

Visual Polyphony: The Role of Vision in Dostoevsky's Poetics

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ABSTRACT

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For Fyodor Dostoevsky, ways of seeing reflect ways of thinking about the world. This dissertation complements Mikhail Bakhtin's analyses of Dostoevsky's poetics by taking a visual-aesthetic approach and exploring "visual polyphony," a concept that Bakhtin used but did not develop at length. When Dostoevsky returned from nearly ten years in exile (1849-1858), his interest in aesthetics was acute. He had intended to write a treatise on art and Christianity, but that project never materialized. Dostoevsky did, however, explore visual matters in essays of the 1860s. And vision figures prominently in his post-Siberian fiction.

Each of the three chapters in this dissertation focuses on vision in Dostoevsky's writing. The first chapter analyzes two important aesthetic statements of Dostoevsky's journal *Vremia*. The first is "Petersburg Visions: In Prose and Verse" wherein Dostoevsky's narrator declares that he is a "dreamer," a claim that also reveals the role of imagination in Dostoevsky's special brand of realism. In "Exhibition at the Academy of the Arts: 1860-1861," Dostoevsky takes issue with the realism of the Academy's prized painting, Valery Yakobi's *Prisoners' Halt*, for being too photographic in its servility to visual objectivity and outward appearance. These writings display Dostoevsky's fascination with vision not as a passive observation, but as an

active, subjective and complex process in which empirical data blends with existing narratives that dictate what the seer sees.

In the second chapter, I show how Dostoevsky renders prison convicts empirically, yet empathetically in *Notes from the house of the Dead* (1861). The narrator Gorianchikov describes the eponymous notes as “scenes.” Through Gorianchikov, Dostoevsky maintains an exterior perspective relative to the peasant convicts’ thoughts. In this sense, Gorianchikov assumes the perspective of a realist painter, yet he manages to humanize the prisoners where Yakobi’s painting fails. This is especially evident in my analysis of what Gorianchikov calls a “strange picture,” which is his description of the prisoners gathered in anticipation of their annual Christmas theater performance. The characters of this novel number among the least psychologically penetrated in his fiction, yet Dostoevsky manages to indicate their interiority from without.

In the third and final chapter, I examine Dostoevsky’s use of Holbein’s *Dead Christ* (1521) in *The Idiot* (1868). Drawing from Pavel Florensky’s explanations of Realism in visual art and reverse perspective in iconography from his article “Reverse Perspective,” I show how the *Dead Christ* combines Realist and reverse perspectival qualities. I use Bakhtin’s term “visual polyphony” to explain the special capacity of this painting to convey conflicting messages about Christ’s death and to elicit conflicting worldviews from Ippolit, Rogozhin and Myshkin. The visually polyphonic painting plays a critical role in *The Idiot*, the most polyphonic of Dostoevsky’s novels. It reveals the visual dimensions to Dostoevsky’s polyphony: things look differently from different perspectives.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A Note on Transliteration.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: Returning from his Exile in Siberia, Dostoevsky Firmly Distinguishes his Literary Aesthetics From a Prevailing form of Realism that was Limited by the Laws of Sight.....	8
Chapter 2: Gorianchikov’s Depiction of Peasant Convicts in <i>Notes From the Dead House</i> Is Visually Oriented, But Does Not Objectify.....	48
Chapter 3: Holbein’s Visually Polyphonic <i>Dead Christ</i> Reveals Ippolit’s, Rogozhin’s and Myshkin’s Contrasting Perspectives in Dostoevsky’s <i>The Idiot</i>	76
Conclusion.....	145
Works Cited.....	149
Appendix.....	160

A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND TRANSLATION

Throughout the dissertation I use the Library of Congress system of transliteration except for the last names of well-known Russian writers and literary critics, and common first names that end in “ii.” Therefore, I transliterate Gorianchikov, but write Gogol rather than Gogol’ and Dostoevsky rather than Dostoevskii. When providing bibliographic information, I use the Library of Congress system, except when citing English-language translations. There I cite the author’s name as transliterated by the translator (for example, Fyodor Dostoevsky). Although I will principally use existing translations, I translate from the original either when I have determined that linguistic nuances in Russian are essential to my analysis and understanding of the text or when there are no English translations available. These I will use in the parenthetical in-text citation of the Russian.

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I am indebted to a community of scholars and writers. I began to think about the visual roots of polyphony in what proved to be a pivotal course for my continued studies: Caryl Emerson's Bakhtin course at Princeton. Liza Knapp advised my M.A. thesis and dissertation, both on Dostoevsky, and her course on Russian religious philosophy introduced me to Florensky's work. Jacques Catteau's *Dostoevsky and the Process of Literary Creation* deepened my understanding of the role of aesthetics in Dostoevsky's creative process. I continue to draw inspiration from Robert Louis Jackson's writing on Dostoevsky's poetics. His *Quest for Form* guided my understanding of Dostoevsky's ideas about beauty, visual and otherwise. I am also indebted to Robin Feuer Miller's *Dostoevsky and the Idiot: Author, Narrator, and Reader* and *Dostoevsky's Unfinished Journey*.

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INTRODUCTION

Those blessed structures, plot and rhyme—
why are they no help to me now
I want to make
something imagined, not recalled?
I hear the noise of my own voice:
*The painter's vision is not a lens,
it trembles to caress the light.*
But sometimes everything I write
with dim eyes and threadbare art
seems a snapshot,
lurid, rapid, garish, grouped,
heightened from life,
yet paralyzed by fact.
All's misalliance.
Yet why not say what happened?
Pray for the grace of accuracy
Vermeer gave to the sun's illumination
stealing like the tide across a map
to his girl solid with yearning.
We are poor passing facts,
warned by that to give
each figure in the photograph
his living name.

-*Epilogue*, Robert Lowell

The painterly aspects of Dostoevsky's work -- his imagery, ekphrases, visual descriptions -- are potent, generative forces in his fiction. Evocative and powerful images help him make the central philosophical claims in some of his best known work: for example, in *The Brothers Karamazov*, the image of Christ kissing the Grand Inquisitor counters Ivan's logical treatise on man's alleged longing for spiritual enslavement, while in *Crime and Punishment* the vision of the pawnbroker's innocent half-sister Lizaveta Ivanova protecting her pregnant belly sharply contrasts to Raskolnikov's rationalization of murder. He also uses visual works to provide an image of characters and thus to add another dimension to their characterizations: Ivan

Kramskoy's *Contemplator* reveals the essence of Smerdyakov in *The Brothers Karamazov* (PSS 14:117), and Dostoevsky uses Raphael's *Sistine Madonna* as a model for Sonia Marmeladova's innocent beauty in *Crime and Punishment*.¹ But despite such shifts to visual imagery at key moments in some of his best-known fictional works, the importance of both visual imagery and of vision in Dostoevsky's poetics is generally overlooked.

The logo-centric emphasis in Dostoevsky studies may stem from incomplete interpretation and understanding of critic and philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin, whose notion of polyphony inspired much of the scholarship in the decades that followed the publication of his *Problemy poetiki Dostoevskogo* (1963).² On the one hand, Bakhtin's polyphony highlights the importance of dialogue -- which the reader experiences as a written, verbal phenomenon -- to Dostoevsky's novels. For Bakhtin, polyphony occurs in Dostoevsky's fiction when multiple characters or "voices" engage in dialogue in his novels without any single character or "voice" taking the lead. On the other hand, Bakhtin conceived of "voice" in visual terms. As Caryl

¹ F. M. Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v tridsati tomakh*, ed. V. G. Bazanov et al. (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo "Nauka," 1972-1990). Konstantin Barsht points out the similarity between Dostoevsky's sketch of Sonia Marmeladova's face and that of Raphael's Madonna in his notebooks for *Crime and Punishment*. Konstantin Barsht, "Defining the Face: Observations on Dostoevskii's Creative Processes," in *Russian Literature, Modernism and the Visual Arts*, ed. Catriona Kelly and Stephen Lovell (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 35-36. From now on, all references to Dostoevsky's works will be given parenthetically in the text, with the first number indicating the volume and the second, the page. I cite all quotations of Dostoevsky from PSS by volume, book number (where relevant) and page number(s) after the colon.

² The 1963 *Problemy poetiki Dostoevskogo* was Bakhtin's significantly altered and expanded revision of his original 1929 publication *Problemy tvorchestva Dostoevskogo*. I cite the 1963 version in this dissertation. Bakhtin scholarship flourished in English in 1968. For the critical reception of Bakhtin in Russia and abroad, see Caryl Emerson's *The First Hundred Years of Mikhail Bakhtin* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1997). For more on the proliferation of Bakhtin's work along with the misunderstandings propagated by translation difficulties, see Craig Brandist, "Problems of Publication and Translation" in *The Bakhtin Circle: Philosophy, Culture and Politics* (London: Pluto, 2002). Bakhtin proposes the idea of polyphony in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. He writes, "a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices is in fact the chief characteristic of Dostoevsky's novels." Caryl Emerson, trans., *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota, 1984) 6. Hereafter *PDP*.

Emerson points out, “voice” is not a strictly verbal phenomenon, but rather a way of *seeing* the world. She writes, “Bakhtin *visualizes* voices, he senses their proximity and interaction as bodies. A voice, Bakhtin everywhere tells us, is not just words or ideas strung together: it is a ‘semantic position,’ a point of view on the world, it is one personality orienting itself among other personalities within a limited field” (Emerson, introduction, xxxvi). Robin Feuer Miller has called attention to the narrator’s constantly shifting perspective in *The Idiot*. She argues that it demands that the reader piece together the story on his or her own. She writes, “The kaleidoscopic mode of narration forces the reader to work.”³

This dissertation complements Bakhtin’s analyses of Dostoevsky’s poetics with a visual-aesthetic approach. I develop Bakhtin’s lesser-known notion of “visual polyphony,” a term that he uses to describe Ernst Neizvestny’s art that was inspired by Dostoevsky’s novels. I expand it to demonstrate the critical function of Holbein’s *Dead Christ* in *The Idiot*.⁴ The ekphrasis, or “the verbal representation of graphic representation,” of the painting in Dostoevsky’s fiction provides the open, yet structured, literary space that enables his characters to communicate their inner worlds to one another and to the reader.⁵ Polyphony becomes possible when two or more characters voice what they *see* from their different perspectives, even and especially when they are looking at this painting.

³ Robin Feuer Miller, *Dostoevsky and the Idiot: Author, Narrator, and Reader* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 230.

⁴ I am borrowing an idea from Bakhtin, when he commented on the Russian-American graphic artist Ernst Neizvestny’s works of art which were his visual responses to Dostoevsky’s novels. Bakhtin wrote that these works—black and white drawings—were “Not at all illustrations.” Instead, he argues, “they are a continuation of Dostoevsky’s world and images into another sphere, the sphere of graphics.” See Bakhtin’s interview in Per Dalgaard, “Neizvestny’s Dostoevsky Illustrations: Bakhtinian Polyphony Applied to Visual Art.” *Russian Language Journal / Russkii iazyk* 40, no. 136/137 (1986): 133-34. This is my translation of Bakhtin’s Russian quoted in the interview.

⁵ This is James Heffernan’s definition of the term. See James A. W. Heffernan, “Ekphrasis and Representation.” *New Literary History* 22.2 (1991): 297-316.

Dostoevsky developed his visual theories for quite some time. Before embarking on his career in fiction, he trained as an engineer and was versed in the laws of perspective. Joseph Frank asserts, “the excellent drawings and sketches in his notebooks—both of European architecture, as well as visualizations of his characters—prove that he acquired considerable skill in this branch of the fine arts.”⁶ Dostoevsky became neither an architect nor a painter, but the graphic mode of representation left a lasting impact on his literary realism, and the visual origins of his poetics reverberate throughout his fiction.

Dostoevsky began his career as an image-driven novelist with *Poor Folk* in 1846. The images that he conjured up through words caught the attention of the most widely read literary critic of the 1840s, Vissarion Belinsky, whose praise of *Poor Folk* launched Dostoevsky’s career as a novelist. Dostoevsky recalls that Belinsky specifically praised him for capturing “in an image” what other writers and critics had been attempting “in words” (*PSS* 3:186).⁷ But it was not until after Dostoevsky’s first trip to Europe in 1862 that he began to incorporate paintings into his work. There are seven major paintings that Dostoevsky incorporates into his novels via ekphrasis. The paintings are by six different painters (two by Hans Holbein the Younger) and belong to various styles that span four centuries, ranging from the High-Renaissance Raphael to the late nineteenth century *Peredvizhniki* (Wanderers) art of Nikolai N. Ge and Ivan Kramskoy. Dostoevsky begins to use the literary technique of ekphrasis in *Notes From Underground* (1862) and continues in every major novel thereafter.

The visual complexity of the paintings that Dostoevsky incorporates into his novels provides fertile ground for his fictional imagination. These paintings capture visually what

⁶ Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1976), 92.

⁷ Konstantin Barsht has published the images and discussed their role in Dostoevsky’s creative process. See K. A. Barsht, *Risunki v rukopisiakh Dostoevskogo* (Sankt-Peterburg: “Formika”, 1996).

narratives struggle to express verbally. Dostoevsky's own struggles to understand the content of these paintings, born out of his personal encounters with them, took lasting hold of his imagination and contributed to his own fictions.⁸ Moreover, on the level of literary form, Dostoevsky imitates the means of representing narratives by using words to create lasting, polysemous images that simultaneously create the conditions for his characters to reveal their unique personalities and leave room for his readers to do the same as they bring their own personal interpretations to bear on the images and paintings that shape dialogue. The paintings referred to in Dostoevsky's fiction, therefore, introduce, reproduce and re-envision the polysemy that his verbal art is known for. Paintings are a visual portal to the novel that informs the text on aesthetic, structural, philosophical and psychological levels.

I develop my notion of visual polyphony by building on the scholarship on Dostoevsky's visual aesthetics, which tends to focus on the icon.⁹ In this study, I look not only to iconography,

⁸ Anna Grigorievna Dostoevsky mentions the special impact that one such painting, Raphael's *Sistine Madonna*, had on Dostoevsky. She recalls the great lengths that Countess Sofia Andreevna Tolstaya went to in order to ship a life-sized copy of Raphael's *Madonna* from Germany to Russia because of Dostoevsky's obsession with the painting. Anna Grigorievna writes, "How many times during that last year of his life I found him standing before that great picture in such deep contemplation that he did not hear me come in; and I, not wishing to disrupt his prayerful mood, would quietly leave the room" (326). This painting served as a source of personal contemplation for Dostoevsky and made two direct appearances in his fiction. Anna G. Dostoevsky, *Dostoevsky: Reminiscences*, trans. Beatrice Stillman, (New York: Liveright, 1975).

⁹ For example, Roger Anderson finds that Dostoevsky adapts "some visual and homiletic properties of the icon to the composition of *Crime and Punishment*" in his chapter, "The Optics of Narration: Visual Composition in *Crime and Punishment*," in *Russian Narrative & Visual Art: Varieties of Seeing*, ed. Paul Debreczeny and Roger B. Anderson (Gainesville, Florida, 1994), 85. Other scholars that have engaged the visual component of Dostoevsky's poetics include, but are not limited to: Robert Louis Jackson, *Dostoevsky's Quest for Form: A Study of His Philosophy of Art* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1966); Robert Louis Jackson, *The Art of Dostoevsky: Deliriums and Nocturnes* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1981); Konstantin Barsht, "Defining the Face: Observations on Dostoevskii's Creative Processes," in *Russian Literature, Modernism and the Visual Arts*, ed. Catriona Kelly and Stephen Lovell (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 23-58. On the overlap between ekphrasis and icons in *The Idiot*, see Ganna Bograd's "Funktsii proizvedenii izobrazitel'nogo iskusstva v tvorchestve Dostoevskogo," in *Transactions of the Association of Russian-American Scholars in the U.S.A.* 28 (1996-97), 313-52. The comparison of literature and visual arts in general dates back to Aristotle. For more on this, see Jean H.

but also to the visual traditions of Realism and photography. All of these images reinforce and deepen Dostoevsky's problem-based poetics. Dostoevsky, as I will elaborate, embeds the multi-perspectival way of seeing characteristic of the icon into his poetics on a structural level. In Dostoevsky's fiction, truth comes from the interplay between several characters who voice what they see from their unique perspectives. To demonstrate this, I focus on four of Dostoevsky's texts and three paintings. In chapter one, I examine Dostoevsky's mock-feuilleton "Petersburg Visions" (1861) for the origins of the principles that govern Dostoevsky's visually-based realism throughout his career; I also study the essay "The Exhibition at the Academy of the Arts in 1860-1861" (1861), where his critique of the artist Valery Yakobi's *Prisoners' Halt* (1861) contains a significant aesthetic statement concerning the role of vision and the visual in his literary realism. Chapter two shows how visual imagery propels observation, objectivity and empathy in his novel *Notes from the Dead House* (1860-61). In chapter three I turn to what is arguably Dostoevsky's most profound and challenging use of visual art to underscore his ethical, even metaphysical, position: German artist Hans Holbein The Younger's (1497-1543) *Dead Christ* (1521) in *The Idiot* (1869).¹⁰ The Russian religious thinker Pavel Florensky's (1882-1937) influential essay "Reverse Perspective" (1920) helps me show how Holbein's painting reveals some of the formal

Hagstrum, *The Sister Arts: The Tradition of Literary Pictorialism and English Poetry from Dryden to Gray* (Chicago, IL: U of Chicago, 1958). For the ancient tradition of comparisons between the arts, see especially pp. 3-36; and S. H. Butcher, *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art: With a Critical Text and Translation of the Poetics* 4th ed. (New York: Dover Publications, 1951); Mario Praz, *Mnemosyne: The Parallel between Literature and the Visual Arts* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1970).

¹⁰ Chapter 3 of this dissertation incorporates the major secondary literature on Holbein in *The Idiot*. The foundational study of the painting is in Robert Louis Jackson's *Dostoevsky's Quest for Form*. Jackson has revisited the Holbein painting in his article, "Once Again About Dostoevsky's Response to Hans Holbein the Younger's Dead Christ in the Tomb" in *Dostoevsky beyond Dostoevsky: Science, Religion, Philosophy*, ed. Svetlana Evdokima and Vladimir Golstein (S.I.: Academic Studies, 2016), 179-91. Olga Meerson "Ivolgin and Holbein: Non-Christ Risen vs. Christ Non-Risen" in *The Slavic and East European Journal* (39.2, 1995), 200-13; and Jefferson J. A. Gatrall's article "The Icon In the Picture: Reframing the Question of Dostoevsky's Modernist Iconography" in *Slavic and East European Journal* (48.1, 2004), 1-25.

and aesthetic features at the core of Dostoevsky's poetics. The way that Dostoevsky uses the painting in the novel is the premier example of visual polyphony.

My overall goal in this dissertation is to reveal the equal importance of the image and the written word in Dostoevsky's poetics.¹¹ In contrast to the numerous studies that have explored the influence and incorporation of the work of other writers into Dostoevsky's fiction, this dissertation shows how Dostoevsky adapts his verbal medium in response to visual modes of representation. It exposes the complex role of vision in Dostoevsky's fiction.

¹¹ For more on the visual arts in Dostoevsky, see Jacques Cateau's *Dostoevsky and the Process of Literary Creation*, trans. Audrey Littlewood, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989). For an analysis of sacred paintings in nineteenth century European literature, including a special section on Russian literature and the Holbein painting, see Jefferson J. A. Gatrall's *The Real and the Sacred: Picturing Jesus in Nineteenth-century Fiction* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan, 2014). For the most recent study of ekphrasis in nineteenth century Russian literature, see Molly Jo Brunson's *Russian Realisms: Literature and Painting, 1840-1890* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois UP, 2016).

CHAPTER 1

Returning from his Exile in Siberia, Dostoevsky Firmly Distinguishes his Literary Aesthetics from the Prevailing Form of Realism that was Limited by the Laws of Sight

During his exile in Siberia, Dostoevsky envisioned writing a comprehensive treatise on art that he described in a letter to his brother Mikhail in 1856 as “the fruit of a decade of careful thought”¹² (*PSS* 28, 1:228-229). This treatise was never written, but Dostoevsky’s writings in the three years immediately following his return from exile in Siberia in 1858 abound with insight into his artistic principles.¹³ It is as if the treatise that Dostoevsky had worked out in his mind was fractured and interspersed in his journal articles and fictional writings in the early 1860s. This chapter focuses on two works that Dostoevsky wrote between 1860-1862, a time during which he began to articulate the role of vision in his poetics. The two works are the mock feuilleton “Petersburg Visions in Verse and Prose” and an article of art criticism entitled “The Exhibition at the Academy of the Arts: 1860-1861” (*PSS* 18:269).¹⁴

¹² In this letter, he also mentions that his proposed treatise on art, “Pis’ma ob iskusstve” (Letters on Art), is “actually about the mission of Christianity in art.” Letter to A. Y. Vrangeli 13 Apr. 1856.

¹³ Dostoevsky was arrested in April of 1849 as a political criminal for his associations with the Petrashevsky circle. He was sentenced to death, but the sentence was commuted on December 23, 1849. His arrest and sentencing were part of the campaign to quell revolutionary thought that threatened the stability of Nicholas I’s empire. For a detailed analysis of Dostoevsky’s testimony, letters and deposition, see Liza Knapp, *Dostoevsky as Reformer: The Petrashevsky Case* (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1987). For a comprehensive accounting of his time and the conditions of life in Siberia, see Joseph Frank. *The Years of Ordeal: 1850-1859* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton UP, 1983).

¹⁴ The article appears in conjunction with a series of critical articles on Russian literature (*Riad statei o russkoi literature* -1861). The series includes the article “G-n —bov i vopros ob iskusstve” (published in *Vremia*, 1861, No.2, February 9), in which Dostoevsky advocates the autonomy of art in opposition to writers such as Vissarion Belinsky (1811-1848) and Mikhail Petrashevsky (1821-1866) and Nikolai Dobroliubov (1836-1861) who called for the strictly utilitarian application of art to serve social functions. Dobroliubov is the eponymous “-bov” of Dostoevsky’s article title. In the article, Dostoevsky points to

Dostoevsky founded the literary journal *Vremia* (Time) with his brother Mikhail after returning from a nearly ten-year exile in Siberia (1849-58).¹⁵ The press culture had grown increasingly polarized during his absence, with each thick journal expressing a certain *napravlenie* (tendency), the common term for an ideological or aesthetic position. On the left was the journal *Sovremennik* (*The Contemporary*), whose materialist-utilitarian perspective was shaped by such Westernizing thinkers as Nikolai Nekrasov, Nikolai Chernyhevsky, Vissarion Belinsky and Nikolai Dobroliubov. On the far left stood *Russkoe slovo* (*The Russian Word*), guided by the predominantly nihilistic philosophy of Dimitry Pisarev. On the conservative right stood the primary journals of the Slavophiles, *Russkaia beseda* (*The Russian Colloquy*) and *Den'* (*The Day*), which sought to articulate and thereby cultivate a uniquely Russian religious national identity. The Dostoevsky brothers conceived of *Vremia* as a literary journal that could occupy the middle ground between ideological conservatism and radical progressivism. They espoused a philosophy of *pochvennichestvo* (from *pochva*, “soil”), which proposed an organic connection to the national tradition, but didn’t entirely reject philosophies coming to Russia from the West.¹⁶ The journal began publication in January of 1861, just before Alexander II’s emancipation legislation went into effect on February 19, 1861, marking the official, but by no means

Fet’s poem “Diana,” the Apollo Belvedere and Homer’s *The Iliad* as models of a certain kind of beauty, attainable through art that edifies as it inspires and pleases aesthetically. In these articles, Dostoevsky takes interest in the arts broadly speaking. His critical writing turns increasingly towards literature after his articles in 1861 on art as such. For more on the broad scope of Dostoevsky’s aesthetic writings at this time, see commentary on this article in (*PSS* 18:237).

¹⁵ For more on the history of the journal and its reception, see Sarah Hudspith’s article “Dostoevsky’s Journalism in the 1860s,” in *Dostoevsky in Context*, ed. Deborah Martinsen and Olga Maiorova, (Cambridge UP, 2015), 280-87.

¹⁶ For more on this concept in Dostoevsky’s journal writings, see Ellen Chances, “Pochvennichestvo: Ideology in Dostoevsky’s Periodicals” in *Mosaic* 7, no. 2 (January 1, 1974), 71-88; and Inessa Medzhibovskaya’s chapter, “Education” in *Dostoevsky in Context*, edited by D. A. Martinsen and O. Maiorova, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 106-113.

practical, end of serfdom as an institution in Russia. As a recently released political prisoner who had spent just under five years alongside criminals from every walk of life in prison camp in Siberia, Dostoevsky was uniquely positioned between the upper and lower classes.¹⁷ Drawing on this experience, Dostoevsky collaborated with like-minded thinkers including his brother Mikhail, the philosopher and critic Nikolai Strakhov, and the poet and critic Apollon Grigoryev to occupy a middle perspective between the surrounding left and right camps. Collectively, the thick journals competed for the role of mediator and social advisor for the Russian reading public.

Dostoevsky Learns to See in “Petersburg Visions in Verse and Prose”

Dostoevsky’s mock-feuilleton, “Petersburg Visions in Verse and Prose,” was published in the first issue of *Vremia* (January 1860) and not again until 1918 (*PSS* 19:262). The narrator is a *fel’tonist*, a writer of feuilletons. The details of the feuilleton writer’s life are taken from Dostoevsky’s biography, such as his obsession with reading Schiller and Hoffman and the fact that Dostoevsky was a practiced feuilleton writer (he had written four in his pre-Siberian writing career).¹⁸ Using his feuilletonist narrator in “Petersburg Visions,” Dostoevsky lays the ground rules for his personal brand of literary realism. Dostoevsky’s feuilleton writer is a self-acknowledged *fantazer*, that is, a “dreamer” or “visionary,” as well as a *mistik*, “mystic.” This moniker is not entirely dreamed up by the narrator. In having his narrator assume the title, Dostoevsky responds to an old dysphemism bestowed upon him by Vissarion Belinsky whose

¹⁷ Dostoevsky was released from prison camp in early 1854 and spent the next 5 years serving in the Siberian Seventh Line Battalion stationed in Semipalatinsk, first as a private, then as non-commissioned officer and eventually as warrant officer. For more on the details of Dostoevsky’s exile see Joseph Frank, *The Years of Ordeal: 1850-1859* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983).

¹⁸ For an analysis of the feuilleton and its impact on Dostoevsky’s aesthetics, see Joseph Frank, “The Petersburg Feuilletons,” in *Dostoevsky: New Perspectives*, ed. Robert Louis Jackson, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1984), 35-55.

social realist criticism shaped *Sovremennik*'s ideology during the 1840s. After Belinsky had embraced Dostoevsky's *Poor Folk* (1846) as emblematic of the Natural School aesthetic and ideology, which sought to reflect the reality of the marginalized Russian people in vivid detail, he disavowed Dostoevsky's next novel, *The Double* (1846), calling it the ramblings of a madman fit for the insane asylum.¹⁹ In "Petersburg Visions," Dostoevsky absorbs Belinsky's fourteen-year-old critique of his fantastic writing style into the title as a way of taking ownership of his uniquely imaginative aesthetic. The feuilleton writer declares that he is a "visionary," that is, one who envisions reality as a merging of the empirical world available to the physical eye with the world of imagination and cognition. The mock-feuilleton is written in such a way as to exemplify this aesthetic stance. By placing it in the very first publication of *Vremia*, Dostoevsky both declares his personal poetic aims and establishes the *napravlenie* (aesthetic/philosophical inclination) of his thick journal.

The translation of the word *snovideniia* in Dostoevsky's feuilleton as "visions" is partially misleading, but in a way that aptly reinforces the blurred line between literal and metaphorical vision that characterizes Dostoevsky's fiction. As in English, the root word *videnie* on its own refers primarily to plain "vision" or "sight" of the visible world during the waking state and secondarily to visions in various modes of consciousness. The added prefix *sno-*, derived from *son* meaning "dream" or "sleep," gives the root *videnie* a decidedly hybrid meaning akin to "dream vision." A *snovidenie* is an immersive and subjective experience that one has either in dreams while sleeping or in the waking equivalent of daydreams. It is an imaginative occurrence. The feuilleton heightens the interconnection between the words *snovidenie* and

¹⁹See commentary on Belinsky's article on *Poor Folk* (*PSS* 19:265-66).

videnie, as if to purposely reinforce their interdependence. He refers to the eponymous Petersburg visions interchangeably as *snovideniia* and *videniia*.

The central and formative “vision” in the feuilleton refers to a rather unassuming childhood experience that proves consequential in the feuilleton writer’s life. At the core of this vision is an *oshchushchenie*, meaning variously “feeling,” “sensation,” “sense,” “perception,” and “experience.” He writes, “And ever since then, from that very vision (*videnie*) (I call my *oshchushchenie* on the Neva a vision [*videnie*]), very strange things started to happen with me”²⁰ (Katz 101; PSS 19:69). The original incident is nothing extraordinary, as the feuilleton writer admits: “What was the incident? What happened there? Nothing. Absolutely nothing. It was merely a sensation (*oshchushchenie*), and all the rest turned out fine” (Katz 101; PSS 19:69). The emphasis on the *oshchushchenie* as a vision shifts attention away from the empirically observable event, the sunset, and towards the introspective experience of it.

A simple report of the empirical event is that the feuilleton writer witnessed a sunset, but the moment in which he claims that “his existence began” (*nachalos’ moe sushchestvovanie*) emerges from his imaginative interpretation of the sunset. The feuilleton writer describes the events that lead up to this moment when as an adolescent he saw pillars of smoke rising from the tops of the St. Petersburg buildings. The rising columns of smoke appeared to form a second city in the sky that loosely resembled the city of St. Petersburg. In the feuilleton writer’s words:

The tense air trembled at the slightest sound; columns of smoke rose like giants from all the roofs on both embankments and rushed upward through the cold sky, twining and untwining along the way making it seem as if new buildings were forming over old ones and a new city was forming in the air (*kazalos’, novye zdaniia vstavali nad starymi, novyi gorod skladyvalsia v vozdukhe*)... (Katz, 101; PSS 19:69)

²⁰ English translations belong to Michael R. Katz. Fyodor Dostoevsky, “Petersburg Visions in Prose and Verse,” trans. Michael R. Katz, *New England Review* 1990 24.4 (2003), 99-116. Throughout the Chapter 1 quote Katz’s translation, providing page numbers from his translation, followed by those from Dostoevsky’s PSS.

The vision appears for an instant to the feuilleton writer as young man, but remains with him as an older man (he admits to having gray hair at the time of writing the feuilleton). This is the moment when the feuilleton writer's own aesthetics crystallized in an image, which, to be precise, is the appearance of an instantaneous city of smoke over the city of St. Petersburg itself.

