolat glacé*, and her thin bare shoulders and the parting in her hair were about all that could be identified (as I remember that picture) amid the sunny blur into which her lost loveliness graded. (*Lolita*, 13)

Annabel's snapshot is, however, subjected to "editing" and transformation in Humbert's memory. Its articulated analogue in Humbert's narration preserves an ambivalent status of either an artefact or a mental picture.

Roland Barthes points out "that rather terrible thing which is there in every photography: the return of the dead" (Barthes 1983: 9). The subject photographed is becoming an object, experiencing "a micro-version of death", "becoming a specter" (Barthes 1983: 14). What most often attracts Nabokov's attention in photographs is an ironically missing context or a strange distortion. The photo is artificial as a casually fixed, stiffened fragment of life with traces of a network of natural ties torn apart. It is also a playing field of chance. Dreyer, who looks like a "real skier" in the photograph, awkwardly falls after the picture is taken (*KQK*, 153). Kinbote's photograph gives a false impression of his intention to pat Shade on the shoulder (*PF*, 23–24). King Alfin's picture taken a moment before he "flew smack into the scaffolding of a huge hotel" shows him raising his arm "in triumph and reassurance" (*PF*, 85). In

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. Walter Benjamin's preference for the long-exposure photograph, which preserved ambiguity of "aura". Decrease of the interval of exposure resulted in more accurate images, clearer focus, but also the evaporation of "aura" (Benjamin 1996; Rodowick 1997: 9).

*Speak, Memory*, family photographs include a dachshund “with some part of its flexible body blurred and always with the strange, paranoiac eyes dachshunds have in snapshots” (*SM*, 48). As R. Shattuck puts it, while examining Proust’s imagery, “photographic precision is only an accepted version of deformation” (Shattuck 1964: 18).

On the contrary, Nabokovian imaginary paintings are often the metaphors for completeness, eternity or memory: it is life naturally settled down on a pictorial surface or a mnemonic combination as, for example, the images of the father’s travel in *The Gift*; a case of the father’s “levitation” — he freezes into a church fresco in *Speak, Memory* when ritualistically tossed up by grateful peasants (*SM*, 31; the analysis of the episode in: Boyd 1990: 7); the three chambers in Shade’s house, “a triptych or a three-act play// In which portrayed events forever stay”, remembered after his daughter’s death (*PF*, 40); a picturesque group of people frozen at “a vantage point of time”, where a moment of repose anticipates rapid changes, in *Pale Fire* (the episode of the Queen’s death; *PF*, 86). A painting or engraving may comprise an encoded message, as in the case of the painter Romanov’s pictures in *The Gift*, one of which refers to Maupassant’s short story. Another example is a Napoleonic-battle engraving in *Speak, Memory* (*SM*, 23). There is a plain reference to its verbal source, Vasili Zhukovsky’s translation of *Die nächtliche Heerschau* by Zedlitz, in the Russian text of the autobiography: a drummer, “moustached” soldiers (*usachi kirasiry*) and the emperor dressed in a frock-coat (*syurtuk*).

In Nabokov’s autobiography, optical, photographic, cinematographic, pictorial and theatrical images and devices function as (1) metaphors of personal memory, vision and imagination (Alter 1991) and as (2) a means of narrative transition and mnemonic linkage (Lanyi 1977). Nabokov’s autobiography is a story of “eye perfecting”, acquisition of mastery over vision and development of the artistic sensibility. Family photographs accompany the text. The status of the photograph is ambivalent: being, on the one hand, a material form of memory, a trace of presence, it is, on the other hand, a replacement of memory, which threatens to block the latter (McQuire 1998: 110, 128, 133). However, in the context of private

or family life, the photograph has a capacity to be unfolded into the narrative, to be translated into a story and to escape oblivion.

Photocamera is both a source of mnemonic images and a metaphor of the process of recollection. Recollection unfolds as a series of “flashes”. Likewise, a “span” is a minimal unit of the Proustian narrator’s memory, the starting point to restore his childhood in Combray. The meaning of such a “span” is that “of a visual fragment that has lost all relation to reality except the capacity to suggest something lost, something infinitely worth seeking” (Shattuck 1964: 22). It is a “fixed unit of observation and retention”, “a meaningless fragment snatched out of the flux” (Shattuck 1964: 22–23), i.e. a snapshot torn from its context. By contrast, the magic lantern and the kaleidoscope imitate the constantly changing flow of visual impressions and reproduce it “in a schematic form” as a succession of heterogeneous images (Shattuck 1964: 23).

Yet in Proust the logic of recollection depends to a considerable extent on the narrator’s all-inclusive consciousness, an analogue of the Bergsonian duration. Nabokov’s mnemonics is shaped by the metaphors of physical vision, which does not exclude errors, gaps and blind spots: the autobiographer does not conceal the fact that certain memory images are replaced by or modeled on the artefacts (pictures, theatre or shadow performances, etc.). Interference of different forms of memory (verbal and visual, semantic and episodic) engenders a strange theatrical space and peculiar contamination of details, e.g. “the hand of memory in a footman’s white glove” that meddles in events to help the memoirist to furnish the room or “the property man” as a means of mnemonic linkage (*SM*, 100, 105). Memory is betrayed by optical illusions and mimicry, when unfamiliar objects assume a form of familiar things, e.g. grandfather Dmitri Nabokov’s bedroom in Russia is camouflaged into the one he had in Nice (*SM*, 59).

Optical metaphors are employed as a means of mnemonic linkage and narrative transition. The memoirist uses the penholder, decorated with a crystal with a photographic view of the bay, cliffs and lighthouse inside, to recall the name of Colette’s dog. As a child he met Colette at Biarritz beach, where they used to play, and fell in love with her. The episode of recollection is apparently

based on the double allusion. The protagonist of Roussel's poem *La Vue* (Roussel 1963) uses a similar device to evoke an imaginary picture of a seaside beach with dogs and children playing. In the Proustian narrator's imagination, a similar penholder evokes the name of Balbec. In *Speak, Memory*, the narrator's two love stories, the stories of Colette and Tamara, are linked together through the symbolic return of Biarritz on the St. Petersburg cinema screen. The celebrated screen lover Mozzhukhin plays the role of the autobiographical hero's "symbolic rival" on the screen (Moses 1995: 54–55). The primitive techniques of the early cinema produced a discrepancy between the image and technical sounds – an effect, which, according to Eisenstein, should have turned the sound-film into poetic message (Moses 1995: 57). The film "noise" was part of a singular atmosphere of the early cinema:

[...] there was a special machine that imitated the sound of the surf, making a kind of washy swish that never quite managed to stop short with the scene but for three or four seconds accompanied the next feature — a brisk funeral, say, or shabby prisoners of war with their dapper captors. (*SM*, 236)

Thus, heterogeneous sensory stimuli activate autobiographical details, literary allusions and cultural realia, which function as elements of individual artistic sensibility. The metaphors of vision do not necessarily reveal, but most often conceal the recollection disguised as a literary allusion or description of an artefact. In his article "Problems of Translation: *Onegin* in English" (published in 1955 in *Partisan Review*) Nabokov identifies Pushkin as a source of his own autobiographical method and points to a stylized character of his lyrical digressions:

Pushkin masks an autobiographical allusion under the disguise of a literal translation from André Chénier, whom, however, he does not mention in any appended note [...] Chénier's curious preoccupation with the whiteness of a woman's skin [...] and Pushkin's vision of his own frail young mistress, fuse to form a marvelous mask, the disguise of a personal emotion [...]. (*PT*, 80–81)

The optical effects of enlargement and diminishing serve as semiotic markers of the narrator's subjectivity, his individual perspective

on the world and personal memory: war pictures, where the Russian locomotives are “made singularly toylike by the Japanese pictorial style” (*SM*, 26); fever delirium images, e.g. enormous spheres and huge numbers, the expanding universe and reduced pencil (*SM*, 37–38); magic lantern slides, beautiful in their natural microscopic size, awkward and rude when enlarged (*SM*, 163–165); the Egyptian space of St. Petersburg as witnessed by the Lilliputian-size observers:

We felt a cold thrill, generally associated not with height, but with depth — with an abyss opening at one’s feet — when great monolithic pillars of polished granite (polished by slaves, repolished by moon, and rotating smoothly in the polished vacuum of the night) zoomed above us to support the mysterious rotundities of St.-Isaac’s cathedral” (*SM*, 237).

A birthday episode from the past (*SM*, 171) is animated into a sound-film by the observer’s “impassioned commemoration”, which allegorically represents the story of the early cinema: light and shade effects that reproduce the natural play of sunlight on foliage, are modified through a series of fade-ins and fade-outs and, finally, sound is added to the picture.

Autobiographical narration is shaped also by “puzzle” or “pattern” metaphors: the autobiographer’s “present state of self is merely the nucleus of the pattern, the central point defined by the continuum, shifting as the pattern itself appears to change” (Bruss 1976: 137). Introduction of camera imagery is motivated by the necessity to expand, enlarge and animate the spans or flashes of memory. Optical devices are exploited as prostheses of memory. The awakening of consciousness is depicted as “a series of spaced flashes” or acts of recollection of “patches” of the past (*SM*, 21, 75). However, the “flashes” of consciousness usually have exact numerical characteristics: by contrast to the Bergsonian duration, consciousness in Nabokov seeks support either in numbers or in spatial images (the same in *Ada*, 405; see also Grishakova 1999, 2000). The camera images are especially prominent. The child, who contemplates the play of shadow and light on linen, is a prototype of the cinema spectator. The game with a crystal egg (*SM*, 24) indirectly refers to the film development, “chemistry of the photo-



graphic process”, in Roland Barthes’ terminology. Retained images or afterimages give birth to miraculous new worlds (*SM*, 34). The “magic glasses” of colored windowpanes, stereoscope, magic crystal, and peephole with a peephole of crystal have a capacity to evoke mental pictures (*SM*, 99, 106, 151, 191). To use Roland Barthes’ dictum, the narrator, who is initially an observer, passes eventually to the role of the “operator” of visual devices and acquires mastery over vision.

Childhood is “an Eden of visual and tactile sensations” (*SM*, 24). Nabokov employs a basic idea from modern psychology: the human body and consciousness keep traces of the past. Philogenesis reproduces ontogenesis. In *Speak, Memory*, the child passes from the “primordial cave” (*SM*, 22) to Ancient Greece (“a marble bust of Diana”, *SM*, 23) and, finally, to the world of modern history (a Napoleonic-battle picture).<sup>17</sup> Insofar as the past gives shape to the present, the child’s fresh, “innocent” vision, his first visual impressions, are crucial for their future life. In this respect, Nabokov’s autobiography belongs to the fictions of aesthetic education and sensory experience, which include, for example, Joyce’s *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* or Huysmans’ *Against the Grain*. The latter is especially noticeable for its extensive descriptions of jewels. In their autobiographical writings, John Ruskin, Proust and Nabokov describe how a child’s sight collects “visual treasures” for future life. For both Nabokov and Proust, the “natural” magic of the world is akin to the magic of art: they are both extremely attentive to visual phenomena. Visualization is connected with verbalization: contemplation of a “handful of lights” or “diamonds” that “slipped into a pocket of black velvet” in the train window (*SM*, 24) is further associated with mother’s jewelry, fire letters of festive illumination, blocks with painted letters and the synesthetic capacity. Reflections of the future in the mother’s ruby and diamond rings (“within the limpid facets of which, had I been a better crystal-gazer, I might have seen a room, people, lights,

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. Proustian Marcel, who, while awakening at night, has only a simple primordial feeling of existence, which makes him equal to an animal or a caveman; he is to pass centuries of civilization to reach the present moment (Proust 1954: 12).

trees in the rain — a whole period of émigré life for which that ring was to pay”) anticipate the author’s artistic future.

## V. The Doubles and Mirrors

By the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the concept of identity became an object of close scrutiny in psychology, physics and philosophy. There appeared various models of shared identity (Pesic 2002), some of them based on old schemata of mythological thinking, e.g. the archaic metaphors of “double” or “shadow” re-interpreted by Freud and his pupils.

The rich semiotic potential of the screen as “mirror” has been activated in film art. The three-dimensionality of the film space seems to be deceitful: “Nevertheless, we are never deceived; we are fully conscious of the depth and yet we do not take it for real depth”; “we have reality with all its true dimensions; and yet it keeps the fleeting, passing surface suggestion without true depth and fullness, as different from a mere picture as from a mere stage performance” (Münsterberg 1970: 23). The same conflict of perception is typical of mirror images, which are seen on the plate surface but perceived as being at a distance behind the glass. “In fact, the mirror image is the antithesis of reality, because it too seems to occur within a world “on the other side”. And it seems this way because it does not reflect reality but a “duplicate” of reality” (Mitry 2000: 79). The screen world of the cinema was perceived as “another” reality, the world of doubles. The mythological-romantic *topoi* of the double, shadow, the worlds of the dead and the living and their ability to change places were optically renewed in the early cinema. It is not surprising that Otto Rank starts his psychoanalytic reading of the *Doppelgänger* motif in myth and literature from an early film (Ewers’ *Der Student von Prag*): from the psychoanalytic perspective, dreamlike quality and pictorial language of early movies make them analogous to the fantasy of origins. Psychoanalytic film theory arises from the historical context of the early cinema, where the film image has been identified as an “incomplete double” of the reality. Contemporary theory draws on the Lacanian reformulation of Freud’s

teaching. According to Metz, the very existence of film depends on the work of the imaginary and unconscious drives or fantasies it triggers in the viewer. Film images give the viewers access to their own subjectivity through identification, voyeurism and fetishism (Metz 1982).

Psychoanalytic examination of the “double” topic in fiction and film usually brings to light the archetypal components of the *Doppelgänger* theory: the autoscopy or scopophilia motifs, speech disorder, displacement, regressive return, dialectics of presence/absence, visibility/invisibility, etc. (Webber 1996: 3–4). This approach often ignores the text-specific or genre-specific traits elaborated within the *Doppelgänger* topic. Both Yuri Lotman and Wolfgang Iser consider “doubling” as the paradigm of fictionality and emphasize its historical changeability (Lotman & Minz 2002; Iser 1993). According to Iser, definite configurations of the Real and the Imaginary form historical paradigms of literary fictionality. In what follows I shall use Iser’s reworking of the Lacanian scheme. As Iser argues, the Imaginary is always configured by the Real. Hence there are different historical forms of the Imaginary.

The Lacanian Real is related to the birth trauma and located beyond the borders of language, being inaccessible for the language subject. The Imaginary, the world of fantasies and drives, preserves ties with the object of desire, i.e. the mother’s body. The mirror phase is the beginning of repression of drives and fantasies and separation from the object of desire. Identity is established and the self constituted in the process. The Symbolic order emerges on account of inevitable loss and repression; it refers to a certain absence. For Iser, the dialectic correlation between the Real, the Imaginary and the Fictive (the latter functionally corresponds to the Lacanian Symbolic) arises as a result of the intentional act and subsequent free play, not as a product of a traumatic repression and loss. Iser reverses the Lacanian scheme. The Imaginary needs the conscious activation or intentional mobilization to emerge. The Fictive plays the role of the incentive and mediates between the Imaginary and the Real. The mediation occurs in the state of a free game, in the course of which the Real and the Imaginary assume a definite form or a “Gestalt”. Iser’s Real is discursive: it consists of

discourses, not of the “raw material” of psychological drives and energies. Thereby different configurations of the Real and Imaginary, or different cultural forms and manifestations of the Imaginary become possible. The work of art neither reproduces reality, as mimetic theories argue, nor activates “the primal scene”, as psychoanalysis tends to think. It provides access to the “cultural” Imaginary, which is already configured by the Real. The Fictive results from the doubling of the referential world and the shifting of usual meanings: the Fictive is a manifestation of the Imaginary under the guise of a certain discursive Real.

Following in Iser’s footsteps, one may distinguish between various discursive-imaginative forms of the “double identity” and build a historical typology of these forms. I shall start with the two dominant configurations to describe the structure of the “double identity” in film and fiction: the Romantic “*split or reduplicated personality*” and the modernist “*invaded or shared personality*”. In the first case, the split between the two aspects (e.g. “good” and “evil”) of the ambivalent personality leads to extrapolation: an aspect is hypostatized into physical *presence* or a personified narrative agent. The doubles are moral or metaphysical opposites, yet their appearance is most often similar or even identical. In the second case, the “shared” or “invaded self” involves the Other’s virtual presence perceived as real, which may result in further serial splittings and displacements. Hypnosis, mesmerism and spiritism lifted to the level of analytical research are obvious stimuli for the development of the idea of the “shared personality” at the turn of the century. Modernist ontology transforms Romantic polar oppositions (this world/otherworld; human/demonic/divine) into gradual ones. The border between the self and the Other, the outside and inside world is effaced, subjectivity erodes the objective world from the inside: the “objective reality” is turned inside out. The structure of the “shared personality” often parodies the perfect harmony of the “souls’ communion”, e.g. the family or love romance. The “shared self” emerges through incomplete metamorphosis or pseudomorphosis, as it happens to the protagonist of Kafka’s story, who, despite his appearance as an insect, preserves human thinking and consciousness. Many theorists of modernity

have pointed out that in modernist literature subjective experience is mediated through objectification. As a result, the outside world “takes on the shape of a radically subjective construct” (Eysteinson 1990: 43).<sup>18</sup>

The scheme of the “split personality” is dominant in many Romantic, neo-Romantic and fantastic-realist texts: Mathew Lewis’ *Monk*, Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann’s *Doppelgänger stories*, *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson, *William Wilson* by Poe, *The Double* by Dostoevsky, etc. Hollywood action films willingly exploit this schema as well, e.g. *Face off* directed by John Woo, 1997. However, in *Face off*, the Romantic plot of the “split personality” is reversed: the protagonists are moral opposites, yet the “exchange of faces” displays certain parallels and leads to further convergences in their lives. Kafka’s, Nabokov’s or Hitchcock’s incomplete or false doubles are examples of “shared personality”.<sup>19</sup>

The *Turn of the Screw* by H. James serves as a paradigmatic text, provoking the double interpretation (fantastic-marvelous and fantastic-uncanny, in Todorov’s terminology): either the ghosts are “real”, the evil projected outside and materialized to show the missioner-governess in full splendor, or the ghosts are the governess’ hallucinations. In the latter case it is the governess’ uncontrolled behavior which leads to the girl’s nervous breakdown and kills the boy (Casebook 1969; Brooke-Rose 1981). This alternative corresponds to the “split” and “shared” types of doubling. Contemporary Spanish film director Alejandro Amenábar created an interesting cinematic inversion of H. James’ paradigmatic tale, *The Others* (2001). Built upon the clichés of a usual ghost story (the haunted house, mysterious servants, the terrified woman with two children, the husband killed in the war and visiting his wife

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<sup>18</sup> Todorov examines this effect in the fantastic literature and notices that the fantastic becomes “normal”, i.e. naturalized, in Kafka (Todorov 1997: 130–131).

<sup>19</sup> Another striking example of shared personality was the Anglo-Scottish writer William Sharp and his female alter ego Fiona Macleod, born in 1893. Fiona wrote in secret works of her own and sometimes appeared to William as a young man, whereas Sharp felt that his spiritual “self” was female. In 1899, the third inner self, called Wilfion, emerged. His function was maintaining harmonic relations between William and Fiona (Miller 1987: 216–220).

after death, etc.), the film text has different degrees of “reality”. The protagonists, whose point of view organizes the film, do not suspect that they are dead and situated “on the other side of the glass”. There are “more” and “less” dead personalities in the strange mirror world, e.g. the servants who know that they are dead and the hostess who does not know or does not admit it. By contrast, the presumable “ghosts” who inhabit the house turn out to be live people. They are the protagonists’ “doubles” in the world of the living. Mirror structures and inversions are prominent in Aménabar’s film. Likewise, there is a mythological figure of the “clairvoyant” in each mirror world — a character who is able to see the inhabitants of the other world (the girl in the world of the dead, the blind medium in the world of the living). Multiple inversions and reverberations unveil the “conspiracy of reality” on both sides of the glass.