The vision of the new city above the old sets in motion a train of thought in the mind of the young writer. Although the feuilleton writer is Dostoevsky's invented persona and not to be equated with Dostoevsky, the feuilleton writer's aesthetic observations of his "vision" illustrates several important features of Dostoevsky's poetics. The feuilleton writer describes the beginning of his existence as follows:

It seemed, finally, that this whole world with all its inhabitants, strong and weak, with all their dwellings, shelters of the poor or gilded mansions, at that twilight hour resembled a fantastic, magical vision (*fantasticheskuiu, volshebnuuu grezu*), a daydream (*son*) which in turn would vanish instantly and rise up like steam into the dark-blue sky. Some strange thought suddenly stirred within me. I shuddered and at that moment my heart seemed to be flooded with a warm rush of blood that boiled up suddenly from the surge of a powerful, previously unknown sensation. It was as if at that moment I came to understand something that until then had only been stirring vaguely within me, and had yet to be comprehended; it was as if my eyes were opened to something new (*kak-budto prozrel vo chto-to novoe*), to a completely new world, unfamiliar to me and known only from obscure rumors and some mysterious signs. I suppose it was precisely at that moment that my existence began. . . (Katz 101; *PSS* 19:69)

Firstly, the vision that alters the young feuilleton writer's life is not a single vision, but rather a multifaceted experience involving multiple visions. The first vision is that of St. Petersburg before him. This vision is a view of the city rooted in empirical observation. His second vision of St. Petersburg in the smoke is still rooted in the empirical realm. Yet the smoke takes on the shape of the city as a product of empirical observation compounded by the transmuting effect of his imagination. This second vision prompts the stirring experience of the third vision, this time, a "greza." A *greza* is a daydream, a form of vision available to the waking mind, the conscious

imagination or reverie. Having seen the vision of the city of smoke, he redirects his gaze to the city of St. Petersburg, and then re-imagines it as the second vision (made of smoke). This yields an insight: St. Petersburg, like the city of smoke, is a vanishing vision. The daydream is the experience of the two cities merging in his mind. The city of smoke makes him conscious of the impermanence of the city of St. Petersburg. More importantly, he becomes conscious of the way in which St. Petersburg is fashioned by him. Once conceived, the daydream reverberates throughout his body as a "sensation" (*oshchushchenie*), a warmth that pulses through his heart and fills his chest. This life-altering moment fittingly requires four multivalent terms (*snovideniia*, *videnie*, *oshchushchenie* and *greza*) in order to express the range of impressions that cascade through the young feuilleton writer's mind and body. Looking at the event in light of early twentieth-century Russian literary theory, we might just as readily replace the feuilleton writer's word "sensation" with "estrangement" because as the young feuilleton writer moves from seeing the city to feeling its recreation in his body, he experiences the perception of an object of thought for the first time. This is the young feuilleton writer's first encounter with the meaning-making potential of fiction, whereby he constructs an image in his mind that corresponds to the city itself and then compares the image in his mind to what he sees in front of him. When writing about it years later, he uses poetic language to recreate that initial sensation of conceiving St. Petersburg as both a literal and fantastical vision.²¹

The daydream coincides with the young feuilleton writer's "opening of his eyes" to something new. The verb that the mature feuilleton writer uses to describe this awakening is

²¹ John Berger begins his classic art criticism, *Ways of Seeing*, with a description of the interplay between narrative and seeing as rooted in childhood: "Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak. But there is also another sense in which seeing comes before words. It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding words, we explain that world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it. The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled." John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, (Penguin: 1972).

prozret’, the imperfective of *prozrevat*’, which signifies both the literal meaning of “to regain sight, to begin to see clearly, to see through” and the metaphorical meaning of “to see the light” in the sense of reaching an understanding of something. This type of vision differs from “looking at” an object of sight. In fact, the Russian word for clairvoyance (*prozorlivost*’) derives from this verb.²² The sensation that stirs in the young feuilleton writer’s body completes an important component of the experience of art, whether plastic, visual or verbal. For Dostoevsky, it is not enough for art to be seen, it must also be felt. The feuilleton writer’s description of his younger self’s *snovidenie-videnie-greza-oshchushchenie* illustrates a progression that reappears throughout Dostoevsky’s fiction: prompted by and rooted in visible, empirical analysis, Dostoevsky crafts his way towards meaning, which is ultimately achieved through a creative synthesis of empirical data in the imagination of an embodied observer.²³

The feuilleton writer projects fictional constructs from his reading onto the characters that he sees roaming the streets of St. Petersburg without rendering his vision of them any less realistic. Instead, his description is self-aware. In his feuilleton, he describes the process by which he cognizes the people that he sees.

²² In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Father Zosima attains *prozorlivost*’ after a lifetime of receiving confessions; he is rumored to see his confessee’s sins before the penitent articulates them (38.I.2.1). This special verb of sight denoted by *prozrevat*’ pertains to insight.

²³ Jacques Cateau has written about Dostoevsky’s fascination with Thomas De Quincey’s similarly multifaceted opium-induced visions in his novel *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1821). He describes his hallucinations as overwhelming sensory experiences, which Cateau compares to Dostoevsky’s epilepsy-induced visions. Cateau writes, “Through De Quincey, [Dostoevsky] discovered that the imagination was no longer a pale and extravagant rival of reality, but was capable of building surreal universes to be experienced by body and soul. He realized that these so-called deviations, pathological or not, were also ways of penetrating man’s mystery and sources of truth and knowledge” (58). The vision of Dostoevsky’s feuilleton writer recalls De Quincey’s opium-inspired visions of London. For more on the role of De Quincey’s novel in shaping Dostoevsky’s realism, Jacques Cateau’s chapter “The Heritage: Literature,” in *Dostoevsky and the Process of Literary Creation*, trans. Audrey Littlewood, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989).

I began to look around and suddenly noticed some strange faces. They were all strange, bizarre figures, completely prosaic, no longer [Schiller's] Don Carloses and Pozas, but now all titular councilors, and, at the same time, they were all fantastical titular councilors. Someone was making faces in front of me, concealing himself behind this entire fantastical crowd, yanking on some strings, springs, and all these little puppets were moving, and he was laughing and laughing! (Katz 103; *PSS* 19:71)

Who is this “someone” laughing? Perhaps Gogol, whose fiction championed the plight of the titular councilor? Why does the feuilleton writer see literary characters instead of ordinary people? In order to make sense of both the literary characters from his memory and the people that he sees on the streets, he compares them to one another, just as he compared the city of St. Petersburg to the city of smoke. The veracity of this type of report does not pertain to the empirical verisimilitude of the Petersburg inhabitants or even to a strictly factual account of them, but rather to the truth of cognition, and the relevant memories, including literary and artistic ones, that inform his vision. Instead of an empirical report, the feuilleton writer delights in the discovery of cognition, and one senses that as he gazes at St. Petersburg and its inhabitants, he is becoming aware of his own hand in the creative act of seeing. Behind the previous storytellers of St. Petersburg, the feuilleton writer is the “concealed person” pulling the strings of the characters in his own fictional St. Petersburg.

This feuilleton writer's complex vision cannot be attributed to the delusions of an insane person. We know that he has not lost his mind in part because he distances himself from a delusional character that is modeled after Gogol's Poprishchin from *Zapiski sumasshedshego* (*Diary of a Madman* -1835). The feuilleton writer defines his madman's delusion that he is the great Italian general Giuseppe Garibaldi in Gogolian fashion:

It had occurred to him that he was none other than Garibaldi! Yes! The civil servants, his co-workers, all remarked that for the last two weeks he'd been preoccupied by that thought; he'd read something in a newspaper that just happened to turn up on a table. Before then he'd hardly spoken with anyone; suddenly he began to get agitated, became confused, asked all about Garibaldi and Italian affairs, just as [Gogol's] Poprishchin did

about Spanish affairs.... Gradually, a little at a time, the incontrovertible conviction began to take shape in his head that he was none other than Garibaldi, a freebooter and destroyer of the natural order of things. (Katz 104; *PSS* 19:72)²⁴

The feuilleton writer can see this man's madness, yet he includes him in order to illustrate the mind's capacity to completely overtake the vision process. The vision of Dostoevsky's narrator and that of the Garibaldi impostor exist on a spectrum, with the difference being that the narrator acknowledges that the city in the sky is a construct, while the impostor remains imprisoned in his delusion. In the words of the feuilleton writer, "The whole of God's world glided by before his eyes and vanished somewhere, the earth slipped from under his feet" (Katz 104; *PSS* 19:72).²⁵

Whereas the feuilleton writer returns to the earth through his body after experiencing his daydream, the madman loses track of the earth and never returns from the daydream. On the one hand, the feuilleton writer gives his critics a real madman. On the other, he lays bare his own cognitive process, whereby he draws from a store of previously read fictions in order to create his own. He uses an existing memory of Poprishchin, who is completely unmoored from his physical body and his surroundings, in order to make sense of the townsman. And the townsman fleshes out the previous memory of Poprishchin in turn. This reciprocal action between

²⁴ The ghost of Garibaldi lingered in Dostoevsky's imagination long after writing "Petersburg Visions." In 1867, as Dostoevsky was writing *The Idiot*, he mentions Garibaldi in a letter to his niece, Sofiia Aleksandrovna Ivanova. He was struck by the appearance of Garibaldi at the First (Genevan) Congress of the League of Peace and Freedom in 1867. Up to that point, Garibaldi had only existed for Dostoevsky in books and newspaper articles; at this moment he walked out of the books and into a shared room. Yet Dostoevsky still has unfavorable things to say about Garibaldi, who becomes emblematic of the unthinking revolutionaries at the Congress who seek to replace the Christian faith with what Dostoevsky believes are false, utopic solutions to address poverty and social ills. See Letter to S. A. Ivanova, 29 Sep. 1867, (*PSS* 28, 2:224).

²⁵ At the end of Gogol's short story, Poprishchin literally flies over his Russian maternal village on the way to Spain. Before taking off he prays, "Save me! Carry me away! Give me three steeds swift as the wind! Mount your seat, coachman, ring bells, gallop horses, and carry me straight out of this world. Farther, ever farther, till nothing more is to be seen!" Nikolai Gogol, *The Mantle, and Other Stories*, trans. Claud Field, (Freeport, NY: for Libraries, 1971). *Www.gutenberg.net*.

imagination and observation generates a creative torque that impels Dostoevsky's mock-feuilleton forward.

The Feuilleton Writer Scoffs at The Idea of Subsuming Multiple Perspectives into One

“Petersburg Visions” illustrates another aesthetic principle of Dostoevsky's, namely, his rejection of the idea that multiple perspectives can be subsumed into a single totalizing perspective. The feuilleton writer scoffs at Andrei Kraevsky's proposed *Encyclopedic Dictionary* for this reason. After paying lip service to Kraevsky's contributions to the advancement of Russian literature for his entrepreneurship during the 1840s and 1850s, the feuilleton writer takes issue with his latest enterprise to edit and publish a comprehensive encyclopedia that incorporates much more than literature.²⁶ He cannot imagine a perspective so all embracing as to be capable of collecting information about every specialized field of knowledge, which is precisely what Kraevsky intends to do. The feuilleton writer writes:

If [Kraevsky] says that he assumed moral responsibility for the articles in the [Encyclopedic Dictionary]; that he will peruse articles in all branches of knowledge—philosophy, natural science, history, literature, and mathematics; that he will revise, condense, and supplement these articles as necessary: then we will have to be forgiven at least for our astonishment. That would even be a bit embarrassing. That would make people laugh; that would even serve to discredit him! I think that if Francis Bacon himself were to publish the *Encyclopedic Dictionary* making such claims of responsibility, even he would make people laugh. It's impossible to know everything, all fields of knowledge on earth! It's impossible to know how to do everything. (Katz 114; PSS 19:82)

That one person could have such a vast range and depth of knowledge of so many different disciplines strikes the feuilleton writer as absurd. Such a totalizing project stands in opposition to

²⁶ Dostoevsky was not only familiar with Kraevsky as a public figure in the literary scene, but Kraevsky was also Dostoevsky's former editor at *Notes of the Fatherland* (1839-1867).

the personalized descriptions of St. Petersburg and its inhabitants that he offers in his feuilleton. The feuilleton writer cannot conceive of an all-embracing thinker who could verify such a diverse multiplicity of perspectives with his own. The feuilleton writer's skepticism of Kraevsky's proposed project resembles Dostoevsky's life-long opposition to similar such totalizing perspectives of thinkers who lay false claim to objectivity and the scientific authority associated with it.²⁷

As a writer of fiction, Dostoevsky employed various means to remind the reader that knowledge does not appear on its own from some mythical perspectival-free space. He constantly reminds the reader that knowledge emerges from a particular place of seeing and is therefore limited by the idiosyncrasies of individual perspective. "Petersburg Visions," as a mock-feuilleton, particularly contrasts with Kraevsky's proposed encyclopedia insofar as the feuilleton writer transparently admits the peculiarity of his own vision, that is, he lays bare the process that makes his vision possible. This transparency places the substance of the "Petersburg Visions" somewhere in between St. Petersburg the city and St. Petersburg the vision. The feuilleton writer's vision is partially quixotic—modern and local belles-lettres occupy his imagination in place of chivalric romances—yet he retains an awareness of his quixotic ways in his writing. He writes lucidly about his quixotic leanings while clearly distinguishing himself from the more quixotic characters of his fictional Kraevsky and Garibaldi who equate their individual perspectives with reality.

²⁷ The most explicit contestation of systematization occurs in Dostoevsky's *Notes From Underground* (1864). He parodies Chernyshevsky's rationalist-utilitarian philosophy in the character of the underground man, who attempts to internalize it but instinctively rejects it. And Dostoevsky makes an image of Chernyshevsky's materialist-utopia in the form of the Crystal Palace, where fixed rational laws predetermine its inhabitants every best interest. Dostoevsky famously rejects the Palace in favor of the capacity to exercise free will, the best of all best interests. Dostoevsky clearly favors individual perspective over the allegedly objective system that makes universal claims for truth and the general good. In *Demons*, Liza Tushina's proposed almanac, often seen as a blueprint for Dostoevsky's *Dnevnik pisatel'ia* (*Diary of a Writer*), also favors a more subjective principle of selection.

The heterogeneous form of the feuilleton matched Dostoevsky's penchant for a range of diverse perspectives. The feuilleton was both a familiar and developing genre that combined satire with news, gossip, anecdotes, literary criticism and scientific findings. The fluidity of the genre freed Dostoevsky from the constraints of a single way of thinking and writing about contemporary events to begin with, but he also further tested the limits of the feuilleton. "Petersburg Visions" is a mock-feuilleton, and not simply a feuilleton; Dostoevsky continues to stretch and bend an already very flexible form as he writes within it. His mock-feuilleton contains gossip and pokes anecdotal fun at what passes for news in other thick journals of the time. The feuilleton writer reports as a documentary journalist on the one hand and as a *daydreamer* on the other. The full title of the piece ("Petersburg Visions in Poetry and Prose") alludes to the hybrid nature of this particular feuilleton insofar as the feuilleton writer conveys his eponymous "visions" through the mediums of both poetry and prose.²⁸

The Feuilleton Writer is a Dreamer

The explicitly stated aesthetic position of the feuilleton writer of "Petersburg Visions" (and of *Vremia* by extension) remains pertinent to Dostoevsky's fiction from the time of its publication in 1861 until the end of his career. The feuilleton writer articulates this aesthetic position in the following passage:

And there, right before me in the crowd flashed some figure, not real, but fantastic (*ne deisvitel'naia, a fantasticheskaia*). I simply can't forswear a fantastic frame of mind (*fanticheskoe nastroenie*). Back in the 1840s people called me a dreamer (*fantazer*) and teased me for it. However, at that time, I'd yet to crawl through a single hole. Now, it goes without saying, gray hair, life experience, etc., etc., and all the same, I've remained a dreamer. (105; *PSS* 19:73)

²⁸ The multifaceted genre of the feuilleton during the 1840s-1860s offered a loose model for the category-defying, visually impressionistic notes of his post-Siberian novel *Notes From the House of the Dead* (1860-62, discussed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation). Joseph Frank argues that Dostoevsky never quite abandoned certain aspects of the genre and that it shaped the writing of his later novels. Frank, "The Petersburg Feuilletons" (See footnote 5).

This is an unabashedly autobiographical insert taken straight from Dostoevsky's recent experience in exile. Dostoevsky was sorely wounded by Belinsky's rejection of his second novel, *The Double*, as the fantastical ramblings of a mad man. He would have nearly ten years to brood over this criticism in combined prison and forced military servitude. Belinsky died in 1848, the year before Dostoevsky was arrested. If Belinsky thought that Dostoevsky was a dreamer before he served time, then one can only imagine what he would have said of this "dreamer" who was confined to overcrowded barracks for four years, followed by five years of compulsory military service in a remote town within an already remote region of Siberia. Deprived of the freedom to set his eyes on new sights and forced to look at the sordid conditions around him, he instead grew acutely aware of the mechanics of his hypertrophic imagination and its vision-shaping power. As we know, Dostoevsky had a "fantastic frame of mind" to begin with.²⁹ He was an epileptic, who described the moment before his seizures both as overwhelmingly imaginative and as an embodied experience of philosophical illumination.³⁰ He admits that this frame of

²⁹ Dostoevsky wrote the autobiographical sketch, "The Peasant Marei" ("Muzhik Marei" 1876), in which he confesses to having an auditory hallucination at the age of nine, a phenomenon he subsequently outgrew. The eponymous Marei consoled the young Dostoevsky, who had been alone in the forest and heard a voice that said "*Volk bezhit!*" ("A wolf is running!" PSS 22:49). The nine-year-old Dostoevsky runs to a peasant who consoles him and quiets him with a sign of the cross over his lips. Dostoevsky was fifty-five years old when he published the sketch in the February 1876 issue of his *Dnevnik Pisatel'ia* (*Diary of a Writer*, 1873-1881). This moment would resurface in his life as a way to relate to the peasant cellmates that he was forced to live with during his exile and imprisonment in Siberia beginning at the age of twenty-nine. For more on this chapter of the sketch, see Joseph Frank's *Dostoevsky: The Stir of Liberation 1860-65*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 213-323; and Harriet Murav's article "Dostoevsky in Siberia: Remembering the Past" in *Slavic Review* 50, no. 4 (1991), 858-66.

³⁰ Looking back on his life in 1870, Dostoevsky estimated that beginning at the age of twenty six, he had suffered an epileptic seizure once every three weeks. Dostoevsky was arrested in April of 1848, at the age of twenty seven and exiled in December of the same year at the age of 28. See James Rice, "Dostoevsky's Medical History: Diagnosis and Dialectic" in *The Russian Review* 42.2 (1983): 131-161; 132. Dostoevsky also created at least five fictional characters who suffered from epilepsy over the course of his career, ranging from the old landlord Murin in *The Landlady* (1847) to the bastard child Smerdiakov in *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880). The others were the orphan Nellie in *The Insulted and Injured* (1861), the "positively beautiful" Prince Myshkin in *The Idiot* (1868) and the suicidal Kirilov in *Demons*

mind is inseparable from his way of seeing the world, but he does not believe that it mind hinders him from seeing reality.

Dostoevsky anticipates criticism of the fantastical style of the feuilleton from Nikolai Dobroliubov, one of the leading contributors to *Sovremennik* and critical successor of Belinsky. Dostoevsky makes the narrator conscious of this anticipated criticism and the narrator stands by the fantastical frame of mind that has been with him since adolescence. The narrator writes, “If I hadn’t been afraid of offending Mr. [Dobroliu]-bov’s delicate sensibility, at the time I’d have prescribed for myself a remedy of birch rods to counteract my gloomy tendency.” The fueiileton writer claims that Dobroliubov will argue that his “gloomy tendency” (*mrachnoe napravlenie*) towards fantasy should have been whipped out of him with birch branches at a young age (Katz 101; *PSS* 19:69). The feuilleton writer is proud to announce that this “gloomy tendency” was never whipped out of him and, for Dostoevsky, this "gloomy tendency" became the foundation for the reality in which his literary production is rooted.³¹ The feuilleton writer preemptively welcomes Dobroliubov’s hypothetical accusation with a renewed sense of conviction in his own aesthetic outlook as that of a dreamer that corresponds to Dostoevsky’s. Through the persona of the feuilleton writer in “Petersburg Visions,” Dostoevsky carefully redefines the dreamer, purging it of the negative connotations that it carries with Dobroliubov. Dostoevsky’s own

(1872). There is a debate as to when he began experiencing epileptic fits. Some sources indicate that he suffered the fits as early as the late 1830s during his adolescence. The earliest authoritative account comes from his fellow student and roommate Dmitri Grigorovich at the Academy of Engineers in October of 1844, when Dostoevsky was twenty two years old. See Peter Sekirin’s section on Grigorovich (pp. 63-68) in *The Dostoevsky Archive: Firsthand Accounts of the Novelist from Contemporaries’ Memoirs and Rare Periodicals, Most Translated into English for the First Time, with a Detailed Lifetime Chronology and Annotated Bibliography* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1997). For more on the clinical history and various accounts of Dostoevsky’s epilepsy, see Ivan Iniesta’s “Epilepsy in Dostoevsky” in *Progress in Brain Research*, ed. Anne Stiles, Stanley Finger, and Francois Boller (2013), 277-93.

³¹ In his mock-feuilleton, he includes the great lyric poet Afanasy Fet (1820-1892) in the category of “dreamers,” and directly quotes his poetry as an example of what such “dreamers” who are allegedly in need of birching can accomplish (Katz 115; *PSS* 19:84).

aesthetic statement shines through the feuilleton writer's: Dostoevsky is not only a dreamer, but he is also a visionary.

The Un-seeing Eye in Yakobi's Painting *Prisoners' Halt*



Fig. 1. Valery Yakobi's *Prival arestantov, Prisoners' Halt* (1861)³²

The second piece of writing that clarifies the role of vision in Dostoevsky's poetics during the early 1860s is "Exhibition at the Academy of the Arts: 1860-1861." Ostensibly an article of visual art criticism in a literary journal, essentially, it is another fragment from the

³² Valery Ivanovich Yakobi, *Prisoners' Halt* (1861). Digital image. [Commons.wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org/).

proposed book on art that Dostoevsky never wrote.³³ The article was one of several published in Russian journals of the time on the topic of the annual exhibition (held in 1861 on September 10) at The Academy of Arts.³⁴ It opens with Dostoevsky's art criticism of Valery Yakobi's (1834-1932) well-known realist painting *Prival Arestantov (Prisoners' Halt; 1861)*, a painting emblematic of a prevailing form of *literary* realism that Dostoevsky vehemently opposed. The artistic notion of realism in both the plastic arts and belles-lettres was experiencing a powerful shift towards the visual in light of the recent invention of the daguerreotype (discussed in the following section) and its remarkable capacity for reproducing the visual world with unprecedented verisimilitude. Upon returning from Siberia after ten years in exile, Dostoevsky found himself out of step with this visual trend in realism. In his critique of Yakobi's painting, he elucidates the importance of the "body's eyes," his term for an embodied gaze (*PSS* 19:154). He

³³ The article was published in the Dostoevsky brothers' journal *Vremia* without authorial attribution. Nonetheless, it is overwhelmingly accepted by modern scholarship as written by Dostoevsky and included in his collected works. One of the leading skeptics of Dostoevsky's exclusive authorship is Vera S. Nechaeva, who argues that it was coauthored with Russian writer Pavel M. Kovalevskii, yet even she does not doubt that the pages devoted to the art criticism of Yakobi's *Prisoners Halt* are Dostoevsky's. V. S. Nechaeva, *Zhurnal M.M. i F.M. Dostoevskikh Vremia, 1861-1863*. (Moskva: "Nauka," 1972), 264. Georgii M. Fridlender argues that "the principle aesthetic positions [...] of the article, unquestionably belong to Dostoevsky" (my translation; *PSS* 19:319). See more about the scholarship on the article in *PSS*, 19:314-30. The Norwegian scholar Geir Kjetsaa attempted to settle the dispute through a statistical linguistic analysis (as opposed to an ideological or stylistic analysis) of several of Dostoevsky's disputed texts. He concludes that the author of "The Exhibition" article "must have been another person than Dostoevsky," however, he analyzes the article as a whole, and does not differentiate between the opening pages that include the section on Yakobi and the remaining 22 pages of the article, which are the disputed pages (30). See Geir Kjetsaa, "Written by Dostoevsky?" in *Association for Literary and Linguistic Computing Journal* 2.1 (1981), 25-38. Fridlender, in the *PSS* commentary, enumerates eight primary reasons in support of Dostoevsky's authorship. My application of the aesthetic principles stated in the article to Dostoevsky's novel *Notes From the House of the Dead* (1860-62, see Chapter 2 of this dissertation) accepts Dostoevsky's authorship.

³⁴ Fridlender cites at least five reviews written around the time of the exhibit in various journals: by Averkiev in *Russkii invalid* (19 Sep. No. 204), Kovalevskii in *Sovremennik* (no. 9 otd. 2, 71-82), Rozengeim in *Notes From the Fatherland* (No. 10, otd. 3, 34-41), Minaev in *Russkoe slovo* (No. 10 otd. 5, 1-22) and Petrov in *Illustrations* (14 and 21 of September, no. 186, 187). The articles reflect a widespread interest among the journals at the time to discover a homegrown Russian painting tradition, which was lagging behind Russian literature as an art form. For further information on the publication and content of these articles, see *PSS* 19:319-24.

also explains the artistic limits of verisimilitude, arguing that for a hypothetical, ideal artist, whom he calls the “true artist,” or *istinnyi khudozhnik*, verisimilitude is a means to an end of artistic expression. For Dostoevsky, the visual artist cannot accurately depict human subjects by effacing himself behind the well-crafted lens required to execute visually realistic painting, but rather, his “true artist” must portray the human subject in such a way as to express both his own and his subjects’ inner complexity from an imaginative place of understanding, that is, with sight and *in-sight*. For Dostoevsky, the lesser artist neglects his personhood by imitating the imagined objectivity of the camera lens, which diminishes the likelihood of viewers experiencing catharsis.

Although the subject matter of *Prisoners’ Halt* is overtly political, Yakobi’s painting caught the attention of Dostoevsky primarily for aesthetic and philosophical reasons. Historian Richard Stites describes the scenario within the painting succinctly: “One of the very first public depictions of exile, it is a harrowing scene of crowds of suffering convicts and families—with a dying man, obviously a member of the intelligentsia, perhaps a radical—stretched out on a wagon.”³⁵ Dostoevsky does not overtly draw attention to his exile experience, but focuses his critique primarily on the dynamic between the officer and the prisoner in the right hand side of the painting, particularly the prisoner’s eye. He also discusses the prisoner wearing shackles in the lower-right foreground of the painting. His analysis of these depictions within the objectifying context of the realist style is unfavorable to say the least.³⁶

³⁵ Richard Stites, *Serfdom, Society, and the Arts in Imperial Russia: The Pleasure and the Power* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2005), 414.

³⁶ In contrast to Dostoevsky’s distaste for the painting, the novelist and art critic Pavel Kovalevskii wrote in his review of the same exhibition for *Sovremennik* that it represented a “big step forward” for Russian art. He adds that the several artists including Yakobi were “embarking on a realistic path (*na real’nyi put’*) and inspired with a sense of modernism.” He finds the content refreshing when set against the antiquated styles that have dominated the art of the Academy since its inception. He writes: “On the canvas, where mighty heavens and lofty worlds were once painted [...] now there appear random clerks, officers, their wives, matchmakers and a distinct servant [various servants – *chelaiaid* is collective; and the

Dostoevsky's extended critique of *Prisoners' Halt* is expressed in ocular terms. He sees indifference in every set of eyes within the painting. He notices it first in the gaze of the officer who forcibly opens a prisoner's eyelid to check for signs of life. Dostoevsky writes:

An officer is standing near the same wagon [on which the prisoner rests]. With one hand he is opening one eye of the deceased, apparently in order to make certain of his death. The big eye of the dead man is open, with his pupil skewed downwards. The officer, very indifferently (*ochen' ravnodushno*) smoking a pipe, calmly looks at the dimmed eye, and precisely nothing appears on his callous face (*na cherstvom litse*): not concern, nor compassion, nor surprise, absolutely nothing, as if he were looking at a dead cat or roadside bird. He is even much more engaged with his pipe, than he is with the deceased, at whom he looked passingly in the eye.³⁷ (*PSS* 19:152)

The officer's unfeeling way of looking at the prisoner, who is dead according to Dostoevsky's interpretation, is unsettling. The officer's examination of the prisoner lacks any outward indication of pathos. He may have glanced at the eye "passingly," but the eye remains cruelly opened for the viewer of the painting. Indeed the officer looks at the prisoner as if from a removed perspective, like that of the realist painter Yakobi who stands outside of the painted world. Dostoevsky describes the officer's way of seeing tellingly, such as how the officer "coolly/calmly looks" at the prisoner's dead eye while "indifferently smoking a pipe." He interprets the officer's face as "hard-hearted or calloused" adding that it expresses "absolutely nothing."³⁸ The examining officer personifies Yakobi's passive way of looking and consequently

idea is that they are all different], *muzhiks* and peasant women, dancing at the tavern, prisoners on the road to Siberia" (my translation; Kovalevskii 71). I'm indebted to Fridlender's commentary (*PSS* 19:319-20) for collating the various Russian reviews of the exhibition at the time. This excerpt is from a section on contemporary arts co-authored by Pavel M. Kovalevskii and Ivan Panaev, "Peterburgskaia zhizn'. Zametki novogo poeta" in *Sovremennik* 9.II (1861), 71-92. Fridlender attributes the art criticism (71-82) in particular to Kovalevskii in *PSS* 19:319.

³⁷ All English translations of "The Exhibition" article are mine.

³⁸ In her article, "The Face of the Other in *The Idiot*," Leslie A. Johnson reveals the inseparable link between ethics and the human face in Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*: "Dostoevsky's notion of good in this, his most ethical novel, is a way of seeing the face of the other" (867). *Slavic Review*, 50.4 (1991), 867-878.

depicting the scene. There is no indication of feeling on the officer's face and he remains indifferent to the loss of life.

For Dostoevsky, the vacant gaze reappears in the other guards of the detachment. He presents this deficiency of feeling in the guards as a product of a way of seeing, which he describes as follows:

One encounters many similar characters among the colleagues in the detachment. And it can be no other way. For most of their life, these gentlemen have been escorting prisoners and they have already seen their fill (*nasmotrelis'*) of such unfortunate people, already grown tired of seeing (*prigliadelis'*) their suffering, their illness, and they've grown accustomed to seeing (*privikli videt'*) amongst themselves such people who are for the most part wicked. The nature of their public service blunts the officers' sensitivity (*chuvstvitel'nost'*) to others, and they occasionally beat the prisoners as coolly as they pack their pipes. (*PSS 19:152*)

Dostoevsky uses three different verbs of seeing in his analysis of the characters: *nasmotret'*, *prigliadet'* and *videt'*. The first, "*nasmotret'*," combines the reflexive form of the root verb "*smotret'*," meaning "to look at/watch," with the prefix "na," which expresses a sense of excess. Dostoevsky thus conveys a sense of mind-numbing habitude. The second verb, combines the reflexive the reflexive form of the root verb "*gliadet'*," also meaning "to look at," with the prefix *pri*, which conveys the sense of "thoroughly." There is an additional connotation of visuality in this verb, similar to the English infinitive, "to eye," since the Russian verb *gliadet'* stems from the word for "eye," or *glaz*. This reflexive form of the verb is also used in the expression "to grow accustomed to/used to the dark" (*prigliadet'sia k temnote*) when the eyes adapt to see more clearly in darkness. The third verb that Dostoevsky uses is *videt'*, which means "to see" in both the literal and metaphorical sense, as in English. In the painting, the eyes of the members of the detachment are so "used to seeing" (*privykli videt'*) suffering, illness and misfortune—that they have adapted to such darkness as normal. Their eyes are desensitized to the suffering of others. The three verbs that Dostoevsky uses for the kind of vision that prevails in the painting pertain to

passive looking and contrast strongly to the verbs of active and imaginative seeing that characterize the vision of the feuilleton writer in “Petersburg Visions.”



Fig. 2. Detail of prisoner in Yakobi’s *Prival arestantov*

In the review, Dostoevsky describes a second prisoner who is so desensitized that he does not feel his own pain. Once again, Dostoevsky perceives a lifeless gaze on the withdrawn prisoner who is in shackles in the painting’s lower right-hand corner (See fig. 2, above).

Dostoevsky takes issue with the unfeeling way in which the prisoner examines the sores in his legs caused by wearing shackles during the transport:

[There is] a prisoner in rags, not paying attention to a thing that is happening around him, busy with his own affairs: he’s looking over his wound, gnawed into his leg by his shackles. The hardened face of this person—who has probably sat out many years in different prisons, and has been sent several times from one to the next, for thousands of miles—has taken on the marker that is quite common to people of this sort, the marker of indifference to everything in the world: whether it be to the elements, the seasons, the torture of his mates or to his very own suffering. With exactly this dull indifference, he looks at his wound, and for that reason, one cannot detect any expression on his rigid face, half-covered by his disheveled hair. (*PSS* 19:153)

Dostoevsky describes the prisoner as occupying a world that is utterly removed from the chaos and suffering on all sides. The prisoner has not only retreated from the disorder surrounding the wrecked cart, but he has also retreated from the living world around him. Dostoevsky portrays him as oblivious to his natural surroundings and the changing rhythms of the weather and the

seasons. The prisoner's detachment from the world begins with his own detachment from his body, which manifests in how he neglects to express his own pain outwardly. Just as the dead eye of the supine prisoner gazes out onto the world, and just as the captain gazes at that same dead eye, so the prisoner gazes at his own suffering with indifference. The prisoner looks at his own body from the perspective of a disembodied gaze that once more echoes the removed perspective of the artist who paints him. The prisoner looks at his own pain without feeling, which prevents him from acknowledging the pain. In the next paragraph, Dostoevsky elaborates the difference between a photograph or a mirror image and real art. The characters within the painting reflect the artist's unfeeling gaze like so many mirrors.

Dostoevsky acknowledges the verisimilitude of the painting, but for him this effect pertains not to "reality," but rather to external appearances. He writes, "Everything that is portrayed in the painting by the artist is exactly as it is in nature (*tak byvaet v prirode*), that is, if you are looking at nature only on the surface" (*PSS* 19:153).³⁹ Dostoevsky compares the fidelity with which Yakobi paints the characters in the painting to that of the camera and the mirror, both instruments that reflect the world passively. "The viewer does in fact (*deistvitel'no*) see actual prisoners (*nastoiashchikh arestantov*) in Mr. Yakobi's painting, just as he would see them, for example, in a mirror or in a photograph, then painted over with great skill in the matter" (*PSS* 19:153). Neither the camera nor the mirror, nor the painter who objectifies himself in the act of mimicking the function of either instrument can produce art in Dostoevsky's opinion because they are lifeless. Consequently, they can only reflect the surface of things.

³⁹ Dmitri Minaev concurs with the superficiality of the Academy painters' aesthetic. He refers to Yakobi's painting as one of several "painting-photographs" (*kartiny-fotografii*), in which the artists "pursue not the general truth of the whole painting, but rather its particular details" (my translation, Minaev, 20). Dmitri Minaev, "Neskol'ko slov o khudozhestvennoi Akademicheskoi vystavke 1861 goda" in *Russkoe Slovo* 3.9-10 (1861), 1-22.

Dostoevsky contrasts the physical experience of the human eye and that of mechanical or technical visual instruments. He argues that Yakobi's finished product, like a mirror or photograph represents an "absence of art" (*otsutstvie khudozhestva*). For Dostoevsky, photographs or mirror images lack the human personality required for art. Dostoevsky claims, "The true artist (*istinnyi khudozhnik*) cannot do this. Whether in a painting, a story, a musical composition, without fail he will be seen (*viden*); he is unwillingly reflected, even against his will" (*PSS 19:153*). The word *istinnyi* pertains not to factual truth, but rather to the realm of spiritual or metaphysical truth. Dostoevsky ascribes Yakobi's gaze to that of nearly every character within the painting, but Yakobi is not a true artist because his gaze is directed at surfaces. For Dostoevsky, the realist painter of this type mimics a superficial surface in order to achieve his brand of realism. The realist painter, like a good reflective surface, can create the illusion of visual depth, but he lacks the sagacity, personality and depth of feeling that characterize Dostoevsky's true artist. On a formal level, the painting is no longer of human characters, but a reproduction of the artist's mechanical modes of seeing. It is not an unfolding human drama, but a collection of unmanned cameras and fallen mirrors.

Dostoevsky also critiques the limited scope of the technical precision in Yakobi's painting. He argues that the visual precision and technical accuracy achieved by Yakobi ought to be distinguished from art:

No, this is not what is required of the artist, neither photographic fidelity, nor mechanical (*mekhanicheskaiia*) precision, but rather something else, something greater, broader, deeper. Precision and fidelity are needed, fundamentally indispensable, yet they are not enough. Precision and fidelity are as yet only the material out of which a work of art is eventually created. They are the instruments of the creative work. (*PSS 19:153*)

The fidelity to reality in Yakobi's painting corresponds to the relative degree of mastery of technique that produces the illusion of real people occupying real spaces, but Yakobi's characters

do not appear truly real to Dostoevsky because of their status as superficial objects. Dostoevsky views verisimilitude as the starting point that grounds the artist in empirical reality. Dostoevsky's *istinnyi* (metaphysically true) art aims at "something else, something greater, broader, deeper." The true artist integrates the visible components of man into a skillful depiction of human experience, one whose form and content reflect the human subject not simply as an onlooker, but as a complex cognizing, imagining and feeling individual.

Dostoevsky's true artist depicts characters with feeling as a result of perceiving them feelingly. As a novelist, Dostoevsky reminds his readers that every set of eyes looks from within a personal context. As a viewer, Dostoevsky demands that Yakobi reintegrate the detached camera lens of the eye into the body so as to depict the convicts not impassively as visual objects, but sympathetically as human subjects. He writes:

The viewer has the right to demand that the artist should see nature not as a photographic lens would, but as a person would. In the old days they would have said that he should look with the body's eyes and, above all, with the soul's eyes, or the spiritual eye. Let him see the human beings in these "unfortunate" convicts and let him show them to us.⁴⁰ (*PSS* 19:154)

The prisoner doesn't feel his own pain because, like his artist creator, he does not look at it with his "body's eyes"; he does not feel what he sees. Dostoevsky demands from the artist a fuller accounting of the prisoner and of the calloused officers, one that indicates a sense of responsiveness to the world and to those occupying it. The camera, by contrast, produces mechanical representations. Like creates like: the artist as camera depicts others as cameras, as a mirror reflects others as mirrors. Dostoevsky demands an artist's eye that the viewer can sense belongs to a particular human body and *dusha* (human soul). He wants to see the complexity of

⁴⁰ The term in quotation marks here referring to the "*neschastnye*" (unfortunate) is the same designation that Dostoevsky uses for the convicts in *Dead House*. Fridlender points to this usage as evidence of Dostoevsky's hand in the composition of "The Exhibition at the Academy of the Arts 1860-61" (See *PSS* 19:315-16).

personality in the artist behind the camera or holding up the mirror, and he wants this complexity to be imparted to the characters within the representation both in form and content. These artistic demands articulate Dostoevsky's poetics, which produce developed characters as inwardly complex and vividly sentient because they are conceived from within a vital place of sensing, feeling and seeing.

Dostoevsky argues that Yakobi even fails at his misguided artistic attempt to model his painting after a photograph because the faces of Yakobi's characters lack individuality. For Dostoevsky, Yakobi is not only a *ne-istinnyi* (un-metaphysically true) artist, he is also a poor photographer: "[Yakobi] photographed each of his subjects and did not paint a painting, and he also committed an investigative error. Everyone of his subjects is a scoundrel, and they are all the same" (PSS 19:155). Dostoevsky identifies this same look of a scoundrel in the horse near the center of the painting. Instead of depicting diverse personalities, Yakobi has merely projected his own apathetic gaze onto several faces.

Dostoevsky identifies a second "photographic infidelity" (*fotograficheskaia nevernost'*) in the painting (PSS 19:155). Yakobi fails to show the linings for the prisoners' shackles. According to Dostoevsky, this error is as egregious as a photographer failing to capture the tail on a horse: "Rest assured that one could never walk a single verst, let alone a few thousand, without leather linings for the shackles to prevent them from cutting into one's leg." He adds: "And at this stage of the journey, without [the linings] the flesh would possibly tear all the way to the bone" (PSS 19:155).⁴¹ Dostoevsky speculates that this "photographic infidelity" is due either to forgetfulness or to the fact that Yakobi did not "inquire into the reality" (*ne spravilsia s deistvitel'nost'iu*). At the very least, it signals that Yakobi made an insufficient effort to imagine

⁴¹ A verst is a Russian unit of measurement that is 1.0668 kilometers or .6629 miles (3,500 feet).

the embodied experience of the prisoners. This absence of empathy and insufficient imagination yield an inaccuracy in the “reality” depicted. For the prisoner—as was certainly the case for the former convict Dostoevsky—perhaps the most memorable impression of this experience would have pertained to the shackles.⁴² Even with linings, the pain at this stage of travel would be excruciating, and yet Yakobi depicts only cold indifference on their faces.

Dostoevsky finishes his critique of Yakobi’s painting by taking aim at his narrow technical training as an art student. He claims that while the young Yakobi is well on his way to “reaching actual truth” (*on dobiraetsia do pravdy deistvitel’noi*), yet he still has a way to go to reach the “remaining, higher truth” (*do ostal’noi, vysshei pravdy*) in his art (*PSS* 19:156).⁴³ For Dostoevsky, this will not come via more academic or technical training, but rather from “general development” (*obshchee razvitie*) and “general education” (*obshchee obrazovanie*).⁴⁴ Lived experience and general edification, Dostoevsky remarks, are rare commodities in contemporary Russian artists, who seek to capture the life of a people with whom they have little to no personal

⁴² In *Dead House*, Gorianchikov refers to shackles at several points, including the difficulties presented by bathing with them, as in the bathhouse scene with Petrov. See Fyodor M. Dostoyevsky, *The House of the Dead and, Poor Folk*, trans. Constance Garnett, (New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2004), 125-26.

⁴³ Twenty years after writing “The Exhibition” article, Dostoevsky would revisit this distinction between “actual” and “higher” truth. In a diary entry from 1881 (undated), he writes, “They call me a psychologist; not true: I am a realist in the higher sense, i.e., I depict all the depths of the human soul” (*PSS* 27:65). Scholars such as Robert Louis Jackson and Malcolm Jones have written at length about this “realism in a higher sense.” See Robert Louis Jackson, *Dialogues with Dostoevsky: The Overwhelming Questions*. (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1993). See also Malcolm V. Jones, *Dostoevsky after Bakhtin: Reading in Dostoevsky’s Fantastic Realism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990).

⁴⁴ Dostoevsky concurs with Minaev on the systemic problem of the education offered by the Academy. Minaev writes that young artists have no time to “sit in front of a book” because they are too busy studying those skills that support their trade. He points out that photography has “killed portrait painting” (*ubila portretnuiu zhivopis’*) and forced artists to look for alternative sources of income that pay far less. As a result of having to piece together odd jobs (such as drawing advertisements for tobacco shops), the artists have no time for their general edification and the Academy does not require it, resulting in paintings that are technically proficient, but philosophically naïve and lacking in substance. See Minaev, “Neskol’ko slov o khudozhestvennoi akademicheskoi vystavke 1861 goda,” 5.

means to empathize. Dostoevsky portrays Yakobi as a product of the educational style of The Academy of Arts, which is vocational rather than humanizing and artistic. This vocational bias within the academy limits each student to the practical demands of his focused field of study. Dostoevsky claims that “history is studied there from the perspective of...suits,” that is, in order for the tailor to know how to make suits, he studies history from the perspective of suit-making. He continues:

Architecture and perspective are studied there without descriptive geometry (that is, just the rules of perspective [*pravila perspektivy*] — gropingly), or a theory of fine arts; anatomy is studied from the perspective of bones, muscles and their coverings, without the actual history of the human being, without general philosophical preparation, and so on. This kind of utilitarian tendency, of course, doesn’t provide that general edification that is utterly essential for the artist, and the arts in our country will never progress without serious preparation for them in the universities. Otherwise, we’ll never break away, either from daguerreotyping and its varying degrees of success, or from complete pseudo-classicism. (*PSS* 19:156)

Dostoevsky perceives a lack of understanding of the human condition in the painting, which prevents Yakobi from attaining Dostoevsky’s approval as a “true artist.”⁴⁵ Dostoevsky encourages Yakobi’s general education in order to develop a way of seeing that allows him to employ his technical skills artistically. Until then, Yakobi’s skill is limited to the mechanical means that he employs to reproduce what he sees. The strict imitation of the daguerreotype leads to the artist “daguerreotyping” reality, rather than portraying it artistically.⁴⁶

Dostoevsky’s personality, by contrast, appears vividly in his interpretation of Yakobi’s painting. He refuses to accept the artistic representation of appearances as “realism” and makes

⁴⁵ In the same letter to his friend Alexander Vrangl that contains his proposal to write “Letters about Art,” Dostoevsky adds that he would dedicate the work to the Grand Duchess Maria Nikolaevna (daughter of Tsar Nicholas I), who was the acting President of the Academy of the Arts. She was involved in the Academy of Arts initially through her first husband, Maximilian, Duke of Leuchtenberg, who was president from 1843 until his death in 1852, at which point Maria Nikolaevna took over his post. Dostoevsky had taken interest in the Academy well before his exile, dating back to the 1840s. Letter to A. Y. Vrangl 13 Apr. 1856 (28, 1:228-229).

⁴⁶ I discuss the specific effect of the daguerreotype on realism in the following section of this chapter.

clear his skepticism of the alleged objectivity of such realism. His critique of Yakobi addresses the objectifying tendency of any so-called “realism” that dehumanizes its human subjects by its empirical imperatives. He emphasizes the dangers of conforming artistic representation to the demands of the eyes exclusively, as if the eyes were somehow self-sufficient instruments detached from the fuller context of the human body, the imagination and the exponentially more complex act of seeing. For Dostoevsky seeing is a compassionate art; looking at human suffering without feeling is pathological, and any art that pretends to see without feeling falls short of his understanding of “true art.” Eyes that look without empathy grow dim and are consequently inferior instruments for the task of both considering the whole of the human subject and rendering the subject whole in art.

The Daguerreotype Captured the Attention of Writers, Critics and Painters Who Modeled Realism After Photographic Depictions of “Real” Life

Valery Yakobi was one of the founding members of the Russian art movement that is now synonymous with Russian Realism, namely, the *Peredvizhniki* (lit. “travelers” or “movers,” commonly misleadingly translated as “The Wanderers” or “The Itinerants”).⁴⁷ His painting won him a gold medal from the Russian Academy of Arts and gave Dostoevsky the chance to develop the nuances of his own aesthetic and visual theories. Dostoevsky contrasts the physically embodied, visual experience with that of mechanical or technological perception. For Dostoevsky, the contrasting visual experiences represent a larger divide between the spiritual and

⁴⁷ Yakobi was a provincial nobleman and an ill fit with the majority of the *Peredvizhniki* who came from lower classes and with whom he maintained very loose associations. He had attended, but did not graduate from Kazan University due to his enlistment to fight for the Imperial Russian Army in the Crimean War (1853-56). When he returned, he elected to study art at the Russian Academy of the Arts where he studied from 1856-61 rather than resume his studies at Kazan. For more on the history of the *Peredvizhniki* and its inextricable ties to Russian Realism, see Elizabeth Valkenier, *Russian Realist Art: The State and Society: The Peredvizhniki and Their Tradition* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1977).

the materialistic plaguing Russian realist visual culture. *Prisoners' Halt* is typical of the social-minded *Peredvizhniki* artists who sought to redirect the public eye away from the mythological content of state-sanctioned art of the time towards the more mundane yet more personally relevant content of daily, contemporary life with all of its social ailments.⁴⁸ The *Peredvizhniki* corroborated the literary motives of the Natural School that emerged in the 1840s and continued to the end of Nikolai I's reign in 1855. This "school" was more of a literary trend that was united by its focus on the same small-scale content of ordinary life and social inequalities. Indeed, Dostoevsky's first novel, *Poor Folk* (1845), was christened as a model for the socially conscious literature that the famous literary critic, Vissarion Belinsky, championed at the time.⁴⁹

By the time he wrote his article, "Exhibition at the Academy of the Arts: 1860-1861," the "realism" that Dostoevsky saw in Yakobi's art was diverging strongly from his own. The daguerreotype was especially influential on the literary realism of the 1840s and 1850s. Following its debut in Russia in 1839, the daguerreotype captured the imagination of writers, critics and artists alike. Russia's first daily newspaper, *Sankt-Peterburgskie vedemosti*, at the

⁴⁸ Nikolai I (1825-55) lorded over the aesthetic aims of the Academy in the three decades prior to the *Peredvizhniki* movement. For Nikolai I, the perfectly smooth surfaces, detailed modeling, well-delineated forms and ancient mythology of Neoclassicism created the perfect artistic medium for his reactionary ideology. As Elizabeth Valkenier writes, "Like other Academies, the Russian *Akademiia* regarded mythological subjects and neo-classical style as the only ones fit to convey genuine beauty and other aesthetic principles of High Art, a valuation it begrudged to realistic scenes of everyday life" (Valkenier, *Russian Realist Art*, 16). Historically, neo-classical painters saw their art as bound to ethics. The movement favored the idea that strong drawings were decidedly rational and consequently morally superior to the frivolous sensuality of the Rococo tradition, against which it established itself. Nikolai I saw a similarly moralizing function for neo-classically inspired art, only directed the clarity and rationality of the painting style towards subject matters that would enflame the heart of the Russian viewer with patriotic feeling. Yakobi emerged as a star pupil of the Academy's modern aesthetic by accomplishing the opposite of this patriotic feeling. He kills the pathos in his depiction and keeps it from having the political charge.

⁴⁹ Belinsky's article is reprinted in *F. M. Dostoevskii v russkoi kritike* (Moscow, 1997). Dostoevsky recalls specifically that Belinsky praised him for capturing "in an image" what other writers and critics had been attempting "in words" (*PSS* 28.1:169).

time a state sponsored publication of the Russian Academy of Sciences, lauded the daguerreotype in an article entitled “*Novogo roda zhivopis’*,” or “A New Type of Painting,” calling this new art form superior to painting in its detailed visual-mimetic capacity. The article described the end product of the daguerreotype as “the most delicate, most precise, most perfect representation that God’s creation and the works of human hands could hope for.”⁵⁰ When Dostoevsky accuses Yakobi of daguerreotyping, he disassociates himself from those critics who have sensationalized its ability to capture reality as it is. The Russian pioneer of photography, Aleksei Grekov, engineered his own version of the daguerreotype and in 1841 published a document entitled *The Painter Without Brush or Paint* that explained how to create the perfect likeness of reality within minutes by reproducing images of physical phenomena onto a metal plate with a daguerreotype.⁵¹ Despite the cumbersome and bulky build of the original camera, early daguerreotypists such as Sergei Levitskii not only took to the streets to document Moscow city life but traveled across the Russian empire to catalogue its vast wilderness and various ethnicities. Eventually, Levitskii committed his daguerreotypes to the documenting of the Crimean War, and the images placed side by side resulted in the pioneering art form of photographic journalism.

A similarly photographic attempt at storytelling took hold of the literary scene in Russia during the 1840s. Nekrasov’s *Physiology of Petersburg (Fiziologiia Peterburga, 1845)* was a collection of “physiological sketches” made by various authors arranged consecutively, the sketches held together not by a written narrative, but rather by their physical proximity in a single album and the very loosely defined content of *realia*. The physiological sketch prevailed

⁵⁰ “Novogo roda zhivopis’” in *Sankt-Peterburgskie vedemosti* (January 25, 1839), 181.

⁵¹ Richard Stites, *Serfdom, Society, and the Arts in Imperial Russia: The Pleasure and the Power* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2005) 372.

in the literature of the 1840s and 50s, in the wake of the daguerreotype sensation. Joseph Frank explains:

Lower-class Russian life had now begun to be depicted in all its varieties [...] But emphasis was placed on the description of externals, on photographic accuracy (the sketches were also called ‘daguerreotypes,’ and were accompanied by illustrations), rather than on imaginative penetration and inner identification with the people involved.⁵²

The collection of images captured by the daguerreotype offered a model for a kind of storytelling that derived its effect from a series of compelling images and the visual narratives constructed from them. Collections of sketches were structured rather like photo albums, with each sketch standing on its own as a glimpse into isolated moments of the so called “real life” of lower-class Russians. The sketches taken collectively, however, lacked narrative continuity. The writers of the “physiological sketch” in the Natural School were trying to achieve a similar effect in literature to what the daguerreotype was accomplishing in the visual arts. These writers began to look at life as it is, so to speak, with an objectivity and impartiality that was analogous to that of the daguerreotype. The Natural School was considered “natural” not because the writers limited themselves to the natural world nor to the empirical descriptions visible to the daguerreotype, but because they sought to depict life in a natural way, that is, without what they perceived to be the un-natural idealization and beautification characteristic of the Russian Romantics in the early and mid-nineteenth century, beginning with Pushkin and continuing with authors such as Lermontov, Baratynsky, and Tiutchev. Belinsky thought that the fantastic filter of the Romantics obscured the clear-eyed focus of the aesthetic that he desired for the *Sovremennik*, which sought to portray the plight of the lower classes in unflinchingly vivid, photographic detail.

Yet Belinsky did not believe that the daguerreotype was a sufficient model for literature on its own. As early as 1846, Belinsky critiqued the model of reality afforded by the

⁵² Joseph Frank, Introduction to *The House of the Dead*, trans. Garnett, (New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2004), xvii.

daguerreotype. His general criticism of the second volume of Butkov's *Peterburgskie vershiny* (*Summits of Petersburg*) is that it is a "mere daguerreotype" that fails to tell a story.⁵³ Belinsky wanted to retain the focus of the sketches on the daily lives of ordinary, lower-class characters, but he wanted to complement the expository, photographic aspects of the sketches with a larger ideological narrative that attempted to raise awareness of the social ills. Belinsky announced that the *Sovremennik* would publish stories about "Russian life," adding, "And this is not a whim, not a fashion, but a rational need having deep meaning and deep foundation: it is a need that expresses the strivings of Russian society towards self awareness, and consequently, awakening to moral interests and intellectual life."⁵⁴ His exemplary model of a physiological sketch that achieved narrative success through the just use of realistic imagery was Dostoevsky's *Poor Folk*. Dostoevsky's and Belinsky's aesthetics had enough in common to coexist for a short while, and both agreed that the daguerreotype was insufficient as a self-standing model for literary realism, but their overlap was superficial. They soon realized that they diverged on the issues of both how *realia* should be incorporated into fiction as well as what ends their conflicting aesthetics should serve. Dostoevsky tied fantastical aspects of the Romantic tradition to the real operations of the imagination in shaping empirical observation. He used the fantastical to depict reality from the imagined world-views of others, but was always quick to remind his reader of the artifice behind the imagined world-view.

⁵³ Belinsky's critique of Butkov comes from the article "Vzgliad na russkuiu literaturu 1846 goda," in *Sovremennik*, I, No.1, 1847. Read in Gippius's *Gogol* (especially pp. 162-65) for more on Belinsky's understanding of the governing aesthetic of the physiological sketches in *The Physiology of Petersburg* (1845) as a "faithful mirror of the real life of St. Petersburg." Vasilii Vasil'evich Gippius's *Gogol* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1981), 162.

⁵⁴ Vissarion Grigoryevich Belinsky, *Selected Philosophical Works* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Pub. House, 1956), 380.

Visual Monologism and What Dostoevsky Doesn't See in Photographic Realism

Dostoevsky's interpretation of Yakobi's homogenization of his characters results in what I will call *visual monologism*. I am borrowing the term "monologism" from Bakhtin, who writes the following:

The dialogic means of seeking truth is counterposed to official monologism, which pretends to possess a ready-made truth, and it is also counterposed to the naïve self-confidence of those people who think that they know something, that is, who think that they possess certain truths. Truth is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born *between people* collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction. (*PDP* 110)

Visual monology is the visual analogue to Bakhtin's literary-philosophical notion of monologism. In visual monologism, subjects are reduced to objects that reflect the unified perspective of the artist. As Dostoevsky's interpretation of *Prisoners' Halt* shows, Yakobi's prisoners are simply reified objects—mirrors and cameras—that reflect Yakobi's superficial worldview. Yakobi's visual bias in the painting neglects each character's unique interiority. Instead of conveying reality dialogically, as a dynamic interplay of unique and conflicting perspectives, Yakobi projects his monologic perspective onto his characters.

As a consequence of Yakobi's visual monologism, his "realism" lacks the capacity to convey truth because, for Dostoevsky, truth arises from the clash of opposing views. In *Dostoevsky's Quest for Form*, Robert Louis Jackson writes that "Philosophical truth for Dostoevsky is contradiction, and life the interaction of contradictory elements" (*Quest for Form* 70). Similarly, Jefferson Gatrall defines the reality within Dostoevsky's novels as "never simply an object to be represented, not an effect, nor even an affect, but a problem..."⁵⁵ I would add to

⁵⁵ Jefferson J. A. Gatrall, "The Icon in the Picture: Reframing the Question of Dostoevsky's Modernist Iconography" in *Slavic and East European Journal* 48.1 (2004), 1-25.

Jackson's description that a Dostoevskian problem is dialogic in both form and content: it can only be represented when characters disagree about what they see from fully-valued, unique perspectives. Neither the narrator, nor the characters' nor the implied author's perspective can be valued over the other in order for the Dostoevskian problem to be fully expressed. Because Dostoevsky works in a verbal medium, the imagined perspectives of his characters manifest as what Bakhtin terms "voices," which express what each character sees. Bakhtin uses the metaphor of "unmerged voices" to describe how Dostoevsky resists the urge to merge his authorial voice with those of his depicted characters, but this resistance also extends into the visual realm: Dostoevsky must resist the urge to project his authorial perspective onto his characters (*PDP* 6). Bakhtin emphasizes voices because Dostoevsky's characters exist in a verbal format and each character expresses their difference of opinion verbally, but the verbal metaphor needs visual supplementation that calls attention to unique perspectives. Dostoevsky's characters are unmerged voices as well as unmerged perspectives.⁵⁶

Ironically, Dostoevsky dismisses Yakobi's perspective even though Yakobi's painting is more dialogic than Dostoevsky's interpretation would lead one to believe. For Bakhtin, a work of art, a word, a language, or a discourse, becomes "dialogized" when it calls itself into question. Yakobi accomplishes this by hinting at the visual artifice of the painting. For example, the painting prominently highlights three eyes that belong to three of the most clearly visible characters. The first is the previously discussed eye of the dead prisoner, the second is the right-eye of the officer examining the prisoner and the final is the left eye of the horse, which stands at the painting's geometric center.

⁵⁶ The appearance of Holbein's *Dead Christ* in Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* elicits conflicting worldviews especially well because the artist portrays its subject dialogically, as I discuss in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.



Figure 3. Detail of three eyes in Yakobi's *Prisoners' Halt*.

The dead man's right eye is shielded from the viewer, while his left eye remains unnaturally opened by the hand of the officer who shuts one eye and leans in to peer with his right in order to examine the prisoner's eye more clearly, or perhaps more objectively. His vision is monocular, just like that of the realist painter, who depicts the painted world from the perspective of a single eye so as to maintain a constant and fixed distance from his depicted subjects.⁵⁷ The horse's right eye is not only turned away from the viewer but is also squinting, while its left eye is wide open and appears to be gazing directly at the viewer, who stands at eye level with the painter. The horse brings attention to the painted world as an artifice by looking at the painter. The horse is also looking at the viewer, reminding us that we cannot look into a painting without it somehow looking back at us and that every viewing is dialogic.

Another gesture hints at the perspectival construction of the painting: a flock of birds fly in single file directly along an orthogonal that is tucked away in the clouds overhead (Fig. 4

⁵⁷ The artist often uses his brush at the end of his fully extended arm to compare the size of the objects that he is depicting against the tip of his brush, for example. Even though *Prisoners' Halt* is an imagined scenario, visual realism relies on maintaining a fixed perspective relative to the depicted objects, and this cannot be from two eyes, which would change the relative position of the depicted object in the artist's vision, consequently distorting the perspectival unity of the representation. For more on the history of and strategy for perspectival representation, see the section in the following chapter on Florensky's "Reverse Perspective." See also the Appendix to this dissertation for an explanation of the perspectival method.

below). The flock is simultaneously emerging from and headed towards the vanishing point, which is wide-left, beyond the painting's frame.



Fig. 4. Detail of flock of birds in single file in *Prisoners' Halt*.

Yakobi thus points to the artifice used to construct the painting. The orthogonal can be determined by the mile-marker (left side of Fig. 4), which is slanted in the painting relative to the horizon, yet if one imagines the mile-marker standing upright, then the parallel lines depicted on the darkened side of the signpost indicate the orthogonal lines perfectly. The line of birds, which is uncommonly long, travels along one of these orthogonals. It is difficult to make out just how many birds there are (my count ends around 30). On the one hand, the painter calls attention to the means of the artist's chosen artifice for representing reality. On the other hand, the vanishing flock serves as a reminder of that moment at which the visible world becomes not less real, but simply less visible.

Perhaps realism's late arrival to Russia is responsible for Yakobi's conscious or subconscious fascination with perspectival method, which visibly permeates his painting, or perhaps it stems from Yakobi's recent studies of the artistic style prevalent at the Russian

Academy of the Arts. Perhaps Yakobi, in the painting, is coming to terms with his own newly acquired gaze. Regardless of the specific cause, Yakobi effectively exposes the governing force of the unfeeling eye behind his artistic medium. He pulls back the eye of the dead (or dying) prisoner to lay bare the instrument behind the artifice. The painting represents the eye as an instrument of great persuasive power, but adds a layer of scrutiny by showing how the objective intention of such representation threatens to overlook the human subject. Yakobi conveys a consciousness of his own medium, just as Dostoevsky makes his feuilleton writer convey a consciousness of his. Yakobi sees the elements that shape his visual narrative, the eye, the perspectival construction, the orthogonal, just as the feuilleton writer sees the elements that shape his narrative picture of St. Petersburg. Yet Dostoevsky, along with the other critics of the time such as Minaev, Petrov and Kovalevskii, still considers Yakobi's painting to be artistically naïve.⁵⁸

Dostoevsky critiques Yakobi's painting for being like a mirror of its creator, yet Dostoevsky's interpretation of the painting reflects certain aspects of his own creative personality. His interpretation reflects the vehement emotion of his gaze. The absence of pain on the chained prisoner's face contrasts with the empathetic pain that Dostoevsky experiences as he draws from his personal memories of shackles. In his ekphrasis, Dostoevsky incorporates the painter's visual reality into a more complex interiority that includes a sensorial space with pain and empathy. For Dostoevsky, Yakobi's misrepresented shackled prisoner exemplifies the consequences of considering empirically observable, visual, information at the expense of the

⁵⁸ The articles reflect a broad interest among the journals at the time to discover a homegrown Russian painting tradition, which lagged behind Russian literature. Fridlender notes that critics were in mutual agreement about the poor quality of the Academy's general education of the artists and about their poor selection of program content. For example, he writes, "All who wrote about the exhibition of 1861 unanimously criticized the programmatic themes that were proposed to the pupils by the Academy" (*PSS* 19:320). For further information on these articles, see *PSS* 19:319-24.

remaining senses and faculties for processing our experiences. The shackled prisoner's eyes are open and capable of looking out onto the surroundings, but they only look in a metaphorical sense. They reflect the world without sensing it. The prisoner negates his pain by detaching his gaze from his body, that is, by detaching his visual from his sensual reality. For Dostoevsky, the strength of the realist, perspectival representation, proves to be its limitation. Yakobi attains the visual precision of the logically ordered system by first objectifying himself and then the characters in turn. The artist flattens his embodied experience in an attempt to become more objective, that is, more mirror-like. As a result, he depicts more mirror-like characters.

Prisoners' Halt does indeed function like a mirror, albeit not the mirror that Dostoevsky had in mind. The officer mechanically opens the dead eye of the prisoner "with one hand" in an act that mimics Yakobi's own revelatory act of coldly opening the viewer's eye onto his painted world. The painter reveals each viewer's gaze to himself. Yakobi's style allows viewers like Dostoevsky to fill in the compassion lacking in this art form by projecting their own feeling onto the depicted characters. Unfortunately for Yakobi, Dostoevsky does not reserve any such compassion for the artist. Yakobi depicts the scene neither with malice nor with particular generosity towards the personae, but rather creates the conditions for a range of responses to emerge from the viewer. Just as the officer coldly lifts the eyelid of the prisoner to check whether he is dead or alive, so Yakobi lifts the eyelid of the viewer onto the painted world to check the viewer for a pulse. The glass eye at the center of the painting, the blank eyes of the remaining prisoners, and the painting as a whole function as mirrors insofar as they reflect the worldview implicit in the viewer who gazes into them. This is theoretically true of any reading or viewing, but the depiction of the eyes makes Yakobi's awareness of this fact an important component in his representation.

For Dostoevsky, Yakobi's brand of realism illustrates a way of looking at the world with an objectivity that is inadequate to represent the multidimensionality of human experience. The end goal of the visual-empirical realism that Dostoevsky identifies with *Prisoners' Halt* is the starting point for the author's own depiction of the human subject in his fiction. Dostoevsky would have the artist outwardly indicate the prisoners' interiority and individuality. The heap of cameras and mirrors would be transformed into a tragic tale of human suffering.