However, the neo-Romantic or fantastic-realist texts structured by the dominant scheme of the split or reduplicated personality often include the motifs of the virtual “infestation”, interference and serial splitting that complicate the initial Romantic scheme. Dostoevsky’s novella presents the double as an antagonist and usurper, a sovereign narrative agent — the “scoundrel” to be separated from the “virtuous and honest” genuine Golyadkin. The double’s behavior patterns correlate with the protagonist’s mental projects either to enjoy the full rights of the social order modeled upon a pattern of the idyllic family romance (sincerity, transparency and paternal care) or to tear “the mask” off and take on the role of a denouncer or, finally, “to efface and bury himself in the crowd” (Dostoevsky 2004: 52), to be “an outside observer”, “a figure on the outside” (Dostoevsky 2004: 152). On the one hand, the attributes “senior” and “junior” as well as constant rendering of Golyadkin senior’s point of view by the narrator or substitution of the narrator’s discourse for Golyadkin’s free indirect speech establish a causal relation and a narrative hierarchy between the doubles. In the episode at Golyadkin senior’s home, where the hero almost succeeds in gaining control over events, unifying the doubles and thus proving that he is a “simple, plain man”, who does not favor “wretched duplicities” (Dostoevsky 2004: 12–13),

the double is reduced to the protagonist's exact copy. On the other hand, both Golyadkins' multiple metamorphoses, extraordinary speed of their motion, mirror effects and the dreamlike character of events make their identity and correlation questionable, which leads to a further splitting: "it seemed to him that a mass, a whole string of absolutely similar Golyadkins was bursting noisily into every one of the room's doors" (Dostoevsky 2004: 158).<sup>20</sup> Bertolucci's *Partner*, a free screen-adaptation of Dostoevsky's novella, augments duplication and "adumbrates... a successful resolution of the oedipal conflict implicitly symbolized by the double configuration" of the "original" and the "copy": Bertolucci's Jacob "does not rival and destroy that original so much as betray him more subtly by becoming indistinguishable from him" (Kline 1982: 78).

Stevenson's archetypal story of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* also comprises interference and creolization effects, whereas Victor Fleming's screen-adaptation (*Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, 1941) follows a simplified Romantic model. Identity of the doubles is explicitly manifested in the film: Jekyll retains resemblance to his "positive self" even after bodily metamorphosis. Hyde's last words ("I'm Dr Jekyll! I did nothing!") are to confirm this identity. Yet Jekyll's and Hyde's narrative functions are different: Hyde is a fully developed Jekyll's "bad aspect", a sovereign narrative agent. If the masks are liable to confusion, the narrative functions are clearly separated: the viewer recognizes the "bad" and the "good" types of behavior. The Romantic scheme is enhanced by the introduction of the female protagonists: Jekyll's angelic fiancée Beatrix and Hyde's seductive mistress Ivy.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Dostoevsky's double has been an object of many contradictory diagnoses (schizophrenia, persecution mania, hysteria of multiple autonomous persons — since the initial pair of doubles multiplies and engenders further splittings, etc.). On Lawrence Kohlberg's opinion, Dostoevsky's text is itself a parodic double of Hoffmann's and Gogol's texts: "Il dédouble Hoffmann et Gogol (Aksakov accusa Dostoïevski d'avoir plagé ce dernier) pour les parodier et les corrompre, et sera lui-même dédoublé dans *Zapiski iz podpolia (Les Notes d'un souterrain)*" (Taylor-Terlecka 2001: 31–32).

<sup>21</sup> John S. Robertson's 1920 version for Paramount/Famous Players already introduces this formula: Jekyll's angelic companion is matched against "a prostitute functioning as an appropriate sex object for the lascivious Hyde" (Tibbets & Welsh 1998: 398). Fleming's film develops the scheme and adds a Freudian tinge of interpretation.



There was a minor follower of Poe, Hoffmann and Stevenson, whose fantastic doppelgänger stories might have attracted Nabokov's attention. It was Aleksandr Chayanov, a talented literary amateur and scholar whose interests embraced a broad area from agriculture to history. His penname was "Botanist X". One of his stories, *The Venetian Mirror, or Miraculous Adventures of the Glass Man* was published in Berlin in 1923. The protagonist Aleksei purchases a Venetian mirror, which has to serve as the final, organizing detail in the decoration of his mansion. The mirror has a strange impact on Aleksei's and his wife's life: it eventually draws the hero into its space, whereas his mirror double is released from the mirror. The mirror double lives Aleksei's life and approaches his wife. While observing his vicious murderous caresses from the other side of the mirror, Aleksei, almost absorbed by the strange mirror world, manages to get free and to save the wife. The glass double escapes, leads a criminal life in the Moscow streets, which is imputed to Aleksei and, finally, sends him the mirror letter charging the hero with murder and addressing a challenge to him. The letter reproduces the future events as the past ones: taking advantage of Aleksei's absence, the double kills his servant and kidnaps his wife. At last, the protagonist overtakes the double, fights him and submits the double to his power again. Chayanov's story bears the imprint of the culture of decadence, where eroticism and love for an "exquisite" detail are combined with the rapidly developing adventure plot line and romantic atmosphere of mystery. It is interesting first of all as a stylization reminiscent of the many other stories of mirror doubles in Romantic, decadent and Symbolist literature (Stevenson, Poe, Oscar Wilde, Bryusov, Bely).

By contrast to Stevenson's story cinematic interpretations, Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) exemplifies the story of the "shared" or "invaded personality". Norman Bates' "mother" is an imaginary construct, yet Hitchcock creates an impression of a double's physical presence. As is well known, he uses different actresses and voices to avoid the fixation of a viewer's attention on the mother's figure and thus prepares the surprising denouement: the mother is part of

Norman Bates' personality. As mentioned above, the modernist ontology replaces Romantic polar oppositions by the gradual ones — hence the serial splittings, incomplete duplications and metonymical substitutions as forms of the modernist and early postmodernist doubling.<sup>22</sup>

The same effect of a “vague focusing” on the double is typical of both Kafka's *Metamorphosis* and Nabokov's *Despair*. The doubling results from a discrepancy between the “internal” and the “external” point of view. The narrator sees Gregor Samsa as both a human (inside) and an insect (outside), the protagonist's self-perception is human, other people see him as an insect. The insect's size is indefinite. It seems to occupy a rather large space in the bed or on the floor. It can stand at the window looking outside, which creates the impression of his being human size. On the other hand, when the insect climbs on the wall to stick to the lady's portrait, it turns out to be approximately of the size of the portrait. In Nabokov's *Despair* the image of the imaginary double is filtered through the unreliable narrator's distorted perception: it turns out that the double is not, in the end, a double at all. However, the fact that the double is an imaginary construct remains unobvious until the end of the novel since the first-person narrator is the main source of information for the reader.

Asymmetry or false doubleness is a sense-generating structure in Nabokov's novels. An encounter with a cinematographic, unrecognizable double is a leitmotif in his prose. False doubleness is the basic motif of his novel *Despair*. False or incomplete doubles abound in the text: the author – narrator – screenwriter – a hypothetical publisher of Hermann's confessions; the narrator-protagonist (Hermann) – his presumable double Felix – his “double” rival Ardalion (his rival in art and incestuous lover of Hermann's wife Lydia) – Hermann's imaginary brother. There are, finally, multiple real and illusory cases of *déjà vu* (landscapes, artefacts, images, etc.) in the text.

On the one hand, *Despair* is a story of the “Jekyll-Hyde” type merging with one's own “shadow” or a deformed side of one's

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<sup>22</sup> Deleuze and Guattari demonstrated how these displacement mechanisms work in Kafka's texts.

own personality. Dr. Jekyll's split cane left at the crime scene symbolizes his split personality. A similar object, a stick, betrays Felix's "other half" in *Despair*. The plot scheme recalls the Lacanian "mirror stage", where the "self" uses the "other" to find confirmation for its own existence. The mirror both objectifies and destabilizes the imaginary process of self-identification. A "split" self is an unstable self, where a permanent struggle for dominance between the two halves occurs. Hyde finally gains supremacy over Jekyll. Likewise, a hypothetical resemblance between Hermann and Felix threatens to overturn the mimetic relation:

It was he and not I who first perceived the masonic bond in our resemblance; and as the resemblance itself had been established by me, I stood toward him — according to his subconscious calculation — in a subtle state of dependence, as if I were the mimic and he the model. [...] He appeared to my eyes as my double, that is, as a creature bodily identical to me. [...] He on his part saw in me a doubtful imitator. (*Despair*, 22–23)

Hermann, like Jekyll, "used to write letters to himself" (*Despair*, 201), simulating the presence of extra participants in the story. He introduces another mirror substitute for his own person, a "brother from Russia" alias a "brother from Germany", who, as Hermann alleges, has committed murder and is going to commit suicide. Both Hermann's and Jekyll's personality are finally absorbed by the double: "Thus, a reflected image, asserting itself, laid its claims. Not I sought a refuge in a foreign land, not I grew a beard, but Felix, my slayer" (*Despair*, 186). Hermann as well as Jekyll murders "himself" murdering the other, i.e. "commits suicide". Both the characters leave confessional notes to explain their failure.

The mirror plays a significant role in both stories. Yuri Levin lists the following functions of the mirror in the *Despair*: (1) confusion of the original and the copy, exchange of roles; (2) the original's acquisition of the properties of the copy; (3) merging of the original and the reflection; (4) the reflection as the "minus-original"; (5) a distorted image (Levin 1988: 20–21).

Stevenson's story was one of Nabokov's favorite books. Yet *Despair*, whether based on its reading or not, is an essentially

modernist interpretation of double identity. Stevenson's story is a version of the metaphysical plot of the struggle of polar opposites, good and evil, combined in the human personality. Nabokov's novel discredits the idea of the "split personality": any similarity is imaginary, the double is a chance companion (a "bad brother" — who can be sacrificed in order that he, Hermann — or Herr Mann, the Man himself — may survive", Burdick 1982: 139) and the mirror serves as a metaphor for mimetic illusion. The mirror is to confirm a perfect identity, but instead betrays a difference. The theme of false resemblances and robust contaminations is counterpointed by the motif of "crazy", unclear, cracked or crooked distorting mirrors, where, on the contrary, a resemblance is erased. A perfect identity is ultimately the identity of the dead, nature morte. That is why Hermann avoids mirrors while writing his story. Hermann's artistic taste is limited to "the plain, crude obviousness of the painter's art" (*Despair*, 26). The literary genre he uses is the confession, which is "sincere" (which means 'tendentious, ideological' for Nabokov) and therefore might find readers in the Soviet Russia. The linkage between the "crude obviousness" of the realist painting and Soviet literature is later highlighted in *Pale Fire*: "Ideas in modern Russia are machine-cut blocks coming in solid colours; the nuance is outlawed, the interval walled up, the curve grossly stepped" (*PF*, 192).

There is also an erotic thematization of the mirror metaphor incorporated into the English version of the novel: Hermann's voyeuristic habit of imagining himself sitting at a distance, observing himself in bed during a sexual act (*Despair*, 37–38). Thus, the mirror metaphor is, first, thematized as a story of the imaginary double and, second, used as a principle for constructing the fictional space. In his 1995 article on *Despair* Sergei Davydov examines the mirror structure of the novel. He, however, overestimates the measure of Hermann's control over the text. As Pekka Tammi demonstrates, drawing on Dorrit Cohn's idea of the struggle for narrative authority, Hermann belongs to the group of narrative agents, who "fail to recognize those very 'clues' that they are recording in their narration" and become themselves "an object of ironic observation" (Tammi 1985: 292). The relation between

the author and the narrator is laid bare and hypostatized in Hermann's address to the "writer-reader", whom he intends to charge with his text's publication. Hermann suspects that the substitute author might appropriate his auctorial rights. Thus, the sender-receiver (author/reader) relationship is also reversed in the mirror world of the novel. The auctorial presence is veiled; the narrator's perspective is explicit, even sometimes too exposed and declarative. The situation is part of the broader Nabokovian metafictional/metaphysical problematic of "the mind behind the mirror", i.e. the Author, alias God alias "petty demon" (Carroll 1982) who implicitly controls the situation. Hermann is an observer of the auctorial fictional world, where some clues are made visible (the "yellow post") and others remain hidden (e.g. his wife's adultery or the function of the stick).

Another metaphor for Hermann's behavior is the "screen-writing": he is eager to impose the conventions of his 'screenplay' on the reader. Hermann's screenplay is, nevertheless, corrected by the auctorial hand. Fassbinder's screen-adaptation of Nabokov's novel employs the opportunities of visual language to introduce the auctorial angle of vision and to accentuate the differences by means of chiaroscuro effects, mirror reflections and color tints.

Hermann's obsessive attention to repetition and resemblance is based on a belief in his "memory of the camera type" (*Despair*, 71). There are, for example, a number of mnemonic links between the geographical spaces of Russia and Germany. The concordances are inexact, asymmetric or false. Hermann's "photographic" memory erases a shift, a discrepancy between them. A courtyard in Tarnitz and "something seen in Russia ages ago" (*Despair*, 78), two Carls Spiesses, the bronze duke monument in Tarnitz and the bronze horseman in St. Petersburg are seen by him as identical twins (see other correlations in Tammi 1985: 308). Hermann's wishful identification of the two different people as doubles is anticipated by the contamination of the two paintings: he mistakes the picture in a tobacco shop in Tarnitz for Ardalion's painting. As Igor Smirnov points out (Smirnov 2000: 142), the painting with two roses and a tobacco pipe on green cloth belongs to Juan Gris

(*Roses in a Vase*, 1914). As it turns out later, there are two peaches and a glass ashtray in Ardalion's still life.

The gradual opposition based on partial presence or a variable degree of a certain feature is a form of displacement and difference-making. It structures the modernist forms of doubling. In the Romantic ontology the "supernatural" or "marvelous" is clearly opposed to the "real": the "real" character is given a "supernatural" double, their conflict leads to mutual destruction, yet the status of the reality remains untouched and the intrusion of the supernatural, often explained away by a moral purpose and action of Providence, only temporarily breaks the laws of the natural world. The modernist "uncanny" is embedded into the "real" as the "virtual". Its reality depends on different degrees or modalities of subjective knowledge, i.e. imaginary forms of duplication, which, being "exteriorized" or "objectified", decompose the stable "reality" from the inside.

## **VI. Multidimensional Worlds**

### **The outside and the inside**

The “interiority-exteriority” is a fundamental metaphysical and ontological opposition of the human self-experience rooted in language forms: “...there is an intuitive connection between the deictic distinction of “inside” vs. “outside”: i.e. ‘X is here’ can be interpreted as ‘X is within the space which contains SELF’”. The notion of containment, or interiority, is “a very basic notion”, which might be introduced into the analysis of the meaning of other propositions (Lyons 1977: 699). The modernist paradigm presents a radical challenge to the traditional metaphysical distinction between the inside and the outside. In the first chapter of *Creative Evolution*, Bergson calls the existence of any isolated system in question — except live bodies, whose autonomy is functional, however. He underscores that science artificially cuts off threads that make any system part of a more extensive whole and extrapolates its “inside” into the “outside”. In *Matter and Memory*, Bergson depicts the observer’s body as the center of the personal world “cut out” from the physical world by the observer’s perception. Merleau-Ponty draws on the perceptual aspect of observation to show that the observer’s body is the background or the void against which the object comes to light. Together they form a “practical system” since bodily spatiality partakes of indeterminate primordial spatiality of the world (Merleau-Ponty 1981; see also Yampolsky 2001).

Freud’s notions of projection and sublimation as well as Surrealist exploration of alternative states of consciousness blurred the clear-cut border between the internal and the external. The Surrealists found sources for artistic inspiration in hallucinations, hypnagogic images and dreams. The “scientific” interest in dreams

and visual phenomena, the shifts of meanings in dreams and interpenetration of different realities, the thin web which makes possible the exchange of thoughts between the “outside” and “inside” realms (Breton’s “communicating vessels”), and, finally, relativity of distinction between the “outside” and “inside” is common for Nabokov and the Surrealists. For the Surrealists, the dream or painting has the same degree of reality as the physical world.

Breton’s *Surrealism and Painting* (1928) starts with the description of the spectator entering a picture thanks to the miraculous power of vision, the “savage state” of the eye: “I feel that I have the right to demand a great deal from a faculty which, more than almost all others, allows me to exercise control over the real, over what is vulgarly understood by *the real* [...]. In such a domain I have at my disposal a power of illusion of which I cease to perceive the limits unless I am very careful. It is perfectly possible, at this moment, for my glance to alight on some plate or other in a book and suddenly the things that surrounded me cease to exist. In place of the things that surrounded me there is now something else since, for example, I am taking part without difficulty in a completely different ceremony... The angle of the ceiling and the two walls in the engraving easily take the place of the angle of this ceiling and these walls. I turn the pages and, despite the almost uncomfortable heat, I do not withhold my consent in the very least from this winter landscape. I mingle with these winged children. ‘He saw before him a brightly lit cavern’, says the caption, and indeed I see it too. I see it in a way in which I do not at the present moment see you, you for whom I am writing, and yet I am writing in order to see you one day, just as truly as I have lived a single second for this Christmas tree, for this brightly lit cavern or for the angels. It makes no difference whether there remains a perceptible difference between beings which are evoked and beings which are present, since I dismiss such differences out of hand at every moment of my life. This is why it is impossible for me to envisage a picture as being other than a window, and why my first concern is then to know what it *looks out* on, in other words, whether, from where I am standing, there is a “beautiful view”, and nothing appeals to me so much as a vista stretching away before me and *out of sight*. Within the frame of an *undefined full-length portrait*,



*landscape or seascape* I can enjoy a tremendous spectacle” (Breton 1972: 2–3).

Despite his indebtedness to Freud, Breton was rather skeptical about the psychoanalytic interpretations of art: the purpose of art is liberation of man by means of poetry, dreams and the miraculous (Breton 1993: 82). The artist is a better expert on dreams and erotic “subtexts” than a psychoanalyst: the latter just strives for appropriation of artist’s functions (Breton 1993: 254) — Nabokov’s resistance to the encroachments of “Viennese mystics” upon his art is well known. For Breton, the dreamwork is analogous to poetic thinking. He repudiates a need for the “outside observer” or the analyst-interpreter of dreams. Dreamwork is essentially poetic, i.e. auctorial work. For example, “condensation” is the same for dream as the three unities for tragedy or the law of the drastic shortcut for modern poetry (Breton 1990: 47–48). In *The Gift*, “the dream’s devices” are likewise modeled on poetic techniques (*Gift*, 149).

According to Breton, the dream captures and entwines ready details of reality in its network, the details, which are known only to the dreamer. The world of the dream and the real world are one,

the latter, in order to constitute itself, only dips into the ‘current of the given’ — to try to have it seen on what differences of relief and intensity depends the distinction that can be made between the true operations and the illusory ones inscribed respectively in one and the other. (Breton 1990: 55–56)

A similar exchange of “the given” occurs between the dream and the real world in many of Nabokov’s novels, for example in *Bend Sinister*, with its ambiguous epigraph: “Or is ‘outer’ and ‘inner’ an illusion too, so that a great mountain may be said to stand a thousand dreams high and hope and terror can be as easily charted as the capes and bays they helped to name?” (*BS*, 146). Therefore the analysis of the dream by the dreamer

*exhausts* the dream’s content and contradicts the diverse allegations that have been made about the ‘unknowable’ character of the dream, or its incoherence. No mystery in the final analysis, nothing that could provoke any belief in some transcendent intervention occurring in

human thought during the night. I see nothing in the whole working of the oneiric function that does not borrow clearly from the elements of lived life, provided one takes the trouble to examine it: nothing [...], except for those elements that the imagination uses poetically, that would contain any appreciable residue held to be irreducible. (Breton 1990: 45)

The notion of the “suture” propounded by Jean-Pierre Oudart in his article “Cinema and Suture” (1969), drawing on the Lacanian logic of the signifier, testifies to a new understanding of the relation between the “internal” image and the “external” reality in the visual arts. Suture (the shot/reverse shot sequence as a basic unit of film language) implies that absence or lack (what is beyond the frame) is permanently inscribed into the visual representation as its structuring principle.

Oudart’s basic contention is that (classical narrative) cinema developed by reappropriating the ‘absent field’ within its own narrative space. [...] cinema does not deny the discontinuity of its signifier, but instead mobilizes that discontinuity by regulating its resurgence. What is outside the frame in one shot (perhaps implied by a character look) is subsequently revealed and placed in frame in a succeeding shot. The desire of the cine-spectator to look *at* the scene of the other, but also to look *from* the place of the other, is taken up as the basic filmic movement. (McQuire 1998: 83)

Stephen Heath suggests that the system of suture described by Oudart is only one mode of film editing, an element of a larger system that inscribes the spectator as a subject in the symbolic order of film discourse (Heath 1981: 76–112).

Thus, as Jonathan Crary remarks in his book on attention and spectacle in modern culture, “[t]he disintegration of an indisputable distinction between interior and exterior becomes a condition for the emergence of spectacular modernizing culture and for a dramatic expansion of the possibilities of aesthetic experience” (Crary 2000: 12–13).