The mock-feuilleton "Petersburg Visions" and "The Exhibition" article can be seen as Dostoevsky's unrealized treatise on art. In the mock-feuilleton, Dostoevsky announces to critics and followers alike that he has returned from Siberia to write fiction according to his fantastically inclined artistic vision. This vision compounds the notions of dream, vision, and daydream into a way of not only seeing the world, but feeling it as a sensation. His fiction emerges out of this complex cognitive-sensorial experience wherein the city of St. Petersburg and the city of smoke simultaneously model and inform one another. Moreover, each city is filtered through the existing poetry and prose that claim St. Petersburg as theirs. The two cities in the feuilleton combine with the existing composite of fictional St. Petersburgs (of various genres) in the mind of the feuilleton writer who incorporates them into the plasticity of the multi-genre feuilleton. The feuilleton writer depicts reality with a conscious transparency about his personal, imaginative and embodied way of seeing. Dostoevsky's vision pertains to the realm of *prozrenie*, that is, "seeing through," "insight," and "discernment." "Petersburg Visions" models an imaginative, meaning-making process that sets the tone for Dostoevsky's realism for the remainder of his career.

“The Exhibition” article defines Dostoevsky’s aesthetic vision primarily by way of opposition. He focuses his criticism on the visual orientation both in the painting and the literature of his time. He speaks about the passive forms of vision that characterize this mode of seeing conveyed by verbs for vision such as “to see one’s fill” (*nasmotret’sia*) and “to grow tired of seeing” (*prigliadet’sia*), both of which carry the sense of seeing something either so much or so often as to lose the capacity to see actually see it. The vacant, disembodied gaze of the artist renders the painted subjects as appearances unfeelingly. Yakobi’s overreliance on vision as a purely empirical process that treats the eye as a mechanical instrument causes him to de-animate his characters. Like a camera, he renders his subjects as visually accurate surfaces, but unlike a camera, he neglects to differentiate between the individuals that he captures in his painting. And while Yakobi questions his own artifice, his subjects remain flat, and his painting only monologizes the characters that he depicts in his painting, further distancing his viewers from the peasants. The form of Yakobi’s painting contains dialogic elements, but its characters utterly lack in individuality, precluding the possibility of the multiplicity of worldviews that characterizes Dostoevsky’s fiction at its best.

Dostoevsky represents the act of seeing as an artist both in the mock-feuilleton and in his art criticism in such a way that articulates the aesthetic outlook that informs his own realist fiction. This is especially apparent in *Dead House*, the novel that Dostoevsky wrote from 1860-62, the period during which the two works analyzed in this chapter were written. Dostoevsky represents reality as an admixture of empirical observation and vividly imaginative processing. He sees through appearances by turning his gaze both outward to the empirical world and inward to the inseparable processes of seeing and co-feeling.

CHAPTER 2

Gorianchikov's Depiction of Peasant Convicts in *Notes From the Dead House* Is Visually Oriented, But Does Not Objectify

In the Early 1860s, Dostoevsky Was Searching for a Literary Form that Could Humanize the Peasantry

Dostoevsky wrote the mock-feuilleton “Petersburg Visions” (1860) and the critical article “The Exhibition at the Academy of Arts: 1860-1861” (1861) as he was writing *Notes from the Dead House* (1860-61).⁵⁹ These works were written during what Symbolist poet Grigorii Chulkov has sarcastically referred to as “the so-called years of peasant emancipation (1860-62).”⁶⁰ Yakobi’s painting and Dostoevsky’s *Dead House* were each part of the movement to

⁵⁹ The timing of the publication for *Notes from the Dead House* relative to the publication of the works covered in Chapter 1 is as follows. The first four chapters of *Dead House* were published in the periodical *Russkii mir* (*Russian World*) beginning on September 1, 1860 and ending in January 25, 1861. The novel was then published serially in its entirety in the journal *Vremia* from April 19, 1861 to December 7, 1862. Dostoevsky submitted “Petersburg Visions,” a mock-feuilleton, to the censors in December of 1860, just three months after *Dead House* started to appear in print. The final version did not appear until March of 1861, in the first issue of *Vremia*. “The Exhibition at the Academy of the Arts” was published in the October 27, 1861 issue of *Vremia* (PSS 19:1-22). See commentary to “*Peterburgskie snovidenie v stikhakh i proze*” in *Stat’i i zametki* (PSS 19:262-263). See commentary to “*Vystavka v akademii khudozhestv za 1860-61 god*” in *Stat’i i zametki*, (PSS 19:314).

⁶⁰ Chulkov points out that the peasant question—as evidenced in but not limited to both the Exhibition Article and *Dead House*—was a central focus of *Vremia* from the time of the journal’s inception. Grigorii Chulkov, *Kak rabotal Dostoevskii* (Moskva: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1939), 76. Ellen Chances notes that the Dostoevsky brothers’ journal *Vremia* (1861-63), in which the three works discussed in this and the previous chapter (the art criticism, the mock-feuilleton and *Dead House*) appeared, served as a podium for rethinking the intelligentsia’s relationship to the peasantry through the philosophy of *pochvenichstvo*. She writes, “It was on the pages of *Vremia* and *Epokha* (Epoch), which superseded *Vremia* after the censors closed *Vremia* in 1863, that the Dostoevskys, with Nikolai Strakhov and Apollon Grigor’ev, set forth the ideology of *pochvennichestvo*, or ‘concept of the soil.’ According to the ‘pochvenniki,’ Russia’s problems stemmed from the isolation of the intelligentsia from the simple people, their isolation from the Russian soil.” See Ellen Chances, “Literary Criticism and the Ideology of Pochvennichestvo in Dostoevsky’s Thick Journals *Vremia* and *Epokha*” in *Russian Review* 34.2 (1975), 151-64. For an introduction to the general political and economic background of *Vremia*, see Vera Nechaeva’s *Zhurnal*

develop modes of representing aspects of reality, such as peasants and convicts, that had previously been neither literary nor artistic subjects.⁶¹ Both works materialized during a time in which the recognition of peasants as free men required a radical reimagining of their personhood. One of the conclusions Dostoevsky—or at least Gorianchikov—draws in *Dead House* is that he is not one of them and can't really be their friend.⁶² The best he can hope for is to gain their respect. In his review of Yakobi's painting, Dostoevsky disapproves of its reductive representation of the peasantry.⁶³ He argues that the painting not only fails to inspire empathy in the viewer, but it also reinforces upper-class stereotypes of the moral bankruptcy of peasant-convicts and thus further isolates the viewer from the peasantry. Yakobi shows the peasant-convicts as "scoundrels" nothing more, whereas Gorianchikov without attempting to penetrate

M. M. i F. M. Dostoevskikh "Vremia" 1861-1863, (Moscow: Nauka, 1972). *Vremia* was founded by Dostoevsky and his brother Mikhail and began publication in January of 1861. For more on the history of the journal and its reception, see Sarah Hudspith, "Dostoevsky's Journalism in the 1860s" in *Dostoevsky in Context*, eds. Deborah Martinsen and Olga Maiorova (Cambridge UP, 2015), 280-87.

⁶¹ Dostoevsky had plenty of opportunity to empathize with the peasantry. He had returned in 1858 from a nine-year exile in Siberia three years prior to viewing Yakobi's painting and writing the critique.

⁶² Gorianchikov the narrator ought not to be confused with Dostoevsky the writer. Dostoevsky creates a true artist in the narrator Gorianchikov who reports empirical observations empathetically.

⁶³ The vast majority of the prisoners depicted in the novel are peasants. Dostoevsky is not irked by Yakobi's depiction of prisoners at large, but of his unfavorable depiction of Russian peasant-convicts. The question of Dostoevsky's attitude to the peasantry is vexed. Dostoevsky scholars are fond of quoting his letters to his brother in which he disparaged the peasants. Some suggest that only later, in the 1870s, did he come to the more sympathetic views expressed, for example, in "Muzhik Marey." For more on Dostoevsky's biases in his depiction of prisoners in *Dead House*, including his paternalism towards the main Muslim character Alei and his emphasis on "the alterity of non-Russians" in *Dead House*, see Elizabeth Blake's article "Portraits of the Siberian Dostoevsky by Poles in the *House of the Dead*" in *Dostoevsky Studies, New Series*, Vol. X (2006), 56-71. Alternatively, Gary Rosenshield argues that while the Jewish Isai Fomich Bumshtein is portrayed farcically when compared to the psychological seriousness with which the Russian peasants are treated, the Muslim Alei is depicted as Dostoevsky's Christian ideal. See Gary Rosenshield, "Religious Portraiture in Dostoevsky's 'Notes from the House of the Dead': Representing the Abrahamic Faiths" in *The Slavic and East European Journal* 50.4 (2006), 581-606.

their psyches, presents them as scoundrels, but distinguishes them from each other and shows them to be complex, sentient and suffering individuals.⁶⁴

Dostoevsky adapts the literary genre of “notes” as his artistic medium for humanizing the peasantry. The chronological progression of the final novel does not reflect Gorianchikov’s original, jumbled notes. Instead, the original manuscript, like the physiological sketches of the Natural School, are not strictly bound by an overarching narrative, but are rather a collection of juxtaposed verbal images. The editor, in his introduction to the novel, points out the lack of narrative continuity in the notes, commenting that, “It was a disconnected (*bessviaznoe*) description of the ten years spent by Alexandr Petrovich in penal servitude”⁶⁵ (Garnett 11; *PSS* 4:7). The editor borrows the title *The Notes from the Dead House* from Gorianchikov, but with one important difference. He keeps the second half of Gorianchikov’s title, “From the Dead House,” but inserts the word “Notes” in place of Gorianchikov’s descriptor, “Scenes.” Gorianchikov calls the content of his writing “*Stseny iz mertvogo doma*,” or “Scenes from the Dead House”⁶⁶ (Garnett 11; *PSS* 4:7). The precise nature of these “scenes” is elusive because

⁶⁴ Dostoevsky sees “the face of a scoundrel (*negodiai*)” in each of Yakobi’s peasant-convicts who “are all the same (*odinakie*)” (*PSS* 19:155).

⁶⁵ Throughout the Chapter I quote Garnett’s translation, providing page numbers from her translation, followed by those from Dostoevsky’s *PSS*. Occasionally, I translate phrases or the passage in whole to bring it closer to the Russian. Fyodor M. Dostoyevsky, *The House of the Dead and Poor Folk*, trans. by Constance Garnett, (New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2004). John Jones calls the arrangement of the notes as “the art of the remiss, of provisional assessment, gossip, idle conjecture, contradiction, uncertainty above all.” John Jones, *Dostoevsky*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983), 158. Dale Peterson argues that this loose arrangement of the notes contributes to Dostoevsky’s “aesthetics of disorder” in the novel. Dale E. Peterson, *Up from Bondage: The Literatures of Russian and African American Soul* (Durham: Duke UP, 2000), 8.

⁶⁶ Gorianchikov’s aesthetics align with Dostoevsky’s and, in this sense, he is a rather transparent mask for Dostoevsky. Joseph Frank argues that Dostoevsky was at least partially motivated to create the persona of Gorianchikov in order to deter censors. See Joseph Frank, *The Years of Ordeal: 1850-1859*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 1983), 218-219. There are, however, many important differences between the character of Gorianchikov and Dostoevsky’s biography, such as the salient fact that Dostoevsky was not imprisoned for the murder of his wife; nor, obviously did he die immediately after his release from prison.

there are no visual images in the notes themselves; this is simply how Gorianchikov defines his writing, which describes various visual art forms, including pictures, staged plays, photographs, impressionistic and realist paintings.⁶⁷ The notes, then, are intended to induce a decidedly visual experience in the reader's imagination. Robin Feuer Miller has written that *Dead House* "affects us in a way approximating a work of visual art."⁶⁸

The "notes" are impressionistic as opposed to strictly documentary or photographic in nature. For ten years, Gorianchikov was not able to process his visual impressions verbally. He was forbidden to write or to own books in prison until the end of his sentence, at which point he had earned certain privileges, including access to books and writing materials.⁶⁹ Thus, he writes the notes primarily after he is released. The "scenes" are not real-time, verbal snapshots of unfolding events during or even close to the time of their occurrence, but recollections of his lived prison experience. They are the product of years of visual data that are finally verbalized, with the paradoxical clarity and distortion that hindsight brings to past experiences.

Gorianchikov's initial impressions of the first month stand out in greater detail than the later

⁶⁷ The precise nature of the genre of this novel has received much critical attention. Joseph Frank, in his chapter on *Dead House*, initially defines it as a hybrid of "unadorned memoir" and "fictional construct," and later in as a tripartite of "sketch form," "personal memoir," and "a documentary novel about collectivity" (*The Years of Ordeal* 222). Chirkov defines the novel as "an artistic memoir," which he considers an important phase in the development of Dostoevsky's realism. See N. M. Chirkov, *O stile Dostoevskogo; problematika, idei, obrazy* (Moskva: Nauka, 1967), 16. Viktor Shklovskii calls the work "a documentary novel" in *Za i protiv* and "a new, original, artistic union of the novel" in *Povesti o proze*. Viktor Shklovskii, *Za i protiv: Zametki o Dostoevskom* (Moskva: Sovetskii Pisatel', 1957), 64-84; Viktor Shklovskii, *Povesti o proze*. (Moskva: Khudozhestvennaia Literatura, 1966), 2:214.

⁶⁸ Robin Feuer Miller, *Dostoevsky's Unfinished Journey* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2007) 22. Robert Jackson describes the visual impact of the notes as "a series of gigantic frescoes of human experience and destiny" (*Quest for Form*, 217).

⁶⁹ Gorianchikov writes that in the last year, he was "able to have more money, to write home and could even have books" (my translation; *PSS* 4:232). He explains that books and outside supplies were considered a threat to prison security because it meant that one had acquaintances in town who could arrange for special treatment and or help prisoners to escape.

memories, which blend into general impressions. He writes about this blending of the later images as follows: “The first month and the beginning of my prison life in general appear vividly to my imagination now. My subsequent prison years flicker much more dimly in my imagination. Some seem to have faded (*stushevalis*’) and flowed into each other, leaving one whole impression: oppressive, homogenous, suffocating” (My translation; *PSS* 4:9).

Gorianchikov’s observation corresponds to the truth of cognition, specifically the function of human memory, which dictates that we remember what comes last best, then what came first, and finally everything in the middle is murkiest.⁷⁰ The word that I have translated as “homogenous” here is *odnoobraznoe*, literally, “single-imaged,” which is to say that the collection of images have melted into a “single-imaged” impression, a kind of imaginary painting of images that are organized by various overarching, yet changing, subjective moods.

Gorianchikov Retains the External Perspective of a Visual Realist Relative to His Characters While Retaining Empathy for Them

Gorianchikov retains the externality of a photo-journalist’s perspective in his depictions of the prisoners, yet this externality differs from that of a photographer or a realist painter such as Yakobi. Both Gorianchikov and Yakobi remain outside of the psyches of their characters, but Gorianchikov differs from Yakobi insofar as he hints at the depth of the prisoners’ inner-worlds from the outside. He suggests that they have complex thoughts, but he neither explicates them nor pretends to know what those thoughts are.

Gorianchikov displays an empathetic objectivity in his depictions of the convicts, as when he describes an old man who was being released after serving a near life-sentence. He writes that the old man’s face was “sad and somber” and contrasts it to the stories that he hears

⁷⁰ This phenomenon is known in modern psychology as the *serial position effect*, which includes the *primacy effect* and *recency effect* that refer to the enhanced memory of the first and last elements of a series. See Andrew M. Colman, *A Dictionary of Psychology*. 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2015).

from other elderly prisoners about the departing prisoner's youthful and enthusiastic countenance when he arrived. Gorianchikov gestures at the inner transformation as written on the face of this prisoner, but he does not explain how this transformation happened, neither does he provide the reader with the elderly prisoner's thoughts. Instead, the reader is left to imagine the years that have transpired in prison to cause this profound change. The vast amount of time elapsed between these two faces, young and old, offers potential for the reader to empathize with the released criminal not only by recreating his prison years in thought, but by drawing on personal memories in order to do so. He feels sadness when he imagines the prisoner's sadness.

Gorianchikov describes the face of a second prisoner in a way that motions to the man's interiority while retaining his external perspective. He recalls the incident as follows:

I remember how a prisoner who had been a well-to-do peasant (*muzhik*) in Siberia was one evening summoned to the gate. Six months before, he had heard that his former wife had married again, and he was terribly downcast about it. Now she herself had come to the prison, asked for him, and given him alms. They talked for a couple of minutes, both shed tears and parted for ever. I saw his face when he returned to the barracks.... Yes, in that place one might learn to be patient. (Garnett 13; *PSS* 4:10)

In this instance, Gorianchikov reports the general appearance of the prisoner's face within the context of a few pertinent historical details regarding his encounter with his former wife.

Gorianchikov neither disregards the prisoner as unthinking nor does he offer an account of the man's inner monologue, but instead he leaves an ellipsis followed by the hyperbolic suggestion that it was "possible" to learn patience as a prisoner. By commenting on the elderly prisoner's appearance while omitting the specific content of the prisoner's inner monologue or even the prisoner's dialogue with his wife, Gorianchikov allows readers to access their own personal memories in order to lend content to the prisoner's experience. The ellipsis cues the reader to co-create the prisoner's interiority in the imaginative act of reading. Gorianchikov remains external to the prisoner's thoughts, but unlike Yakobi, he manages to create an awareness of his

interiority. The reader's experience of the prisoner's subjectivity contrasts with the indifference that Dostoevsky sees when looking at the faces of Yakobi's prisoners. Gorianchikov's use of external perspective combines the clarity of a removed perspective with empathy.

Contrary to the photographic realism that Dostoevsky disdains in *Prisoners' Halt*, Gorianchikov's realism does not reduce the prisoners to their external appearances. Gorianchikov reports what he sees as well as what he does not see and rounds out empirical facts with humanizing guesswork about the invisible interiority of the hearts and minds of the prisoners. For example, he recalls that he never witnessed an outward display of repentance during his time in prison, but he does not conclude from this that the prisoners were inwardly unrepentant:

I have said that in the course of several years I never saw one sign of repentance among these people, not a trace of despondent brooding over their crime, and that the majority of them inwardly considered themselves absolutely in the right. This is a fact. No doubt vanity, bad example, boasting, false shame are responsible for a great deal of this. On the other side, who can say that he has sounded the depths of these lost hearts, and has read what is hidden from all the world in them? (Garnett 19; *PSS* 4:15)

Gorianchikov renders the prisoners as layered personalities viewed from a place of introspection. He does not jump to conclusions from the absence of outward repentance in the other convicts, but once more draws attention to their unsounded depths and the portions of their hearts that are permanently hidden not only from Gorianchikov and his readers, but from "all the world."

The interiority of most of the characters in the novel, including Gorianchikov's, remains hidden from view. We know from the fictional editor of *The Dead House* that Gorianchikov committed a crime of passion, for example. While the reader is never told explicitly that Gorianchikov feels repentant for his past crime, the editor informs us that Gorianchikov commissions a memorial service on St. Katherine's Day once he is released. Dostoevsky reinforces the connection to St. Katherine by having Gorianchikov befriend and admire his

landlady's young granddaughter, Katya. And although there is no overt mention of Gorianchikov's wife being called Ekaterina, the reader is left to put two and two together. True to the poetics that govern Dostoevsky's depiction of peasant-characters in the novel, here, with the condemned wife-murderer Gorianchikov, we are left to guess.⁷¹ The reader can conclude from this information that the memorial gesture is for his wife, but neither the editor nor Gorianchikov in his notes speaks to his feelings of repentance. Instead, Gorianchikov leaves room for the reader to judge for himself while simultaneously cautioning against judgment. Gorianchikov lives out his sentence with the knowledge of this sin weighing on his conscience, yet Gorianchikov knows that he too appears unrepentant to the other prisoners.⁷² He, along with every other prisoner, follows the unwritten rule that no prisoner must speak of his former life as a free person, especially on the topic of his purported crime. Perhaps Gorianchikov allows for this disparity between the inner life and the outward behavior in the other prisoners because he is acutely aware of the disparity between what he holds in his heart and what he reveals to others on the subject of his crime. Regardless of Gorianchikov's personal repentance, he does not presume to know what is in the prisoners' hearts.

⁷¹ Liza Knapp suggests one compassionate way of piecing together the related facts of Gorianchikov's past, his memorial on St. Katherine's Day and his relationship to the young Katya as follows, "Also possibly relevant in Gorianchikov's case is the pure love that develops between him and Katya, the young granddaughter of the landlady: the circumstances suggest that whereas he once loved his wife Ekaterina with a murderous jealous passion, the love he now feels for her namesake is pure" (Footnote 20, p. 329). Taken from Liza Knapp's article on Dostoevsky's elliptical realism, "Dostoevsky's Ellipses and Dostoevsky's Realism in *The Dead House*," in *"A Convenient Territory": Russian Literature at the Edge of Modernity. Essays in Honor of Barry Scherr*, ed. Michael Wachtel and John M. Kopper, (Bloomington: Slavica, 2015), 319-36.

⁷² Gorianchikov may not disclose his past in the edited notes, but there is the possibility that the excised sections that the editor refers to as the product of "madness," might have had to do with his guilt over his wife. See Ruttenburg's book *Dostoevsky's Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2008), 70–90. For more on the significance of Gorianchikov's murder of his wife to the work as a whole, see "The Narrator in House of the Dead" and "The Nethermost Pit and the Outer Darkness: 'Akulka's Husband: A Story'" in Jackson's *The Art of Dostoevsky*, 33–114. See also Karla Oeler's "The Dead Wives in the Dead House: Narrative Inconsistency and Genre Confusion in Dostoevskii's Autobiographical Prison Novel" in *Slavic Review* 61.3 (2002), 519-34.

Dostoevsky keeps portions of Gorianchikov's heart as well as his past hidden from the reader. Despite having his private notes, we are not given Gorianchikov's inner world to read like an open book,. Whereas Yakobi, according to Dostoevsky, tried to hide his personality by imitating a camera lens, Dostoevsky consistently makes the reader conscious of the perspective of the artist-persona, Gorianchikov, behind the notes. Like Yakobi, Gorianchikov is a nobleman who sought to depict a largely unexplored segment of the population with whom he had little to no interaction. In the words of the novel's fictional editor, the former prisoner Aleksandr Petrovich Gorianchikov was "a man who had been a gentleman and landowner born in Russia, had afterwards become a convict in the second division for the murder of his wife, and on the expiration of his ten years' sentence was spending the rest of his life humbly and quietly as a settler in the town" (Garnett 8; *PSS* 4:6). From the outset, we learn that Gorianchikov is a murderer, and one of Dostoevsky's greatest artistic feats in the novel is his humanization of Gorianchikov. The reader experiences Gorianchikov as such a kind presence that we often forget he has committed an awful crime. Gorianchikov extends the favor bestowed on him to the prisoners by endeavoring to humanize them in turn.

Gorianchikov distrusts the prisoners' learned behaviors and considers their external appearances deceptive even though he limits his factual account to empirical observation. He writes, "One has but to take off the outer superimposed husk and to look at the kernel more closely, more attentively and without prejudice, and some of us will see things in the people that we should never have expected. There is not much our wise men could teach them. On the contrary, I think it is the wise men who ought to learn from the people" (Garnett 156; *PSS* 4:121-22). Gorianchikov sees the prisoner's husk as a construct and his outward behavior as a performance. He does not assume to know what lies beneath, but looks closer. His husk-kernel

metaphor recalls the metaphor in the biblical book of Proverbs: “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver” (Proverbs 25:11). As Maimonides interprets this proverb in his *Guide to the Perplexed*, the parables are like apples of gold that are overlaid with silver filigree work having very small holes. At a distance, one sees a silver apple, the outward image of the gold apple beneath, but a closer look allows one to glimpse gold beneath the fine mesh silver exterior. Similarly, Gorianchikov does not vulgarize the peasants by equating them with their appearances at a distance, as a realist painter would.⁷³ His description renders the peasant-convicts not with a camera lens, but rather with the “fitly spoken” words that create an image of them as layered subjects with deceptively simple exteriors. In his notes, Gorianchikov bears the marks of Dostoevsky’s “true artist,” one who renders his subjects not simply with vision, but also with insight.

Gorianchikov is a Dreamer

Like the self-declared “dreamer” who narrates *Petersburg Visions*, Gorianchikov is prone to fantasy and counts himself among the less sociable of the prisoners. He writes about a relatively private space where the dreamers take walks. It is where the more brooding prisoners, Gorianchikov among them, go to think in private: “Here, behind the buildings, those of more unsociable and gloomy disposition like to pace in their recreational time, hidden from all eyes, and fall to thinking” (my translation; *PSS* 4:9). The other prisoners walk in plain sight of the main courtyard as they engage in conversation. The introverted prisoners, however, go to a place where they cannot be seen and walk as they converse with themselves. Robert Russell writes that Dostoevsky’s depictions of space “are all on the one hand ‘real’ in that their representation is

⁷³ This is true even in the case of the more overtly unrepentant criminals such as Petrov, whom Gorianchikov describes as exceptionally violent and yet Gorianchikov was convinced that at some level, Petrov “loved [him]” (my translation; *PSS* 4:86; 97).

mimetic, and on the other hand they are psychological constructs, spatial analogues of the characters' minds."⁷⁴ The place for dreamers is uncommon for being both spacious and hidden from public view, a fitting spatial analogue for the relative freedoms available to the dreamer-prisoners in the realm of their imagination. The editor informs us that Gorianchikov continues to stroll alone once he is released. He reports from his conversation with Gorianchikov's landlady that, "According to her, [Gorianchikov] almost did nothing and for months on end neither opened a book, nor picked up the pen; but for entire nights would walk back and forth around his room thinking whatever and sometimes even talking to himself" (my translation; *PSS* 4:9). The pacing in his room reenacts his dreamer's pacing, perhaps by force of habit or perhaps to help recreate the original conditions in which the notes were conceived. But while the dreamer's area in the prison was expansive relative to the claustrophobic norm, his dreamer's area outside of prison is confined relative to the open spaces available to him as a free man. Even after his release, Gorianchikov walks in the tight quarters of his rented room, a spatial analogue of the extended psychological confinement of prison.⁷⁵

In prison, Gorianchikov confesses to frequently encountering other prison dreamers and wondering about what they were thinking: "Meeting them during these little strolls, I liked to peer into their gloomy, branded faces and to guess what they were thinking about" (my translation; *PSS* 4:9). The verb translated here as "to peer into" (*vsmatrivat'sia*) combines the

⁷⁴ See Robert Russell, "The Modernist Tradition" in *The Cambridge Companion to the Classic Russian Novel*, ed. Malcolm V. Jones and Robin Feuer Miller, (New York: Cambridge UP, 1998), 214.

⁷⁵ Robert Jackson points out that the prison occupies Gorianchikov's mind until his death, which comes shortly after his release. He writes, "[Gorianchikov] gains freedom only to die a short while later a lonely and broken man. This tragic denouement is of course the direct consequence of the power of the dead house" (*The Art of Dostoevsky* 36). Karla Oeler sees the continuation of Gorianchikov's imprisonment after his release as the result of the "patriarchal discourse that he so meticulously records," in her article, "The Dead Wives in the Dead House: Narrative Inconsistency and Genre Confusion in Dostoevskii's Autobiographical Prison Novel" in *Slavic Review* 61.3 (2002), 519-34.

prefix *v-*, meaning “in” or “into,” with the root *-smotr-*, or “look.” This verb is especially fitting for Gorianchikov’s peculiar vision throughout his notes since it contains the reflexive ending *sia*, which connotes the reflexive sense of “looking into oneself.”⁷⁶ During these prison strolls, Gorianchikov looks into the faces of the other gloomy prisoners and imagines what they are thinking by delving into his own thoughts. He wonders about other prisoners’ thoughts but he rarely pretends to know them in his writing: he instead reports on their facial expressions. Unlike Dostoevsky’s characters of his immediately subsequent fiction whose interiority is often rendered explicit, in *Dead House*, Gorianchikov only wonders about his fellow prisoners’ interiority.⁷⁷ He allows himself to imagine only the fundamentally unknowable minds of the other dreamers by delving into his own “gloomy disposition” as a dreamer.

While Gorianchikov identifies with the dreamers, he distinguishes himself from the extreme dreamers who carry their dreaming to the point of madness. For example, there is one character in the prison hospital whom he calls *sumashedshii* or a “madman” (Garnett 209; *PSS* 4:160). The prisoner initially shows no obvious outward indications of madness. Only when he

⁷⁶ On the topic of vision in the novel, Jackson describes Gorianchikov’s (and Dostoevsky’s) vision not as a literal form of vision, but rather as the hard-won knowledge after a Dante-esque journey through the underworld of the prison that allows him to experience the peasant-convicts as fellow human beings. Carol Apollonio emphasizes vision in the novel as an operation of grace whereby “Prisoner and reader alike open themselves to revelation,” especially in communal scenes such as the theater scene discussed in the second half of this chapter (357). For more on vision in the novel see Jackson’s *The Art of Dostoevsky* (especially Chapter 2) and Carol Apollonio’s “Notes From the Dead House: An Exercise in Spatial Reading, or Three Crowd Scenes,” *Rossiiskii Gumanitarnyi Zhurnal* 3.5 (2014), 354-68. My concept of vision in the novel aligns with Jackson’s, but I am also interested in this section in how literal forms of vision shape the content of the notes. I interpret Gorianchikov’s vision as a product of Dostoevsky’s hybrid realism that allows for an empathetic experience of the depicted character’s subjectivity while retaining exteriority. I discuss the overlaps between literal and metaphorical vision in the preceding Chapter 1. See the section entitled “Dostoevsky Learns to See in ‘Petersburg Visions in Verse and Prose.’”

⁷⁷ I have in mind here characters such as the underground man in *Notes From Underground* (1864) and Raskolnikov from *Crime and Punishment* (1866). However, early in his writing career, Dostoevsky also writes directly about the thoughts of certain characters such as Devushkin in *Poor Folk* (1846) and Goliadkin in *The Double* (1846).

starts telling a story about how he will be rescued from his impending punishment does Gorianchikov realize that the prisoner is delusional. The story quickly descends into the realm of unbelievable fantasy, since Gorianchikov discovers that the prisoner bases his entire rescue story on a single, momentary look that he had exchanged with a woman at the prison hospital entrance. The madman uses this meeting of eyes as evidence both of her love for him and of her consequent desire to save him. He then proceeds to tell Gorianchikov that she will use her connections in town to set him free. This reveals a dreamer of an extreme kind who has become detached from reality. Even as Gorianchikov calls the madman's story "the creation of a poor, sick brain" (Garnett 209; *PSS* 4:160), he cultivates empathy for the prisoner who has been driven to the point of madness because of the inhumane horrors of corporal punishment. The madman's story is factually untrue, but Gorianchikov retells it in such a way as to reveal both the madman's inner state as well as the dark truth of how fear of punishment utterly distorts his mind. Gorianchikov is a dreamer, but he, like the feuilleton writer of *Petersburg Visions*, can still distinguish between the empirical world and the fictions that we use to understand them, between the city of St. Petersburg and the imagined city of smoke above it.

Dostoevsky Models Gorianchikov's Authority after Benevolent Authorities Who Are Contrasted with Cruel Authorities in his Fictional Prison

Gorianchikov critiques the cruelty of certain authorities in prison and contrasts them with benevolent authority figures who care for the prisoners and empathize with them. For example, he contrasts a cruel prison major with a sensible warden, and a "good doctor" in the prison ward both with doctors who are "wolves" that take advantage of the peasant patients and with indifferent doctors who care nothing for them. Even the prison executioners (*palachi*) have contrasting ways of meting out punishments: the abused prisoners speak fondly of the

sympathetic and respected Smekalov because he does not consider himself above them, but they despise and fear the “monster” Zherebiatnikov, who revels sadistically in their physical and psychological tortures. Gorianchikov’s critique of authority sheds light on his own authorship. When he writes about the prison as a whole, he imitates the sensible warden. When he writes about the prison hospital, he mimics the merciful doctors. When he writes about the executioner’s hall, he assumes the relatively sympathetic perspective of Smekalov, who wins the respect of the prisoners because he never looks down on them despite his obvious authority over them at the time of punishment.⁷⁸ Dostoevsky lurks behind Gorianchikov’s critiques of prison authorities, as if contrasting their authority with that of his own humanizing narrator.

Gorianchikov governs his fictional universe in sharp contrast to how “the major” runs the prison. The feared major is a parody of the third-person omniscient narrator who watches the prisoners’ every move. His omnipotence is invasive. Gorianchikov writes:

This major was a fateful being for the prisoners; he had reduced them to trembling before him. He was insanely severe, “flew at people,” as the convicts said. What they feared most in him was his penetrating lynx-like eyes, from which nothing could be concealed. He seemed to see without looking. As soon as he came into the prison he knew what was being done at the furthest end of it. The prisoners used to call him “eight eyes.” His system was mistaken. (Garnett 18; *PSS* 4:14)

Like a third-person narrator with pretensions to omniscience, the major has more eyes than is humanly possible and, for Gorianchikov, his “system” is flawed. The major lacks respect for the

⁷⁸ Carol Apollonio makes note of the authorities along similar lines, and while she does not interpret them as models for Gorianchikov as author, she argues that in *Dead House*, “As everywhere in Dostoevsky’s work, these mundane identities are masks for greater, invisible and morally loaded forces beyond. The convicts are all confined in prison because they are guilty (or judged guilty) of a sin. If our world, too, is a prison, then we, too are guilty – although in our case we can call our guilt original sin. In Dostoevsky’s world-view, redemption comes only to those who have sinned. And if in the dead house the major brutally flogs the prisoners with sadistic pleasure, so, too, do free people suffer helplessly at the hands of a ruthless God, the deity that Ivan Karamazov, righteous, blind man that he is, accuses of injustice” (Apollonio, “An Exercise in Spatial Reading,” 358). For Apollonio, such “mundane authorities” also include those who shape the society into which the peasants are being integrated during the peasant emancipation (359).

prisoners' privacy, and the prisoners fear the idea that he sees everything more than they fear his violent punishments and explosive outbursts. The prisoners actively protect what meager privacy they do have, and yet this major threatens to take this from them. Gorianchikov critiques the major's rule as exceedingly cruel because his "system" forcibly exposes their intentionally hidden thoughts.⁷⁹ Neither the major, nor anyone for that matter, can "see without looking." This is the myth that the major cultivates by instilling irrational fear in the prisoners. But Gorianchikov (who voices Dostoevsky's views on prison reform) points out that a system that is based on repression through either fear or inhumane treatment (such as solitary confinement) is unsustainable and will lead to rebellion.⁸⁰

As an author, Dostoevsky governs his fictional prison-world by limiting his observations of the prisoners to what his narrator Gorianchikov can observe empirically. Dostoevsky gives the prisoner-subjects in his fiction room to breathe, like the sensible warden who oversees the prison operations and supervises the major's activities. In the novel, Gorianchikov argues that if it were not for the presence of a kinder, more sensible governor above the cruel major in the prison's chain of command, then the major's tyranny would have led to "great trouble" (Garnett 18; *PSS*

⁷⁹ The British jurist and philosopher, and inventor of the panopticon, Jeremy Bentham, influenced the nineteenth-century prison reform movement that advocated for correctional punishment in the West and eventually in Russia. Anna Schur discusses this issue in connection with Dostoevsky's beliefs about punishment in *Wages of Evil: Dostoevsky and Punishment* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 2012). Bentham's proposed system for prison management never materialized, but it aligns with the system of "eight eyes." His proposal: "If it were possible to find a master of everything which might happen to a certain number of men, to dispose of everything around them, so as to produce on them the desired impression to make certain of their actions, of their connections and of all the circumstances of their lives, so that nothing could escape nor oppose the desired effect, it cannot be doubted that a method of this kind would be a very powerful and a very useful instrument which governments might apply to various objects of the utmost importance." Quoted from Schur's *Wages of Evil*, 117. For more on Bentham's influence on Russian prisons and his reception into Russian philosophy, see Ian R. Christie, *The Benthamites in Russia: 1780-1791* (Oxford: Berg, 1993).

⁸⁰ See Schur's Chapter 2, "Squaring the Circle; The Justice of Punishment" for Dostoevsky's response to Beccaria and other theorists on prison reform who advocated solitary confinement and opposed communal living in prison (Schur 1993, 38-61).

4:14). This is the same governor who both allows the prisoners to put on the annual prison play and understands the importance of permitting the prisoners the limited freedoms that they do have. “Eight-eyes” aspires to omniscience, but Dostoevsky does not. Instead, he retains consciousness of the limits of vision and writes *The Dead House* in the character of the first-person narrator Gorianchkov. Like the sensible governor, Gorianchkov does not overstep his authority by lording over the characters in his notes with any pretense to special knowledge about their inner worlds. Instead, he allows his fictional prison-subjects their autonomous privacy. Gorianchkov’s “system” for ruling his fictional prison is sensibly grounded in respect for the prisoners as individuals and not as lesser beings under a tyrannical rule.

In the prison hospital, the doctors are the authorities. One has the sense that Gorianchkov questions not simply how the doctors ought to treat prisoners in the prison-hospital, but also subconsciously questions what he might glean from them in order to treat his prisoners more compassionately as an author.⁸¹ The doctor-peasant relationship is especially relevant to the nobleman Gorianchkov because peasants are inherently skeptical of doctors insofar as “they will be treated by ‘the gentry,’ for doctors are after all ‘gentlemen’” (Garnett 185; *PSS* 4:150). It is no small feat for the doctors to overcome the peasants’ skepticism and win their trust. The doctors who are “wolves” withhold the medicine and supplies that the government provides for the convicts and then turn around to sell them for profit on the sly. The beneficent doctor in the prison hospital cares for the sick patients not only medically, but also by comforting them and mercifully allowing them to stay for longer than initially warranted. He has compassion for his sick patients. Gorianchkov writes about the healing capacity of the good doctor’s humane

⁸¹ James Rice calls the prison-hospital “an artistic paradigm of institutional confinement and the clinical experience.” Gorianchkov, along with the paternal doctor, brings warmth to the otherwise clinical atmosphere. See James L. Rice, *Dostoevsky and the Healing Art: An Essay in Literary and Medical History* (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1985), 66.

treatment of the prisoners: “Humanity, kindness, brotherly sympathy are sometimes of more use to patients than any medicine” (Garnett 186; *PSS* 4:151). The same could be said of Gorianchikov’s authorship of the patients from within the prison hospital as seen in the case of the “madman” who fabricates an elaborate escape story.⁸² Like the good doctor, Gorianchikov tends neither to coldly report the prisoner-patients’ illnesses, nor to condescendingly judge their attempts to fool the doctors in order to prolong their stay in the prison hospital. Instead, he finds a way to treat the sick patients in his writing with a “brotherly sympathy” and sooner justifies their seemingly questionable or odd behavior than condemns it. His patient-subjects in the novel benefit from Gorianchikov’s humane treatment insofar as they are rendered as robust, multifaceted characters. As an artist, Gorianchikov treats the ill patients not as busted carts that require a good mechanic, but rather as well-rounded, whole and sympathetic persons who need a human touch.

Gorianchikov’s empathetic authorship differs from a third type of medical treatment in the prison-hospital, that exhibited by the medical assistant who confirms the death of the prisoner Mikhailov. The deceased prisoner is completely naked, yet retains his shackles.⁸³ Gorianchikov notes, “[The medical assistant] (*fel’dsher*) [...] went up to the dead man with rapid steps that sounded noisy in the silent ward, and with a particularly unconcerned air, which he seemed to

⁸² See previous section in this chapter: Gorianchikov is a Dreamer .

⁸³ Dostoevsky spent four and a half years in leg irons, like those of Yakobi’s shackled prisoner, in a Siberian stockade from 1849-1853. In a letter to his brother, from February 22, 1854, Dostoevsky recalls vividly the moment that he put on shackles: “At exactly 12 o’clock, i.e., exactly as it became Christmas Day, I put on shackles for the first time. They weighed about ten pounds and were extremely uncomfortable to walk in” (my translation; *PSS* 28.I:173). February 22, 1854. In *Notes From the Dead*, the narrator describes the moment of being literally freed from his shackles as the beginning of “new life” (my translation; *PSS* 4: 232). The shackles were dehumanizing for Dostoevsky. In *Dead House*, his semi-autobiographical narrator, Gorianchikov, argues that the use of shackles can be justified neither as a form of physical punishment nor as a restraint, but only as a means to demoralize the prisoners. Gorianchikov defines fetters as “simply a form of degradation, a disgrace, and a physical and moral burden” (Garnett 182; *PSS* 4:147). The fetters are emblematic of the accepted practice of treating the prisoners as less than human.

have assumed for the occasion, took his wrist, felt his pulse and went away with a wave of his hand” (Garnett 183; *PSS* 4:148). In a manner that recalls Yakobi’s indifferent officer who confirms the political prisoner’s death (see Chapter 1), the medical assistant appears unmoved by the prisoner’s death and treats him as an object. In his feverish delirium, Mikhailov had removed all of his clothing in order to cool himself down. Even the small cross around his neck was too much to bear, and yet he was not permitted to remove his shackles. The medical assistant remains unmoved by the sight of Mikhailov’s naked, emaciated, shackled corpse. The prisoners and the sergeant on duty, by contrast, are moved to pity. They close his eyelids and the sergeant on duty removes his weapons, kneels and crosses himself before Mikhailov. For these characters, Mikhailov is a person and not an object. Gorianchikov reports his death both with the common decency of his fellow prisoner-patients and the generosity of the sergeant who forsakes his authority for a moment and shows his respect by removing his weapons and kneeling before the deceased.

Gorianchikov Describes a “Strange Picture” From Multiple Perspectives

Gorianchikov’s depiction of the peasant-convicts who gather to see the annual prison play offers another striking contrast between his and Yakobi’s realist styles. Gorianchikov paints a picture of the temporary prison theater house scene before the eagerly anticipated Christmas Eve play: “Until the curtain was raised, the whole room represented a strange and animated picture (*predstaviala strannuiu i ozhivlennuiu kartinku*)” (Garnett 157; *PSS* 4:122).

Gorianchikov describes the picture (*kartinka*) as “*ozhivlennaiia*,” deriving from the root *zhizn’*. It means not just “animated” but even “boisterous” and “lively,” adjectives that denotes motion, sound and activity. The picture is “strange” for several reasons: it incorporates motion, sound

and various time frames, which are considered from all possible perspectives within the theater. It also contains a realist painting that is painted onto a handmade stage curtain.

An important component of the “strange picture,” the stage curtain is the centerpiece of the prison theater. The prison artists painted a pastoral lakeside setting with a covered wooden porch that pertains to one of the upcoming plays involving “country gentlemen.” Prisoners in the audience, especially Gorianchikov, are impressed with the craftsmanship of the curtain making as well as with the quality of the art painted onto it. The curtain elevates the impromptu prison theater to the level of an authentic theater house in their estimation and adds an air of luxury to the holiday. The painting is not a backdrop; it disappears from view as soon as the curtain is lifted. It stands rather as an image of the mental escape afforded by the play to come.

Gorianchikov acknowledges the importance of the theater as an escape from prison monotony, but it is clear that the theater is much more than entertainment both for him and for his fellow inmates. Beneath the surface level of the painting that represents luxury, escape and entertainment lies the peculiar curtain itself, which is composed of materials that belong to various members of the prison community. It includes literal pieces of the clothing and supplies of the prisoners, officers and townspeople. Where there is not enough cloth to complete the curtain, there are sheets of paper begged from officers by prisoner-artists. From the prisoner-spectator’s perspective, the curtain is created for the sake of the painted scene. But for Gorianchikov, the painting is an afterthought to the curtain itself. The curtain beneath the painting contains the realia of the gathered community who in this sacred artistic moment is inwardly united in joyful anticipation of the play itself. It is an emblem of the cathartic power of art, in this case, the theater, that is especially evident on this occasion.

The sense of community in the “strange picture” is reinforced by the fact that the spectators’ bodies are so crushed into one another as to begin to break down the physical boundaries between them. They are verging on physical unity, yet contrary to the forced unity that typifies the overcrowded prison or that characterizes the “hell” that Gorianchikov describes in his notes on the bath-house scene, this uncommonly crowded ward does not create discord among the spectators. On the contrary, Gorianchikov writes:

Masses of spectators crowded, squeezed tightly, packed on all sides, waiting with patient and blissful faces for their performance (*predstavlenie*) to begin [...] A strange light of childlike joy, of pure, sweet pleasure, was shining on these lined and branded brows and cheeks, on those faces usually so morose and gloomy, in those eyes which sometimes gleamed with such terrible fire. (Garnett 157; *PSS* 4:122)

The crowded atmosphere yields a rare feeling of shared joy among the prisoners. Gorianchikov develops prisoners’ inner-complexity in the form of contrasting lights. In his “picture,” the prisoners are not simply depicted as “scoundrels,” à la Yakobi, but each of them houses the “strange light of childlike joy” alongside “terrible fire.” The tiny prison quarters feel uncharacteristically boundless, as if stretching to house the entire town—prisoners, officers and citizens alike—for this communal event. Gorianchikov depicts a rare gathering that spans contrasting world-views. Each spectator comes to see the play from a uniquely positioned physical and metaphorical perspective. The typically buried joy of the prisoners now emanates from each of their faces as they wait for the curtain to part and the play to begin.

Gorianchikov also depicts music played by uniquely talented convict-musicians. Despite the limited availability and quality of their instruments, the musicians manage to capture the essence of the Russian songs that they play. Gorianchikov praises them, “Upon my word I had had no idea till then what could be done with simple peasant instruments: the blending and harmony of sounds, above all, the spirit, the character of the conception and rendering of the tune

in its very essence were simply amazing. For the first time I realized fully all the reckless dash and gaiety of the gay, dashing Russian dance songs” (Garnett 158; *PSS* 4:123). Despite the inferiority of their instruments, these musicians manage to capture an essence, in this case, the spirit of the “Russian dance song.” Gorianchikov also praises their originality, which he argues characterizes the prisoners’ general way of being: “The tone, the taste, the execution, the handling of the [balalaika] and the characteristic rendering of the tune, all was individual, original and typical of the convicts” (Garnett 158; *PSS* 4:123). The artistry is achieved through originality. They absorb the original into an idiosyncratic, deeply felt artistic vision, achieving an ideal of verisimilitude that aligns with the spirit of Dostoevsky’s “true artist.”

Whereas in Dostoevsky’s interpretation of Yakobi’s painting, the artist seems to occupy a perspective that belongs to a world apart from his subjects, in the prison theater performance, the dividing line between artist and spectator is indeterminable. In the first place, there is no one correct angle from which to view the play. Everyone experiences the play from wherever they manage to be situated in the overly-crowded theater: “And not only were people literally sitting on others, especially in the back rows, but the beds too were filled up, as well as the spaces to the right and left of the curtain, and there were even some ardent spectators who always went round behind the scenes, and looked at the performance from the other ward at the back” (Garnett 155; *PSS* 4:120). On the one hand, the variety of perspectives on the play highlights both the different ways of seeing it as well as the different impressions that result from these individualized perspectives, none of which is privileged over the other. On the other hand, the prisoners are united by their joy in the shared experience. The physical proximity of the spectators to the performers and the viewpoint of some spectators who are back stage, shadowing the actors’ perspective, breaks down the division between actor and spectator. Instead, the theater is filled to

the brim with actor-spectators. The variety of perspectives hints at both the variety of perspectives within the community as a whole as well as the variety of individual perspectives. The lack of division between spectator and actor is also mirrored in Gorianchikov who is both prisoner and narrator. Unlike Yakobi's painting, Gorianchikov's "strange picture" humanizes the prisoners.

The Play Itself Unfolds Largely in the Prison-Spectators' and Prison-Artists' Imaginations

When the curtain rises, the stage design invites the creative participation of the prisoners to complete the play in their imaginations. Gorianchikov explains that the prisoners have no shortage of imagination with which to render the set realistic. He calls attention to this special quality of the prisoners:

I may observe that our scenery was very poor. Both in this play and in the others we rather supplied the scene from our imagination than saw it in reality. By way of background there was a rug or a horse cloth of some sort; on one side a wretched sort of screen. On the left side there was nothing at all, so that we could see the bed, but the audience was not critical and was ready to supply all deficiencies by their imagination, and indeed, convicts are very good at doing so. "If you are told it's a garden, you've got to look on it as a garden, if it's a room it's a room, if it's a cottage it's a cottage—it doesn't matter, and there is no need to make a fuss about it." (Garnett 164; *PSS* 4:128)

Gorianchikov overhears this statement about how to look at the play from one of the prison-spectators in the theater. The prisoners and the reader occupy a similar stance in relation to the stage insofar as Dostoevsky places a similar demand on the reader's imagination that the prison stage places on that of the prisoners. Both the reader and the convicts have to envision the scenes while being prompted by words. Realism in *The Dead House* prison-theater does not pertain to visually realistic images that somehow forcibly impress reality onto the eyes of the observers. Instead, as Dostoevsky shows through the convict-spectators (in the manner of the feuilleton writer in "Petersburg Visions"), realism unfolds in the dynamic interaction between the

empirically available data and the creative cognition of the individual observer who recreates reality according to the unique “garden,” “room,” or “cottage” in his imagination.

The peasant-actors animate their stage roles imaginatively. For example, the peasant Netsvetaev wins the role of “the benevolent country gentleman” by supplementing empirical observations from his past with an ingenious detail that is both off script and his own invention. He had competed against another peasant Vanka Otpety for the role, but the convict-actors chose Netsvetaev, not for his superior acting, nor because of his superior looks, but because he proposed to walk about with a cane and pretend to draw things on the floor. Gorianchikov reports, “Netsvetaev assured them that he would come on with a cane and would wave it about and draw patterns on the ground with it like a real (*nastoiashchii*) gentleman and tiptop swell” (Garnett 160; *PSS* 4:125). The “real” gentleman, all convict-actors agreed, would do exactly such a thing. Vanka Otpety’s performance was unconvincing because it lacked imagination. Netsvetaev wins the part in this theater not simply by mimicking the appearance of the benevolent country gentleman, but rather by imaginatively reinterpreting his subjective childhood experience of the gentlemen, including his fascination with the gentleman’s cane. No one bothers to ask what exactly Netsvetaev draws on the ground, yet there is something that rings true to life in his imaginative portrayal, not only for Netsvetaev, but apparently for the actors who unanimously vote for him, as well as for the audience who heartily applaud his performance. In contrast to Yakobi’s strict adherence to photographic realism, Netsvetaev, with the addition of a fantastical gesture, succeeds in making his subject more realistic.

Netsvetaev’s performance is one of many microcosms of the notes’ aesthetic vision. Both Gorianchikov and Netsvetaev exhibit the vision espoused by Dostoevsky’s mock-feuilleton narrator in *Petersburg Visions*. Gorianchikov portrays reality as an empirical observation, in this

case, Netsvetaev's childhood memory—the gentleman he observed walking with cane in hand—and the creative synthesis of that observation with his imagination, i.e., the gentleman drawing imaginary pictures on the ground with his cane. Netsvetaev's realism, like that of his author-reporter Gorianchikov, recreates the truth of observation as shaped by personal cognition. Netsvetaev's performance faithfully renders his understanding of “a benevolent country gentlemen.”

Even though certain actors stand out in the performance, the roles of spectator and actor are interchangeable in this prison theater. The audience participates in the performance and the actors occasionally break character to indulge in the enjoyment of their own performance as they act. Gorianchikov recalls that the audience often upstaged the actors. The audience does not intentionally break the fourth wall, but rather innocently co-creates the spectacle together with the actors by contributing their own intuitive and spontaneous responses to the play. He writes:

What interested me more than all was the audience; they were all completely carried away. They gave themselves up to their pleasure without reserve. Shouts of approbation sounded more and more frequently. One would nudge his neighbor and hurriedly whisper his impressions, without caring or even noticing who was beside him. Another would turn ecstatically to the audience at an amusing passage, hurriedly look at everyone, wave his hand as though calling on everyone to laugh and immediately turn greedily round to the stage again. (Garnett 159; *PSS* 4:124)

Like the actors, audience members turn to the rest of the audience. The urge to share their experience with each other causes them to whisper their impressions to one another. The audience greets one actor Sirotkin, who plays “the benevolent country lady,” with a roar of laughter when “she” arrives on stage, and Gorianchikov also notes that “the lady herself could not refrain from laughing several times” (Garnett 161; *PSS* 4:125). In other words, the actors also experience the audience's joy. In opposition to what Dostoevsky perceived as the isolating experience of viewing Yakobi's “realist” painting, Gorianchikov's depiction of the prisoners in

this scene is wholly communal, from the narrator to the actors to the audience, and perhaps even to the reader. In the scene he not only reconnects the prisoners to one another, but he also renders them whole by supplementing their “terrible fire” with the “strange light of childlike joy.” The reader senses the warmth with which he depicts the convicts—not from the removed perspective of an objectifying lens, but rather from the immersed perspective of an empathetic human being and co-inhabitant of a world that he shares with the subjects that he depicts.

Gorianchikov’s imagination is perhaps liveliest of all during the play and his impressions bear the characteristic marker of his empathetic perspective. The prisoners offer Gorianchikov one of the best seats because they perceive him, as a gentlemen, to be an authoritative theater critic. This is one of the rare displays of actual respect for Gorianchikov, who is typically disregarded or distrusted by the peasant-convicts for being a nobleman. Gorianchikov returns the act of kindness by recreating the theater scene with a sense of profound gratitude. Dostoevsky does not present a depersonalized egalitarian theater, but rather allows for the different strata of society to coexist. Gorianchikov uses his privileged position not to condescend and objectify the prisoners, as does Yakobi, but rather to connect personally with their enjoyment of the experience as a co-participant. At several points during the performance, Gorianchikov notices that the faces of the prisoners are filled with childlike joy, just as they were in anticipation of the play. This appears to be both an objective observation and a projection of Gorianchikov’s own profound joy onto the prisoners’ faces. Gorianchikov even confesses to being distracted by the unabashedly joyful face of Alei during the performance: “Alei’s charming face beamed with such pure childlike joy that I must confess I felt very happy in looking at him, and I remember that at every amusing and clever sally on the part of the actors, when there was a general burst of laughter, I could not help turning to Alei and glancing at his face” (Garnett 158; *PSS* 4:123).

Gorianchikov delights in not being seen by Alei, who is too absorbed to notice that he is being watched. Gorianchikov notes excitedly, “He did not see me—he had no attention to spare for me!” (Garnett 157; *PSS* 4:122). Empathy takes center stage for Gorianchikov. Despite the fact that they are looking at different objects, Alei and Gorianchikov are united in their sense of wonder at what is unfolding before their eyes. For Alei, it is the play on stage. For Gorianchikov, at this moment, it is Alei. Dostoevsky adds to Gorianchikov’s depiction of the prisoners the element that he found lacking in Yakobi’s painting by depicting the prisoners from a place of vital feeling through the personality of Gorianchikov. In order to see Alei’s joy, and to render it as an artist, Gorianchikov must feel joy. Gorianchikov, in turn, creates the conditions for the reader to experience joy. The reader must supply his or her own imagination and bring his or her own joyful experiences to bear on the cathartic experience, thereby stitching the pages of the novel into the communal stage curtain.

At the outset of the novel, Gorianchikov reminds the reader that his notes of prison life come from the tangential perspective of a single prisoner. It pertains to “a world apart, unlike everything else,” and as he puts it, “It is this corner apart that I am going to describe” (Garnett 12; *PSS* 4:10). This “world apart” signifies both the whole prison, which is separate from the life out in the world, and his own unique perspective. Although this “world apart” is viewed from a single prisoner’s perspective, it is accessible to the reader. For example, in the opening paragraph, Gorianchikov sets up the visual parameters of the prison in the opening paragraph and establishes the fixed perspective from which a prisoner is forced to look at the world. He writes:

Our prison stood at the edge of the fortress grounds, close to the fortress wall. One would sometimes, through a chink in the fence, take a peep into God's world to try and see something; but one could see only a strip of the sky and the high earthen wall overgrown with coarse weeds, and on the wall sentries pacing up and down day and night. And then one would think that there are long years before one, and that one will go on coming to peep through the chink in the same way, and will see the same wall, the same sentries and the same little strip of sky, not the sky that stood over the prison, but a free, faraway sky. (Garnett 12; *PSS* 4:10)

The description emphasizes the isolation that stems from having to look at the world from the fixed perspective of a single body positioned at a fixed point. Gorianchikov establishes the psychological sense of confinement in visual-spatial terms; the immensity of the free sky is reduced to a peephole by the prison conditions. He reinforces the chink in the wall with a description of the parameters of the prison courtyard as “two hundred paces long and a hundred and fifty wide, in the form of an irregular hexagon” (Garnett 11; *PSS* 4:9). The shape of the prison courtyard thus echoes the chink in the wall, reinforcing the visual claustrophobia of the prisoner who for years must gaze at the blue sky through a chink from within a slightly larger chink. These two chinks mirror human perspective: we must endeavor to make meaning out of the immensity of the world from the fixed perspective of our own embodied vision. Once a year, the prisoners draw especially near to that “faraway sky,” through their imaginative, collaborative theater experience in which perspectival unity and, therefore isolation, begins to break down.

In the novel, the prisoners adopt an eagle whose wing is wounded. Once the eagle's wing heals and he regains his capacity to fly, Gorianchikov describes, not without jealousy, how the eagle flees from the prison walls in a straight line. Similarly, the play creates the rare opportunity for the prisoners to escape the prison walls, and like the healed eagle, they flee directly, with all of their artistic might, to that free space. The wounded eagle leaves the literal confinement of prison walls to the free space of the world beyond them. But even though the prisoner's perspective remains physically fixed, he manages to transcend it by a certain kind of artistic

vision. Contrary to the reinforced isolation of Yakobi's perspectival depiction of the prisoners in the painting, the novel offers a way out of the isolation imposed on our psyche by the body's fixed viewpoint. This is a problem that I take up in the following chapter with Florensky's critique of the Renaissance humanistic viewpoint in Realist art, which amounts to making point of view, and consequently individual consciousness, into a prison house.

As we have seen, Gorianchikov gives us flashes of the peasant-convicts' artistic vision throughout his notes, a vision that mirrors his own. The theater activates this meaning-making capacity in the minds of the prisoners, thereby creating the conditions to exit the prison-cave of fixed perspective. Gorianchikov develops this imaginative capacity in the majority of the peasant-convicts portrayed in his notes. He predisposes the reader to consider the peasant-convicts with compassion, leading by example with his own artistic talent, which combines careful empirical observation with the imagination that makes compassion possible. The reader can empathize with Gorianchikov's peasant-convicts to the degree that he or she is willing to co-create Gorianchikov's characters in his or her imagination, guided by Gorianchikov's verbal prompts, and to the degree that the reader can overcome the limitations of his or her own perspectival isolation.

CHAPTER 3

Chapter 3: Holbein's Visually Polyphonic *Dead Christ* Reveals Ippolit's, Rogozhin's and Myshkin's Contrasting Perspectives in Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*

“Architectural combinations of lines, of course, have their own secret.”
-The narrator in *The Idiot*

Dostoevsky's writings became increasingly logo-centric after he completed what is his most poetically iconic, image-based novel, *The Dead House*. His narrators abandon their exterior posts relative to their characters' psyches and turn away from the visual mode of representation. Whereas Gorianchikov depicts the peasant convicts as a primarily visual phenomenon yet acknowledges their unknowable interiority, Dostoevsky delves more directly into characters' thoughts and develops their inner life as a verbal phenomenon. In Dostoevsky's next work, *Notes from Underground* (1864), he creates what is perhaps his most psychologically exposed character whose first-person narration exposes his private thoughts. Although he switched from first-person to third-person narrator in *Crime and Punishment* (1866), his narrator remains extremely close to Raskolnikov and conveys his thoughts both through direct and free indirect discourse. Before completing *Crime and Punishment* in December 1866, in October 1866 Dostoevsky wrote *The Gambler*, which is told from the first-person perspective of the gambling addict Alexei Ivanovich. Dostoevsky returns to the visual arts in earnest in *The Idiot* (1868) with his description of Hans Holbein the Younger's *The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb* (1521).⁸⁴ The painting, or more precisely, a copy of the painting, hangs above a doorframe in

⁸⁴ Erika Michael refers to it variously as *The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb*, *Dead Christ* and *The Dead Christ in the Tomb* as do the scholars that she cites in her voluminous book *Hans Holbein the Younger: A Guide to Research* (New York: Routledge, 2013). The titles used in Russian are: “*Khristos*,

Rogozhin's home. *The Dead Christ* not only provides a disturbing image of Christ's decaying body within the novel, but it also elicits the highly developed inner worlds of Dostoevsky's main characters into dialogue with one another and structures their conversations around the philosophical problem of resurrection.⁸⁵ In *The Idiot*, he balances the predominantly visual poetics of *Dead House* with the predominantly logo-centric poetics of his novels written in the mid-1860s.

Dostoevsky first encountered Holbein's painting not in its original religious context -- the original was likely commissioned as either a lid to a sepulcher or a *predella* to an altarpiece -- and not in an art gallery, but rather via ekphrasis in Karamzin's *Letters of a Traveler*. Karamzin writes about *The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb* that "nothing divine is visible, but as a dead person he is depicted quite naturalistically. Tradition has it that Holbein painted it from the body of a drowned Jew" (my translation).⁸⁶ These words eventually led Dostoevsky to the painting itself, which he saw in Basel on August 11/23 in 1867, one month before he began the

sniatyi so kresta" (Christ, taken down from the cross), "*Mertvyi Khristos v grobu*" (Dead Christ in the Tomb) and "*Khristos v grobu*" (Christ in the tomb). The German used by its current holder in the Kunstmuseum Basel is "Der tote Christus im Grab" (The Dead Christ in the Tomb), and in scholarship "Der Leichnam Christi im Grabe" (The Corpse of Christ in the Tomb).

⁸⁵ The first painting to appear in a Dostoevsky novel is N. N. Ge's *Last Supper* (1861) in *Notes from Underground* (1864). From then on, he engages at least one major painting in each of his novels. Raphael's *Madonna* (1512) appears in *Crime and Punishment* (1866). *The Idiot* (1869) features two Holbein paintings, *The Darmstadt Madonna* (1526) and *The Body of Dead Christ in the Tomb* (1521), along with Hans Fries's *The Beheading of John the Baptist* (1514). Raphael's *Madonna* reappears in *Demons* (1872) and Claude Lorrain's *Landscape with Acis and Galatea* (1657) appears there for the first time. In *Demons*, the description of Stepan Trofimovich's dress, chosen by Varvara Petrovna, derives from an engraved portrait of Kukol'nik that she admired as a child. The Raphael and Lorrain paintings resurface in the remaining two novels, *The Adolescent* (1875) and *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880), along with the appearance of Ivan Kramskoy's *The Contemplator* (*Sozertsatel'*–1876).

⁸⁶ See Nikolai M. Karamzin, *Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh 2* (Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1984), 207.

notebooks for *The Idiot* in September of 1867.⁸⁷ Dostoevsky's personal writing about the painting has much in common with Karamzin's, but his ekphrasis of the painting in the novel attests to a more nuanced and ambiguous interpretation.⁸⁸

Dostoevsky's modern reader encounters the painting ekphrastically in *The Idiot*, which leads to a desire to see the painting, much as Karamzin's *Letters* led Dostoevsky to the original. *The Idiot* was Dostoevsky's attempt to portray a "positively beautiful person" in the character of Prince Myshkin, and his primary model for Prince Myshkin in world literature was the collectively portrayed figure of Jesus by the evangelists in the canonical gospels.⁸⁹ In this chapter, I examine *The Dead Christ* outside of the novel's context before returning to the novel and to the theories of Pavel Florensky (1882-1937) about realism and reverse perspective, which I use as models for understanding Ippolit's, Rogozhin's, and finally Myshkin's interpretations of the painting. I analyze the painting itself in an attempt to trace both the way Dostoevsky transforms the painting in his novel as well as the way the painting transforms the novel. Dostoevsky frequented many European museums and was familiar with both Russian Orthodox depictions of Christ that were rooted in Byzantine iconography as well as Western representations. Florensky, as a Russian Orthodox theologian, helps us to understand the painting from within the aesthetic tradition of Russian Orthodox iconography.

⁸⁷ Miller notes that the "The first two notebooks for *The Idiot* [...] extend from 14 September 1867 to 30 November 1867" (*Dostoevsky and the Idiot* 48).

⁸⁸ According to a diary entry of his wife Anna Grigorievna, Dostoevsky also expressed admiration for Holbein, a response she contrasts with her own distaste for the painting. She writes, "Fedya was so struck by Holbein's *Dead Christ* that he proclaimed Holbein a remarkable artist and poet (*on provozglasil Gol'beina zamechatel'nym khudozhnikom i poetom*)." A. G. Dostoevskaia, Basel, Thursday, August 12, 1867 in *Dnevnik A. G. Dostoevskoi, 1867 g.* (Moscow, 1923), 234. My translation.