The obverse side of the unstable relationship between the inside and the outside is the modernist problematization of the “self” and identity, which should serve as a basis for the distinction between the inside and the outside world. The modernist literary “self”

becomes much more fluid, indeterminate and incomplete in comparison to the clear-cut character of realistic fiction. In Nabokov, the indeterminacy of the character is formally indicated by the system of mobile pronouns (there are two or more *I*'s telling the story), doublings, sudden shifts and slippages of markers of narrative identity and deictics. What is rather frequent yet still "scandalous" in Dostoevsky — a loss of one's own identity — becomes the norm in modernist fiction as a manifestation of the principle of the "naturalization" of the fantastic (Todorov 1997).

The identity of the character is connected with the whole system of spatial and temporal modeling and deixis, as D. Barton Johnson shows, employing Yuri Lotman's distinction between the static and dynamic subtypes of cultural texts, "[t]he hero contains within himself the possibility of destroying the initial structure of the static world through successfully challenging its boundaries and establishing new ones" (Johnson 1982a: 94). D. Barton Johnson describes the structure of thematic oppositions of the *Invitation to a Beheading* and the system of phonetic and iconic symbols associated with thematic polarities. He demonstrates that this superstructure resides in the grammatical form of deixis or linguistic spatio-temporal localization. The resolution of tension between the deictic emblems determines the dénouement: "...the dénouement of the novel is signaled more unambiguously by the deictics than by the events themselves" (Johnson 1982a: 91).

The spatiotemporal modeling based on patterning and deictic shifts or recenterings between the overlapping worlds as well as the protagonist's intermediary position between the worlds are rather typical of Nabokov's novels. The shifts occur between the diegetic and extradiegetic world, metaphorically associated with "this" (terrestrial) and "other" (extraterrestrial) world as well as between the textual and extratextual reality. There are some basic oppositions (transparency/opacity, visibility/invisibility, closure/openness, etc.) that serve as world markers. The device of decentering or relocation heightens the reader's involvement in the fictional world. Nabokov destabilizes the usual process of reading, where such shifts are invisible: the very destabilization becomes a text-generating principle in his novels.

The short story *Terra Incognita* (1931 in Russian; 1963 in English) is an impressive example of this strategy. While returning together with his friend Gregson from the exotic land of Zonraki, where they collected plants and butterflies, the first-person narrator-protagonist falls ill. During the attacks of fever and hallucinations, the surrounding reality becomes translucent for him and shows the symptoms of decomposition, whereas another, solid reality (a room in a distant European city, “the wallpaper, the armchair, the glass of lemonade”; *Stories*, 303) becomes visible through the first. However, in the episode of the death of the narrator’s two companions, the tropical landscape is again recognized as the actual reality and the European room as a fictitious one (“since, everything beyond death is, at best, fictitious: an imitation of life hastily knocked together, the furnished rooms of nonexistence”, *Stories*, 303). In the episode of the narrator’s own death, the realities change places twice. The European room becomes the actual reality of storytelling and narrator’s death, whereas the reality of the exotic land is displaced to the level of the virtual: “Everything around me was fading, leaving bare the scenery of death — a few pieces of realistic furniture and four walls. My last motion was to open the book, which was damp with my sweat, for I absolutely had to make a note on something; but, alas, it slipped out of my hand”. One fictional reality is supposed to be actual, another its virtual extension, yet the reader is not let to know which is which.

As mentioned above (see the section “Possible worlds and modeling systems”), the process of reading and writing is a mobile system of recenterings and relocalizations. Linguists use the notion of discourse (re)orientation to describe shifts of the contextual identity from the actual speaker to the one quoted. The distribution of the speaker’s and the listener’s functions at any point in a discourse, the social relationships obtained between these participants, the temporal and spatial coordinates constitute the “orientation of discourse” (Chafe 1974: 123). By quoting the other’s speech, the actual speaker relinquishes the role of the speaker to someone else: “...he temporarily pretends he is that someone else, and utters exactly what he claims that other person to have uttered” (Chafe 1974: 129). Thus the speaker maintains a certain balance

between the “egocentric” discourse orientation and a communicative necessity to make assumptions on the content of the hearer’s consciousness. These assumptions depend on the context of speaking and the latitude of material reported from memory. Chafe examines the speaker’s shifts in speaking and writing (summarized in Chafe 1994) and infers that fictional representation involves *doubling* of the speaker’s consciousness, i.e. a *dissociation* of the represented or extroverted consciousness and the representing or introverted consciousness. The latter is engaged in the processes of remembering and imagining of the data present in the former.

The notion of narrative “displacement” has been employed also in psychology:

The ability to ‘displace’ in time and space, including seeing things from another’s perspective, is thought to be a key factor in linguistic and cognitive development — indeed, arguably, ‘displacement’ is one of the defining characteristics of human intelligence. (Emmott 1997: ix)

Recently the idea of displacement has gained popularity in cognitive research of the embodied and experiential response to language and the role of deictic shifts in achieving the illusion of situatedness within a textual world (e.g. Gerrig 1993, Werth 1999, Emmott 1997). Nabokov’s fiction lays bare the invisible process of recentering and makes it an object of fictional representation (see e.g. Levin on Nabokov’s ‘bispatiality’: Levin 1998: 323–391; Levin gives a description of Nabokov’s contrasting worlds; what is the most important, however, is the very strategy of recentering that involves the reader in a complex game of hide-and-seek).

In *The Defense*, the scene is set in the incompatible but overlapping worlds. The chess world provides an escape from the leveling “publicity”, i.e. a compulsory identification or a social role: Luzhin’s “public image” as the “morally beautiful” child from his father’s books “in sturdy colorful covers”, “written for boys, youths and high school students”, or a Wunderkind on a lithograph; and the school life with a special attention paid to pupils’ “inner life”, i.e. the *common, organized* “inner life”, etc. (*Def*, 19). Little Luzhin’s clothes similar to his father’s clothes or

his grey uniform coat serve the purpose of “social mimicry”. He is only a copy of “the real Luzhin, the elderly Luzhin, the writer of books” (*Def*, 11). The need to protect the chess world from outside intrusions evolves into a metaphorical “invisibility” provoked by Luzhin’s unwillingness to be seen, to be exposed to public attention: he avoids contact and refuses to return to school after his photograph appears in the newspaper. Luzhin manages to become “invisible” to his classmates: they fail to recall his face later, in adult life.

Yet the “invisibility” of mental space exhausts Luzhin and makes him vulnerable since his body is part of physical reality:

Only rarely did he notice his own existence, when for example lack of breath — the revenge of a heavy body forced him to halt with open mouth on a staircase, or when he had toothache, or when at a late hour during his chess cogitations an outstretched hand shaking a matchbox failed to evoke in it the rattle of matches, and the cigarette that seemed to have been thrust unnoticed into his mouth by someone else suddenly grew and asserted itself, solid, soulless, and static, and his whole life became concentrated in the single desire to smoke... (*Def*, 75)

The physical stimulus provokes a mental discord: a match that burns Luzhin’s hand confuses the train of his thoughts, evokes a terrifying mental picture of chess abysses and determines the fatal denouement of the tournament.

Luzhin immerses into cerebral life, while looking for a compensatory order and harmony lacking in physical reality — the “chaotic” adult behavior incomprehensible for a child who is unable to see its hidden springs and motives; a chessboard falling apart; objects spilling from Luzhin’s pocket or from his wife’s handbag, etc. The chaotic physical dimension, which evokes aversion or anxiety, is suppressed. However, when bright and ordered, the physical reality becomes, on the contrary, a source of peace and satisfaction. Brought up in a comfortable homely routine, Luzhin is glad to find repose in the material existence, the more tempting the less available during his chess career. He is a latent Epicurean. Luzhin’s marriage starts from a purely sensual impulse: he associates his future wife with a young prostitute he

has once seen, a symbol of forbidden sexual pleasures. Luzhin's teacher and impresario Valentinov cultivates in him the Oriental love for sweets as a substitute for sex. Therefore Luzhin willingly indulges in the well-regulated world of marriage and quits it only as a captive of fate. The material order is simple and soothing; it mimics the desirable mental order. That is why Luzhin likes kitsch and that is why a sinister parallel is drawn between the "dead" pawns and wooden kitsch souvenirs that attract Luzhin's attention in his fiancée's house. Invisible chess powers are beneficial. Yet being materialized, they symbolize stasis and death.

The fact that the protagonist belongs to both the "visible" and the "invisible" world becomes the cause of their interpenetration and interchangeability. The "visible" and "invisible" dimensions change places. Luzhin loses the capacity for orientation in the physical space: the latter assumes the forms of his consciousness. No less terrible is the tangible world assuming the forms of the imaginary otherworld:

The long description of Luzhin's laborious and confused progress out of the hall where he had played resembles nothing so much as a nightmarish journey through hell. Phantoms, shades, ghosts, and shadows are mentioned some dozen times in two pages; darkness, blackness, smoke, murk, and fog obscure his sight. (V. Alexandrov 1995: 80)

*The Defense* could be read either as a chess allegory or as a psychological novel about the chessmaster going mad (Tammi 1985: 135–145; Johnson 1985: 86–92; Field 1986: 131). D. Barton Johnson's astute analysis discloses a parallel between the double Rook sacrifice in the Anderssen–Kieseretsky game (Johnson 1985: 89) and a literary strategy of *The Defense*. The reference to the Anderssen–Kieseretsky game is telling: Anderssen's impressive victory demonstrated that material (numerical) superiority is less important in chess than dynamics and mobility. Nabokov "rewrites" the Romantic-Symbolist conflict between the inner world and the external reality. The mental and the physical dimension of Luzhin's personality are not totally separated. Despite the split which, according to Julian Connolly, isolates not only Luzhin's physical self from his cerebral self, but the protagonist from the

author (Connolly 1993: 85–87), there is a permanent exchange and infiltration between the different aspects of reality. Either the mental or the physical dimension becomes “visible” within the changing focus of the narrator’s attention. In the light of these oppositions, the ending of the novel may be read not as a suicide but as a “vanishing trick” that Luzhin performs to escape visibility and the material inertia of the surrounding world, which are in the chess world the synonyms for death.

In *Invitation to a Beheading*, the size of the still unread part of a book is associated with the duration of the protagonist’s life (see Alexandrov 1999: 121). The diegetic world, where the character lives, is overtly artificial: it is a space of theatre or circus. The extradiegetic world, where he finds himself after his death, is akin to Uspensky’s “fourth dimension” (Alexandrov 1999: 105–131). As Vladimir Alexandrov points out, Pyotr Uspensky’s three-dimensional world is a provisional realm, where nature reveals its transcendental intention through theatrical devices and mimicry (Alexandrov 1999: 272–274). Cincinnatus, as a being who belongs to the fourth dimension, is “opaque” for the three-dimensional world creatures. Uspensky refers to his predecessor Hinton, while speaking of beings that live in the three-dimensional world but are able to perceive the fourth dimension as well (Uspensky 1992: 12). Cincinnatus only partly belongs to three-dimensionality:

[...] it was as if one side of his being slid into another dimension, as all the complexity of a tree’s foliage passes from shade into radiance, so that you cannot distinguish just where begins the submergence into the shimmer of a different element. (*IB*, 103)

The play of shade and light on the foliage is a manifestation of living and shimmering substance of the world, which is contrasted with its dead mechanical imitations.

Furthermore, a parallel is drawn between the mechanical imitations of living reality and obsolete fictional techniques. In prison Cincinnatus reads the book *Quercus*, a biography of an oak tree, a detailed enumeration of all events witnessed by it, accompanied by extensive “dendrological, ornithological, coleopterological and mythological” commentaries. In Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando* the



protagonist is writing the book *Oak Tree*. Nabokov's negative reaction to *Orlando* in a letter to Z. Shakhovskaya is well known (Boyd 1990: 402). The object of Nabokov's parody is the immobile outside point of view in narration: "It seemed as though the author were sitting with his camera somewhere among the topmost branches of the *Quercus*, spying out and catching his prey" (IB, 104). In Woolf's novel *Orlando* ties his heart to the oak-tree and centuries pass before his eyes without him changing. As is known from Woolf's diaries, *Orlando* is meant to be a playful and parodistic book: "My own lyric vein is to be satirised" (cit. in: Graham 1961: 349). The narrator in *Orlando* is developed into a parody on Woolf's favorite device of "contemplative consciousness" or "the mind in solitude". The oak tree, to which *Orlando* ties his heart, evidently refers to a huge amount of English pseudo-historical "oak books" appearing in the late 19<sup>th</sup>–early 20<sup>th</sup> century: W. Harrison Ainsworth's *Boscobel, or the Royal Oak. A Tale of the Year 1651* (L., 1874); L. Lusk's *Sussex Oak. A Romance of the Forest Ridge of Sussex* (L., 1912); Ch. Mosley's *The Oak. Its Natural History, Antiquity and Folk-Lore* (L., 1910); Emily Taylor's of New Buckenham *Chronicles of an Old English Oak, or Sketches of English Life and History* (L., 1860). Isabella Burt's *Oak Book* comprises a detailed enumeration of events witnessed by a tree:

Surely no object, by art or nature, is more suggestive of the reminiscences of by-gone ages than an aged tree. In gazing on an old oak, how many visions of other days glide before the mental view. Fancy pictures the face of the country when that old tree was a sapling [...] or imagination presents the haughty, unscrupulous baron, with his half-British retainers, rushing by in pursuit of the wild animals [...]. Ages roll on [...] and new generations disport themselves around the old oak [...]. Long lines of pack-horses, with numberless well-mounted (and well-armed) pedestrians, and the nobles travelling, with their numerous well-appointed retinue, might have been seen. (Burt 1860: 69–70)

It may be that Nabokov did not notice or was not willing to notice the parodic character of Woolf's book and implicitly placed it among the other English *Oak Books*. There is a description of

successive events from the immobile point of view in the Nabokovian parodic *Quercus* that recalls similar passages in *Oak Books*:

Employing the gradual development of the tree (growing lone and mighty at the edge of a canyon at whose bottom the waters never ceased to din), the author unfolded all the historic events — or shadows of events — of which the oak could have been a witness; now it was a dialogue between two warriors [...]; now highwaymen stopping by and the song of a wild-haired fugitive damsel; now, beneath the storm's blue zigzag, the hasty passage of a lord escaping from royal wrath..., etc. (*IB*, 105)

In *Bend Sinister* translations of Shakespeare's works are compared with a perfect mechanical imitation of a living oak-tree: they are, like *Quercus*, systems without history, mechanical devices ineptly imitating changing reality, individuality and duration.

The parodic metaphor of the immobile “cameraman” in *Quercus* is symptomatic of Nabokov's strategies. Nabokov avoids fixation on the immobile point of view. He employs different experimental forms of relationships between the “inside” and the “outside”: the “other dimension” in *Invitation to a Beheading* or *The Defense*, “nodality” in *Bend Sinister*, and the Möbius strip in *The Gift*.

In her letter to Walter Minton of June 15, 1960 Véra Nabokov wrote: “DAR consists of five chapters, four of these are written by the author (as “invisible observer”), the fifth (No. 4 in the sequence) purports to be the work of the main protagonist” (V. Nabokov. *Letters to G. P. Putnam's sons*). Véra Nabokov's letters written on behalf of her husband were authorized by Nabokov himself. Therefore the letter serves as evidence, which settles the question of the relationship between the auctorial narrator and the protagonist of *The Gift* in favor of advocates of the auctorial presence (Tammi, Dolinin) contra, for example, Yuri Levin who argues that the whole novel is written by the protagonist. However, both sides agree that the protagonist participates in the auctorial function and is “more” than a character: the novel is wrapped up in itself, it is both the “cover” and the “content” (Levin 1981, reprinted in Levin 1998); “the novel being read is at the same time

the novel to be written” (Ronen 1981: 378). Tammi writes of “an innovative reapplication of the standard functions belonging to narrator and character, illustrating in the end a peculiar fusion of the two principally divergent agents” (Tammi 1985: 82). Although the auctorial narrator as the external consciousness retains control over the narrative, the protagonist, who is in the process of his artistic development, takes part in the auctorial function (Tammi 1985: 86). Therefore one may speak of the “shared” point of view. The device remains implicit in classic realist narration (as “vision together”) and is consciously exposed in Nabokov’s novel as well as in other modernist texts, e.g. in André Gide. Nabokov might have learnt “a-text-within-a-text” technique from Gide, who incorporated a series of inner “mirrors” in his novels, drawing attention to the relationship between the author and his creation (the *mise-en-abyme* device; Dällenbach 1989, Livak 2003: 174).

There is every reason to speak of the anticipation of the experimental prose of the 1950–1990s (Robbe-Grillet, Pynchon, etc.) in Nabokov’s fiction. On the other hand, the metafictional recentering is not rare in modernist fiction, e.g. in Gide’s, the Serapions’ prose or in Konstantin Vaginov’s *The Goat’s Song*, either. The identity of the character matters less than his “relational value” in the system of overlapping fictional worlds and the perceptual positions available in these worlds.

Nabokov’s narrator demonstrates his method by “invading” the character:

[...] I made the slightest of motions, as if nudging my soul to start it sliding downhill, and glided inside Pal Palych, made myself comfortable inside him, and felt from within, as it were, that growth on his wrinkly eyelid, the starched winglets of his collar, and the fly crawling across his bald spot. I examined all of him with limpid, mobile eyes. The yellow lion over the bed now seemed an old acquaintance, as if it had been on my wall since childhood. The coloured postcard, enclosed in its convex glass, became extraordinary, graceful and joyous. It was not you sitting in front of me, in the low wicker armchair to which my back had grown accustomed, but the benefactress of the school, a taciturn lady I hardly knew. And right away, with the same lightness of movement, I glided into you too, perceived the ribbon of a garter above your knee and, a little higher,

the tickle of batiste, and thought, in your stead, that is was boring, it was hot, one wanted to smoke. At that instant you produced a gold case from your purse and inserted a cigarette into your holder. And I was within everything — you, the cigarette, the holder, Pal Palych scrabbling awkwardly with his match, the glass paperweight, the dead bumblebee on the windowsill. (*Sounds: Stories*, 19)

Similar devices are employed in the short story *Recruiting* and in *The Gift*, where “the maturing of the hero’s literary gift is directly associated with his capacity to adopt the vantage point of other C-agents inhabiting the novelistic world” (Tammi 1985: 59). In this case Nabokov might have been influenced by Bergson’s theory of absolute knowledge, i.e. “a kind of intellectual sympathy by which one places oneself *within* an object in order to coincide with what is unique in it and consequently inexpressible” (H. Bergson. *An Introduction to Metaphysics*; cit. in: Kern 1983: 24–25). There is also a similar passage in Flaubert’s letter of December 23, 1853 to Louise Colet, where the writer speaks of the pleasure of quitting his own personality and “settling” in every character or thing being described (Flaubert 1984: 332).

The main structural idea of *The Gift* is tension between the “otherworld” and “the real” vision, between the extradiegetic space of the auctorial narrator and the diegetic space of the protagonist, the fictional “inside” and “outside”. The metaphor of “the house of being”, which is to shatter after death and to disclose a limitless vision of “the eye”, shapes interplay of these meanings. The Nabokovian “house of being” is an analogue for Henry James’s famous metaphor of the “house of fiction”. In Nabokov’s novel the author-narrator is either “outside” or “inside” the “house”: alteration of his position brings about shifts in perspective and generates different configurations of transparency and opacity, visibility and invisibility. The character is either “transparent” or “opaque” depending on his and the narrator’s position within the diegetic/extradiegetic space. Thus, a “shadowy youth”, Yasha, is present at the meeting at Chernyshevsky’s. He is invisible for everyone except the narrator and Aleksander Yakovlevich, who is mad and therefore, like Falter in *Ultima Thule*, sensitive to the “otherworld”. In the room Yasha is seen anamorphically: “The shadows of two volumes

standing on the desk mimicked a cuff and the corner of a lapel, while the shadow of a third volume, which was leaning against the others, might have passed for a necktie” (*The Gift*, 39). Further, as if the “otherworld” and “this world” change places, Yasha is becoming more solid than all sitting in the room:

The sofa could be seen through Vasiliev and the pale girl! Kern, the engineer, was represented only by the glint of his pince-nez; so was Lyubov Markovna; and Fyodor himself existed only because of a vague congruity with the deceased — while Yasha was perfectly real and live, and only the instinct of self-preservation prevented one from taking a good look at his features. (*The Gift*, 40)

Fade-out or optical disappearance of guests closes the meeting: “And now they all began gradually to grow less distinct, to ripple with the random agitation of a fog, and then to vanish altogether; their outlines, weaving in figure-eight patterns, were evaporating, though here and there a bright point still glowed...” (*The Gift*, 56). Finally, Yasha reappears, as if thinking that his father is already gone, which means that he is again visible only for Aleksander Yakovlevich and the narrator.