⁸⁹ This declaration comes from a letter Dostoevsky wrote to his niece Sofiia Aleksandrovna Ivanova (PSS 28.2:251; January 1/13, 1868). He also drew inspiration from Cervantes's portrayal of Don Quixote and Dickens's Pickwick (both mentioned in the letter), yet he described Jesus as the model of moral perfection that surpasses all others.

Who Does Holbein the Younger Depict in *The Dead Christ*?



Fig. 5 - *Dead Christ in the Tomb*.⁹⁰

Art critics and historians dispute the subject of the painting, which, in English is commonly referred to as Holbein's *Dead Christ* (1521), one of several titles that the painting has accrued over time. Holbein himself never gave it a title, and he may or may not have included the inscription in the wooden frame that refers to its subject as "Jesus Nazarenus Rex" (Jesus the King of Nazareth). The first appearance in print of a title for the painting comes from the 1586 Inventory of Basilius Auerbach who refers to it simply as, "a picture of a dead man by H. Holbein, oil on wood, with the title, 'Jesus Nazarenus Rex.'"⁹¹ According to James Heffernan, "A picture title is a kind of verbal representation. It answers precisely the kinds of questions answered by sepulchral inscriptions—Who is it? What is it? And it begins the work of interpreting the picture for us."⁹² The modern viewer of Holbein's painting finds answers to

⁹⁰ Holbein the Younger, Hans. *Holbein's Dead Christ*. Digital image. *Dailyserving.com*.

⁹¹ The translated quote is taken from *The Paintings of Hans Holbein*, which contains transcripts from the Auerbach's original inventory. Paul Ganz, *The Paintings of Hans Holbein* (London: Phaidon, 1950), 57. The framer of the portrait could very well have been Holbein himself, although there is evidence to suggest that it was added towards the end of the 16th century, well after Holbein's death in 1543.

⁹² James A. W. Heffernan, "Ekphrasis and Representation" in *New Literary History*, 22.2 (1991), 303.

these very questions in the painting's wooden frame, which contains, between the letters in "Jesus Nazarenus Rex," images of the various instruments of torture that are emblematic of the Passion. Heffernan defines ekphrasis as "a verbal representation of a graphic representation" (Heffernan, 303). Thus, the inscription on the wooden frame of Holbein's painting begins the work of *ekphrasis* for the viewer. It transforms the visual art into narrative by explaining whose corpse it is. It is as if the inscription is compensating for the painting's ambiguous visual cues that do not clearly identify its subject as Jesus the man, let alone Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

The painting offers mixed signals about the identity of its subject. One set of signals yields a painting of a dead man. There is no indication of Jesus as "Rex," literally "king." Holbein is rumored to have used an actual corpse as a model for this study and, in many ways, the painting looks like a naturalistic study of the dead body of a non-descript drowned man with an additional circular wound on his right hand. The subject's forehead does not bear the wounds of a crown of thorns, and there are no indications of scourging across his torso.⁹³

The second set of visual signals yields a portrait of Christ with the stigmata in accordance with canonical Gospel narratives. Despite the absence of certain signature wounds, the nail holes of the crucifixion show on the subject's right hand and foot.⁹⁴ Holbein includes a wound in the subject's side, which appears to be pierced with the so-called "Holy Lance" in accordance with the Gospel of John (John 19:34). The tomb is lined with the clean linen in which Christ was

⁹³ The flogging of Christ appears in two canonical gospels, John 19:1 and Matthew 20:19, 27:26. All bible citations are from the Authorized (King James) Version.

⁹⁴ The term stigmata comes the Greek term for "signs" or "marks" from Paul's *Letter to the Galatians*: "From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks [*stigmata*] of the Lord Jesus" (Galatians 6:17). The marks have come to refer to the characteristic markers of physical suffering that Jesus underwent during the crucifixion according to the canonical gospel narratives. The nail holes and the wound in his side from the holy lance are the stigmata that are represented in the painting, the evidence of wounding from flogging and from the crown of thorns are missing the stigmata.

wrapped by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus according to John 19:38-42.⁹⁵

Each proposed painting title contains the inherent assumption that the person portrayed is neither a common man nor simply the historical Jesus. They all lay claim to the special title “Christ,” given to Jesus the man by his followers after his death and resurrection, thereby settling the debate over Jesus’s divinity. The name “Christ” literally means “the anointed one,” from the Greek *christos*, which is a translation of the Hebrew *mashiakh*. There were certain Jews who believed that the anointed son of King David would be sent by God to restore Israel to greatness. Jesus’s followers thought that he was this anointed son. Using the name *Christ* to refer to Jesus elevates him to this special status and alters the viewer’s experience of the painting.

Yet while the painting’s titles identify the subject as the Christ, Holbein’s decision to not entitle the painting and answer the question of his subject’s identity mirrors the equivocal rhetoric of Jesus himself, as depicted in the gospels. When Jesus stands on trial before the high priests and scribes in the Gospel according to Luke, they ask him to affirm or deny the allegations that he is Christ.

And as soon as it was day, the elders of the people and the chief priests and the scribes came together, and led him into their council, saying, “Art thou the Christ? Tell us.” And he said unto them, “If I tell you, ye will not believe: And if I also ask *you*, ye will not answer me, nor let *me* go. Hereafter shall the Son of man sit on the right hand of the power of God.” Then said they all, “Art thou then the Son of God?” And he said unto them, “Ye say that I am.” (Luke 22:66-70)

Jesus neither affirms nor denies. Holbein’s painting recreates the ambiguity in Luke’s poetics for Jesus. In both cases, the question of Jesus’s identity is left up to the reader’s interpretation.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Matthew 27:57, Mark 15:43 and Luke 23:53 mention only Joseph of Arimathea.

⁹⁶ The corresponding scenes in the other three gospels are similarly ambiguous insofar as Jesus never calls himself “Christ,” but variously defers to his interlocutors or to his works when asked who he is. See Mark 14:53-65, Matthew 11:1-5 and John 10:22-42 and 18:19-24.

Both the inscription and the paintings' various titles point to a problem of interpretation that is especially pertinent to this painting. The paint and oil create an image on Holbein's canvas that is more ambiguous than the inscription suggests. The enigmatic subject polarizes viewers whose interpretations are as strong and as varied as their beliefs concerning Jesus's elusive identity.⁹⁷ The addition of the inscription on the painting identifies the subject as Jesus, but does not settle the debate over the subject's divinity. The subject is unquestionably Christ-like, but the painting withholds final judgment. It conveys different stories depending on how one frames it, so to speak. The painting both deepens the faith of believers and corroborates the skepticism of non-believers. It is simultaneously reverent and blasphemous.

Tatiana Kasatkina has argued that the relative spatial positioning of the painting determines our interpretations of it. In her article "Seeing the Original," Kasatkina describes her visit to Basel to see the original.⁹⁸ She notes that when the painting is viewed from below, it appears that Christ's body is weak and decaying. Viewed head on, it appears to be flexing and stable. Most of Dostoevsky's contemporaries would have seen it from below, but not Dostoevsky, who stood on a chair in order to see it at eye level.⁹⁹ This, Kasatkina argues, is what allowed Dostoevsky to see the Holbein differently from Anna Grigorievna and all of the characters in *The Idiot* for that matter. These gazers, looking from below, tend to see the dead

⁹⁷ Anna Grigorievna, Dostoevsky's second wife, recalls Dostoevsky saying, "One's faith could be smashed by such a picture." But this comment is taken from a context in which Dostoevsky allegedly expressed admiration for Holbein the Younger based on this painting. Anna Grigorievna adds that it filled Dostoevsky with "ecstasy" and "so deeply impressed Fedya that he pronounced Holbein a remarkable artist and poet" (*Dnevnik A. G. Dostoevskoi* 366).

⁹⁸ Tatiana Kasatkina, "After Seeing the Original," in *Russian Studies in Literature* 47.3 (2011): 73-97.

⁹⁹ Anna Dostoevskaja wrote that Dostoevsky "was completely carried away by [the Dead Christ] and in his desire to look at it closer got on to a chair so that I was in a terrible state lest he should have to pay a fine, like one is always liable to here" (*Dnevnik A. G. Dostoevskoi* 365).

corpse. Kasatkina's experience of the painting reveals its chameleon-like capacity to adapt its appearance. The painting appears differently not only to different viewers, but even to the same viewer who sees it from two slightly different perspectives.

The composition of the painting raises further questions. Holbein was in part extracting Jesus from a religious tradition that painted him with a vertical orientation. This tradition emphasized his triumph over death through the resurrection. But Holbein does not lead the viewer directly to this happy ending. Instead, he focuses on the period of time following Jesus's death on the cross, which is either the moment before the resurrection or the moment before the continued decay of his body. The painting is vertically claustrophobic and reads, on the one hand, as a total submission of the body to the earth, to gravity, to mortality. Decay appears to be slowly working its way inward from his extremities towards his core. On the other hand, the corpse appears to be flexing, as if rising from the earth, and the light on his midsection appears to expel the decay from his body.



Fig. 6. *Dead Christ in the Tomb*. Hans Holbein the Younger.

The horizon line sits just below the draped surface (See the yellow line in Fig. 7 below).* If we pause to consider the positioning of Jesus's body relative to the horizon line, we see that the arc

* Please refer to the Appendix for an analysis of perspectival terms.

of Jesus's body is reminiscent of the sun. The positioning of his body relative to the horizon raises the question: Is this a rising or a setting sun? Or perhaps somehow both?

The perspectival analysis raises further questions if we extend the only clearly visible parallel to the vanishing point, where it meets the horizon beyond the painting's frame, to the left.¹⁰⁰

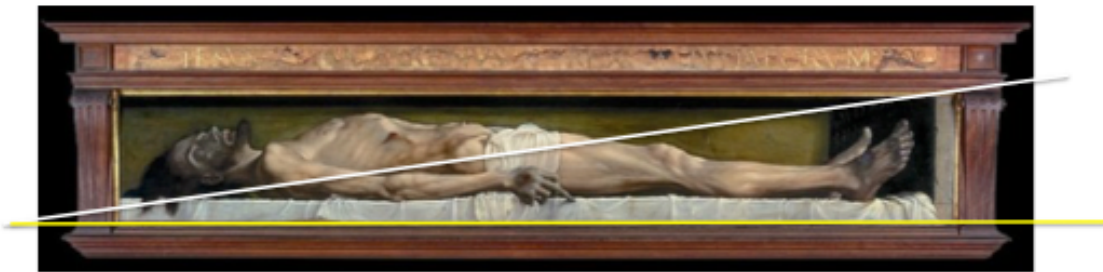


Fig. 7. Perspectival analysis of *Dead Christ*.

This tells us that the vanishing point is positioned slightly below and to the left of the subject's body. It follows from the laws of one-point perspective that the viewer is also gazing from this position slightly below and to the left.

The Holbein painting combines elements of two- and one-point perspective. The tomb is rectangular, yet it is also not centered. Both the front and the inside of the right wall of the tomb are visible, while the left wall, near his head, is absent from the painting. This places the viewpoint to the left of the coffin. The front facing sides on the top and bottom of the tomb are also visible, but the inside of the bottom of the tomb is out of view, while the inside of the top of

¹⁰⁰ Holbein's mastery of the perspectival method is apparent in such masterpieces as his *Ambassadors* (1533). The painting includes his famous anamorphic skull. In order to bring the skull into focus, one must look at the painting from one of two peculiar vantage points, very close to the painting from either low left or far upper right. For more on Holbein's manipulation in this painting, see John David North's *The Ambassadors' Secret: Holbein and the World of the Renaissance* (New York: Hambledon and London, 2004).

the tomb can be seen receding towards the back wall. This places our viewpoint just below the bottom of the coffin. The result is that we are looking at the tomb as if from below and to the left of the tomb. In a strictly perspectival depiction, then the result of such a viewpoint *would* render the tomb in such a shape as in Figure 2:

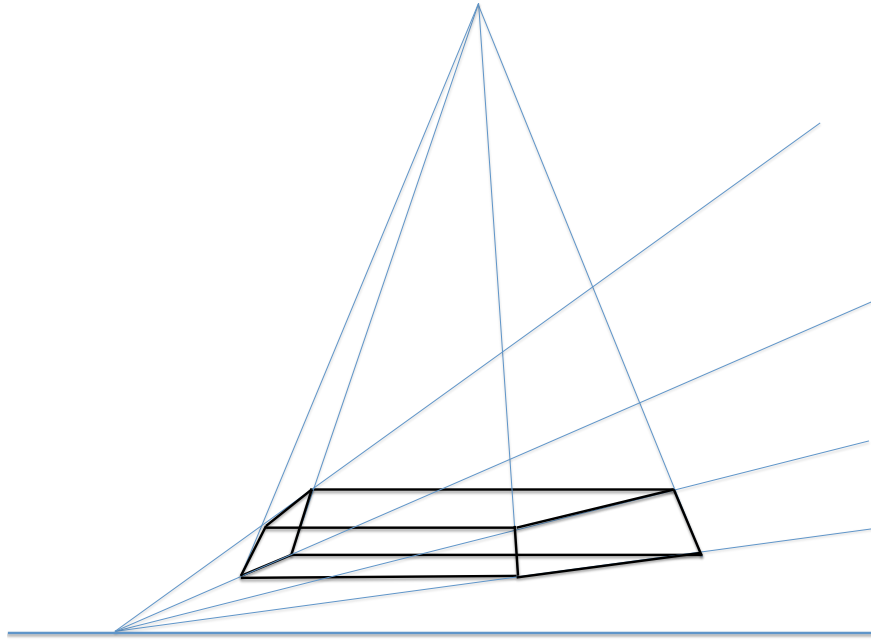


Fig. 16. Hypothetical perspectival analysis of Holbein's *Dead Christ* if it were painted in strict two-point perspective.

In this strict, two-point perspective rendering of the tomb, there are two planes, in this case those parallel to the y- and z- axes, which are oblique to the picture plane, while one plane, here parallel to the x-axis, is parallel to the picture plane. And yet it is clear that this is not the precise shape generated in the painting because the vertical lines in the painting are depicted as perpendicular to the horizon as in the Figure 3:

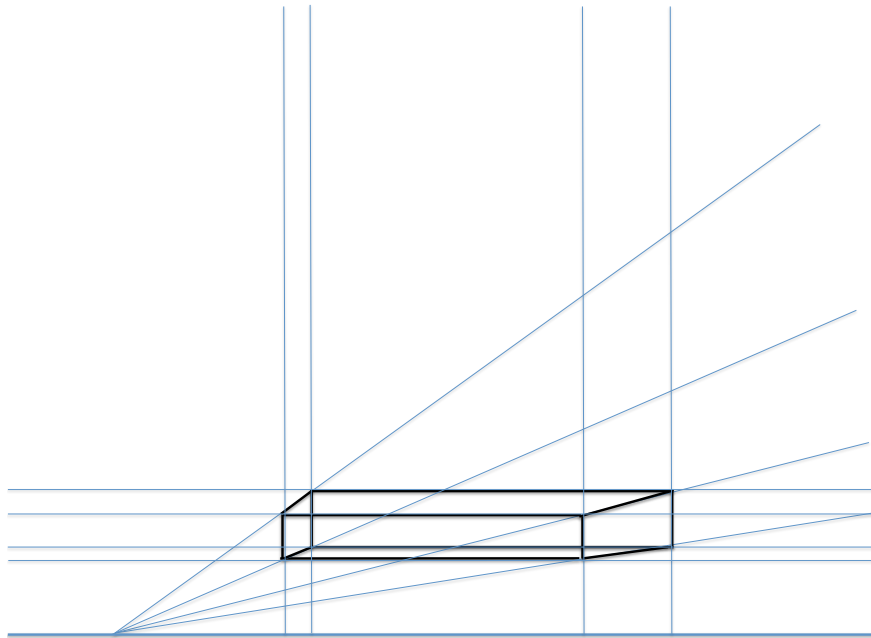


Fig. 17 Perspectival analysis of Holbein's *Dead Christ* in one-point perspective.

At last we can see the perspectival oddity of the painting. A view from below and to the left requires that two axes be oblique to the picture plane, but Holbein's rendering appears to be drawn from one-point perspective, since there are clearly two axes (the x- and y- axes), which are parallel to the picture plane. This point is evident here by the two sets of imaginary lines, one parallel and one perpendicular to the horizon. On the other hand, it is entirely possible that the painting is indeed drawn according to strict two-point perspective and that the very short height of the tomb makes the vertical lines of the tomb appear upright rather than slanted as they would if the vanishing point were not as far above.

The painting's viewpoint raises questions about whose perspective is being imitated here. During Jesus's time, tombs were actually carved into the side of large rock faces. Bodies were inserted into the hollowed portion of the rock. The tomb was not sealed by a stone over an opening in the top, but rather by a large blocking stone, either round or square, in front of the

tomb. Here is a diagram of one such tomb, which is called a rolling stone tomb:

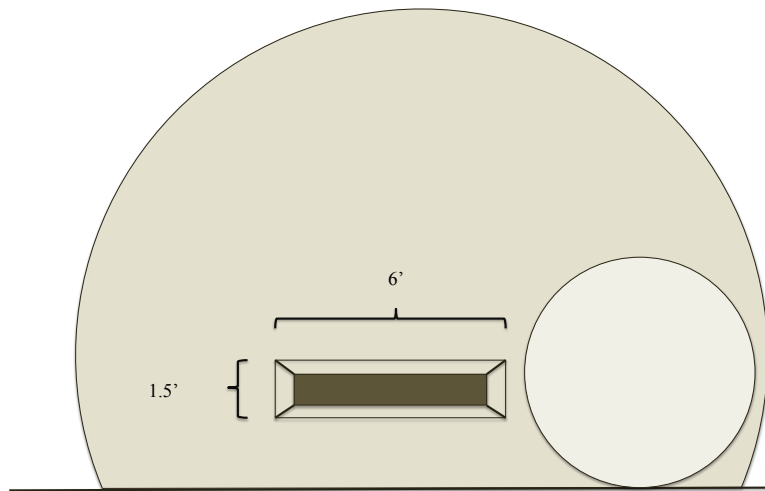


Fig 8. *Diagram of Quadrosolia tomb with rolling blocking stone.* The typical recess is 1.5' tall, 2' deep and 6' wide.

If Jesus were in a modern tomb that opened at the top, it would be physically impossible both for Jesus's right hand and for the linen that has been wrapped around his body to be draped over the bottom of the tomb, as it is in the painting. The fact that he is depicted in a quadrosolia tomb makes this physically plausible.



Fig. 9 Close up of Jesus's hand from Holbein's *Dead Christ*.

We are gazing at a tomb that would have been visible from the viewpoint of a person who was standing in front of, slightly below and to the left of the entrance of the tomb when the stone was rolled away from the tomb. The blocking stone tomb would have allowed for the side-view of Jesus's body that Holbein represents in the painting.¹⁰¹

The canonical gospels offer several possible interpretations for this viewpoint from which the scene is painted. The evangelist Mark (15:47) describes both Mary Magdalene and Mary the Mother of Jesus as seeing the dead body of Jesus from outside of the tomb.¹⁰² The tomb must have been a small, personal tomb—as opposed to a larger tomb with multiple-chambers—in

¹⁰¹ The tomb is a type of *loculi*, which is a recess dug into the side of a rock. There are two types of *loculi*: an *arcosolia* if the top of the recess is arched and a *quadrosolia* when it is rectangular. See Amos Kloner's article on Jesus's tomb for a comparison of historical tombs with Gospel accounts. Amos Kloner, "Did a Rolling Stone Close Jesus' Tomb?" *Biblical Archaeology Review* 25.5 (1999): 22-26. The Gospel of Mark indicates a rolling stone tomb, "And he bought fine linen, and took him down, and wrapped him in the linen, and laid him in a sepulchre which was hewn out of a rock, and rolled a stone unto the door of the sepulchre" (Mark, 15:46). However, rolling stone tombs were allegedly very rare compared to the square blocking stones; this taken with other information from the gospels leads Kloner to conclude that the tomb was actually a square blocking stone tomb.

¹⁰² The gospel accounts also allow for the perspective to belong to one of an undisclosed number of guards who were ordered to seal the tomb with the massive stone.

order for Jesus's body to be visible from the entrance in accordance with these gospel accounts.

The window of time in which Jesus's body would have been visible is the evening following his crucifixion. Mark (15:34) and Luke (23:44-46) state the time of death at the "ninth hour," that is, at 3 pm.¹⁰³ This is approximately three hours after he was crucified (Mark 15:25). Mark states that it is not until "evening" that Joseph of Arimathea comes to take Jesus's body down from the cross on the eve of the Sabbath, that is, on Friday (Mark 15:34-37). The body would have been dead for at least three hours, which marks the beginning of rigor mortis, the stiffening of the muscles consistent with the flexed appearance of the body in the painting. Although the exposure of his mostly naked body to the air would have hastened the decomposition process (bacteria thrives under exposure to water and air), three hours of exposure is not enough time to account for the greenish discoloration visible on the body of the corpse in the painting. This discoloration can, however, be attributed to the model corpse that Holbein used, which was found in the Rhine. Decomposing flesh typically emits a green substance (fodder for flies) within three to eight days after death. The water in which the model was found may well have hastened this greening process by allowing the bacteria to thrive in the relatively warm temperatures of the Rhine River.¹⁰⁴ Further discoloration appears as a darkening of the extremities (head, hand and feet, in particular). This can be accounted for by lividity, which indicates a pooling of blood in the lower portion of the body that, that closest to the earth at the

¹⁰³ The "ninth hour" refers to the ninth hour of the day. Jesus was crucified around the time of the spring equinox, which meant that the twenty-four hour day was evenly divided into twelve hours of daylight and twelve hours of night. Sunrise would have begun at around six or seven am, meaning that the "ninth hour" would have been at around three or four pm.

¹⁰⁴ It is possible that the body may have been floating for three days, but the refloat, the body's resurfacing after drowning, would have been hastened by the shallowness of the river and the warm waters. If the water is less than forty degrees Fahrenheit then the body can remain under water in a semi-fetal position for as long as two weeks.

time of and following death. Lividity begins as early as twenty minutes after death and the blood congeals within four to five hours, at which point it becomes visible on the surface of the skin. The darkness at Jesus's feet fits the gospel account of the crucifixion, but the discolored face and hand (only the right hand shows) do not. It is possible to imagine that Holbein is challenging the gospel narrative. Perhaps the decay is what might have been seen three days after Jesus's death, when the stone had been rolled away and the tomb was *not* empty, but rather contained the body of Jesus subject to the natural process of decomposition. All of these interpretive possibilities are at play at once.

The perspective from which both the tomb and the subject are depicted matches that of someone gazing into the tomb. By gospel accounts, three characters—Joseph of Arimathea, Mary Magdalene or Mary the Mother of God—could have seen the body from this perspective. All three would have seen the body before the tomb was sealed. Joseph of Arimathea took Jesus's body down from the cross and put his body into the tomb (see Mark 15:46). This act was perhaps done out of kindness, but certainly out of reverence. Joseph carried out the burial in accordance with Halakha, which forbids the hanged body of a condemned criminal to remain unburied overnight.¹⁰⁵ The perspective of the painting also recalls Mary Magdalene's and Mary the Mother of God's as they mourned at Jesus's tomb.¹⁰⁶ The two women model the first church to form after Christ's death according to the passage, "For where two or more are gathered in my name, I shall be in their midst" (Matthew 18:20). The painting raises the question: Is Christ somehow metaphorically resurrected in those who gather to honor his memory? At the same

¹⁰⁵ Halakha is Jewish Law comprised of the five books and the Oral Torah. For the law pertaining to the burial of those who suffered capital punishment, see Deuteronomy 21:23.

¹⁰⁶ The two are mentioned as being present at the tomb *before* the disappearance of his body in Mark and Matthew: Mark 15:47, "And Mary Magdalene and Mary *the mother* of Jesus beheld where he was laid"; Matthew 27:61, "And there was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre."

time, the question of how one could possibly rise from this state asserts itself, challenging any pretense to faith. Once more, Holbein raises questions without answering them.

If one looks closely at Christ's face, his eyes appear to be rolling up into his head, another marker of death overtaking him. Yet there are various ways of reading the eyes. On the one hand, the rolled eyes appear vacant, just as the prisoners' eyes in Yakobi's *Prisoners' Halt*. On the other hand, Jesus's eyes appear to be actively straining to see something beyond the confines of his own canvas. The eyes raise the question: *is* he looking or are his deceased eyes simply un-shut? Because of the unique lower-left viewpoint of the painting, the left-hand side of the tomb is shielded from the viewer, once again, posing a question instead of answering it. If he is looking, *at what* is he looking? One can assume that he is looking at the tomb, but Holbein specifically hides the left wall of the tomb from view.¹⁰⁷ If we consider the gaze in light of his posture on the cross, he would have been gazing upwards. This would allude to his resurrection and in vertical arrangement would encourage the viewer to direct his own gaze heavenward, to the promised life to come. This message is obscured by the horizontal positioning of the body which causes the heavenward gaze to lose its upward thrust, but it lingers as a bifurcated reminder of both his message of the afterlife as well as his being forsaken by that same father on the cross. Does he look in vain to the empty heavens or is he metaphorically eyeing his own ascent?

Every aspect of the composition exhibits a duality that corresponds to the "bifurcation" that Bakhtin finds on the smallest scale in Dostoevsky's novels. Bakhtin writes about the appearance of conflicting views at every turn in Dostoevsky:

¹⁰⁷ See Appendix for a more detailed analysis of this viewpoint, especially fig. 3.

Where others saw a single thought, he was able to find and feel out two thoughts, a bifurcation; where others saw a single quality, he discovered in it the presence of a second and contradictory quality. Everything that seemed simple became, in his world, complex and multi-structured. In every voice he could hear two contending voices, in every expression a crack, and the readiness to go over immediately to another contradictory expression; in every gesture he detected confidence and lack of confidence simultaneously; he perceived the profound ambiguity, even multiple ambiguity, of every phenomenon. (*PDP* 30)

This tension of opposites is central to Dostoevsky's poetics, and it is precisely what makes this Holbein painting a perfect fit for his novel. Bakhtin argues that Dostoevsky's novels are so thoroughly multi-perspectival that contrasting perspectives permeate his writing from the macro-level of form to the micro-level of detail. Holbein's painting exhibits a tension that is so exquisitely balanced as to nearly outshine Bakhtin's Dostoevsky in his signature craft.

Caryl Emerson writes about the polyphonic novel and carnival as two manifestations of dialogism: "Each may be considered an extreme—and thus instructive—of dialogism: one of the word and the other of the body."¹⁰⁸ I propose that the painting is a form of *visual polyphony*, in which a dialogism of images unfolds. The details of the image within the painting exhibit the small-scale permeation of competing perspectives that is characteristic of Dostoevsky's word in the polyphonic novel. They recreate visually the "profound ambiguity" of the phenomenon of Christ's death in a painting. On the level of visual content, the painting portrays the corpse, the details of which lead down at least two very different interpretive roads. We can see how the painting captivated Dostoevsky and we can also see how the painting provides an open structure that allows its three viewers in Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*—Ippolit, Rogozhin and Myshkin—to find conflicting evidence for their contrasting convictions.

¹⁰⁸ Caryl Emerson, "Polyphony and the Carnavalesque: Introducing the Terms" in *Studies in Russian and Slavic Literatures, Cultures, and History: All the Same the Words Don't Go Away : Essays on Authors, Heroes, Aesthetics, and Stage Adaptations from the Russian Tradition* (Boston: Academic Studies, 2010), 3.

Florensky is Philosophically Opposed to Calling Linear Perspectival Art “Realism” or “Naturalism”¹⁰⁹

Pavel Florensky first delivered “Reverse Perspective” in 1920 as a lecture for a course on Byzantine Art at *MIKhIM*, The Moscow Institute of Historical Art Research and Museum Management, where Florensky was lecturing at the time in the Byzantine Department.¹¹⁰ The word “reverse” in the title is a translation of the Russian “*obratnyi*,” which is also commonly translated as “reversed” or “inverted.”¹¹¹ The art theory set forward in this lecture offers a framework for discussing the philosophical ramifications of linear perspective. The key points of his theory allow us to compare and contrast Ippolit’s, Rogozhin’s and Myshkin’s different ways of seeing Holbein’s *Dead Christ*. I will first explicate Florensky’s criticism of linear perspective as “Realism” and then show how his criticism illuminates Ippolit’s and Rogozhin’s egocentric perspective. I will then show how Florensky’s “reverse perspective” resonates with Myshkin’s more multi-perspectival way of seeing.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ What follows assumes a basic understanding of one-, two-, and three-point perspective, which I explain in the Appendix.

¹¹⁰ *Moskovskii institut istoriko-khudozhestvennykh izyskanii i muzevedeniia*.

¹¹¹ Florensky adopted the term from the Russian-German art historian Oskar Wulff (1864-1946) who wrote about iconography and the psychology of art in his publication *Die umgekehrte Perspektive und die Niedersicht : Eine Raumschauungsform Der Altbyzantinischen Kunst und ihre Fortbildung in der Renaissance*. Leipzig: Unidentified, 1907. Florensky also borrows from Erwin Panofsky’s analyses of the underlying assumptions of linear perspective: the first being that linear perspective ignores the double effect produced by viewing the world with two eyes instead of one; the second is that the flat plane can adequately represent a naturally curved visual image. For a discussion of six different definitions of this term, see Clemena Antonova, “On the Problem of ‘Reverse Perspective’: Definitions East and West.” *Leonardo* 43.5 (2010): 464-69. She uses the Christopher Wood’s translation of the term in her title. See his introduction in *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, trans. Christopher S. Wood. (New York: Zone, 1997). See especially 6-27. For more on a comparison between the two works, see Clemena Antonova’s *Space, Time, and Presence in the Icon: Seeing the World with the Eyes of God*. (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2010). See especially her chapter “Reverse Perspective -- A Critical Reading” (29-62).

¹¹² It is tempting to draw a comparison between Florensky’s ideal art in “Reverse Perspective” and the Cubist art of Picasso and Braque, which was making its way onto the art scene during the thirteen years

In *Reverse Perspective*, Florensky describes the means used to attain verisimilitude in linear perspectival paintings as a “geometric construct.”¹¹³ All objects within the frame conform to straight lines that converge at either one, two or three vanishing points that are imagined to sit either on or beyond the canvas. The vanishing points orient the viewer’s relationship to the painted world in such a way as to create a convincing illusion of depth. According to Florensky, perspectival painting captivates by fastening the viewer to a single viewing point and forcing him or her to see the depicted image from a single perspective. But for Florensky, this literal phenomenon extends into the metaphorical realm. The form of perspectival painting not only forces the viewer to see an image from a certain perspective, but it also discourages the viewer from thinking about the content from different perspectives.

Florensky traces the origins of linear perspective to the early theater. The ancient Greek stage designers, whom Florensky calls the “first theoreticians of perspective,” sought ways to impress a convincing illusion of reality upon their audience (Florensky 246).¹¹⁴ Florensky

prior to Florensky’s publication of this article in 1920. Picasso and Braque were certainly painting single objects from multiple perspectives, but they were interested in distorting mass and calling attention to the acts of depicting and conceiving of the world artistically. Robert Rosenblum puts it as follows: “For the traditional distinction between solid form and the space around it, Cubism substituted a radically new fusion of mass and void. In place of earlier perspective systems that determined the precise location of discrete objects in illusory depth, Cubism offered an unstable structure of dismembered planes in indeterminate spatial positions. Instead of assuming that the work of art was an illusion of a reality that lay beyond it, Cubism proposed that the work of art was itself a reality that represented the very process by which nature is transformed into art.” Robert Rosenblum, *Cubism and Twentieth-century Art*, (New York, NY: Abrams, 2001), 13. Florensky, by contrast, was primarily interested in art’s symbolic function and thought that Byzantine iconography restored objectivity to mass. I discuss both points later in this chapter.

¹¹³ Pavel A. Florensky, *Beyond Vision: Essays on the Perception of Art*, ed. Nicoletta Misler, trans. Wendy R. Salmond (London: Reaktion, 2002). All Florensky quotes in this chapter are taken from this book; the page numbers are provided in parentheses in the text of the chapter.

¹¹⁴ The Greeks of whom Florensky speaks were far more than stage designers. They were the pre-Socratic philosophers and polymaths, Anaxagoras (c. 510- 428 BCE) and Democritus (c. 460- c. 370 BCE).

laments their discovery of linear perspective, which he describes in no uncertain terms as a cruelly manipulative device that paralyzes the spectator:

Presupposing that the spectator or the stage designer was chained fast, like the prisoner of Plato's cave, to a theatre bench and neither could nor should have a direct vital relationship to reality, these first theoreticians of perspective provided rules for a deception that ensnared the theatre spectator as if he were separated from the stage by a glass barrier and there were just one immobile eye, observing without penetrating the very essence of life and, most important, with his will paralyzed, for the very essence of a theatre that has become mundane demands a will-less looking at the stage, as at some 'untruth', something 'not really there': some empty deception. Anaxagoras and Democritus replace the living man with a spectator [...] and so they thereby make clear the rules for deceiving this spectator. (Florensky 210)

Florensky uses harsh language to articulate how the form of perspectival painting creates the conditions for a hostile takeover of the mind. He describes the theater in no uncertain terms as a manipulative space, in which stage-designers transform their audience into will-less prisoners who are severed from reality by an illusory backdrop, as if by a "glass barrier" (Florensky 210).¹¹⁵ Florensky considers the illusion to be a weak imitation of reality. Illusion transforms the "essence of life" into "an empty deception" and renders the viewer passive (Florensky 210). Like the consumptive Ippolit, who is confined to his deathbed and looks out at the world through his bedroom window, the viewer feels divided from the "essence of life" which remains out of reach.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ The word "theater" derives from the Greek word θεωρία (also the etymological root of "theory"). The admixture of seeing and contemplation is present in it; θεωρία means both "looking at, viewing, beholding" and "contemplation, speculation." The word comes from the noun θεωρός, which is either a "spectator" or an "ambassador who speaks or makes sacrifices to the gods." θεωρός, in turn, combines θεα, "sight," "view," or "aspect" with the infinitive ὁρᾶν, which expresses both seeing and knowing: "to look, see, perceive, behold, observe." θεωρός results in translations that blur the distinction between seeing and knowing, such as "one who sees/perceives a sight/view." The "theater" is both a place of seeing and a metaphor for the mind's capacity for both speculation and understanding. All Greek references come from the Liddell, Scott Lexicon as digitized in Perseus Digital Library. Ed. Gregory R. Crane. Tufts University. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>.

¹¹⁶ The bed-ridden Ippolit spends his last days staring out of his bedroom window, a point that I discuss below in the section entitled "Ippolit's Physical Perspective."

Florensky shows how linear perspective was adopted as the defining artistic method of two related but separate artistic movements called Realism and Naturalism. For Florensky, nothing could be further from ‘reality’ than the illusion generated by linear perspective and nothing could be further from ‘natural’ than the highly artificial means employed to achieve the illusion. The practitioners of nineteenth-century Realism sought to depict reality unadorned, objectively, with unprecedented precision and fidelity to the prosaic, visible world.¹¹⁷ The movement grew as a reaction to what its proponents saw as the subjective embellishments and indulgences of Romanticism. Yet Florensky prefers to define linear perspective as characteristic of “subjectivism and illusionism” (Florensky 208). He attributes the terms “Naturalism” and “Realism” to the arrogance of the practitioners and proponents of linear perspective, who claim that what they see from their privileged point of view is both natural and real. Florensky jabs, “Who does not find it flattering to consider his own self real and natural, i.e., resulting from reality itself, without deliberate intervention?” (Florensky 252). The “realist” is, according to Florensky, someone who substitutes the limited scope of his or her own perspective for reality. For Florensky, the roots of linear perspective extend beyond visual deception into the philosophical ignorance of Plato’s cave inhabitants.

Florensky argues that the artificial means of achieving linear perspective undermines the notion that it is a “natural” way of perceiving things. Florensky speaks of the historical use of various mechanical devices invented by early perspectival painters to artificially achieve the desired illusion of perspectival painting: “The purpose of the devices is to make it possible for

¹¹⁷ Naturalism is rooted in the natural sciences and biology, according to nineteenth-century art critic Jules-Antoine Castagnary, the man who coined the term as applied to the visual arts in 1863. He contrasted it with Realist artist Gustave Courbet’s approach, arguing that naturalist artists strove for passionless, objective depiction and that their “sole aim was to reproduce nature,” adding that “Naturalism is truth balanced with science.” Jules-Antoine Castagnary, “Salons des Refusés (1863),” in *Salons 1857-1879* Vol. 1 (Paris, 1892).

the most unskilled draughtsman to reproduce any object in a purely mechanical fashion” (Florensky 247). The devices constructed by artists allow them to conform their painted objects to the underlying geometric schema of linear perspective. One such device involves viewing the objects to be painted through a glass that contains a lightly-etched graph on one side (See Fig. 6 below). Each square on the glass graph corresponds to a square on the canvas, thus ensuring proportionality in the painting. Florensky includes the following image to illustrate the means used to achieve verisimilitude in sixteenth-century paintings.

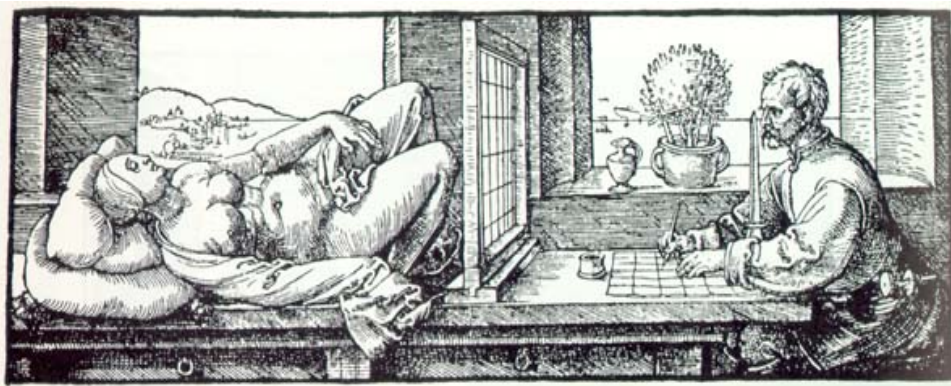


Figure 10. Dürer's *Underweyssung*, 1st edn., Nuremberg, 1525.¹¹⁸

The device tricks the eye into believing that the painted objects are real. Yet Florensky argues that the viewer knows that he is gazing “at some ‘untruth,’ something ‘not really there’” (Florensky 210). An unsettling disparity arises in the viewer because he senses the artifice behind the seemingly real objects. The paintings are as if filtered through a graph, just as the bed-ridden Ippolit’s worldview is filtered through the graph of his windowpanes and through the graph of Meyer’s wall beyond them.

¹¹⁸ Albrecht Dürer, *Dürer's Underweyssung*. Digital image. *Vanedwards.co.uk*.

Florensky holds that the single viewpoint of linear perspective precludes objectivity. He argues that the modern, perspectival schema distorts objects by equating them with appearances. Florensky attributes the hierarchical scale of the represented objects in linear perspective to the egocentric schema of linear perspectival painting, which characterizes the egocentric worldview of what he terms “modern man” (Florensky 252). Objects that are far away from the viewer are less well-represented: they are smaller and less vivid. Objects that are closer to the viewer are better represented: they are larger, more detailed and more vivid. The objects that are further away are by design less significant. Florensky infers this organizational feature that the size of the painted objects in linear perspective corresponds directly to their proximity to the artist as the ultimate value of the painted world. Linear perspective tailors its content to the single viewpoint of a single viewer who stands at the optic center of the painting and values the objects according to their proximity to him.

Florensky argues that linear perspective is dehumanizing. Linear perspective forces the viewer to look at the content of a painting from a coldly removed perspective, “We are not seeing reality,” he contends, “but we are experiencing a visual phenomenon; and we spy on it as if through a chink, with cold curiosity, with neither reverence nor pity” (Florensky 211). Linear perspective transforms the fundamental attitude of the viewer from that of a connected participant into a detached voyeur.

Perspective is rooted in the theatre not simply because historically and technically perspective was first used in the theatre, but also by virtue of a deeper motivation: the theatricality of a perspectival depiction of the world. For in this consists that facile experience of the world, devoid of a feeling for reality and a sense of responsibility, that sees life as just a spectacle, and in no sense a challenge. (Florensky 210)

For Florensky, the *form* of perspectival painting inherently isolates, forcing us to look at its content passively and without empathy. The painting corrupts from within, morally weakening

the viewer by detaching him from his surroundings, ridding him of any sense of responsibility for the world outside of the mind, a world reduced to mere appearances.

Florensky's skepticism about perspectival art extends to what he describes as the scientific, systematizing philosophical environment in which linear perspective flourished. He is wary of scientific models that generalize specifics into broad categories and strip the specific content of individuality. He identifies this systematizing and homogenizing tendency with linear perspectival art, wherein objects are no longer "subject to their own laws," but merely fill in the blanks that belong to an impersonal graph projected from the eye (Florensky 216). Florensky defines the space of linear perspectival painting as "Euclidean-Kantian" (216). The Euclidean half comes from the "geometric construct" of the rectilinear structure used to recreate these appearances according to Euclid's systematic book on geometry, *The Elements of Geometry*. On a structural level, the objects in the painting conform to a geometric, Euclidean schema. But the darker half of the schema derives from what Florensky sees as the solipsistic, Kantian, philosophical world-view that readily accepts fidelity of appearance as Realism. Kant was especially interested in scientific knowledge of the sort that could be clearly articulated from within a rigorous and systematic philosophy of the mind. His philosophy emphasized *how* the mind processes things. For Kant, the world that is assumed to exist outside of our minds is inaccessible without the mediation of our *way* of seeing things. Kant understands space not as something external to man, but as a *subjective* condition, an "intuition."¹¹⁹ In *The Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant defines the mental schema—his famous Categories—that he believes determines all mental perception. Kant's Categories, however, reduce the subjective experience to a set of universal preconditions for human perception. Kant writes Euclid's book of *The*

¹¹⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar, (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Pub., 1996), 78.

Elements for the mind, as it were. The Categories set the parameters for orderly thought, just as the geometric schema of linear perspective sets the parameters for the production of orderly images. Kant sought to understand how the mind works, so as to distinguish illusion from reality, fiction from fact. The result of Kant's attempt at objectivity yields once more, as with linear perspective, what Florensky calls "illusionism," that is, it excludes the possibility of scientific objectivity.

For Florensky, both Realism and Kant's theory are the fruits of the ego of "modern man." Both replace "living reality" with an artificial schema. Both are limited scientific models that are merely tools for understanding the world, but neither reflects the complexity of world. Both strip reality of its special content and reduce the concrete value of individual and singular objects to appearances. For Florensky, there is danger in sacrificing the irreplaceable, individual values with an abstract system of thought. For Dostoevsky, the same holds true, as is evident in the collection of tortured, abstractly minded heroes that populate his pages—the underground man, Raskolnikov and Ivan Karamazov to name a few. Ippolit Terentiev also belongs to this collection, and Florensky's theory of Realism helps to make sense of how Ippolit sees Holbein's painting.

Ippolit's Physical Perspective Reinforces his Egotistical Worldview

Ippolit Terentiev is a bright adolescent who throughout *The Idiot* expresses an amateur, atheistic, scientific philosophical worldview. He has a penchant for philosophical oration and keeps company with several main characters of the novel including Kolya, the young, gentle-hearted admirer of Myshkin, and Rogozhin, the darkly impassioned suitor of Nastasya Filippovna and friend of Myshkin. Ippolit's awareness of his consumption makes his philosophizing cynical. He becomes embittered with the knowledge of his impending, premature

death and the fact that he must remain in bed for most of his remaining days. This perceived injustice and resulting indignation consume his thoughts and dictate his narrow scientific outlook.

Ippolit's bed-bound perspective informs his interpretation of the painting. Like the spectators of ancient Greek plays whom Florensky identifies as the first viewers of the linear perspectival backdrops, Ippolit is a spectator in his own life, watching it without participating in it or sensing his connection to it. Instead, he is separated from it as if by a glass wall. He often literally sees the world through a window and even speaks to his visitors through it, as well. In fact, another painting, Mikhail Klodt's *Last Spring* (see fig. 11 below), bears an uncanny resemblance to Dostoevsky's portrayal of Ippolit. Dostoevsky was familiar with the painting, as it was one of several that he critiqued in his article, "The Exhibition of the Academy of the Arts 1860-1861." Dostoevsky provides the following ekphrasis of it in the October 27, 1861 issue of *Vremia*:

The sick patient, a young woman who is dying, is sitting in a large armchair across from an open window. She has consumption, won't survive past spring, and her family members know it. Her sister stands near the window and is crying; another sister kneels beside the sick patient. Behind the partition panels, the father and mother of the dying young woman sit and talk amongst themselves. Their conversation must be melancholy: the dying young woman's condition is bad; the mood of her sisters is foul, and it is all illuminated by the beautiful, clear light of spring. The whole painting is painted beautifully (*prekrasno*), impeccably, but in the final analysis, the painting is far from beautiful (*prekrasnaia*)" (my translation; PSS 19:167).

I highlight the Russian words *prekrasno* or "beautifully" and *prekasnaia* or "beautiful" in translation because the adjective is the same one that Dostoevsky uses six years later in his letter to Sofia Ivanovna to describe both Christ and the essential quality that he wants to depict in Prince Myshkin (28.2:251; January 1/13, 1868). Dostoevsky wants not only to create an image of a "positively beautiful person" (*sovershenno prekrasnyi chelovek*), but he also wants to depict

him “beautifully,” *prekrasno*. Here, the execution of the painting is beautiful, but the overall effect of the image according to Dostoevsky is repulsive because it highlights the meaningless death of a young person.



Figure 11. Mikhail Klodt's *Last Spring* (1861).¹²⁰

The painting shows a sense of division from life beyond the windowpanes, through which the terminally ill patient gazes. The sick woman, like Ippolit, is artificially cut off from life. Moreover, she is unmoved by the sense of renewal brought on by spring since it is her “last spring,” as the painting’s title makes clear. Her windowpane has been temporarily opened in this moment, though the panes remain visible at the top. The light of spring and the sense of flourishing life overflow from without into at least a portion of the room. There is a fleeting connection to life before death, although the patient’s face remains in the shadow cast by her

¹²⁰ Mikhail Klodt, *Last Spring* (1861). Digital image. *Petroart.ru*.

bedroom walls as if to show that this light of spring does not touch her thoughts, which are overshadowed by both illness and her impending death.

Dostoevsky incorporates elements from Klodt's *Last Spring* into the novel when the reader first encounters Ippolit in St. Petersburg. Ippolit spends most of his time looking at the world beyond his bedroom walls through his windows. Evgeny Pavlovich has heard rumors about Ippolit receiving visitors through this window and asks, "Is it true what I've heard, that you are of the opinion that you need only to talk to the people through the window for a quarter of an hour, and they will at once agree with you in everything and follow you at once?" (2.X.293).¹²¹ Evgeny Pavlovich's question reinforces the sense of separation between Ippolit and others in the novel. Still Ippolit's rhetoric is convincing as evidenced by those who "follow him," hypnotized by Ippolit's orderly and rational philosophy.¹²²

The small window is deeply connected with Ippolit's thought process, as when he confesses that he has "spent so long looking out of that window and thought so much" (2.X.295). The tiny window metaphorically filters and limits Ippolit's thoughts. But what Dostoevsky shows us and what Florensky allows us to see more clearly is that Ippolit's way of *seeing* the world directly influences his way of *thinking* about it. Recalling Florensky's description of the "pane of glass" that exists between the audience and the depicted background on the stage, one can see that Ippolit sees the world the way Florensky's modern perspectival painter does. Interestingly enough, Alberti, the father of modern perspective art theory, described his method

¹²¹ Fyodor M. Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York, NY: Vintage, 2003). All quotations from *The Idiot* are taken from this translation and cited in the following format: (part, chapter, page number). For example, this citation comes from Part 2, Chapter X, page 293.

¹²² In this same scene, Ippolit confesses to dreaming of talking through the window to the *narod* (people). The *narod* find a way into Ippolit's life despite his self-inflicted isolation. He shares the pains of his isolation with those gathered at the *dacha* (summer home) in Pavlovsk for Myshkin's birthday, and his long-winded confession culminates in him weeping on Lizaveta Prokofevna's bosom.

for perspectival painting using the window as a model: “I inscribe a quadrangle...which is considered to be an open window through which I see what I want to paint” (Alberti 56).¹²³ And Erwin Panofsky, the early twentieth-century art historian from whom Florensky’s “Reverse Perspective” derives a great deal, describes the perspectival view of space not as foreshortening, but rather as the phenomenon “when the entire picture has been transformed...into a ‘window,’ and we are meant to believe that we are looking through this window into a space” (Panofsky 27).

Ippolit craves what Florensky calls “living *contact*” (Florensky 209) with the world that exists beyond his window. Ippolit poignantly articulates his feeling that he has lost this living contact in his Necessary Explanation, “The point is in life, in life alone—in discovering it, constantly and eternally, and not at all in the discovery itself” (3.V.394). He tells Lizaveta Prokof’evna that he came to the prince’s dacha “in order to see the trees” in accordance with what appears to be a dying wish (2.X.295). Ippolit has been fastened to the fixed perspective of his bed and forced to gaze out into a world in which he feels he cannot participate. “Nature,” he contends, “is very much given to mockery” (2.X.296) He questions the natural order of things and protests against nature’s alleged wisdom, arguing, “Why does [nature] create the best beings only so as to mock them afterwards?” (2.X.296). I thus interpret nature as he experiences it. He feels mocked by nature, which has brought him into being only to kill him at a young age. He laments nature’s inexorable theft of his own life.

Ippolit’s physical perspective reinforces his philosophical perspective. When Ippolit wants to know the hard truth about how much time he has left on this, he requests a scientist’s opinion. The scientist who comes to Ippolit’s aid is actually a medical student who is aptly

¹²³ Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, trans. Cecil Grayson (New York: Phaidon, 1972).

named *Kislorodov*. The Russian word *Kislorod* means “oxygen,” and Pevear and Volokhonsky translate his name as “Oxygenov” (3.V.388). Ippolit boasts, “About a week ago the student Oxygenov was brought to me; in his convictions he is a materialist, an atheist, and a nihilist, which is precisely why I invited him; I needed somebody who would finally tell me the naked truth (*goluyu pravdu*), without mawkishness or ceremony” (3.V.388). Ippolit trusts Oxygenov to offer a realistic estimate of his numbered days because Oxygenov’s criterion for truth is rooted in science. Oxygenov gives Ippolit two to four weeks to live. Ironically, “Oxygenov” is a poor substitute for the life-engendering oxygen that Ippolit wants to continue to breathe, the same air emanating from the trees that he longs to see. By requesting Oxygenov, however, Ippolit reveals that he is a “modern man” as Florensky defines it, a man for whom “reality exists only when and to the extent that science deigns to allow it to exist” (Florensky 217). Ippolit also echoes the realist urge for objectivity, untainted by sentimentalism. In short, Ippolit reveals his convictions by asking for a realist who will level with him about his condition. This is the philosophical perspective from which Ippolit approaches the painting in Part Three of the novel.

Ippolit’s ekphrasis of the Holbein painting is part of the written “Explanation” that he reads out loud at Myshkin’s birthday celebration.¹²⁴ He recalls seeing the painting at Rogozhin’s house. His description of the painting comes within the broader philosophical context of a debate between Lebedev (the town gossip and alleged interpreter of the Apocalypse) and Ippolit over the question posed by Hamlet’s famous line, “To be or not to be” (3.IV.368). Lebedev philosophizes about the Apocalypse, more specifically about the meaning of “Wormwood” as a symbol in Revelation. He ultimately concludes that the Apocalypse is nigh, and he points as evidence for his prophesy to the dissolution of society, which lacks a binding moral idea to hold

¹²⁴ The introduction to the painting comes in Part 2, when Myshkin visits Rogozhin’s house in a scene that I discuss later in this chapter (PV 217; PSS 8:181).

it together. This theory sets the stage for Ippolit's description of the Dead Christ painting, which, Ippolit sees as a naturalist painting that refutes the possibility of Christ as one such binding idea. He believes that the painting demonstrates Christ's failure as a Savior, yet, it also reflects Ippolit's own overwhelming sense of powerlessness in the face of death. Ippolit's "Explanation" is a long suicide note that he intends to end emphatically by shooting himself, thereby establishing his stance on the debate over Hamlet's famous line.

Ippolit calls himself a "dead man" when he apologizes for his audacity at speaking philosophically in front of polite society (2.X.295). He excuses himself by claiming that he should not be thought of as an eighteen-year old because, "A dead man has no age" (2.X.295). He replaces the content of what he sees beyond his tiny window with the content of what he feels in his bedroom. He sees mockery in nature not only because nature is killing him but also because he feels mocked by his audience at Myshkin's—Ippolit accuses them of laughing at him. Dostoevsky shows us the limits of Ippolit's materialistic and self-centered way of seeing things. Like Florensky's "realist," Ippolit the scientist can hardly lay claim to scientific objectivity when he looks into the world and cannot see the limits of his own vision.

When Ippolit turns his attention to the *Dead Christ*, he sees the cruel force of "nature" as a mysterious void that is overtaking Christ's body. He critiques the painting as follows:

Nature looms in the painting in the form of some enormous, inexorable, mute beast, or, to put it more faithfully, much more faithfully, strange though it is— in the form of some giant machine of the most modern construction, which has senselessly seized, crushed, and devoured into itself, dully and unfeelingly, a great and priceless being—such a being that was by itself worth all of nature and all of her laws, worth the entire world, which was created, perhaps, solely for the appearance of this being! It is as if exactly this notion is expressed by this painting, the notion of a dark, insolent, and senselessly eternal force, to which everything is subjugated, and it is conveyed to you involuntarily. (My translation; *PSS* 8:339)

Ippolit's understanding of "nature" seems self-contradictory. Although he first describes it as an all-consuming "beast," he proceeds to compare it to a machine. By referring to it as a machine "of the most modern construction," as if it were a novel invention, Ippolit reinforces his notion that nature acts *unnaturally*. But the contradiction fades when we see that both the "beast" and the "machine" are images of cruelty, which Ippolit attributes to nature because "nature" is his executioner. There is neither beast nor machine depicted in the painting. Instead, he uses the images metaphorically. Both metaphors represent Ippolit's searching attempts to describe a disturbing feeling that the painting elicits in him. Ippolit alludes to "a dark, insolent, and senselessly eternal force" (*temnaia, naglaia, i bessmyslenno-vechnaia sila*) in the painting, but does not elaborate on it. Florensky offers a way of fleshing out our understanding of this force for Ippolit: the machine, the beast and the dark force are found in the *manner* of perceiving and depicting Christ.

Florensky's theory of the non-empathetic core of linear perspectival painting resonates with Ippolit's metaphors. In the *Dead Christ*, Holbein creates a convincing illusion of reality with the unfeeling and machine-like precision of linear perspective. In order to depict Christ so precisely, Holbein must subject his image to the schema, which first partitions his image into proportionate parts and then visually devours him, like a beast, into its own vanishing points. Ippolit's description of the dreaded force is at some level an emotional response to the form of the painting. The perspectival schema is the modern machinery of the truly "dark force" that devours Ippolit's priceless Christ. It is the black hole of the ego that lurks in man, maker of machines, deviser of schemata, and proponent of an ego-centric worldview that renders Christ's beauty illusory. As Ippolit says, "there is not a word about beauty" (3.VI.407) in this painting's worldview. Like Florensky's "realist," Ippolit reduces the heterogeneity of his surroundings to

the homogeneity of the self. The painting's true vanishing point rests in his egocentric viewpoint, which acts as a vacuum that devours objectivity and otherness. Ippolit fails to see beauty because he does not see Christ in the painting, but himself as a dead man. This is reinforced by the fact that when Ippolit speaks about the figure in the painting being devoured, he refers to him not as Christ, as he does elsewhere when he speaks about the historical Jesus, but rather anonymously as the "great and priceless being."¹²⁵ He feels himself being artificially cut off from life by nature, as if by a machine that is itself devoid of feeling and life. Ippolit's experience of the Holbein painting leaves him cold, reduced to the role of Florensky's spectator, "totally deprived of the general human feeling common to all men" (Florensky 210).

The way that Ippolit views the painting is symptomatic of the way that he views life. Like Florensky's "realist," Ippolit equates his single perspective with reality. He tries to convince others of the universal truth of his contingent perspective. He tries to replace all perspectives with his own. His way of looking at the world, thus informs his monologic way of thinking and interacting with others.¹²⁶ Ippolit exhibits "philosophical monologism" in his habit of lecturing those around him. In Ippolit's conversation with Evgeny Pavlovich, the narrator remarks, "Ippolit was barely listening to Evgeny Pavlovich, and even if he said 'well' and 'go on' to him, it seemed to be more from an old, adopted habit of conversation, and not out of attention and curiosity" (2.X.294). Ippolit's way of speaking is an extension of his way of seeing. Like Florensky's "realist," his perspective does not allow for alternative perspectives. Ippolit's

¹²⁵ Robert Louis Jackson's article alerted me to this fact. Jackson "Once Again About Dostoevsky's Response," 186.

¹²⁶ Bakhtin defines the context of monologism as follows, "In an environment of philosophical monologism, the genuine interaction of consciousnesses is impossible, and thus genuine dialogue is impossible as well. In essence idealism knows only a single mode of cognitive interaction among consciousnesses: someone who knows and possesses the truth instructs someone who is ignorant of it and in error" (*PDP* 80).

“Necessary Explanation” is a forty-minute, uninterrupted, unsolicited monologue that he forces onto a room full of Myshkin’s visitors.¹²⁷

Ippolit is so completely attached to his way of seeing things that he rejects any alternative view as deceit. In doing so, he makes himself inconsolable. He grows irate when he imagines others, such as Myshkin, trying to mollify him on his last days on earth with sentimental Christian teachings. He even questions his own impulse to come to Pavlovsk to see the trees one last time because both the teachings and the trees offer false hope. He poses the following rhetorical questions:

And what do they want to do with their ridiculous “Pavlovsk trees”? Sweeten the last hours of my life? Don’t they understand that the more oblivious I become, the more I give myself up to that last phantom of life and love with which they want to screen my Meyer’s wall from me, with all that is written on it so frankly and simple-heartedly, the more unhappy they will make me? (3.VII.412)

Meyer’s wall is an extension of Ippolit’s window, a continuation of the graph that mirrors his systematizing, categorizing, and monologic mode of thought. Ippolit tells his audience that he will not invest in the “phantom” of life because he would rather stick to Meyer’s wall, that is, to his way of seeing things. Once again, Ippolit’s way of seeing things prematurely severs him from life. Oxygenov may or may not have been correct about Ippolit’s remaining time on earth, but his prescriptive prognosis hastens Ippolit’s death. In choosing Meyer’s wall over Pavlovsk, Ippolit effectively chooses knowledge of life over life itself. His way of seeing slowly isolates him from life and culminates in his attempted, but embarrassingly unsuccessful, suicide. Consumption overtakes Ippolit not long after Nastasya Filippovna’s murder, but this is not what is tragic in his case. Ippolit’s tragedy lies in how his way of seeing things steals life from him long before his consumption does.

¹²⁷ Lizaveta Prokofevna also accuses Ippolit of “corrupting” Kolya with his atheistic teachings. See 2.X.296.

Ippolit's perspectival way of seeing extends beyond the frames of the Holbein painting and culminates in his rejection of "the wellspring of force and life," which he imagines as embodied in the sun. He refers to the sun as (3.VII.414). He is also waiting for the sun to rise so that he can "drink to the sun's health" (3.IV.372) before taking his own life, as if redirecting nature's mockery of him back onto the sun that shines favorably on all but him. At the moment of the rebirth of the sun, the renewal of day, Ippolit wants to end his life. He wants to see the sun rise only to spite it. In Holbein's painting, the body of Christ arcs above the horizon like the sun. As suggested in my analysis, this "sun" can be interpreted visually as rising or setting or somehow both. Depending on the viewpoint and depending on the way of seeing, it is rising after setting below the horizon or it is sinking into the earth and leaving it behind. The metaphor is determined by how one frames Christ's death. Is he the Savior who trampled down death, or was he trampled by death? Ippolit sees a dead man; arguably, he does not even see Christ at all, but his own death. His toast to the sun's health is an emphatic rejection of its life-giving powers and by extension, an emphatic rejection of Christ's resurrection. Ippolit makes sure to let his audience know that this rejection of life is a conscious and willful decision: "When I get to these lines, the sun will probably already be risen and resounding in the sky, and a tremendous incalculable force will pour out on all that is under the sun. So be it! I will die looking straight into the wellspring of force and life, and I will not want this life!" (3.VII.414).

Ippolit concludes his speech with an explicit rejection of the sun, the life that it sustains, and its potential beauty, all of which, for him, are things that he cannot have. He writes about the natural beauty that surrounds him, simultaneously acknowledging and rejecting the fact of its beauty. It looks beautiful from where he sits, but he does not consider it beautiful because it has nothing to do with him. It represents a feast to which he is not invited. Ippolit laments his

inability to participate: “What do I care about all of this beauty, when every minute, every second, I must and am forced to know that even this tiny fly that is now buzzing near me in a ray of sunlight, even it participates in this banquet and chorus, knows its place, loves it, and is happy, while I alone am a castaway, and only in my pusillanimity did not want to understand it till now” (3.VII. 413).¹²⁸ Having seen the feast from within his bedroom window, he marvels at its beauty, but like Florensky’s “realist,” he projects his own inner state onto his surroundings and hastens to reject the invitation. The self-proclaimed “castaway” quickly casts away the feast as undesirable once he realizes that everyone—even the buzzing “fly” enveloped in its ray of sun—has been invited except him.

The only remaining power that Ippolit does have, as he understands it, is the ultimate rejection of the invitation to the feast through suicide. In a passage that prefigures Ivan Karamazov’s philosophical returning of his “ticket” to a world that is founded on the suffering of innocent children in *The Brothers Karamazov*, Ippolit criticizes the fundamental terms of existence: “If it had been in my power not to be born, I probably would not have accepted existence on such derisive conditions. But I still have the power to die, though I’m giving back what’s already numbered. No great power, no great rebellion either” (3.VII.414). The chapter in which Ivan returns his ticket is aptly entitled “Rebellion.” Both Ivan and Ippolit reject the logic behind God’s divine wisdom and both contemplate removing themselves from an existence that they consider poorly conceived. Whereas Ivan rejects any justification of the suffering of innocent children, Ippolit rejects any justification either of his own or Christ’s innocent suffering, as indicated by Ippolit’s analysis of the Holbein painting. Neither follows through with suicide. Ivan never attempts suicide, but instead clings to life with an irrational, Karamazovian

¹²⁸ Ippolit takes this image of the buzzing fly from a story that Myshkin had told him. In Myshkin’s words, “[Ippolit] had borrowed it from his former words and tears” (3.VII.423).

thirst for “the sticky leaves” that bud in spring.¹²⁹ Ippolit of course, rejects even these “sticky leaves” and attempts the suicide, but fails. Neither Ivan’s nor Ippolit’s rebellion alters either the divine or the natural order of existence. In the end, Ippolit’s body succumbs to the natural order and his body is consumed by disease. Nature consumes Ippolit just as it consumes Christ in his interpretation of the Holbein painting.

Ippolit questions the arbitrariness of a “higher power” that suddenly “annihilates” its creatures, himself among them. He refuses to accede to this arrangement with humility and instead asks his audience “Isn’t it possible simply to eat me, without demanding that I praise that which has eaten me?” (3.VII.413).¹³⁰ The concept of devouring resurfaces towards the end of Ippolit’s speech after he mentions the “devouring force” at the core of the painting. Ippolit looks into the Holbein painting and sees his own fate.

Both Rogozhin and His Home Reflect the *Dead Christ* Painting

Just as Realism hypnotizes Florensky’s viewer into mistaking its optical illusions for reality, the *Dead Christ* mesmerizes Rogozhin. The painting lures Rogozhin effortlessly into its artificial world, wherein his faith falters. His tragic struggle to recover faith is especially evident in his futile attempt to conquer his obsession with the painting. He not only takes on the morbid qualities of the figure within the painting, but the arrangement of the corpse in the painting also dictates his arrangement of Nastasya Filippovna’s dead body after he murders her. Rogozhin

¹²⁹ Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Vintage, 1991), 273. Ippolit is not without his own irrational, life-affirming impulses, as the story of the poor medic’s wallet reveals. Ippolit sees the medic drop his wallet on the street, and despite his advanced consumption, against the dictates of the law of self-preservation, he impulsively rushes to the wallet and climbs several flights of stairs (which induces a crippling coughing fit) to return it to the man. The story comes as part of Ippolit’s “Necessary Explanation” in Part 3 of Chapter 5.