The “house” is both the real house where Fyodor is going to live and the “house” of the novel being written by him, and also the novel (*The Gift*) itself. Therefore the motive of “keys”, pointed out by D. B. Johnson, becomes especially significant (Johnson 1982: 193–194; Johnson 1985: 96–101). It is also the “earthly house”, where “windows are replaced by mirrors; the door, until a given time, is closed; but air comes in through the cracks” (*The Gift*, 294).<sup>23</sup>

Fictional space is the “reverse side” of the extradiegetic reality, which, in its turn, partakes in another higher reality. Movement along the Möbius strip (Ronen 1981) or the reversed “eight”-

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<sup>23</sup> There is an interesting parallel for Nabokov’s favourite motif of “lost keys” — Mark Aldanov’s favourite saying reported by another émigré writer Vasili Yanovsky in his memoirs *Les Champs Elysée* (*Поля Елисейские*). Aldanov was Nabokov’s friend and correspondent. According to Yanovsky, he used to say: “The key to *War and Peace* is lost and impossible to find”. Yanovsky comments: “Every work of literature was supposed to have a key. If Mark Alexandrovich has not succeeded in finding it, nobody else could find it” (Yanovsky 2000: 324).

shaped symbol of infinity constantly recurs in the novel: “the conversation you are carrying on while your mind runs around you’re the outside of your own words and along the inside of those of your interlocutor”; random thoughts as well as details of the physical world form together “the reverse side of a magnificent fabric, on the front of which there gradually formed and became alive images invisible to him” (*The Gift*, 158, 298).

The “Möbius strip”, “eight”, “ampersand”, “lemniscate” and “hourglass” are different versions of the infinity symbol in Nabokov’s fiction. In *Bend Sinister*, the hourglass, which resembles the mathematical emblem of infinity, is one of the “signs and symbols associated with the point of contact between the novel’s two worlds” (Johnson 1985: 197). The soldiers of the totalitarian regime do not let the philosopher Krug in the city. The south side guard demands the signature of the north side guard, whereas the north side soldiers can not read and write. “Doomed to walk back and forth on a bridge which has ceased to be one since neither bank is really attainable. Not a bridge but an hourglass which somebody keeps reversing, with me, the fluent fine sand, inside” (*BS*, 24). The hourglass is a metaphor for measured infinity like a verse line, a unit of poetry (another metaphor for the bridge, “a line of lights with a certain lilt, a metrical incandescence with every foot rescanned and prolonged by reflections in the black snaky water”, *BS* 17). In *Creative Evolution*, Bergson says: “It is not easy to get rid of the image of the hourglass while thinking about time” (Bergson 1913: 21).

The hourglass is an ambiguous symbol. If the movement of sand is identified with the direction of historical time, it turns out that measurable time runs towards the future, the future is being filled and the past disappearing. On the other hand, the hourglass visually demonstrates that the future and the past consist of the same matter and that the idea of time is conventional. Being perceived as a visual image or icon, the hourglass represents the reverse time of human life (as depicted in the first chapter of *The Gift*): the diminishing future, the replenishing past. Time is reversible neither in the mathematical nor in the physical sense, but in terms of human perception: “What we are now trying (unsuccessfully) to do is to fill the abyss we have safely crossed

with terrors borrowed from the abyss in front, which abyss is borrowed itself from the infinite past. Thus we live in a stocking which is in the process of being turned inside out, without ever knowing for sure to what phase of the process our moment of consciousness corresponds” (*BS*, 161).

As for the other attributes of the “house of being”, the non-transparent window, a window turned by night darkness into a mirror, which unifies “the viewer and the view” (*Pale Fire*), is a leitmotif of Nabokov’s fiction. In modern art theory the non-transparent window is a symbol of the immediate, primordial space, which precedes the subject/object, inside/outside divisions and which is characteristic of modern painting (Yampolsky 2001: 20–26). The mirror world behind the window is also the interior world reversed and projected outside, into “the exterior darkness, whither the brighter portions of various household objects have already crossed to take up tentative positions on different levels of the helplessly black garden” (*The Gift*, 17). And

if, according to the Swabian code, an insulted actor was permitted to seek satisfaction by striking the shadow of the offender, in China, it was respectively an actor — a shadow — who fulfilled the duties of executioner, all responsibility being as it were lifted from the world of men and transformed into the inside-out one of mirrors. (*The Gift*, 193)

Thus, the form of the Möbius strip is repeated on the different levels of narrative hierarchy. It also bears on the author-narrator and protagonist relationship and the alternation of personal forms. Fyodor does not want “to invade alien worlds for the purpose of discovering a place for himself” (*The Gift*, 136). Likewise, a personified narrator is formally absent in the novel. It would be formally not impossible to consider the novel to be written by Fyodor with the alternation of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> person, as Yuri Levin does. However, the elements of the author’s mythopoeia incorporated into the fictional world are too apparent to ignore them: the author-narrator and the protagonist are two sides of the same texture. The first person is an epitome of their linkage: in the first-

person fragments the distance between the auctorial narrator and the protagonist is minimal. However, “although the narrating “I” on the extradiegetic level has a clear and intimate connection with the character Fyodor on the diegetic level”, as Julian Connolly remarks, “the[ir] identity is not precisely congruent”: the auctorial component undergoes the process of evolution and eventually gains the full control over the text (Connolly 1993: 198–199).

The “Möbius strip” form of Nabokov’s novel discloses the split between narration and narrative. They are paradoxically separate and inseparable: “...each is part of the other, like the front and back sides of a sheet of paper” (Branigan 1984: 4). The relationship between narration and narrative is a basic problem of narratological theory further developed by psychoanalysis of the film as “(1) a play of presence/absence between the author as subject and a narrator, i.e., any of the author’s representatives in the text” and “(2) a play of identity/difference between the viewer as subject and a narrate, i.e., any of the viewer’s representatives in the text” (Branigan 1984: 11).

The “cracks” in the earthly house are reminiscent of the “cracks” in human vision in the three-dimensional world described by P. Uspensky in *Tertium Organum* (Uspensky 1992: 22, 28): man sees reality through the “cracks” of the present. The “air”, which passes through the earthly house, is both a draught of the otherworld, to which Aleksander Yakovlevich is sensitive, and the draught of poetry: poetry permeates the “house of fiction”.

Thus, the novel imitates the universe: multiple worlds are embedded one within another. The author-narrator’s world merges with the protagonist’s world. In chapter 5 of *Speak, Memory* Nabokov establishes a reverse proportion between the fact and fiction: having been fictionalized, a fact fades, loses its personal color and becomes associated with the fictional character. In *The Gift*, the real world metamorphoses into the fictional and the fictional world assumes the form of the real. Poetry mingles with prose, the otherworld filters into the earthly reality. The story of father’s travels intertwines with Pushkin’s documentary prose, the Chernyshevskys’ story with the book on Chernyshevsky, love for Zina with *The Gift* (see Davydov 1982; Paperno 1997). Finally, all



these worlds intertwine as different forms of writing and maturing literary self-consciousness (see Tammi 1985: 84 on *The Gift* as a *Künstlerroman*).

Chernyshevsky's utilitarian thesis on the superiority of life over art is subverted by a playful reversal of the direction of mimesis, when the real space imitates the fictional one. Actually it is a double reversal: the "authentic" fictional or imaginary reality imitates another fictional space. Thus, Tannenber Street, the protagonist's new place of residence, begins with a post office and ends with a church, "like an epistolary novel" (*The Gift*, 12); a sequence of shops on the street follows "its own law of composition" or forms "a typical line" (13). The paragraph in Fyodor's book hangs "over a precipice with a boarded window and a crumbling porch" (197). "A long dotted line of beautiful days" is interrupted "by the interjection of a thunderstorm" (310). The St. Petersburg of memory is "restored here and there [...] according to the best pictures of our national painters" (26). The blue in Fyodor's poem is hardly inferior to remembrance of blueness (33). The trees in the park reveal "immense talent" in miming their own ghosts (26). The blankness of wood, being "transferred to paper, would satisfy the water colorist only as long as the paint remained wet" (81). A Chinese person throws water over the reflection of flames on the wall of his house (120). Closed, limited space (as related to the motif of short-sightedness) is unbalanced by the phenomena of disturbed or polarized vision and *tromp d'oeil* that causes the decentering of the observer and his immersion into the world "substance", where 'fiction' mingles with the 'reality'.

For Andrei Bely, the mirror was an emblem of the reversibility of mimetic relations of art and life and therefore a source of ontological anxiety and panic:

If art is a copy of life, it is superfluous in the presence of the original... If, however, life exists for the sake of art, it exists for the sake of reflection that meets me each time that I approach the mirror... And yet, I don't know — perhaps those who say that life exists for art are right, because we may turn out to be not people, but only their reflections. And it is not we who approach a mirror, but it is the reflection of someone unknown who approaches me from the other

side and increases in size on the mirror's surface. So that actually, we neither go anywhere, nor come from anywhere, but merely expand and contract on the surface, all the while remaining on the same plane. (A. Bely's *Third Symphony*; cit. in Maslenikov 1957: 45)

Being already considerably detached from the Symbolist sources, Nabokov turns this reversibility into a source of purely aesthetic bliss or anxiety, making possible in fiction what is impossible in life.

### ***Bend Sinister* as a multilayer dream**

Or is "outer" and "inner" an illusion too, so  
that a great mountain may be said to stand a  
thousand dreams high and hope and terror  
can be as easily charted as the capes and bays  
they helped to name? (*BS*, 146)

Nabokov's *Bend Sinister* has been judged by critics as a strange or not quite successful text. There were few critical responses to it in 1947 when it was published, and it still engenders certain critical perplexity, although a number of scholars have paid close attention to it. D. B. Johnson's thematic analysis (Johnson 1985: 185–123) and P. Tammi's narratological analysis in terms of the auctorial "incomplete control" over the text (Tammi 1985: 115–125) are especially revealing. Nabokov himself defined the novel as an author's fantasy (*BS*, 6–7) and repudiated any connection with political or social problems of the time. However, despite the author's desire to forestall political interpretations of the novel, the latter has been accepted as a parallel to Nabokov's other anti-totalitarian texts (*Invitation to a Beheading*, *Tyrants Destroyed*, etc.). In the Introduction of 1963, Nabokov denied any didactic or allegorical goal, any serious idea, but admitted that "certain reflections in the glass directly caused by the idiotic and despicable regimes" can be distinguished in the book: "worlds of tyranny and torture, of Fascists and Bolshevists, of Philistine thinkers and jack-booted baboons" (*BS*, 6).

The text of the novel might be understood as a system of contrastive, antonymous isotopies, which both maintain and undermine the “social message”. It is an example of modernist “negative aesthetics”. Adorno’s method of negative aesthetics is itself a part of the modernist paradigm and its “otherness” in respect to the 19<sup>th</sup> century humanist and positivist culture (see Adorno 1997). As evident from Eysteinnsson’s comment on Adorno’s work, the modernist method consists in the radical subjectification of the objective reality:

[...] while subjective experience is to be mediated through objectification, that is, as an objective gestalt [...], this objectification, in order to express the negativity of experience, must be constructed in a radically “subjective” manner — it must not take the shape of “rationalized” objective representation to which as social beings we are accustomed. Thus, on the level of representation [...] the outside world is forcefully objectified through all the surface elements familiar to us, but on another level this objectification does not concur with our habitualized perception of the “objective” world, and hence takes on the shape of a radically subjective construct. (Eysteinnsson 1990: 43)

In Nabokov’s novel, the closed world of ideology, comprising elements of fascism, communism and mass psychology, is deconstructed in the alternative worlds of character’s thoughts, recollections and dreams. The philosopher Adam Krug refuses to accept the language of “social conspiracy” since the people involved in this “conspiracy” (classmates, colleagues and acquaintances) belong to his personal world. The very convention of “reality”, the shared world of human relations and meanings, is corrupted and used by the totalitarian regime for its own purposes (“the diabolical method [...] of tying a rebel to his wretched country by his own twisted heartstrings” — *BS*, 7). It assumes a form of social conspiracy. Krug’s philosophical method is defined as “creative destruction” of any closed, complete, and therefore mythological system; scientific metaphors are crucial in this deconstruction. Tension between the alternative worlds, the world of false social solidarity and the world of shared human thought and emotion, reaches its peak in the episode of the protagonist’s death, while, to

subdue the dictator, Krug attempts to turn the prison yard situation into a school game or fight. At that point the narration opens onto the level of the author-narrator whose presence permeates the protagonist's world. The internal, "virtual, private, fleeting" story (Jahn 2003) erodes the external story from the inside and puts its "physical, recordable, public, permanent" status under question. The "author" is eventually problematized as a threshold figure ("both an agent responsible for the text and a position within it"; Ginsburg & Rimmon-Kenan 1999: 72), and, finally, the metaleptic blending of the author and the character dispels the mimetic illusion altogether.

According to the Introduction, "the greater part of the book was composed in the winter and spring of 1945–46" (*BS*, 5), but work on it had already begun in 1942. Certain published and unpublished documents from the time should be appropriately related to the novel since they point at its key motifs and metaphors. On February 4, 1944, the *New York Browning Society* invited Nabokov to give a talk and sent him a leaflet containing the schedule of meetings and the description of lectures. The Society was founded to study and popularize Robert Browning's life and works, but it was engaged in other educational activities as well. As one can learn from the leaflet, German culture was a focus of the Society's interests in 1944. The description includes a report on Prof. Schneider's lecture on German philosophy accompanied by some observations on totalitarian elements in German philosophical thought from Hegel to Nietzsche. The editor of the leaflet remarks:

[...] though it is a strange indictment to bring against philosophers, of all people, very humbly I would suggest that the German people are less to blame for misapplication of their ideas than are philosophers to blame for failing to see the logical and natural outcome of those ideas, when translated into action.

Thus, philosophy is seen as a practical activity or spiritual leadership. The philosophical image of Adam Krug, a solitary, free hunter in the kingdom of thought, might have been consciously opposed to this "applied" philosophy. The leaflet ends with the following statement:

The German people must save themselves. The final picture cannot be that of a fully armed, powerful world force holding Germany in subjection — the final picture must be that of an aroused higher Germany, armed with the might of truth and right, standing, as does the higher nature of man in George Gray Barnard's famous statue, upon the vanquished form of her own cruel, bestial, depraved nature.

Miss Henrietta Green closed our December meeting with the singing of Schubert's *Gretchen am Spinnrode*. In the last plaintive notes of that fresh, youthful voice, in the words *Mein Herz ist sehr*, one could fancy that one heard the pathetic cry of the submerged, tortured Germany, the gentle, kindly, friendly Germany, pleading for a chance to survive. That it be given a chance, is as important for the rest of the world as it is for Germany. (*Letters to and from miscellaneous correspondents*, folder 118)

The outlook for the future rebirth overshadows the ominous historical events, the actual historical tragedy of Germany related to *similar* ideas of national rebirth and might. Nabokov's fierce anti-German response that evokes the literal, biological meaning of "nature" is the obvious reaction to the "metaphysical" phraseology and presumed political innocence of the leaflet:

I have lived in Germany for 17 years and am quite sure Gretchen has been thoroughly consoled by the secondhand, somewhat bloodstained, but still quite wearable frocks that her soldier friend sent her from the Polish ghettos. No, I am afraid we shall never see the Barnard statue in a German impersonation. It is useless looking at a hyena and hoping that one day domestication or a benevolent gene will turn the creature into a great soft purring tortoiseshell cat. Gelding and Mendelism, alas, have their limits. Let us chloroform it — and forget. (*SL*, 47–48)

The letter is directed against a straightforward idealistic interpretation of the European situation. George Gray Barnard's name is a symbol of democracy: the artist was famous for his sculptural illustrations of the American democracy (*Struggle of the Two Natures in Man*, 31 allegorical figures *Broken Laws* and *Laws We Keep*, the statue of Lincoln). In *Bend Sinister*, "a tortoiseshell cat", as a metaphor for a "domestic" and "gentle" Germany appears in the episode of an emergency session at the University President's place (*BS*, 43–44). It is probably worth noting that in the Soviet

tradition the sentimental dictator and a cat are the usual pair in children's literature on Lenin. The "Gretchen" metaphor is also used in the novel — transmuted into the Bachofen sisters, outwardly erotic and submissive, actually cruel, practical and deceitful. Mariette Bachofen exposed to the violence of soldiers embodies "the gentle, kindly, friendly Germany, pleading for a chance to survive". The theme of Nazism as violence inflicted "on the gentle, cultured German people" (Boyd 1992: 86) emerges also in *Double Talk* and *Pnin*. The end of the following passage evokes the style of the leaflet and questions the understanding of culture as an autonomous, self-sufficient entity:

[...] she was selected to die and was cremated only a few days after her arrival in Buchenwald, in the beautifully wooded Grosser Ettersberg, as the region is resoundingly called. It is an hour's stroll from Weimar, where walked Goethe, Herder, Schiller; Wieland, the inimitable Kotzebue and others. "*Aber warum* — but why " — Dr Hagen, the gentlest of souls alive, would wail, "why had one to put that horrid camp so near!" for indeed, it was near — only five miles from the cultural heart of Germany — "that nation of the universities", as the President of Waindell College, renowned for his use of the *mot juste*, had so elegantly phrased it when reviewing the European situation in a recent Commencement speech, along with the compliment he paid another torture house, "Russia — the country of Tolstoy, Stanislavski, Raskolnikov, and other great and good men". (*Pnin*, 113)

Nabokov cites approvingly the following idea of the leaflet: "In Goethe, it is true, were found what seemed to be fundamental flaws in character, flaws which seem also to be inherent in the type of German now in power" (*Letters to and from miscellaneous correspondents*, folder 118). *Bend Sinister* is permeated by polemical allusions and references to Goethe, such as a periphrasis of the famous Goethe's statement: "I am born to lead as naturally as a bird flies" (*BS*, 27). The story of the production of *Hamlet* in the State Theatre where "Osric and Fortinbras have acquired a tremendous ascendancy over the rest of the cast" (*BS*, 96) obviously refers to the staging in *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*: the actress and the producer, "like Goethe, imagine Ophelia in the guise of a canned peach: 'her whole being floats in sweet ripe passion'", says

Johann Wolfgang, Ger.poet, nov., dram.& phil. Oh, horrible” (*BS*, 104). The officially sanctioned interpretation of *Hamlet* as “a play founded upon young Fortinbras’ attempt to recover the lands lost by his father” with clear racist and anti-Semitic connotations (*BS*, 97) may be read as, among other things, a *reductio ad absurdum* of Wilhelm Meister’s version of Shakespeare where an essential part of action is transferred to Norway and Hamlet is a blond and blue-eyed Nordic hero.

All these allusions and explicit statements by Nabokov are, of course, obvious “social comments”. Yet in Nabokov’s own words, *Bend Sinister* is primarily a story of the character and its author. Nabokov’s letter to his fellow-émigré Zenzinov (March 17, 1945) indicates a contradiction underlying Adam Krug’s story, one that can be redescribed, in Richard Rorty’s terms, as the theoretical incompatibility of “private autonomy” and “solidarity” (Rorty 1989). Nabokov’s indignant remark was provoked by Vasili Maklakov’s, the official representative’s of the Russian émigrés in France, visit to the Soviet embassy. During the reception in the embassy, Maklakov drunk a toast “to the motherland, to the Red Army, to Stalin”:

I can understand denying one’s principles in one exceptional case: if they told me that those closest to me would be tortured [to death — *M. G.*] or spared according to my reply, I would immediately consent to anything, ideological treachery [betrayal of principles — *M. G.*] or foul deeds and would even apply myself lovingly to the parting on Stalin’s backside. (Boyd 1992: 84)

In Nabokov’s opinion, Maklakov was not put in a hopeless position, which would make the betrayal inevitable: it was rather a false feeling of solidarity that prompted Maklakov to glorify Stalin in the Soviet embassy.

The novel’s metaphors of a “mug” (the name Krug meaning not only a perfect “circle” in Russian but also a “mug” in *German*; the Russian word for a “mug” is *krushka*, which can also be playfully interpreted as a diminutive of “krug”) and a “handle” (a vulnerable point, a lever to handle, to manipulate a man) are reverberations of Nabokov’s letter to Zenzinov which presents personal fears and commitments as more powerful than social conventions. What is

called “historical necessity” consists of personal feelings and commitments. One should not be misled by “common goals”. The “social” and “personal” meanings are often polemically juxtaposed in the Nabokovian metaphors. For example, the episode of Krug’s death, which might be regarded as heroic martyrdom, is shaped as a schoolboys’ game or fight. The episode might contain the real facts metamorphosed: a mutilation of a Tenishev school student during a football game or Nabokov’s own football trauma in Berlin in 1932, where the Russian club played with a rather aggressive team of German workers (Leving 1999: 131).

There is also a possible literary subtext to the episode, a fragment from Pascal’s *Thoughts*:

How does it happen that this man, so distressed at the death of his wife and his only son, or who has some great lawsuit which annoys him, is not at this moment sad, and that he seems so free from all painful and disquieting thoughts? We need not wonder, for a ball has been served for him, and he must return it to his companion. He is occupied in catching it in its fall from the roof, to win a game. How can he think of his own affairs, pray, when he has this other matter in hand? Here is a care worthy of occupying this great soul and taking away from him every other thought of the mind. [...] And if he does not lower himself to this and wants always to be on the strain, he will be more foolish still, because he would raise himself above humanity; and after all, he is only a man, that is to say capable of little and of much, of all and of nothing; he is neither angel, nor brute, but man. (Pascal 1952, f. 140; 1963, f. 522)

A game has both a metaphysical and aesthetical meaning: it offers a possibility to act at random, to play by guess in the situation of Deus absconditus or “uncertainty of the sentence” (in Pascal’s terms), to act as if one’s own principles were absolute while knowing their relativity (the Pascalean theory of probability). In the game episode Krug loses his permanent characteristics of heaviness and inertia and becomes, like King Lear, “only a man”.

The moment of death is especially significant as a realization of the Nabokovian theme of crossing a border (Levin 1998: 323–352): a process of passage resists any general interpretations and the very idea of passage is usually eclipsed by sharp sensory



impressions. For example, Nabokov's poem *The Execution* (1928) equates shooting (execution) with a photographic flash (see Emerson 1912; Barthes 1981 on photography as death; cf. also the simultaneity of the photographic flash with death in *Transparent Things*). The wordplay is apparently based upon the different meanings of the English verb "shoot": "to hit or kill with firearms", "to take shots/pictures", "to send a ball (in sports)".

Certain letters of 1944 reveal author's personal concerns as possibly contributing to the shape of the novel's plot. It is clear, for example, from the letters of Dr. Leon Dinkin (*Letters to and from miscellaneous correspondents*, folder 42) that the Nabokovs consulted him about their son's health in 1944 (a stomach-ache of uncertain origin). "Exploratory laparotomy" (incision into the abdomen) was suggested by doctors, but Dinkin was resolutely against it and offered to bring Dmitri to New York for further observation under his control. Dmitri might even enter some New York school: "It may sound monstrous to you, but it is still better than eviscerate him, excuse me for such a word. I am definitely against the surgery" [translation is mine — *M. G.*]. It is noteworthy that Nabokov sent a copy of *Bend Sinister* to Dinkin. The doctor thanks him for it in his letter of August 20, 1947, and reports: "I read it through one evening and half of the night and did not sleep the rest of the night. It is really sinister". Evidently, the "horrors" of radical medicine may have no less impact on an individual sensitivity than the violence of totalitarian rule that uses "the diabolical method [...] of tying a rebel to his own wretched country by his own twisted heartstrings" (*BS*, 7). A "release game", one of the most gory episodes of *Bend Sinister*, combines the aforementioned meanings (the cruelty of school games, medical horrors) with the rudeness and falsity of imaginary psychoanalytical manipulations aimed at the release of the "collective unconscious". Thus "personal" (biographical) and "social" (historical, cultural, and philosophical) subtexts are systematically brought together in Nabokov's work into singular polygenetic textual constructions (see Tammi 1999: 34–64 on Nabokov's polygenetism).

In April 1946, Nabokov received a letter from Mikhail Kaminaka. From this and the letters that followed (*Letters to and from*

*miscellaneous correspondents*, folder 83) he learned about the destiny of his Berlin friends and acquaintances. Mikhail Kaminka was a former Tenishev student like Nabokov. His father, August Kaminka, a prominent Russian lawyer, scholar and political figure, fled to Berlin from the Bolshevik regime. Mikhail describes the death of his father in a German camp in Latvia: it is evident from the letter that he had stayed in the camp voluntarily, despite a permit to go free obtained by his wife from the German authorities. Mikhail expresses the hope that his father could have used the poison he had prepared in case of Bolshevik arrest (the fragment of the letter published in Grishakova 2004). But, according to Kaminka's letter, the Soviets, who entered the Baltics on the eve of the war, turned out to be tolerant to both A. Kaminka and Nikolai Vasilievich (Yakovlev?). These men took refuge in the Baltic after they left Berlin and soon found themselves between the two dangerous regimes. Their fates were different.

The philosopher Grigori Landau, mentioned in Mikhail Kaminka's letter, was another prominent émigré figure. In my opinion, he might have been one of the possible prototypes for Adam Krug, the philosopher who started with the philosophy of history and ended as an aphorist (cf. Landau's *The Twilight of Europe* and *Epigraphs*). The Bolsheviks invited him to return to Russia and offered collaboration. M. Kaminka assumes that he might have been then subjected to "Gletkin" tortures (see Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*) or, to the contrary, might have been one of the very few Jews who survived in Latvia. Now it is known that Landau died in the Soviet camp in Siberia (Ravdin 1994).

Adam Krug's "intermediary" position on the bridge is a metaphor for the "in-betweenness" or, in other words, indefinite status of Russian émigré life and a key image highlighting multiple counterpositions inherent in the novel: between the English and the Slavic- or German-speaking world, between reality and dream, life and death, body and consciousness, "autonomy" and "solidarity". One may read these contrasts in the context of Landau's small philosophical treatise *The Twilight of Europe*, which deals with the inner tensions of Europe between the two world wars. It also elucidates the reasons of Nabokov's distrust for populist slogans, which

sometimes disguise totalitarianism. According to Landau, in World War I the allies destroyed Germany in the name of the ideal, ahistorical aim of “absolute peace”. They proclaimed this sacred idea rather than their own profit or benefit the genuine goal of the war. It was not a war against Germany but a war against the premises of any future war and injustice nesting in Germany. Pacifism itself became a tool of the war that was meant to make all dreamers and compassionate people not indifferent to the suffering of other human beings to side with the enemies of Germany. One could name such an ideological challenge the “abuse of solidarity” — in terms of Rorty’s understanding of “solidarity” as a capacity to empathize with other people’s suffering and humiliation (Rorty 1989).

Landau presumes that the easy birth and spread of “absolute” (radical) ideas are maintained by the common history and common space of modern Europe. The rapid development of European culture has produced a tight network of extremely intense communications and the feeling that any goal is accessible. “Idealistic maximalism”, argues Landau, is inherent in the proud European culture. In creative work, this pride is justified: beneficial for “experts”, “creators” or “professionals”, it becomes dangerous in the minds of ignorant “public”. Mass culture is governed by approximation: it lacks the exact notions and weighted promises of experts. It is clear, says Landau, where this slope leads us when a crowd of professional leaders of society (politicians, journalists, preachers, ignorant writers and teachers) steps on it: the shepherds themselves belong to the herd. The common ground of contemporary communications produces the effect of “flatness”: the society overgrows old systems of thought developed by humankind by means of hard work and inherits only naivety instead of spontaneity and rationalism instead of wisdom. The masses imagine that it is easy to arrange the world according to their wishes. Landau’s essay anticipated the critique of modernity in the works of Hannah Arendt, Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer and other European intellectuals, who warned against dangers of technical instrumentalism of the Enlightenment, its “will to power” and the desire for mastery and control.

According to Landau, Germany had accumulated a considerable creative potential by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The defeat of Germany in the First World War was the defeat of Europe. The triumph of the masses had started. In *Bend Sinister*, the allegorical “Party of an Average Man”, “Ekwilist” teaching and all the symptoms of the oblivion of history and mental degeneration in the Padukgrad inhabitants mark the triumph of “mass mentality”. Aleksandr Dolinin wrote that the pathos of Landau’s discourse on European energies and creativity may have influenced the conception of *Glory* (Dolinin 1999: 206). *Bend Sinister* is, by contrast, permeated by anxious thoughts on European history, which are rather close to Landau’s reflections on the unstable balance between democracy and totalitarianism.

Landau’s thesis on the false idea of the all too easy accessibility of extreme goals, such as eternal peace, justice or harmony, could also attract Nabokov’s attention: the real growth of knowledge consists of the accumulation of axiomata media; intermediate steps. The utopianism of “ideal aims” destroys the living reality. The idea of the destructiveness of “idealistic maximalism” is also prominent in *Lolita* where it assumes the form of the Romantic-decadent solipsistic quest and fetishization of the lost beloved, the ‘eternal Lolita’.

Landau’s book contains polemics with Spengler’s notions of organic growth and decline of cultures (on polemics with Spengler in *Glory* and *The Gift*, cf. Dolinin 1999: 204–206). Landau argues that the highest functions of culture (such as philosophy, for example) contradict its “organic whole” and are possible thanks to the cultural potential, free from its organic (biological) basis. The superdevelopment and the supertension of an isolated function in an organism contradict its organic wholeness and may cause its destruction. However, contradiction is a necessary part of existence and dissatisfaction is a basic principle of it. The more developed a culture the sharper this tragic contradiction. Nabokov’s constant opposition to the utopian agendas, e.g. Marxism or psychoanalysis, that claim to be able to resolve contradictions or fulfil wishes, is well-known. A contradiction underlies the novel: Adam Krug’s heavy body belongs to the physical reality whereas his conscious-

ness strives for infinite freedom. The hypertrophied extrinsic self of the Nabokovian creative personality (Krug, Luzhin, John Shade) is a consequence of asceticism of the intrinsic self:

His misshapen body, that grey mop of abundant hair, the yellow nails of his pudgy fingers, the bags under his lusterless eyes, were only intelligible if regarded as the waste products eliminated from his intrinsic self by the same forces of perfection which purified and chiselled his verse. (*PF*, 23)

The contradiction is not so much an expression of the traditional Romantic-Symbolist dualism of nature (of the inward and outward reality): it is inscribed into scientific metaphors as well.

In the unpublished chapter of *Conclusive Evidence*, Nabokov, referring to himself in the third person, mentions “Mr. Nabokov’s method of referring to himself in the third person as ‘Sirin’”:

One is reminded of those problems of “objectivity” that the philosophy of science brings up. An observer makes a detailed picture of the whole universe, but when he has finished he realizes that it still lacks something: his own self. So he puts himself in too. But again a “self” remains outside and so forth, in an endless sequence of projections, like those advertisements that depict a girl holding a picture of herself holding a picture of herself holding a picture that only coarse printing prevents one’s eye from making out. (*CE*, 128; written in 1950)

The problem of objective knowledge arises together with the discovery by relativist physics of the impossibility to describe the world without including a human observer. The Einsteinian theory is based on the observations made by two or more observers but neglects the existence of the “last” outside observer: there must be the third (the fourth, the fifth, etc.) observer observing the previous observers.

In chapter 14 of *Bend Sinister* there is an allusion to the Einsteinian’s favorite example — an elevator — where the mental work of a “wary logician” is depicted as an excursion for “a carload of tourists”, “pressing on, surmounting all difficulties” and finally arriving at the starting point: “let us suppose that an elevator...” (*BS*, 146). In the Einsteinian example of elevators, the outside and

the inside system of observation are isolated. Two observations, irreconcilable and mutually exclusive, are still valid: “It is impossible to settle the differences between the outside and the inside observers. Each of them could claim the right to refer all events to his c.s. Both descriptions of events could be made equally consistent”. “These two descriptions, one by the outside, the other by the inside, observer, are quite consistent, and there is no possibility of deciding which of them is right” (Einstein and Infeld 1938: 229, 231). Krug’s neighbor, a former official, moves to live in the elevator to avoid arrest. One day, however, some “men” just draw the elevator out of the shaft and carry it away with “the observer” inside, obviously by the order of the authorities. Nabokov ironically “rewrites” an Einsteinian metaphor to show the relativity of the very notions of the “inside” and “outside”.

Krug’s dialogue with soldiers on the bridge is an ironical illustration of the Einsteinian system. The soldiers of the south side guard do not permit the philosopher to enter the city since his pass is not signed by the north side guard, whereas the north side soldiers can not sign the pass because of their inability to read and write. Krug tries to explain relativity theory for the soldiers since the latter are able to see the events only from the limited point of view as defined by the bureaucratic rules: “They of the solar side saw heliocentrically what you tellurians saw geocentrically, and unless these two aspects are somehow combined, I, the visualized object, must keep shuttling in the universal night” (*BS*, 25). The soldiers — “outside observers” cannot see a reason for Krug’s permanent appearances and disappearances and ask him: “Do you live on the bridge?”

The problem of the ‘last observer’ as the presumable guarantee of scientific objectivity was the target of critique of the theory of relativity by John William Dunne, a British philosopher of science. Modern physics actually refers to the Pascalian problem of the “Hidden God” and the “truth” as a matter of the point of view or perspective.<sup>24</sup> John William Dunne propounded the theory of seria-

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<sup>24</sup> Blaise Pascal “aura été le premier à jouer systématiquement du paradigme à des fins philosophiques et/ou apologétiques, et à en jouer en pleine conscience de ses implications théoriques” (Damish 1987: 63).

lism to resolve the problem of the “last” observer. In chapter 2 of *Serial Universe* he uses the following example to illustrate his ideas. A painter who escaped from the lunatic asylum began to draw a picture of the universe. He painted a landscape as he saw it, but noticed that something was missing and soon understood that he himself was missing as a part of the universe. “With the remorseless logic of the lunatic” (Dunne 1934: 30) the insane artist proceeds to expand his picture, portraying himself as a part of the universe, and then adding again himself who is aware of his own existence, etc. — the multiple pictures with an increasing number of artists of increasing capacity:

The artist is trying to describe in his picture a creature equipped with all the knowledge by the picture which the pictured creature would draw. And it becomes abundantly evident that the knowledge thus pictured must always be less than the knowledge employed in making the picture. In other words, the mind which any human science can describe can never be an adequate representation of the mind which can make that science. (Dunne 1934: 32)

According to Dunne, one can systematically treat the condition of being a self-conscious creature aware of something other than oneself only by presenting it as an infinite regress: “The notion of absolute time is a pure regress. Its employment results in exhibiting us as self-conscious observers” (*ibid.*, 34). Dunne argues that the things which belong to the core of human experience (sensations of color, sound, etc.) are not explainable in the frame of objectivist science for whom the observer is a mere abstraction: “Physics is, thus, a science which has been expressly designed to study, not the universe, but the things which would supposedly remain in that universe if we were to abstract them from every effect of a purely sensory character” (Dunne 1973: 18). The scientific procedure consists in pushing the observer as far back as possible,

reducing him to the level of a helpless onlooker with no more capacity for interference than has a member of a cinema audience the ability to alter the course of the story developing before him on the screen [...]. It is a permanent obstacle in the path of our search for external reality that we can never entirely get rid of this individual. Picture the

universe how we may, the picture remains of our making. (Dunne 1973: 21)

In Dunne's opinion, this obstacle cannot be circumvented but can be admitted and used in experimental knowledge based upon the notions of time and the moving observer. It is not Time but the observer who moves. He observes, which means that his field of presentation (a brief span of attention, the "now") moves within Time. The Time substratum exists constantly: the past, the present and the future are simultaneous. But the observation itself (the movement within the Time dimension) takes time. It is another time, the time of the higher order: it penetrates the primary time in its past, present and future. So the distinction is drawn between the events observed and observational events. Time is serial and there is the serial observer. The first observer exists in the usual three-dimensional space where the fourth dimension is time. The primary time is the fourth spatial dimension for the four-dimensional second observer whose time is the fifth dimension, etc. etc. The field of the primary observer is absent in dreams, therefore dream observation is wandering hither and thither (along the past and the future) by flashes. That is why the "anticipation" of future events happens in dreams. A mental barrier between the past and the future exists only when we are awake: "In reality, the associational network stretched, not merely this way and that way in Space, but also backwards and forwards in Time" (Dunne 1973: 60). On waking, the usual three-dimensional interpretations are applied to the dream logic. The dream results from the process of observation by the higher-order observer whom man has hypostatized into the figure of "animus", the mysterious soul that is actually equal to his own mental states: "Although the "higher-order observer" is nothing more magnificent or more transcendental than one's own highly ignorant self, he is beginning to look perilously like a full-fledged 'animus'" (Dunne 1973: 167). One may suppose that death is a phenomenon of three-dimensional continuum, a break similar to dreaming and other alternative states of consciousness:

Any world which is described from observation must be, as thus described, *relative* to the describing observer. It must, therefore, fall



short of accordance with reality in so far as it cannot be thought of, by anyone who accepts the said observer's description, as capable of containing that observer. Consequently, you, the ultimate, observing you, are always outside any world of which you can make a coherent mental picture. If you postulate the existence of other observers making different descriptions, then it turns out that *you and these observers must together form a composite observer who is not includible in the world as thus conjointly described*. You, as part of that composite observer, retain your individuality [...]

The picture you draw shows the real world in its relation to yourself — shows, that is to say, how that world is capable of affecting you. If drawn as the composite effort of many observers, it shows how the physical world is capable of affecting Mind in general. The most important fact which emerges is that you prove to be the immortal part of an immortal composite observer... (Dunne 1973: 190)

Nabokov used the 1945 edition of Dunne's *The Serial Universe* (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1934) for his manuscript *Notes for Texture of Time* (1957–1961; partly incorporated into the Fourth Part of *Ada*). Later, in the 1960s, he used the 1934 edition of *An Experiment with Time* (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1927) while examining his own dreams according to Dunne's method (see Boyd 1992: 487–488).

There is, for example, a coincidence between the real event and a dream in a series of dreams recorded on October 18–20, 1964:

Oct. 18, 1964 8.30 AM

Several dreams which jostled each other out as I tried to remember; could only retrieve a few broken bits. A patch or pattern of ivy-like leaves or light-and-shadow with an after-image effect, suspended near me was recognized as the fatidic sign of imminent dissolution: a “this-is-it” feeling, frequently experienced. Another dream, also recurrent, was the nightmare of finding myself in the haunts of interesting butterflies without my butterfly net and being reduced to capturing and messing up a rarity with my fingers — in this case a Spanish insect. A bleached Blue.

Oct. 19, 1964 8.45 AM

Dream constipation continues. Managed to recall only one image, on the fringe of waking — hardly the dream itself, disjointed nothings, rudiments or dregs — namely a dim white propeller — like thing on a

chair in a leafy avenue; and the words “Kars” (or “Kans”) and “Etan”, in another piece of dream stuff.

Webster says “Etana” was a Babylonian “spaceman” who attempting to mount to heaven on an eagle, became frightened and fell to his death.

Oct. 20, 1964 12.00 AM

Read in the N.Y. Times about the death, in air crash near Belgrade, of Several Red Army officers. The plane hit a hill in the fog and one engine landed on a forest road that wind to the top of Avala Hill. Cf. dream jotted down yesterday. Good enough?” (*Notes for the works in progress. Dreams*).

There is the essay *Time and J. W. Dunne* in J. L. Borges’ collection *Otras inquisiciones* (1952). Borges remarks that Dunne’s synthesis of the immediate past and immediate future is an image of eternity: humans become accustomed to the eternity in dreams. Dunne was famous in the 1930–40s: Nabokov might have heard of him at the time. In his lecture *The Creative Writer* (1941), Nabokov says:

That human life is but a first installment of serial soul and that one’s individual secret is not lost in the process of earthly dissolution, becomes something more than an optimistic conjecture, and even more than a matter of religious faith, when we remember that only commonsense rules immortality out. (*CW*, 25)

The “serial soul” is a trace of Dunne’s terminology whereas the rejection of “optimistic conjecture” and “religious faith” as conclusive evidence of immortality is also in tune with Dunne’s attempt to find a scientific solution for the problem of death. In his lecture, Nabokov defines “the creative mind” as a “perfect blend of the purest essence of reason with the deepest spirit of dreams” (*CW*, 21).

The following parallel between the “self-conscious” novel technique and the “self-conscious” landscape painting in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (1941) obliquely refers to Dunne’s example of the insane artist:

*The Prismatic Bezel* can be thoroughly enjoyed once it is understood that the heroes of the book are what can be loosely called “methods of composition”. It is as if a painter said: look, here I’m going to show you not the painting of a landscape, but the painting of different ways

of painting a certain landscape, and I trust their harmonious fusion will disclose the landscape as I intend you to see it. (*Real Life*, 79)

Finally, Dunne's parable of the insane artist might have been one of the multiple subtexts of *Pale Fire*: it applies to the "mad" Kinbote imposing himself on Shade's life and poetry by means of his obsessive commentary but also, to some extent, to the author who is trying to express himself through a series of imaginary literary substitutes. Nabokov might have had in mind Dunne's idea of the "serial universe" while imagining his own fictional universes or, as Donald B. Johnson calls them, "worlds in regression."

*Bend Sinister* may be understood as a complex dream: a preliminary title *A Person from Porlock* refers to Coleridge's famous vision. The author-narrator is "dreaming" of Krug's life. Both dream and narration are the forms of absence in three-dimensional space accompanied by the "transparency" of the latter acquired due to the higher level of observation and by the spatialization of the lower-order time. Thus the metaphor of "observation" is metafictional: it refers to the process of writing (cf. Iser 1993: 16: an act of fictionalizing turns elements of the given world into objects for observation; the fictive "implies creating a position from which the represented world becomes observable"). The time of the observation intersects the space-time where Krug lives, acts and dies. Krug is also dreaming of himself. It is a multilayer dream (cf. "I want to wake up. Where is he? I shall die if I do not wake up": *BS*, 186). His dreams are permeated by the presence of a "mysterious intruder" or "genius" (Dunne's animus), the "higher-order observer" whose associational network stretches backwards and forwards within time (Dunne 1973: 60) and who is apparently common to both the protagonist and the author. In the state of madness, which is another form of absence in three-dimensionality, Krug "suddenly perceives the simple reality of things and knows but cannot express in the words of his world that he and his son and wife and everybody else are merely my whims and megrims" (*BS*, 7). The border between two worlds becomes transparent: "Krug's consciousness has at least partly merged with that of his creator, for he is now aware of events in both worlds" and hears "the cautious crackling of a page" thrown into the author's wastebasket

(Johnson 1985: 192). In the end, the author metaleptically traverses the diegetic space of the text. It is a new level of serial time, — yet not the ultimate level, since the real Author of the text stands behind the author-narrator.

Michael H. Begnal, who examined the alternation of pronouns in the novel and the co-existence of the two “I”-agencies of telling the story (the author and the protagonist), notes: “The pronouns change because Krug is dreaming the dream and participating in it as a character at one and the same time”. Dream effects constitute the text:

After spending hours getting to Quist’s antique shop on the outskirts of the city, Krug can step through a hidden door and walk into his own backyard in a matter of minutes. At a most crucial moment, Linda cannot hear what the police who have captured David are shouting, and they cannot hear her, etc. (Begnal 1985: 25)

As it often happens in Nabokov, *Transparent Things* seems to be a companion text for *Bend Sinister* and *Pale Fire* where the device of the serial observer is used ironically. The “dead author”, the floating identity of characters (a “person”, a “pilgrim”; “a person dancing in a variety of forms around his own self” — Nabokov 1972: 92), the dreamlike reality, anticipations — all these features have been already noticed. The very notion of “transparency” has a special, Dunnian meaning in *Transparent Things*, and the last letter of R. contains an ironical hint at the “composite observer”, whose shape he is assuming while dying:

I believed that treasured memoirs in a dying man’s mind dwindled to rainbow wisps; but now I feel just the contrary: my most trivial sentiments and those of all men have acquired gigantic proportions. The entire solar system is but a reflection in the crystal of my (or your) wrist watch. The more I shrivel the bigger I grow. I suppose this is an uncommon phenomenon. Total rejection of all religions ever dreamt up by man and total composure in the face of total death! If I could explain this triple totality in one big book, that book would become no doubt a new bible and its author the founder of a new creed. Fortunately for my self-esteem that book will not be written — not merely because a dying man cannot write books but because that

particular one would never express in one flash what can only be understood *immediately*. (TT, 84)

Early 20<sup>th</sup> century literature and philosophy discovered individual perceptual time. Nabokov's intention was apparently that of embedding several individual time-orders, their exposition as different perceptual fields within the single subjective field of perception. The device of the "serial observer" discloses an affinity between the metafictional and metaphysical issues: the status of the fictional world, its development in time, the fiction of the creator. The idea of serial time and space orders apparently had a personal significance for Nabokov who experienced multiple shifts in space and time before he escaped the awful "dream" of pre-war Europe.

The Shakespearean subtext probably provides the most important key to the novel. Pekka Tammi has pointed out a Shakespearean allusion embedded into the Pascalian "infinite spaces" mentioned in *Bend Sinister*. It is Hamlet's complaint "O God, I could be bound in a nut-shell, and count myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams" (Tammi 1992). Both the Shakespearean and the Nabokovian characters want to "wake up". They need to "translate" the reality to their idiosyncratic language to handle it. To refer again to Rorty's influential account, one may agree that Nabokov's ability to sense cruelty (his "solidarity" with the victims) was very high and his faith in a possibility to improve social life and make it free of cruelty was weak. But the conflict of *Tyrants Destroyed* and *Bend Sinister* does not rest in the incompatibility of "private autonomy" and "solidarity": it is rather a matter of choice between "private autonomy" and a "bad solidarity". While using the concept of "bad solidarity", I refer to the abuse of the human capacity for "solidarity" (i.e. the capacity to share other people's feelings) based on some false idea assuming a form of shared emotion or belief. The novel suggests a parallel between the psychology of advertising and the psychology of totalitarianism: both use the vocabulary of "solidarity" and different modes of hypnotic suggestion or "collective mysticism" to achieve their goals. In Borges *L'illusion comique*, political slogans are modeled upon

commercial advertising devices (the political dictatorship can be likened to the sale of penknives, cigarettes, washing machines).<sup>25</sup>

The choice between autonomy and solidarity is difficult since the protagonist (in both Shakespeare and Nabokov) is tied to “bad” solidarity with personal ties and memories forming a part of his private idiosyncrasy; this makes him especially vulnerable. He can only view reality through the language of his “private autonomy” since the language of “solidarity” is misused and corrupted. It is not his “solipsism” or indifference to the outward world, but rather the historical paradigm or “necessity”, which does not leave him any choice.

The basic unresolvability of the plot dilemma also complicates the metafictional task of “creating a position from which the represented world becomes observable” (Iser 1993: 16). The text unfolds as a “serial dream” of multiple observers or the different independent modes of auctorial vision. The narrative “is evolving by degrees towards an ever greater individuation” of the author-narrator whose personal presence might be traced throughout the whole text, but whose control over the fictional worlds is “only a comparative matter” (Tammi 1985: 115). It seems that the text construction is determined not so much by the evolvment of the Infinite Consciousness of Gnosticism, but rather by the paradoxical nature of the attempts to imagine or to describe infinity. The final coincidence of finiteness and infinity in the author-persona recalls those riddles which agitated European science in the 1920–50s: the “last” observer in relativist physics, logical paradoxes, and Gödel incompleteness theorem in response to Russell’s hierarchy of restrictive “types”. Escher’s strange pictures of the 1930–50s presented the visual analogies for the logical paradoxes:

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<sup>25</sup> A similarity between political profiteering and advertising devices is also highlighted in *The Gift*: an advertising trick becomes a cause of the Hodynka catastrophe, the theme of Fyodor Sologub’s short story *In the Crowd*; the Bolshevist regime is an “eternalized, ever more monstrous in its heartiness” repetition of “the Hodynka coronation festivities with its free candy packages — look at the size of them (now much bigger than the original ones) — and with its superbly organized removal of dead bodies...” (*The Gift*, 339).

[...] one single theme can appear on different levels of reality. For instance, one level in a drawing might clearly be recognizable as representing fantasy or imagination, another level would be recognizable as reality. These two levels might be the only explicitly portrayed levels. But the mere presence of these two levels invites the viewer to look upon himself as part of yet another level; and by taking that step, the viewer cannot help getting caught up in Escher's implied chain of levels, in which, for any level, there is always a level below, "more" imaginary than it is. (Hofstadter 1980: 15)

The Russellian–Gödelian analogy was applied to Nabokov's fiction for the first time by Dr. Dinkin in his comments to *Ultima Thule* (January 19, 1949), a proto-text of Bend Sinister, a fragment of the unfinished novel *Solus Rex*, where the knowledge of death and afterlife is regarded as a logical paradox:

Not long ago I read a similar thought in Bertrand Russell (*History of Western Philosophy*): if a philosophical system is perfectly logical, without any errors or contradictions, and thus well-balanced and absolutely closed in itself, it inevitably comes to incongruous results, is monstrous and loses any contact with 'reality'. (*Letters to and from miscellaneous correspondents*, folder 42; translation mine — M. G.)

*Ultima Thule* is a poem written in a language unknown to the narrator. The narrator, a painter Sineusov, sets to illustrate the poem: the illustration is a parallel to his "narratological" task, an attempt to understand the mad Falter's "unspeakable" message. The latter, as a result of a certain playful combination of thoughts, is self-evident, logically inexplicable and unprovable. All the attempts to prove the existence of afterlife or to answer the question whether the word "heterological" is itself heterological (the Richard paradox) would end in a vicious circle. There is, nevertheless, a mysterious correlation between the world and "another world", a kind of cross-reference. D. Barton Johnson has noticed the reverberation of the words of the narrator's dying wife in the madman's speech (Johnson 1985: 208), which apparently suggests the mysterious interdependence of the worlds. The auctorial point of view could be reconstructed as the result of the interdependence and located at the metametalevel where "the riddle of the universe" is to be solved.

In *Bend Sinister* the story is also conveyed by different “possible worlds” of different languages: the finite, closed and therefore “monstrous” totalitarian language; the languages of science; the idiosyncratic language of character’s thoughts and recollections; incomplete and indefinite dream languages, etc. Put through the various realities and evolving towards infinity, the story finally withdraws back into the author-persona. The author is the “other-world” observer of the fictional space: he is identical with the “consciousness” of the text. But being also involved in the text from the inside and “embodied” in it, he becomes together with it a part of the outside physical reality. So the quest for infinity ends in a “strange loop”, a finite representation of infinity, which “occurs whenever, by moving upwards (or downwards) through the levels of some hierarchical system, we unexpectedly find ourselves right back where we started” (Hofstadter 1980: 10, 15). The fictional space of *Bend Sinister* is unfolding as a series of alternative worlds to be finally reversed into the paradoxical self-reference. This subversive gesture problematizes the text-author-reader relationship and maintains a tension between the mimetic and the antimimetic tendency of the novel: the reader is free to choose whether to read the text as an author’s fantasy or as a gloomy dystopia with real prototypes.

### **The worlds of seduction: *Lolita***

In the 1980’s, after a number of “formalist” readings of *Lolita*, testifying to its aesthetical merits, had been published, some critics became concerned with the one-sided appraisal that ignores the novel’s ethical message. For example, Ellen Pifer (Pifer 1980) focused on the moral consequences of Humbert’s vile deeds. Some critics took an accusative stance — Elizabeth Dipple, for instance, argues that “Nabokov *should*, perhaps, at least on one level, have a more exacting moral in tow” (cited in *Guide* 2000: 102). The new studies, especially Rorty’s influential reading, raised important questions about the cultural and social context of the novel, although the very opposition of the “formalist” versus “ethical”



reading or one-sided preference given to one or another seems to be wrong. The reader has no direct access to the meaning of the verbal text, which is first and foremost a linguistic phenomenon: only close attention and analysis of the textual form grants access to the “message”. Therefore both textual and contextual analysis serves as antidote against the ideologically or politically “correct” but textually aberrant readings.

No doubt, *Lolita* provokes “aberrant” readings. As mentioned above (*The Models of Time*), Nabokov’s interest in the exploration of “aberrant cases” is not exceptional in modernist culture. It destabilizes a seemingly clear-cut border between the “norm” and the “anomaly”, and, on the other hand, contributes to a better understanding of the “norm”. Starting with Lionel Trilling, critics have pointed out the effect of seduction that the novel has on the readers, who take Humbert’s side and identify with him.

The motif of seduction is also foregrounded in the recent interesting contextual readings of *Lolita*, e.g. in the *Lolita* chapter in *Shopping with Freud* by Rachel Bowlby or Elizabeth Freeman’s article “Honeymoon with a Stranger: Pedophilic Picaresques from Poe to Nabokov” (Bowlby 1993, Freeman 1998). The latter places Nabokov’s novel into the literary tradition of travels with a child-bride (Poe, Mayne Reid, Nathaniel Hawthorne’s “Little Annie’s Ramble,” etc.) and interprets travel as an opportunity to “appropriate” the American culture and become its “legible subject” either as a criminal or a victim. Rachel Bowlby suggested that the worlds of *Lolita* and Humbert, usually polarized by critics as the world of mass culture and the world of high modernism, are not so different: *Lolita* and Humbert are both “aesthetical consumers”. *Lolita* is enchanted by ads (words and images) shaped into the image of ideal consumption. The language of ads, cheap fiction and Hollywood movies imitates poetry. In his essay on Nikolai Gogol, Nabokov wrote about the advertisement’s capacity to replace the real world, turning it into a kind of satellite shadow world. The advertising world of “handsome demons” mimics human existence (*The Gift*, 20); a simulacrum infiltrates physical reality.

A number of modern psychologists and writers (Gustave Le Bon, Tarde, Elias Canetti, Grigori Landau) detected the effects of

imitation, contagion and hypnotism in the social behavior of the crowd (see Engel-Braunschmidt 2002 on Nabokov and Canetti). According to Tarde and Le Bon, in mass behavior, the faculty of empirical seeing becomes substituted for “fascination” or “collective hallucination” (Crary 2000: 244–245), which make an individual obedient and liable to external manipulations. Modern technologies (cinema, photography, and advertisement) incite and increase attachment to images typical of mass psychology. They are “techniques of attraction and fascination” (Crary 2000: 238), akin to hypnosis and suggestion. Even before Michel Foucault, Jean Baudrillard and other theorists of modernity started writing on the implicit, hidden forms of power and violence, Nabokov indicated that modern forms of coercion operate by means of attraction and seduction.

Perceptual worlds of seduction (political, commercial, visual or erotic) assume the forms of human “archetypal” desires and enlist the “subconscious” of potential consumers. As Roland Barthes has shown in his *Mythologies* (1957), the world of advertising and mass media reproduces desire shaped into the image of ideal consumption. The connotative (Barthes 1957), or else emotive and esthetical (Eco 1998) functions predominate in advertising. Advertising and mass media reproduce social and cultural stereotypes. In modern societies, “electronic forms of communication (both visual and auditory) have replaced oral tradition in the transmission of cultural myths” (Passikoff & Holman 1987). In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud argues that the price of culture is the voluntary relinquishing of essential archaic emotions. Cultural archetypes (perfection, cleanness, harmony and order) serve as the substitutes for natural pains and pleasures. These surrogate pleasures are actively exploited by the mass advertisement industry. The symbols of comfort, security, cleanness, efficiency, prestige, sexuality, etc., form the “archetypes” of consumption mythology and turn the advertised object into a marketable commodity. Advertisement seeks to meet the consumer’s psychical needs and ideological dispositions. Thus, advertising and mass media channel and influence the consumer’s perception, yet they reach their goals by proclaiming their power to satisfy the consumer’s deep wishes and expecta-

tions, i.e. by creating a “mirror image” of the consumer. Thereby shared values are presented as individualized. Advertisement appeals to each and everyone: “particularly for you”. Further differentiation of meanings entails the association of products with gender and social roles or group identities (e.g. Solomon & Assael 1987).

Nabokov repeatedly highlighted a similarity between advertising strategies, political propaganda and erotic seduction — all of these employ hidden forms of hypnotism or suggestion, trigger the lower instincts and abuse the human inclination for “solidarity”. Commercial fetishism, reification of a human into an object of aesthetical or political manipulation, repudiation of history and complexity of life are implicitly or explicitly present in his fiction as the threatening forms of seduction. In *Bend Sinister*, the work of the totalitarian machine is distributed between multiple channels of visible and invisible coercion — from different erotic forms of seduction to rough suggestion or shamanic rituals (cf. the dictator Paduk’s performance in the prison to force the philosopher to sign the agreement).<sup>26</sup>

Advertising combines verbal and visual appeal. In her innovative 1993 study of *Lolita*, Rachel Bowlby describes certain mechanisms of commercial seduction transformed into “aesthetical consumption”. She shows that the opposition of the ethical versus formalist-aesthetical reading is only one in a series of the apparently sharp antinomies suggested by the novel (romantic versus banal, victim versus criminal, perverse sexuality versus true love,

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<sup>26</sup> Likewise, the wish-fulfillment world of the Great Revelation in the 3rd chapter of *Ada* is reminiscent of Communist ideology. The first decade of the Great Revelation coincides with the initial stage of Aqua’s mental illness, when she “was not quite twenty” (*Ada*, 22), i.e. not long before 1864. “The New Believers” identified Terra with “another world”, which got confused with the Real World. The Manichean picture of Great Revelation with its separation of “demons” and “monsters” from the realm of angelic spirits “restored all the stales but still potent myths of old creeds” (*Ada*, 23). In the 1850-60’s, the most important of Marx’ works were published and the spread of Marxism began. In 1864, the First International was founded. The Great Revelation produces a kind of social religion that fills Aqua’s deranged mind with fantastic utopic images of “a future America of alabaster buildings one hundred stories high, resembling a beautiful furniture store crammed with tall white-washed wardrobes and shorter fridges” (*Ada*, 23), i.e. the images of advertising.

etc.). “Aesthetical consumption” serves as the third member of the opposition mediating bipolarity and ensuring reversibility and interchangeability of the poles. Both aesthetic consumption and advertising incite the desire: they are techniques of ‘pleasure surplus’ production. The experience of pleasure is presented as self-sufficient and limitless, overshadowing the object’s practical purposefulness, its limitations or finitude. The object is idealized as a perfect object of desire. The subconscious clues or choice determinants are important in both advertising and aesthetic consumption.

I would suggest that the “archetype” may serve as another mediating term between the polarities of mass culture and the high modernist model of culture. There is an obvious connection between the Romantic poetics, borrowing symbols and “archetypes” from mystical and occult sources, and psychoanalysis, drawing, in its turn, on the Romantic tradition (e.g. Freud’s works on Hoffmann and other Romantic writers, or Jung’s interest in spiritualist séances). In psychoanalysis, the “supernatural” or “uncanny” is subjected to introjection, i.e. absorbed within the psyche as the “subconscious” or the world of fantasies, dreams and the irrational. Modernist culture originates in both mystic-romantic impulses and scientific positivism. Psychoanalysis comprises both tendencies (compare Edgar Allan Poe’s mystical “chemistry” and Humbert Humbert’s interest in psychology and love for taxonomies and classifications in *Lolita*).

In *Lolita*, the idealized images of advertisement alternate with scenes of imaginary erotic cannibalism and mutilated consumption. Cf.: “Lovely, glossy-blue picture-postcards”, i.e. advertising booklets of “a luxurious hotel on the Riviera”; “His father and two grandfathers had sold wine, jewels and silk, respectively”. The idealized sea resort is a world of perfection and cleanness (eternal summer, “clean sand” and a “whitewash cosmos”, “orange trees, friendly dogs, sea vistas and smiling faces”, etc.) (*Lolita*, 9–10). “...that frenzy of mutual possession might have been assuaged only by our actually imbibing and assimilating every particle of each other’s soul and flesh” (*Lolita*, 12). I “was ready to offer her everything, my heart, my throat, my entrails” (15). “My only grudge against nature was that I could not turn my Lolita inside out and

apply voracious lips to her young matrix, her unknown heart, her nacreous liver, the sea-grapes of her lungs, her comely twin kidneys” (165).

A dapper young fellow was vacuum-cleaning a carpet of sorts upon which stood two figures that looked as if some blast had just worked havoc with them. One figure was stark naked, wigless and armless. Its comparatively small stature and smirking pose suggested that when clothed it had represented, and would represent when clothed again, a girl-child of Lolita’s size. But in its present state it was sexless. Next to it, stood a much taller veiled bride, quite perfect and *intacta* except for the lack of one arm. On the floor, at the feet of these damsels, where the man crawled about laboriously with his cleaner, there lay a cluster of three slender arms, and a blond wig. Two of the arms happened to be twisted and seemed to suggest a clasping gesture of horror and supplication. (*Lolita*, 226)

Humbert’s vocabulary is borrowed from Romantic, neo-Romantic and decadent sources (Byron, Keats, Poe, Melville, Baudelaire, Verlaine, Rimbaud, etc.; see Alfred Appel’s notes in *Lolita*, 319–457). The romantic-decadent art (German and English romanticism, French and Russian decadence) massively relies on archetypes, and the cinema exploits and renovates Romantic clichés. The cinematic mystical and erotic symbols and archetypes (*femme fatale*, child-wife, vamp, harlot, nymph, melodramatic plots, murder, gothic monsters, somnambulists, automatons, Good and Evil) stem from Romantic clichés. Therefore Humbert, brought up on the Romantic-decadent sources, recognizes film art as his “own” language, as the machinery of desire production, when trying to cater to the forms of Lolita’s desire. The language of advertisement is familiar to him as well: upon his arrival to New York, Humbert works as a writer and editor of perfume advertisements.

Cinema is also a form of visual seduction. Insofar as it reproduces the processes of memory, attention or imagination (Münsterberg 1970), it becomes a “mirror” that presents trivial film plots as archetypes of the spectator’s own subconscious. From the point of view of psychoanalytical film theory, film satisfies scopophilic instincts, i.e. a primordial wish for pleasurable watching, and

develops the narcissist aspects of scopophilia, which comes from the recognition/misrecognition and identification with film images. Finally, it satisfies a male desire for turning a female into an object of erotic consumption (Mulvey 1992; originally published in *Screen*, vol. 16, No. 3).

The Hollywood star industry (a celebrity factory) actively exploits the consumer's "archetypes". Motion pictures function as a mythology of American society: the cinematic myths, as "communicated via accepted and widely-used modes of transmission", "make manifest the shared metaphysic and social values of a culture" (Holbrook & Hirschman 1993: 124). Mass culture becomes the epitome of culture in general: the world of "perfect copies", simulacra, the culture adapted and simplified; made an object of desire and a means of self-identification.

Thus, Humbert meets Lolita in the possible world of desire, or a subjective "mindscape", (Wendland 1985: 142) which becomes actualized in the consumers' (both Humbert's and Lolita's) consciousness, yet is, nevertheless, permanently displaced back to the position of the possible world. In the worlds of their fantasies, Humbert and Lolita are the "proxies" or embodied forms of desire for each other (although in Lolita's world, Quilty, who is present as Humbert's shadow from the very beginning, substitutes Humbert and becomes, for her, a form of the Imaginary). They are able to communicate to the degree their desires meet in the imaginary world of wish-fulfillment.

As Albert Wendland has shown, certain texts, which are usually placed on the border between conventional mainstream science fiction (SF) and the psychological novel, or even blamed as "non-orthodox" SF, represent the worlds of wish-fulfillment. In this respect, *Lolita*, which has often been characterized as a text that borders on the limits of mass culture (pornography, crime story), may be also considered as containing the elements of science fiction:

[...] these novels raise profound questions on how an alien world might be received (perhaps even welcomed by the "abnormal" members of the "normal" society), but they also demonstrate the

problem of not objectifying the different types of reactions to the new.  
(Wendland 1985: 142)

The fictional world of *Lolita* is constructed as Humbert's pervasive, hermetic "mindscape", examined in its reactions and adaptation to American life. Not unlike the protagonists of psychological SF, Humbert refuses to accept the alien world and feels anger or anxiety when the world does not submit to his will and desires. The story of Humbert is pervaded by the nostalgic desire for the past, utopic world (which for Bradbury's heroes is a form of escape from the modern commercialized America; see Wendland 1985: 145). The new and peculiar settings described in psychological SF appeal to "long-buried memories and impressions in the characters" (Wendland 1985: 147), which evokes a strange sense of *déjà vu*, when the character is attracted to them. In *Lolita*, the American landscape is overlaid by Humbert's desires, associations and cultural allusions, which produce the feeling of the "uncanny" and turn the fictional world of the novel into the private "F(antasy)-world" (Ryan 1991: 119), i.e. a world formed by Humbert's mind.

Being, on the one hand, a compendium of 20<sup>th</sup>-century mass culture, *Lolita* belongs, on the other hand, to the classic 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century genre of confessions. Its connection with the classic tradition manifests itself in (1) self-justification, as Humbert's main intention postulated in the first chapter and sustained till the end, as well as the didactic aim of John Ray's foreword; (2) the euphemistic, veiled language of desire. The orthodox literary confession is an epitome of the "readerly text" (in Barthes' terminology), i.e. the text, which presents itself as transparent and complete, but compensates for its alienation by especially subtle means of manipulation and seduction of the reader (Chambers 1984: 13). Humbert's confession demonstrates fiction's power of seduction and exemplifies the insatiability of desire by means of the infinite reversibility of oppositions (*Lolita* as either a mystical nymphet or a conventional American teenager; Humbert as a true romantic lover or a pervert, etc.), which only incites reader's desire to "know for sure", to fix the meaning. The motif of metamorphosis and alternation of nymphets as well as a series of spurious nymphets or incomplete incarnations, (Monique, Valeria, etc.), also

serves as a means to avoid fixation of desire. As Shoshana Felman argues, “[t]he rhetoric of seduction may be summarized by the performative utterance par excellence: ‘I promise’” (Felman 1983: 30). The rhetoric of seduction channels the reader’s desires by artificially inciting and manipulating their expectations.

Humbert’s narration activates pulp fiction and mass media frames that serve as tools for the reader’s seduction. He presents the action as planned by “fate”, refers to the fatal coincidences and prophecies, magic forces, (“infatuation”, “spell” and “poison” of love), uses an obscure language to conceal his motivations — and betrays physiological and psychological details of his life (coitus interruptus, visits to orphan houses), which are in sharp contrast with romantic euphemisms. Both aspects of the novel (romantic, aesthetic, seductive and vulgar, foul, repulsive) are well balanced: Humbert’s discourse contains the elements of its own deconstruction. The doubling of speech forms and the effect of the narrator’s elusiveness create a perfect mechanism for inciting reader’s curiosity. Nomi Tamir-Ghez has described the strategies of the narrator’s, implied reader’s and narrative situation’s doubling in Humbert’s discourse: the shift of personal forms and the resulting split of the speaker, alternation of the two genres of narration (diary and memoir) and two speech-situations (court speech and written confession) with different pragmatics, etc (Tamir-Ghez 1979). These strategies that permanently channel reader’s expectations beyond the actual narrative situation and prompt him to seek explanations beyond the actual frame of reference make the novel a form of seduction and allow Humbert to escape the reader’s final verdict. Bakhtin describes this effect as “unfinalizability”. Unfinalizability is understood as self’s capacity “to outgrow from within” and “to render *untrue* any externalizing and finalizing definition” imposed from the outside, to resist the reifying essentialist impact of such definitions: “As long as a person is alive, he lives by the fact that he is not yet finalized, that he has not yet uttered his ultimate word” (Bakhtin 1999: 59). Humbert’s confession comprises a series of metamorphoses, which incite reader’s curiosity, yet are resistant to closure and finalization.



## Conclusion

The aim of the present study was to explore the ways in which the categories of poetics, i.e. fictional time, space and point of view construction, are related to cultural encodings and the artistic practices of the modernist and postmodernist age. Whereas classical narratology, employing the ready-made “container” metaphor, often defined the narrative as the representation of events in time and space, my purpose was to show that time, space and point of view are themselves complex constructions, emerging as a result of both the author’s individual sensibility and cultural factors. Time and space may be described as either physical containers of action or innate categories of consciousness or, finally, as a result of human activity in the world. In the latter case, the construction of fictional worlds is only part of a broader experience of orientation and managing “reality”, which was for Nabokov “an infinite succession of steps, levels of perception, false bottoms, and unquenchable, unattainable” (*SO*, 10–11).

Nabokov, as an artist and a scientist, was especially sensitive to the modeling capacity of fiction. Yet besides his scientific and aesthetic interests, it was probably his rather unique experience of movement between cultures and languages, i.e. different time and space orders, which had an impact on his semiotic sensibility. For Nabokov, the problems of alternative temporalities (the social, subjective and pathological types of time, reversibility, eternity, and the specious present), space construction and habitation (objective and subjective, actual and virtual, physical and mental space) as well as the phenomenology of vision were always the most urgent questions. Nabokov’s critics have often described his work as a peculiar combination of mimetic plausibility, (a bright and impressive fictional world), and its radical subversion. (Post)modernist mimesis is relational: it involves representational and metarepre-

sentational aspects, fosters various types of time and space synthesis, surfaces resistance and adaptation between the verbal texture and pseudo-sensoric images and, finally, activates alternative forms of experience and attention by exposing standard conventions of fictional storytelling. Because of its explorative-theoretical quality, (post)modernist fiction has been called metafiction or self-reflexive fiction. I have tried to show that metafiction is not just a formal experiment, but a representation of individual vision, i.e. “fiction whose primary concern is to express the novelist’s vision of experience by exploring the process of its own making” (Christensen 1981: 151).

From this perspective, Nabokov’s models are self-reflexive metaphors. They disclose the paradoxical nature of fiction where

(1) alternative forms of time synthesis are incorporated into the chronological framework that is endowed by esthetical meanings;

(2) the verbal, (discrete, discursive), aspires to the state of the visual (iconic, nondiscursive), and hence emerges the topos of writing as “seeing”, the “*ut pictura poesis*” problem and numerous thematizations of the failure or incapacity of the verbal to reach the material presence of the visual (see e.g. Steiner 1982); in his fiction, Nabokov employs the capacity of the verbal medium to invade and mimic the other media, while at the same time pointing at their difference;

(3) the Fictive is rooted in both the Real and the Imaginary and embodies their mutual tension; the Fictive as both a reduplication and distortion of the Real is thematized in the metaphors of the “mirror” and the “double”;

(4) the work of fiction is both a verbal construction and an imaginary world, which has a lesser or greater degree of actuality or virtuality, but never attains a comprehensive presence; it comprises zones of indeterminacy, gaps and blank spots; insofar as their filling depends on the reader, the work of fiction is a virtual phenomenon.

The Bergsonian opposition of the spatialized time of the clock (chronology) and the lived time of consciousness (duration) has had the most important impact on the poetics of time in modernist fiction and has been reified in literary theory, where chronology has been seen as the social and thus less interesting type of time construction, and achrony as the artistic type of time disordering. Nabokov's fiction, however, subverts straightforward oppositions. In his novels and short stories, chronology is endowed with poetic and symbolic function. Dates and date sequences refer to the facts of auctorial personal mythopoeia or the real historical events. They also serve as a means of creating intra- and intertextual links. On the contrary, alternative and individual time forms (tempus reversus, the specious present, etc.) are endowed with exact scientific or philosophical connotations. The younger generation of postmodernist authors, drawing, among others, on Nabokov's work, elaborated complex narrative strategies to render alternative forms of perceptual time and space (e.g. Martin Amis' *Time's Arrow* as a fictionalized form of tempus reversus).

The presence of several time orders blurs seemingly clear-cut temporal schemes. Likewise, the virtual space of thought, dream, hallucination or other alternative states of consciousness erodes the stability and self-obviousness of the topographical space: the fictional world assumes the form of dream, desire or fantasy. The textual actual world is recentered in respect to alternative possible worlds or projected onto the extratextual world as its virtual extension. The mimetic relation between "reality" and "fiction" is subverted.

The perceptual synthesis in both reality and fiction is always a result of a certain compromise and a unification of perspective, i.e. a cognitive hypothesis. The study of the "aberrant types" helps to understand the "normal" space-time synthesis and blurs a clear-cut border between the "norm" and deviation. The "difference within similarity" is a basic principle of Nabokov's poetics. It is thematized as the motif of incomplete duplication, false doubleness, partial metamorphosis, distorted mirror reflection, etc. On the contrary, the "reproductive repetition", i.e. the recurrent return of the past, signifies stasis, inertia and death.

Forms of textual space-time such as the circle, spiral or Möbius strip disclose a split between narration and narrative that engenders a dialectical relationship of alternating presence or absence between the author and a narrator. Not unlike Bakhtin, Nabokov considered the author's, narrator's and character's relationship as a model of "participant" observation, which makes the Other a part of the experience of "self". On the contrary, reification and fetishization of the Other leads to solipsistic entrapment of the self and breaks communication. Both metafictional and metaphysical meaning of vision is thematized in Nabokov's fiction. In literature and cinema, readerly or spectatorial empathic identification with the "observer", i.e. the perspective structuring the (meta)textual space, is the main means of involvement. It enables the reader's or spectator's "immersion" in the work and organization of his experience by means of textual strategies.

The verbal art aspires to a state of viscosity, hence the topos of writing as "seeing" — as a mere aspiration or unattainable goal. The "failure" of the verbal to reach the state of the visual is used as a constructive principle in Nabokov's fiction. The first possible source of tension between the verbal and the visual within the fictional text is the twofold nature of the fictionalizing act, a discrepancy between the mimetic and diegetic aspect of the narrative presentation and perception, between "what is shown" and "what is told". Yet the narrator's "specular desire" for "full vision" turns out to be narcissistic self-reflection and stimulates the resistance of the visual to the verbal, a suspense or blockage of verbalization. The latter means an increasing degree of textual "indeterminacy".

In Nabokov's novels, optical shifts, polarized or confused vision and other visual disturbances disrupt a predictable course of events and unbalance automatic motion or the pre-conditioned behavior of reified characters. Optical, photographic, cinematographic, pictorial and theatrical images and devices function as metaphors of memory, vision, imagination and as a means of narrative transition and mnemonic linkage.

Finally, vision is thematized as a means of seduction. Modern culture produces noncoercive forms of control over perception, while insistently channeling attention by means of different

technical devices, including the cinema and advertisement. In mass behavior, the faculty of empirical seeing becomes substituted for the effects of attraction, hypnotism or collective hallucination. Nabokov points to a similarity between advertisement strategies, political propaganda and erotic seduction that employ hidden forms of hypnotism or suggestion. He uses the strategies of occultation and withholding of information in his fiction to create an image of an elusive narrator, to avoid the final fixation of meaning and to incite curiosity of the reader who is liable to be seduced by clichés of confessional prose and mass culture.

The models of spatio-temporal organization, perspective and plot structuring in fiction are the elements of the cultural frames of meaning. They not only activate old frames, but generate new ones and mould our cultural sensibilities and perceptions in subtle and invisible ways. Besides universal models (patterns of signification or “forms of meaning”) that embrace generic and cultural paradigms, there are also micro-models active in a certain context or the work of a certain author. Their significance and power depends on the ability to engender or activate larger cultural frames of meaning. Micro-models function as mobile interfaces between individual perception and cultural frames.

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## Index

- Acquinas, Thomas 132  
Adamovich, Georgi 128  
Adams, Jon-K. 118  
Adorno, Theodor 250, 258  
Ainsworth, Harrison W. 240  
Aldanov, Mark 244  
Aldrich, Virgil C. 26, 157  
Alexander, Samuel 78  
Alexandrov, Vladimir 55, 58,  
121, 126, 239  
Allais, Alphonse 33  
Alter, Robert 212  
Amenábar, Alejandro 222  
Amis, Martin 282  
Anderssen, Adolf 238  
Annenkov, Yuri 61  
Appel, Alfred Jr. 34, 63, 65, 97,  
125, 126, 177, 187–189, 210  
Arbib, Michael A. 20  
Archimedes 84  
Arendt, Hannah 258  
Arnheim, Rudolf 188, 192  
Arutyunova, Nina 153  
Assael, Henry 274  
Augustine 42–43, 78  
Baak, J. J. van 50  
Bachelard, Gaston 15, 45  
Bader, Julia 63  
Bakhtin, Mikhail 12, 15, 27, 41,  
48, 98, 134–136, 144–146,  
148, 159, 161, 169, 279, 283  
Bal, Mieke 14, 23, 149, 150,  
152  
Banfield, Ann 150  
Barabtarlo, Gennady 76  
Barnard, George Gray 252  
Barthes, Roland 11, 54, 117,  
169–170, 209, 211, 216, 256,  
273, 278  
Bataille, Georges 169, 193  
Baudelaire, Charles 276  
Baudrillard, Jean 209, 273  
Begnall, Michael 267  
Bekhterev, Vladimir 189  
Bely, Andrei 51, 58, 61, 88,  
102, 130, 132, 178, 185, 188,  
224, 249  
Bender, John 43  
Benjamin, Walter 13, 62, 170,  
206, 211  
Bergson, Henri 12, 14, 27, 42,  
57, 70, 72, 75, 78, 80, 90–91,  
103–104, 107–110, 116–117,  
128, 140, 150, 186, 197, 201,  
230, 243, 245  
Bernal, Olga 191  
Bertolucci, Bernardo 223  
Bertrand, Denis 151  
Bethea, David M. 94  
Black, Max 20–21, 23, 26  
Blackwell, Stephen 70  
Blavatsky, Helena 130  
Blok, Aleksandr 52  
Bluestone, George 176, 183  
Blum, Harold F. 78  
Boldyrev, Nikolai 153  
Boltzmann, Ludwig 111  
Booth, Wayne C. 168

- Bordwell, David 32–33, 141, 176  
 Borges, Jorge Luis 96, 265, 268  
 Bosch, Hieronymos 61  
 Botticelli, Sandro 81, 208  
 Bouissac, Paul 18, 23  
 Bowlby, Rachel 272, 274  
 Boyd, Brian 50, 53, 55, 63–64, 67, 69, 76–78, 89, 94, 103, 106, 212, 240, 253–254, 264  
 Bradbury, Malcolm 16  
 Bradbury, Ray 278  
 Bradley, Francis Herbert 117  
 Branigan, Edward 141, 247  
 Breton, André 98, 231–233  
 Breughel, Pieter 61  
 Brockmeier, Jens 20, 75  
 Brooke-Rose, Christine 163, 166, 221  
 Brooks, Peter 117–118  
 Browning, Robert 251  
 Bruner, Jerome 9, 14, 22–23, 41, 198  
 Brunius, Jacques-Bernard 123, 184  
 Bruss, Elizabeth 76, 215  
 Bryusov, Valeri 224  
 Buchholz, Sabine 45  
 Buffon, Georges Louis Leclerc de 54  
 Bulgakov, Mikhail 51, 60, 181  
 Bunin, Ivan 99, 115  
 Buñuel, Luis 169  
 Burdick, Dolores M. 227  
 Burling, Valerie 186  
 Burt, Isabella 240  
 Byron, George G. 177, 276  
 Caillois, Roger 56  
 Canetti, Elias 272  
 Carroll, Lewis 113  
 Carroll, William C. 228  
 Carter, William C. 105  
 Casetti, Francesco 148  
 Castellan 189  
 Castellano, Charlene Ann 185  
 Chafe, Wallace L. 41, 151–152, 235  
 Chambers, Ross 278  
 Chaplin, Charles S. 203, 205  
 Chatman, Seymour 147, 149, 152, 160–161, 174  
 Chayanov, Aleksandr 224  
 Chénier, André 214  
 Chernyshevsky, Nikolai 60, 83, 85, 193, 195, 243, 247–248  
 Christensen, Inger 281  
 Chudakov, Aleksandr 147  
 Clark, Beverly Lyon 56  
 Clay, Edmund R. (Kelly, E. R.) 79  
 Cleugh, Mary F. 78  
 Coates, Steven L. 69  
 Cohn, Dorrit 159, 227  
 Coleridge, Samuel Taylor 66, 177, 266  
 Colet, Louise 243  
 Connolly, Julian W. 97, 124, 169, 193, 238, 247  
 Cooper, James Fenimore 34  
 Cordle, Daniel 18  
 Cornis-Pope, Marcel 25  
 Courtés, Joseph 25, 150–151  
 Cray, Jonathan 134, 203, 233, 273  
 Culler, Jonathan 117–118, 149  
 Currie, Mark 16–17  
 Dali, Salvador 169  
 Damish, Hubert 261  
 Dällenbach, Lucien 24, 242  
 Danesi, Marcel 20, 26  
 Dante Alighieri 81

- Davydov, Sergei 82, 98–99,  
 227, 247  
 Deely, John 17  
 Deleuze, Gilles 24, 50, 77, 109–  
 110, 180, 186, 200, 206, 225  
 Delluc, Louis 183  
 De Mille, Cecil Blount 207  
 Denikin, Anton 34  
 Derrida, Jacques 96, 134–135  
 Descartes, René 210  
 Dickens, Charles 176  
 Dinkin, Leon 256, 270  
 Dipple, Elizabeth 271  
 Dobuzhinsky, Mstislav 64  
 Doležel, Lubomír 28–29, 33,  
 36–37, 88  
 Dolinin, Aleksandr 75–76, 85,  
 111, 241, 259  
 Dostoevsky, Fyodor 139, 172,  
 179, 221–223, 234  
 Doyle, Arthur Conan 170  
 Drizo, Mikhail 205  
 Duchamp, Marcel 203  
 Dunne, John William 78, 261–  
 266  
 Durkheim, Émile 72  
 Duve, Thierry de 204  
 Eco, Umberto 16, 27, 32–33, 35,  
 38, 40, 193–194, 208, 273  
 Eddington, Arthur Stanley 78  
 Egidi, Giovanna 80  
 Eikhenbaum, Boris 146, 199  
 Einstein, Albert 23, 85, 134,  
 260–261  
 Eisenstein, Sergei 176, 178, 214  
 Eliot, Thomas Stearns 66  
 Emerson, Ralph Waldo 256  
 Emmott, Catherine 41, 46–47,  
 156, 236  
 Engel-Braunschmidt, Annelore  
 273  
 Epstein, Mikhail 90, 183, 190  
 Erdinast-Vulcan, Daphna 48  
 Erman, Michel 90  
 Ermarth, Elizabeth Deeds 13,  
 85–86  
 Escher, Maurits Cornelis 269–  
 270,  
 Esrock, Ellen J. 157–158  
 Evreinov, Nikolai 55–56  
 Ewers, Hannes Heinz 218  
 Eyraud-Bompard 189  
 Eysteinnsson, Astradur 221, 250  
 Fassbinder, Rainer Werner 228  
 Faure, Elie 182, 207  
 Fawell, John 173–174  
 Felman, Shoshana 162–164,  
 166, 279  
 Field, Andrew 238  
 Flaubert, Gustave 14, 34, 38,  
 196, 243  
 Fleming, Victor 223  
 Florensky, Pavel 111  
 Fludernik, Monika 14, 32, 43,  
 45, 148, 150, 152  
 Fontanille, Jacques 150–151  
 Foster, John Burt Jr. 100–101  
 Foucault, Michel 159–160, 273  
 Fraasen, Bastiaan van 44, 48  
 Fraisse, Paul 79  
 Fraser, Julius Thomas 78, 83  
 Frawley, William 47  
 Freeman, Elizabeth 272  
 Frege, Gottlob 29  
 Freud, Sigmund 91, 98, 103,  
 111–112, 118, 130, 135, 163,  
 218, 223, 230, 232, 272–273,  
 275  
 Friedman, Norman 144  
 Frueh, Alfred 203  
 Gance, Abel 123, 184  
 Gandelman, Claude 54

- Garbo, Greta 183, 203  
 Gardner, Martin 113, 116  
 Gauguin, Paul 61  
 Gavins, Joanna 49  
 Gazdanov, Gaito 101  
 Gebauer, Gunter 145  
 Geertz, Clifford 128  
 Genette, Gérard 11, 44, 68,  
     148–150, 152, 159–161  
 Gerrig, Richard 80, 236  
 Gibson, James Jerome 141  
 Gide, André 51, 83, 242  
 Ginsburg, Ruth 251  
 Gödel, Kurt 269  
 Goethe, Johann Wolfgang 15,  
     253  
 Gogol, Nikolai 146, 179, 223,  
     272  
 Gombrich, Ernst Hans Josef  
     204, 206  
 Gorky, Maxim 62  
 Gould, Stephen J. 55  
 Goya, Francisco José de 207  
 Graham, John 240  
 Greber, Erika 15  
 Greimas, Algirdas Julien 11, 25,  
     48, 150–151, 158  
 Griffith, David Wark 176, 179  
 Grigor, Indrek 70  
 Gris, Juan 228  
 Grishakova, Marina 10, 25, 57,  
     215, 257  
 Grossmith, Robert 70  
 Gruzdev, Ilya 60–61  
 Guattari, Felix 24, 50, 225  
 Gunning, Tom 180  
 Hägg, Samuli 152  
 Hale, Dorothy J. 168  
 Hamburger, Käte 139, 148  
 Hansen-Löve, Åge 58, 94, 184,  
     199  
 Hanson, Norwood Russell 22  
 Hawthorne, Nathaniel 272  
 Hayles, Katherine N. 71, 81  
 Hayman, David 196  
 Heath, Stephen 136, 233  
 Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich  
     251  
 Heidegger, Martin 30, 44  
 Heise, Ursula K. 13  
 Heraclitus 117  
 Herman, David 11–12, 14– 15,  
     47, 76, 150, 161  
 Hesiod 14  
 Hesse, Hermann 20  
 Hester, Marcus 26, 157  
 Heynick, Frank 23  
 Hillis Miller, J. 24  
 Hinton, Charles 55, 126, 130,  
     239  
 Hirschman, Elizabeth C. 277  
 Hitchcock, Alfred 27, 81, 162,  
     169, 173–176, 189, 221, 224  
 Hoesterey, Ingeborg 12  
 Hoffmann, Ernst Theodor  
     Amadeus 61, 221, 223–224,  
     275  
 Hofstadter, Douglas R. 24, 270–  
     271  
 Holbrook, Morris B. 277  
 Holman, Rebecca H. 273  
 Holquist, Michael 134  
 Holthusen, Johannes 59  
 Homer 14, 177  
 Horkheimer, Max 258  
 Howard, Jane 78  
 Hrushovski, Benjamin 25  
 Hughes, Robert 77  
 Hugo, Victor 177  
 Husserl, Edmund 44, 93, 128,  
     136, 146, 159  
 Hutcheon, Linda 52

- Huysmans, Joris Karl 140, 216  
 Hyde, George M. 56  
 Infeld, Leopold 261  
 Ingarden, Roman 158  
 Iser, Wolfgang 27, 219–220,  
 266, 269  
 Ivanov, Vyacheslav I. 59  
 Ivanov, Vyacheslav Vs. 177  
 Jacobs, Karen 13, 139, 159, 171  
 Jahn, Manfred 12, 45, 87, 142–  
 143, 148–149, 152, 158, 174,  
 251  
 Jakobson, Roman 23, 134, 185  
 James, Henry 12, 25, 27, 88,  
 141–144, 161–168, 176, 183,  
 221, 243  
 James, William 79, 91, 135,  
 148, 150  
 Jancovich, Mark 67  
 Janet, Pierre 72, 78  
 Johansen, Jørgen Dines 39  
 Johnson, Donald Barton 71, 85,  
 113, 116, 119, 127, 195, 234,  
 238, 244–245, 249, 266–267,  
 270  
 Johnson, Kurt 70  
 Johnson, Lee McKay 69, 81  
 Johnson, Mark 24, 192  
 Johnson, Martin 78  
 Jonge, Alex de 63  
 Josipovici, Gabriel 203  
 Joyce, James 14, 51, 65, 140–  
 141, 216  
 Kafka, Franz 51, 88, 140, 161,  
 220–221, 225  
 Kaminka, August 257  
 Kaminka, Mikhail 257  
 Karamzin, Nikolai 89  
 Karl, Fredrick Robert 126  
 Karlinsky, Simon 85  
 Kaverin, Veniamin 61–62, 183  
 Kearns, Michael 12  
 Keats, John 276  
 Kermode, Frank 25, 48, 114,  
 132  
 Kern, Stephen 243  
 Khodasevich, Vladislav 60, 123  
 Kieseretsky, Lionel 238  
 Kline, T. Jefferson 223  
 Klinger, Max 202  
 Koestler, Arthur 257  
 Kohlberg, Lawrence 223  
 Korsakoff, Sergei 42  
 Kostandi, Oleg 61, 195  
 Kracauer, Siegfried 13  
 Kris, Ernst 205  
 Kristeva, Julia 45, 50, 96  
 Kuzmanovich, Zoran 94  
 Lacan, Jacques 27, 118, 135,  
 159–160, 163, 169, 218–219,  
 226, 233  
 Lachmann, Renate 9, 37, 198  
 Lakoff, George 24, 31, 192  
 Landau, Grigori 257–259, 272  
 Lang, Fritz 178  
 Langacker, Ronald W. 49, 152  
 Lanser, Susan Snaider 144, 152  
 Lanyi, Gabriel 197, 212  
 Laurence, Jean-Roch 14, 189  
 Laursen, Eric 109  
 Le Bon, Gustave 272  
 Lee, Lawrence L. 55, 81, 85  
 Léger, Fernand 182  
 Lemming, Evgeni 62  
 Lenin, Vladimir 89, 253  
 Lenz, Friedrich 153  
 Lermontov, Mikhail 99–100  
 Levin, Yuri 75, 91, 98, 226,  
 236, 241, 246, 255  
 Leving, Yuri 52, 87, 94, 193,  
 255  
 Lewis, David 29, 31–32, 35

- Lewis, Mathew 221  
 Liégeois, Jules 189  
 Lincoln, Abraham 252  
 Livak, Leonid 83, 106, 242  
 Livy (Titus Livius) 177  
 Ljunggren, Anna 51, 198, 199  
 Lloyd, Harold 125  
 Lodge, David 16  
 Lotman, Yuri 10, 26, 30, 34,  
   38–41, 210, 219, 234  
 Lubbock, Percy 12, 27, 141,  
   143–144, 148  
 Lukash, Ivan 61  
 Lumières 85, 189, 210  
 Lunts, Lev 61  
 Lusk, Lewis 240  
 Lyons, John 33, 113, 230  
 Lyotard, Jean-François 13  
 Mach, Ernst 140  
 Mad (Drizo, Mikhail) 205  
 Magritte, René 169  
 Maguire, Robert A. 102  
 Maklakov, Vasili 254  
 Malmstad, John E. 102  
 Mandelshtam, Osip 210  
 Man, Paul de 196  
 Mann, Thomas 54, 80  
 Manovich, Lev 179  
 Marx, Karl 274  
 Maslennikov, Oleg 249  
 Maupassant, Guy de 11, 212  
 Mayer, Carl 189  
 McCormick, Peter 32, 36–38,  
   41  
 McHale, Brian 13, 24, 55  
 McQuire, Scott 140, 181, 197,  
   206, 209, 212, 233  
 McTaggart, John Ellis 78  
 Medarić, Magdalena 56, 203  
 Méliès, Georges 113, 181, 189  
 Melville, Herman 276  
 Menary, Richard 39  
 Mendilow, Adam Abraham 45  
 Merleau-Ponty, Maurice 15, 45,  
   50, 58, 128, 135, 137, 139–  
   141, 150, 230  
 Merrell, Floyd 22  
 Metz, Christian 25, 178, 194,  
   219  
 Meyerhoff, Hans 44  
 Michalski, Milena 179  
 Miller, James E. 221  
 Miller, Karl 221  
 Minkowski, Eugène 72, 74–75  
 Minton, Walter 241  
 Minz, Zara 52, 219  
 Mitchell, W. J. Thomas 13,  
   156–157  
 Mitry, Jean 116, 177, 179, 181,  
   185, 218  
 Möbius, August 27, 84, 169,  
   241, 244–247, 283  
 Montesquieu, Charles-Louis  
   184  
 Moraru, Christian 64  
 Morris, Charles W. 67  
 Moses, Gavriel 178–179, 207,  
   214  
 Mosley, Charles 240  
 Mozzhukhin, Ivan 214  
 Mulvey, Laura 277  
 Münsterberg, Hugo 179, 181,  
   218, 276  
 Murnau, Friedrich Wilhelm 189  
 Murphy, Dudley 182  
 Musil, Robert 140  
 Nabokov, Dmitri 214  
 Nabokov, Véra 154, 241  
 Nabokov, Vladimir 11–12, 19,  
   23, 27, 33–34, 37, 40, 42, 50–  
   58, 60–61, 63–70, 72, 74–81,  
   83–91, 93–102, 104–114,



- 116–119, 122, 126, 128–132,  
 137–138, 141, 153–154, 159–  
 160, 162–163, 169–173, 176–  
 179, 182–194, 196–203, 205–  
 208, 210–216, 221, 224–226,  
 228, 231–232, 234, 236, 238,  
 240–257, 259–261, 264–274,  
 280–284  
 Naiman, Eric 51, 71, 81, 94  
 Nakata, Akiko 86, 96  
 Nelles, William 44  
 Nietzsche, Friedrich 12, 23, 27,  
 61, 100–104, 112, 118, 251  
 Nilsson, Nils Åke 185  
 Nobus, Dany 169  
 Norrman, Ralf 115  
 Nöth, Winfried 46  
 Nünnig, Ansgar 12  
 O'Neill, Patrick 14, 25  
 Olesha, Yuri 60, 178, 185  
 Oudart, Jean-Pierre 233  
 Oulanoff, Hongor 61, 188  
 Panofsky, Erwin 156, 182  
 Paperno, Irina 56, 247  
 Parmenides 117  
 Pascal, Blaise 127–128, 255,  
 261  
 Passikoff, Robert 273  
 Pater, Walter 141  
 Pavel, Thomas G. 31, 36, 111,  
 161  
 Peer, Willie van 69  
 Peirce, Charles S. 17, 22, 38, 42,  
 64–65, 150  
 Pelc, Jerzy 42  
 Perry, Campbell W. 189  
 Pesic, Peter 218  
 Phelan, James 152  
 Picasso, Pablo 58, 61  
 Pick, Lupu 189  
 Piéron, Henri 79  
 Pifer, Ellen 271  
 Plato 134, 181  
 Poe, Edgar Allan 221, 224, 272,  
 275–276  
 Poplavsky, Boris 101  
 Porphyry 48  
 Poster, Mark 30  
 Pratt, Mary Louise 143  
 Prince, Gerald 152  
 Propp, Vladimir 19  
 Proust, Marcel 11–12, 17, 42,  
 48, 51, 54, 64, 68, 80, 91, 97,  
 100, 105–106, 112, 138, 140,  
 171, 195–196, 212–214, 216  
 Pushkin, Aleksandr 60, 177,  
 214, 247  
 Putnam, George Palmer 241  
 Pyatigorsky, Aleksandr 41–42,  
 102  
 Pyle, Robert Michael 50, 53, 63,  
 69  
 Pynchon, Thomas Ruggles 242  
 Quine, Willard Van Orman 31  
 Racine, Jean 177  
 Ransom, John Crowe 67  
 Ray, John 278  
 Ravdin, Boris 257  
 Reid, Mayne 34, 2724  
 Rembrandt 207  
 Remington, Charles Lee 55  
 Remizov, Aleksei 179  
 Ribot, Théodule Armand 72  
 Ricardou, Jean 158  
 Richardson, Brian 81  
 Ricoeur, Paul 26, 28, 30, 32, 41,  
 45, 80, 171  
 Riffaterre, Michael 14  
 Rimbaud, Arthur 276  
 Rimmon-Kenan, Shlomith 12,  
 109, 111, 150, 251  
 Robb, Alfred A. 78

- Robbe-Grillet, Alain 85, 191, 242
- Robertson, John S. 223
- Roché, Henri-Pierre 203
- Rodowick, Norman David 13, 211
- Ronen, Irena 242, 244
- Ronen, Omri 242, 244
- Ronen, Ruth 29, 33, 40, 180
- Rorty, Richard 254, 258, 268, 271
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques 89, 172
- Roussel, Raymond 214
- Ruskin, John 105, 140, 216
- Russell, Bertrand Arthur  
William 29, 270
- Ryan, Judith 13, 140–141
- Ryan, Marie-Laure 13, 21, 24, 26, 29, 31–32, 46, 66, 100, 162, 278
- Saussure, Ferdinand de 135
- Sawyer, Andrew 114
- Scammell, Michael 57
- Schneider 251
- Schnitzler, Arthur 140
- Schreurs, Marc 177
- Sebeok, Thomas 20
- Seurat, Georges-Pierre 61
- Shakespeare, William 40, 241, 254, 269
- Shakhovskaya, Zinaida 240
- Sharp, William 221
- Shattuck, Roger 105, 140, 212–213
- Shelley, Percy Bysshe 177
- Shklovsky, Viktor 57, 59, 61, 70, 118, 145, 207
- Skonechnaya, Olga 94
- Slonimsky, Mikhail 61
- Smart, John Jamieson Carswell 78
- Smirnov, Igor 178, 228
- Smith, George Albert 185
- Sologub, Fyodor 269
- Solomon, Michael R. 274
- Spoto, Donald 175
- Stalin, Iosif (Joseph) 254
- Stalnaker, Robert 35–36
- Starobinski, Jean 89
- Steen, Gerard 24, 49
- Stegner, Page 34
- Steiner, George 201
- Steiner Peter 23, 66
- Steiner, Rudolf 130
- Steiner, Wendy 156, 281
- Stendhal 11
- Stengers, Isabelle 23
- Stern, Josef Judah 24
- Sternberg, Meir 12, 43–44, 75
- Sterne, Laurence 14, 179
- Stevenson, Robert Louis 70, 221, 223–224, 226
- Stoicheff, Peter 69
- Stuart, Dabney 34, 188, 207
- Sturgess, Philip 14
- Sturt, Mary 78
- Sukenick, Ronald 68
- Swanson, Roy Arthur 126
- Sweeney, Susan Elizabeth 132–133
- Talbot, William Henry Fox 206
- Tamir-Ghez, Nomi 279
- Tammi, Pekka 11, 52, 56, 66, 68, 76, 90, 96–98, 117, 129, 198, 201, 227–228, 238, 241, 243, 248–249, 256, 268–269
- Tarde, Gabriel 272
- Taussig, Michael 145
- Taylor, Emily 240
- Taylor-Terlecka, Nina 223
- Tekiner, Christina 76
- Tibbets, John C. 223

- Timenchik, Roman 87, 177  
 Todorov, Tzvetan 11, 25, 59,  
 221, 234  
 Toffler, Alvin 65  
 Toker, Leona 71, 76, 83, 86, 89,  
 95–96, 107, 117  
 Tolstoy, Leo 40, 116, 131–132,  
 161, 184, 193, 253  
 Torgovnick, Marianna 56  
 Traubenberg, Juri Rausch von  
 34  
 Trilling, Lionel 272  
 Tsvyvan, Yuri 87, 104, 178–  
 179, 184, 210  
 Tulving, Endel 70  
 Tynyanov, Yuri 199  
 Uexküll, Jakob von 93  
 Uexküll, Thure von 93  
 Uspensky, Boris 41–42, 48,  
 111, 115, 148, 150, 153  
 Uspensky, Pyotr 55, 91, 126,  
 130, 132, 239, 247  
 Vaginov, Konstantin 242  
 Varshavsky, Vasili 128  
 Vasseleu, Cathryn 50  
 Velázquez, Diego 207  
 Verlaine, Paul 228  
 Vinci, Leonardo da 155  
 Vinogradov, Viktor 45, 146,  
 148  
 Virgil (Publius Vergilius Maro)  
 177  
 Virilio, Paul 189, 204  
 Voloshinov, Valentin 135–136,  
 139  
 Vonnegut, Kurt 115  
 Vossler, Karl 146  
 Wagner, Peter 13, 158  
 Waite, Sarah Tiffany 85  
 Walsh, Richard 31  
 Waugh, Patricia 15  
 Webber, Andrew J. 219  
 Wellbery, David E. 43  
 Welsh, James M. 223  
 Wendland, Albert 277  
 Wenz, Karin 49  
 Werner, Hans C. 69  
 Werth, Paul 48, 236  
 White, Allon 58, 139  
 Whitehead, Alfred North 78  
 Whitrow, Gerald James 78–79,  
 112  
 Whorf, Benjamin 23  
 Wiene, Robert 189  
 Wiener, Norbert 112  
 Wilde, Oscar 58, 224  
 Wilson, Edmund 162–163, 221  
 Wimmers, Inge Crosman 12  
 Wimsatt, William K., Jr. 32  
 Winteler, Jost 23, 134  
 Wittgenstein, Ludwig 38  
 Woo, John 221  
 Wood, Beatrice 203  
 Wood, Robin 173  
 Woolf, Virginia 80, 140, 239,  
 240  
 Wulf, Christoph 145  
 Wyllie, Barbara 187, 189  
 Yakovlev, Nikolai 257  
 Yampolsky, Mikhail 55, 134,  
 182, 210, 230, 246  
 Yanovsky, Vasili 128, 244  
 Zamyatin, Evgeni 59, 61–63, 89  
 Zedlitz, Joseph Christian von  
 212  
 Zeller, Nancy Ann 83  
 Zeno 116, 128  
 Zeninov, Vladimir 254  
 Zhukovsky, Vasili 212  
 Zimmer, Dieter E. 55  
 Zoran, Gabriel 46–47, 94