¹³⁰ He adds, “I agree that it was quite impossible to arrange the world otherwise, that is, without the ceaseless devouring of each other...” The thought of devouring looms large over Ippolit’s conscience.

embodies both the murdered and the murderer. Moreover, Rogozhin grows up in a sepulchral residence that bears resemblance to the painting's tomb, which is perhaps responsible for his attraction to the painting: he senses the resemblance of its perspective to that of his domicile. His preoccupation with the painting can only be partially attributed to his surroundings and to the perspectival manipulations employed by Holbein to create the convincing appearance of reality. The rest is Rogozhin's projection of his own perspective onto the painting. He violently conforms both Nastasya Filippovna and the painting, to the demands of his egocentric worldview. He is a Florentinian "realist" in this sense, but rather than painting Nastasya Filippovna's corpse, he sculpts it.

The painting overtakes Rogozhin's life in different ways. In the first place, Rogozhin's home resembles the painting's tomb. A reproduction of *The Dead Christ* hangs in "a big reception room" in Rogozhin's house.¹³¹ The narrator writes about the house that, "Both outside and inside, everything is somehow inhospitable and dry, everything seems to hide and conceal itself" (2.III.204). The outside of the house reflects its inside, where the Holbein painting reinforces the general sense of entombment and the absence of life. The paintings that line the interior walls of Rogozhin's home are landscapes and portraits, as if highlighting the replacement of the natural world with the artificial (2.III.217).

Myshkin identifies Rogozhin's essence in the Rogozhin home. He tells Rogozhin, "Your house has the physiognomy of your whole family and of your whole Rogozhin life" (2.III.207).

Both Rogozhin's house and the Holbein painting overlap in Myshkin's mind with Rogozhin, the

¹³¹ There is no ambiguity of the identity of the subject of the painting for the narrator. He begins the work of ekphrasis for the reader, indicating that, "It portrayed the Savior (*Spasitel'*) just taken down from the cross" (2.IV.217). And while he settles the debate over the persona depicted within the painting, he does not settle the debate over what it means for the Savior to be depicted in this way. This debate is left open for both the characters and the reader to decide.

man. When Myshkin visits Rogozhin in his home, he also speaks about the shared qualities of the art within the house and the architecture as though struggling to conceive of them independently of Rogozhin. The “Rogozhin life” which his belongings collectively emblemize can be characterized largely by the negation of life—death, the tomb, and the destruction of the means to generate life—and also by secrecy, concealment and isolation. Rogozhin’s physical surroundings reflect and sustain his isolation, as Ippolit’s window and brick wall reinforce his. The clear sense of division between the private space of Rogozhin’s dwelling and public space creates a removed vantage point from which to view the world without. And although Rogozhin, too, looks at the world through his tiny windows, they serve a different function from that of Ippolit’s window. The narrator mentions that the former’s house is “sturdily built, with thick walls and extremely few windows,” adding that in such houses, “the ground-floor windows sometimes have grilles” (2.III.204). For Rogozhin, the windows, reinforced with grilles, are meant to keep others out and to prevent others from wandering into the privacy of his home, but they also sever him from his surroundings. For Florensky, Realism stems from a similarly removed perspective, which reinforces disconnection between the viewer and the falsified reality in the painting: “We are not seeing reality, but we are experiencing a visual phenomenon; and we spy on it as if through a chink, with cold curiosity, with neither reverence nor pity, even less with the pathos that distance lends” (Florensky 229). Rogozhin’s removed physical perspective reinforces his apathy and his artificial severance from life around him reinforces the functional equivalence of his home to a tomb.

The narrator frames the home, as it were, with a wooden sign, which bears an inscription that recalls the wooden frame and label around the Holbein painting. The label for the home hangs on the gates in front of the home and the inscription reads, “House of the Hereditary

Honorary Citizen Rogozhin,” thus beginning the work of ekphrasis for the reader (2.III.204). The title names the former owner and inhabitant of the house, Rogozhin’s recently deceased father, who was a rich merchant. The home nominally belongs to a dead man, the Rogozhin father, and establishes the Rogozhin home as a tomb of sorts.¹³² The inscription thus doubles as an epitaph and as with the wooden frame on the *Dead Christ*, the inscription raises as many questions as it answers for the reader: To which dead Rogozhin does it belong? To the literally dead father? To the metaphorically dead son? Perhaps both? Rogozhin sleeps on a “wide red morocco couch” in his father’s former study, which is filled with oil paintings, including a large portrait of Rogozhin’s father that overlooks the study (2.III.207). The absent father, or rather the prominent absence of a literal father in Rogozhin’s home is analogous to the perceived absence of God, The Father, in Holbein’s *Dead Christ*.¹³³

It is unclear whether his father is a castrate, but Rogozhin tells Myshkin that his father hosted a sect of eunuchs for three generations. The association with the eunuchs points to this as a distinct possibility.¹³⁴ This would make Rogozhin’s father an artificial inversion of the life-generating Father of the Christian tradition, and Rogozhin, by extension, an inverted, non-

¹³² As for the ownership of the house after Rogozhin’s father passes away, Rogozhin makes clear that the house belongs to his mother (2.IV.206). She inherits the home from her deceased husband and lives down the hall from Rogozhin.

¹³³ Rogozhin’s father is also the original purchaser of the copy of the Holbein painting that Rogozhin the younger admires.

¹³⁴ William J. Comer defines the central tenet of the sect, the members of which are called *skoptsy* (castrates), as follows: “These sectarians believed that the physical alteration of their sexual organs (oskopenie) would release their souls from the temptation to have sexual relations, and therefore safeguard their spiritual purity.” For more on the historical sect and its significance in the novel, see William J. Comer, “Rogozhin and the ‘Castrates’: Russian Religious Traditions in Dostoevsky’s *The Idiot*” in *The Slavic and East European Journal* 40.1 (1996): 85. See also Laura Engelstein, *Castration and the Heavenly Kingdom: A Russian Folktale* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003) on the associations of the Castrates with the merchant class.

resurrected Christ.¹³⁵ Rogozhin is an outlier within the family insofar as he is by no means a Castrate; on the contrary, he suffers a hot-blooded sexual passion for Nastasya Filippovna.¹³⁶ Yet Rogozhin does fall in with the Castrates to a degree: he does not mutilate himself, but he eventually destroys the sole object of his sexual passion, Nastasya Filippovna, effectively castrating himself in the process. Moreover, outside of the context of his all-consuming desire for Nastasya Filippovna, he feels more dead than alive. He confesses to Myshkin that upon hearing her mention the possibility of marrying him, “for the first time [he] breathed like a living person” (2.III.215). Rogozhin awaits resurrection like the dead man entombed in the painting. But tragically, for Rogozhin, resurrection can only come through Nastasya Filippovna, whom he kills (see below).

The narrator describes Rogozhin’s features in terms that apply to Christ’s features in Holbein’s painting. For example, when Myshkin visits Rogozhin’s home for the first time in Part Two, the narrator describes Rogozhin’s face as twisted, which anticipates Christ’s distorted face in the painting. The narrator notes that upon seeing Myshkin in his home, “[Rogozhin] went pale and froze on the spot, so that for some time he looked like a stone idol, staring with fixed and frightened eyes and twisting his mouth into a sort of smile perplexed in the highest degree” (2.III.205). This look remains on Rogozhin’s face during their conversation. The narrator writes, “The paleness and, as it were, the quick fleeting spasm still had not left Rogozhin’s face”

¹³⁵ I borrow the coinage “non-resurrected Christ” from Olga Meerson’s article, “Ivolgin and Holbein: Non-Christ Risen vs. Christ Non-Risen.” *The Slavic and East European Journal* 39.2 (1995): 200-13.

¹³⁶ The narrator also leaves open the possibility that Rogozhin’s brother, Semyon Semyonovich, who lives in the wing of the same house, has also murdered his wife. We know next to nothing about this brother apart from the fact that in response to Myshkin’s question, “Does he have a family?” Rogozhin replies, “He’s a widower. Why do you ask?” to which Myshkin has the following ambiguous, yet suggestive reaction: “The prince looked at him and did not answer; he suddenly became pensive and seemed not to hear the question. Rogozhin did not insist and waited. Silence fell” (2.III.206). The moment recalls the elliptical realism identified by Liza Knapp in the *Dead House* except that the reader is led into imagining the worst about both Rogozhin and his brother.

(2.III.205). His “paleness” evokes Christ’s pallor, and the “fleeting spasm” that remains frozen on Rogozhin’s face prefigures Christ’s mouth in the painting, which is frozen in a perplexingly open position.¹³⁷ In his *Notebooks to the Idiot*, Dostoevsky had proposed that Myshkin would analyze the painting, and especially the moment in the Gospels when Christ cries out “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?” or “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34).¹³⁸ Christ’s open mouth in the painting invokes this cry and expresses his poignant sense of abandonment. Rogozhin’s deceased father has abandoned him, too. Not only has Rogozhin taken on certain features of Jesus in the painting that hangs in his reception room, but he may also identify with him as a forsaken son.

The placement of the painting within the home – over a doorway, a threshold space, sitting between two rooms, as if between two worlds – is also significant. The placement of the painting’s reproduction recreates the original context of Holbein’s painting. The original that was likely commissioned as either a lid to a sepulcher or a *predella* to an altarpiece occupied a threshold space between this world and the next, with equal potential for concealing and revealing what lies beyond.¹³⁹ The painting’s placement raises a metaphorical question about

¹³⁷ This is another bifurcated symbol within the visually polyphonic painting. Jesus appears to be exhaling or moaning in a gesture that can be interpreted as his last breath or cry on the one hand and his reawakening breath or cry on the other.

¹³⁸ In a proposed passage for the novel, Dostoevsky has the Idiot speak of Christ’s “terrible cry.” I owe this finding in the *Notebooks* to Jackson in his most recent article, “Once Again about Dostoevsky’s Response to Hans Holbein the Younger’s Dead Christ in the Tomb,” p. 187. I quote his translation here: “‘What cry?’ his interlocutor asks. ‘Eloi! Eloi!’ ‘So there was an eclipse.’ ‘I don’t know—but it was a terrible cry,’ the Idiot answers.” Jackson adds to this passage that “Dostoevsky directly follows this exchange with the line: ‘The story of Holbein’s “Christ” in Basel’ (*PSS* 9:184).” This cry is featured in each of the other three canonical Gospels: Matthew 27:45-46; Luke 23:44-49, John 19:28-30.

¹³⁹ I thank Tom Roberts for this observation that he made in a conference paper entitled “Ippolit Terent’ev as Forerunner: Contextualizing Fries’ ‘The Beheading of John the Baptist’ in ‘The Idiot,’” delivered at AATSEEL in Los Angeles, 2013.

what, if anything, lies in the “next room.” Its placement challenges the viewer who may dwell on the painting without walking through, or who might walk through despite or perhaps even because he sees the painting. This painting marks a critical bifurcation that divides the characters of the novel roughly into two rooms, as it were, those who believe what they can see with their own eyes, and those who believe through faith in the renewed life that awaits them in the “next room.”

Rogozhin claims that he likes looking at the painting,¹⁴⁰ but Myshkin thinks that Rogozhin looks at the painting as a symptom of his desire “to recover his lost faith by force” (2.V.231). Rogozhin not only looks at the painting in order to win back his faith “by force,” but he also models his murder of Nastasya Filippovna after the painting, as if to incarnate the painting and look at it in real life. The narrator writes: “The sleeper was covered from head to foot with a white sheet, but the limbs were somehow vaguely outlined; one could only see by the raised form that a person lay stretched out there” (4.XI.606). Her bare toe also juts out from under the sheet, and the narrator remarks that “it seemed carved of marble and was terribly still” (4.XI.606). The “raised form” of the dead body of Nastasya Filippovna mirrors the arched dead body of Christ in the painting. Rogozhin reenacts the murder and burial of Christ by murdering his personal object of worship and staging her body in the tomb. He then lies in wait, as if anticipating her resurrection, which would cause him to believe again, effectively winning back

¹⁴⁰ The *Dead Christ* is Rogozhin’s prized possession as he indicates by boasting about his rejection of three exceedingly generous offers from two different merchants who wanted to purchase it from him. Rogozhin tells Myshkin, “All these paintings here my deceased father bought at auctions for a ruble or two. He liked that. One man who’s a connoisseur looked at them all: trash, he said, but that one—the painting over the door, also bought for two rubles—he said, isn’t trash. In my father’s time somebody showed up offering three hundred and fifty rubles for it, and Savelyev, Ivan Dimitrich, a merchant, a great amateur, went up to four hundred, and last week he offered my brother Semyon Semyonich as much as five hundred. I kept it for myself” (218.2.IV).

his lost faith “by force.”¹⁴¹ Rogozhin tries to stage and witness Nastasya Filippovna’s literal resurrection, but his objectifying love yields resurrections opposite: death. In his real-life staging of the painting, he literalizes the theoretical problem of objectification identified by Dostoevsky in Yakobi’s depiction of prisoners. Whereas Yakobi metaphorically kills the subjects in his painting by extinguishing their interiority, Rogozhin literally objectifies the subject of his art by murdering her. He transforms her from a living subject into a breathless marble statue. His realist sculpture precludes metaphorical resurrection, either for Nastasya Filippovna or for himself, and his attempt to recover faith “by force” only yields violence, death and further isolation.

Rogozhin’s artistically arranged post-murder scene interprets *The Dead Christ* not as the portrayal of death as a means to eventually renewed life, but instead as an end in itself. He conforms Nastasya Filippovna’s body to his egocentric demands. Rogozhin’s egotistical, possessive love is an inversion of Christ’s selfless, resurrecting love. Myshkin points out this inversion when he tells Rogozhin, “Your love is indistinguishable from enmity” (2.IV.213). Rogozhin’s egocentric worldview precludes selfless love. The death and the decay of Christ’s body in the painting are naturalistic depictions, on the one hand, and metaphorical depictions of self-denial, self-sacrifice, self-abnegation, on the other. Rogozhin interprets the painting literally and sees the dead body as just that, a corpse. Viewing the body metaphorically contradicts Rogozhin’s interpretation. The potentially self-sacrificial attributes of Jesus in the painting, for instance, the wounds that he endured out of love for mankind, undermine the ego that is the supreme value and source of Rogozhin’s reality. Rogozhin’s love for Nastasya Filippovna turns to enmity because it is self-centered rather than self-sacrificing. He does not regard Nastasya

¹⁴¹ Andrew Wachtel interprets the scene as a photograph of the same biblical scene in his article “Dostoevsky’s ‘The Idiot’: The Novel as Photograph” in *History of Photography* 26, no. 3 (2002). Nina Pelikan Straus identifies the scene as an objectified Madonna in *Dostoevsky and the Woman Question: Rereadings at the End of a Century* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1994).

Filippovna as an independent entity and complex subject who exists in her own right, beyond the confines of his ego.

Rogozhin devalues, objectifies and coerces Nastasya Filippovna to fit his solipsistic interpretation of his most prized possession, *The Dead Christ*. He violently shapes the physical body of Nastasya Filippovna into conformity with his artistically egocentric interpretation of the painting's non-resurrection. The marble idol made of Nastasya Filippovna's body devours his own most beloved being, just as "nature" devoured Ippolit's "priceless being" in his similarly solipsistic interpretation of the painting. Nastasya Filippovna is devoured not by an indifferent, impersonal force of nature, but rather artificially by the artist who sees and renders her in an objectifying style. Rogozhin is not only a Florenskian "realist," but also a Naturalist: he literally imitates nature as he arranges his naturalist tableau.

Rogozhin's egocentric worldview makes him easily mesmerized by the perspectival painting. In order to suit his ego, he overlooks certain aspects within the painting that would challenge his interpretation. The egocentric perspective that orders the painting's realistic style mirrors Rogozhin's egocentric worldview, but he does not see the subtle ways in which Holbein breaks with perspective, such as his depiction of Christ's right hand and middle finger. Neither does he see the ways in which Christ's protruding hand and flexed body seem to be wrestling his way out of the inward pull of the perspectival painting and exiting the tomb. Nor does Rogozhin see ambiguity in the visual cues, such as the decaying/regenerating body, or Christ's open mouth that could be exhaling its last breath or breathing its first breath of resurrection. Instead, the form of the realist painting strokes Rogozhin's ego, and he self-flatteringly believes that his interpretation of reality is reality *per se*. But this illusory reality emerges dynamically out of the

general form of the painting and Rogozhin's way of seeing it. Once convinced of the superiority of this reality, he drags Nastasya Filippovna into conformity with it.¹⁴²

Rogozhin never leaves *this* painting, namely, Rogozhin's *Dead Christ*, and he makes his home in it, as it were. He bears the marks of the painting, the tomb, and the inverted Christ, but he also puts the stamp of his "Rogozhin life" onto these things and personalizes them. He chooses to remain trapped in the moment of Christ's death and keeps the painting where his father left it, hanging overhead in the reception room to the Rogozhin home. Rogozhin eclipses the life that Christ lived with the shadow of his own ego. Like Father Ferapont in *The Brothers Karamazov*, he looks for evidence of the resurrection in the wrong place. The decaying body in the painting that has the potential to serve as a means to faith instead corroborates both his self-centered worldview and his consequent lack of faith in the possibility of resurrection through overcoming his self-imprisonment. Like Ippolit, Rogozhin remains trapped in the theater of the mind that epitomizes Florensky's redefinition of so-called "Realism." He is ensnared in the philosophical illusoriness of Plato's cave, into which he drags Nastasya Filippovna violently.

The Empathetic Vision of Reverse Perspective Embraces Many Linear Perspectives

Myshkin does not see the opposite of what Ippolit or Rogozhin see in the painting, rather he has a more comprehensive way of seeing that embraces Ippolit's and Rogozhin's. If Ippolit and Rogozhin embody Florensky's "realist," "monocular" way of seeing, then Myshkin embodies a panoptic way of seeing that is characteristic of Florensky's reverse perspective and its special capacity to restore the viewer to the "living reality" beyond the artistic representation.

¹⁴² Myshkin narrowly escapes Rogozhin's attempt to kill him shortly after they look at the Holbein painting and discuss it in his home (I cover their discussion later in this chapter). During their conversation, Myshkin feels painfully uncomfortable in Rogozhin's house and wants out as soon as he goes in. This is, on the one hand, an expression of Myshkin's dislike of the painting in Rogozhin's house, as I discuss. But it is, on the other hand, an expression of Myshkin's fear of being murdered by Rogozhin, a fate that Nastasya Filippovna ultimately cannot escape. Myshkin is saved in the last moment by an epileptic fit that overcomes him in the moment Rogozhin is about to murder him.

Florensky contrasts the egocentric, modernist trend of linear perspective with the non-linear-perspectival art that prevailed among ancient and medieval artists. The form of this painting style challenges the value system dictated by the ego in linear perspective. Florensky defines this form as follows: “the further away something is, the bigger it is; the closer it is, the smaller. This is reverse perspective [...] we are not drawn into this space; on the contrary, it repels us, as a mercury sea would repel our bodies” (Florensky 239). The term “reverse” in Florensky’s “Reverse Perspective” refers to the reversal of the artist or viewer’s relationship to the painting. The word translated as “reverse,” *obratnyi* in Russian, may also be translated as “inverse.” Florensky conveys both senses of the term: a reversal in the sense of being repelled by the painting back into the living world and an inversion in the sense of inverting the hierarchical, egocentric value system of linear perspective.

Reverse perspective is Florensky’s way out of the Platonic cave of linear perspective. In reverse perspective, the objects are depicted as if from several perspectives, none of which is privileged over the next as the definitive “reality.” Reverse perspectival art removes both the painter and the viewer from the center of the depicted world, which becomes polycentric, in the sense that there are multiple centers or viewpoints from which a single object is considered. The monologic form of linear perspectival art is replaced with the more dialogic form of “reverse perspective.” In contradistinction to the subjectivising form of linear-perspectival artists, the multi-perspectival art of reverse perspective, Florensky argues, reflects on a formal level the conviction that objects exist in and of themselves, independently of their momentary appearance to the viewer. Reverse perspective does not attempt to reproduce the object depicted with fidelity to the eye, but rather engages the viewer in an act of contemplation that turns the viewer’s

attention away from the painting itself and towards the world in which such objects—including the viewer’s body—exist, beyond the canvas.

Florensky cites medieval Byzantine icons as an example of art that incorporates multiple perspectives into its representation of an object. In a Byzantine icon of this style, for example, all four sides of a table might be depicted instead of just two. To the Western critic, steeped in the interpretation of linear perspective as “Realism,” such tables appear primitive. Florensky chastises critics who argue that such art is inferior to linear perspective because it lacks a coherent spatial schema that would bring all of the represented objects under the orderly rule of “perspectival unity” (Florensky 246). Multiple perspectives, Florensky argues, are significant not only as a way of privileging the object, but also as a way of reflecting on a formal level the viewer’s act of conceiving of and viewing the object depicted from many different perspectives.¹⁴³

Florensky critiques images created by the method of linear perspective. He argues that linear perspective does not accurately reflect of what we see in the world because it involves reducing the image to what *one* eye sees. Florensky points out that every image that a person sees is a synthesis of two images, one from the left and one from the right eye. The mind’s union of these two separate images is what lends depth to the visible world. The illusion generated by linear perspective is not even an accurate visual illusion because it reduces the visible world to its appearance from a single viewpoint, a flat image seen by a single eye. The image alone not

¹⁴³ Florensky argues that perspectival art *mis*represent objects. He asks, “And what resemblance can there be between, for example, a table and its perspectival depiction, if outlines which we know to be parallel are depicted by converging lines, right angles by angles that are acute and wide, if the segments and angles which are equal are represented by unequal sizes, and unequal sizes by equal ones?” (Florensky 253). Also see Boris Uspensky, *The Semiotics of the Russian Icon*, ed. Stephen Rudy, (Lisse: Peter De Ridder, 1976), 49. From now on, Uspensky’s work will be cited in the text of the chapter.

only lacks visual depth for Florensky, but philosophical depth, which according to Florensky stems from the synthesis of multiple perspectives:

There is not a single person in his right mind who thinks that his point of view is the only one and who does not accept every place, every point of view as something of value, as giving a special aspect of the world that doesn't exclude other aspects, but affirms them. Some points of view are more full of content and characteristic, others less so, each in its own respect, but there is no absolute point of view. Consequently, the artist attempts to examine the object he depicts from various points of view, enriching his observation with new aspects of reality, and acknowledging them as more or less of equal meaning. (Florensky 267)

On a formal level, reverse perspective accounts for the range of perspectives that lend depth to our understanding. To be sure, the images depicted in this style appear flat, that is, lacking in visual depth, but the decision to paint the object from multiple perspectives adds depth to the object by leading the viewer into both an acknowledgement and a consideration of multiple perspectives. The object is fleshed out, so to speak. It is rendered with depth in the viewer's imagination, which is prompted by the painting. Long after Florensky, Boris Uspensky redefines the tradition of multi-perspectival rendering of Byzantine iconography. In his *Semiotics of the Russian Icon* (1976), he calls it "summation." Uspensky describes summation as an act of "multilateral embrace" that is depicted by the iconographer in such a way as to encourage this "embrace" of the object depicted in the viewer's mind (Uspensky 50).¹⁴⁴ The viewer's capacity to synthesize contrasting perspectives adds depth to the image and restores a sense of connection not only to the depicted objects and subjects, but to one's lived, personal experience. I contend that an image that exhibits *visual polyphony* reflects this capacity for summation both in content, as with the dialogic visual cues in *The Dead Christ*, and in form, as in the case of reverse

¹⁴⁴ Miller's description of the "kaleidoscopic" narration in *The Idiot* demands the reader's synthesis of the narrator's shifting perspectives (*Dostoevsky and The Idiot* 230). Both Holbein's *Dead Christ* and the form of the novel initiate a kind of process of summation in the viewer/reader that is analogous to the act of both creating and understanding an icon.

perspective that characterizes Byzantine iconography. A *visually polyphonic* painting animates the viewer by setting in motion the process of “summation” (Uspensky 50).

Byzantine iconographers rendered the contents of their icons not as viewed from a single vantage point, but rather as entities that were given to the viewer, who then would contemplate those entities from several sides and several angles. By contrast, the table in linear perspective maintains the visual unity of the schema in order to create a singular, realistic visual encounter. Florensky calls the viewer’s one-eyed perspective both “monocular” and “cycloptic” vision. The unity of the painting comes at the cost of abandoning contradictory or even slightly alternative perspectives (Florensky 267). Consequently, the form of the painting reduces the status of the viewer from that of a contemplator to a gazer, and the status of the object from that of a self-subsisting whole to a fleeting and incomplete fragment of that whole. The object depicted in linear perspective gains the illusion of visual depth, but it loses depth in the viewer’s imagination.

The act of contemplation is not the end goal of reverse perspective for Florensky. The strictly perspectival painting produces the opposite effect of what Florensky would have a “Realism” accomplish. For Florensky, any art that lays claim to such an ostentatious title as “Realism” ought not to draw one into an illusory world either of the painting or of the mind, but rather ought to catapult the viewer back into the living reality beyond either. He writes, “The task of perspective, as with other artistic methods, can only be a certain spiritual excitement, a jolt that rouses one’s attention to reality itself. In other words, perspective too, if it is worth anything, should be a language, a witness to reality” (Florensky 254). Florensky regards art as symbolic and declares that it must offer a vivifying sense of connection to the world beyond its own representation by depicting that world in an artful, but still symbolic, way. A good painting, like

a good symbol, does not pretend to *be* the thing that it represents, but rather *points* to the true nature of the thing represented. It reintegrates the viewer into his immediate surroundings, as opposed to severing him from them. Florensky considers art as a road map for reality, not a self-sufficient replacement of reality. “The map,” Florensky explains, “represents to the extent that through it and by means of it we turn in spirit to the actual thing depicted [i.e., the land and bodies of water], and does not represent if it does not carry us beyond its own confines, but instead detains us in itself as in some pseudo-reality, in a likeness of reality, if the map lays claim to a self-sufficient significance” (Florensky 260). Real art for Florensky, then, restores a sense of connection to one’s surroundings by engaging the viewer with life beyond the confines of both the canvas and the ego.

Myshkin’s Many Ways of Seeing Draw from Different Professions that Reinforce his Reverse Perspectival Worldview

It is difficult to define Myshkin’s philosophical point of view because he borrows habits of thought from various vocations, yet it is critical to understand his multi-faceted persona in order to clarify his interpretation of the painting. Like Ippolit the student, Myshkin does not have an established profession. The narrator clearly defines Ippolit as a materialist, atheist and nihilist, but he doesn’t define Myshkin’s identity and concomitant perspective, which he attempts to flesh out for the length of the novel. Before turning to Myshkin’s experience of the painting, I would like to examine his way of seeing and how it differs from Ippolit’s.

When Myshkin first arrives in St. Petersburg, his very practically minded and well-connected relative, General Epanchin, tries to determine which skills Myshkin possesses that will allow him to provide for himself. The General discovers that Myshkin is a skilled calligrapher, but he does not call Myshkin a calligrapher, he calls him “an artist” (1.III.34). The term that he

uses here is *artist* and not *khudozhnik*, the term used by Dostoevsky to denote his “true artist” (see Chapter 1 section on “The Exhibition”). Nonetheless, General Epanchin calls Myshkin an *artist* because he exhibits a special mastery of the craft of calligraphy that elevates it to the status of art in his eyes. He considers Myshkin an *artist* not only because of his beautiful penmanship, but also because of the way in which Myshkin describes the signatures of historical people that he has copied. Within each signature Myshkin sees a personality, or in his words the “whole military scrivener’s soul is peeking out of it” (1.III.34). Myshkin waxes poetic about these signatures, confessing that “you can even fall in love” with a script that has exactly the right proportion of light and dark in the form on the page and the ink in each letter. The general applauds him, “You’re not simply a calligrapher, my dear fellow, you’re an artist” (1.III.34). The question remains, what kind of artist is Myshkin? He is not a painter. Not unlike Dostoevsky, he is an artist who creates with words. The dividing line between the two blurs in the case of Myshkin’s calligraphy, where the word and the image, logos and icon merge to create beautiful art.¹⁴⁵

Adelaida returns to the idea of Myshkin as an artist during their first conversation. She asks Myshkin to pick a subject for her to paint. Myshkin expresses confusion at the question and replies, “It seems to me you just look and paint” (1.III.34). Myshkin reveals that his notion of art stems not from artifice, but rather from sincerity of expression. In the same way that a child looks and draws what he sees, artlessly, Myshkin calls for Adelaida to simply paint what she

¹⁴⁵ For more on ekphrasis in *The Idiot*, see Molly Jo Brunson, who discusses the role of vision and the visual arts in Dostoevsky’s “fantastic Realism” in the novel; Brunson, *Russian Realisms: Literature and Painting, 1840-1890* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois UP, 2016). Jefferson Gatrall argues that “[Dostoevsky’s] ekphrastic impulse extends to his own word pictures.” He adds, “In Dostoevsky’s fiction, the term *kartina*, or ‘picture,’ occurs in a variety of different contexts, including actual paintings, literary portraiture, mental impressions, and memories.” Jefferson J. A. Gatrall, *The Real and the Sacred: Picturing Jesus in Nineteenth-century Fiction* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan, 2014), 175.

sees. Adelaida concludes that since art is so simple for Myshkin, he must simply “know how to look,” something that she claims not to know how to do. Perhaps she has forgotten what she once knew as a child. Myshkin, however, retains this child-like way of looking. He is referred to as a “perfect child” by the general and Doctor Schneider and is aware of his special connection to children, as evident in his ability to convert a community of Swiss children to love the outcast Marie.¹⁴⁶ He converts them with his capacity to render Marie sympathetic in their eyes. The voices of authority in the Swiss village depict Marie as shameful. Myshkin challenges this perspective by offering different ways of looking at her. He also exhibits his child-like connection to art by allowing it to connect him and others to life. He does not tell Adelaida to paint a simple subject from a detached, voyeuristic perspective, but rather tells her to paint a story that would allow the viewer to feel empathy for the criminal about to be executed. For Myshkin, as for a child, art serves as a means to connect rather than isolate.

Florensky describes Byzantine art as natural because of its child-like manner of representation. According to him, the learned “schema” of linear perspective artificially replaces the child’s natural manner of representing objects. He argues:

The drawings of children, in their lack of perspective and especially their use of reverse perspective, vividly recall mediaeval drawings, despite the efforts of educators to instill in children the laws of linear perspective. It is only when they lose their spontaneous relationship to the world that children lose reverse perspective and submit to the schema with which they have been indoctrinated. This is how all children behave, independent of each other. This means that it is not mere chance, or a willful invention by one of them putting on Byzantine airs, but a representational method that derives from a characteristic perceptual synthesis of the world. (Florensky 219)

Myshkin cannot explain to Adelaida how to paint, because for him it is a matter of looking and painting. There is no division between art and life for Myshkin. There is no pane of glass, no window between him and his surroundings. Art is an extension of the living world, to which the

¹⁴⁶ See *The Idiot*, 1.IV.51 and 1.VI.74.

child-like Myshkin bears a “spontaneous relationship.” Myshkin “knows how to look” in the sense that he knows how to synthesize what he sees imaginatively as a child.¹⁴⁷

Myshkin ultimately obliges Adelaida with a subject, but it proves to be an impossible subject to paint, that is, impossible with paint: Myshkin paints with words. Even when Myshkin has only described the face of a condemned man before the scaffold, a confused Adelaida asks, “What sort of picture would it make?” (1.IV.63). What makes the subject difficult to paint is that Myshkin begins to tell an entire story about his subject. That is, he recounts the tale of a condemned man’s final days and examines the man’s life from the many different perspectives of different moments leading up to the execution. Myshkin’s idea for the painting is perhaps best described in his own words when he instructs Adelaida, saying “You know, here you have to imagine everything that went before, everything, everything” (1.V.64).

Dostoevsky would revisit this idea in his *Writer’s Diary* in 1873, in a preface to his own street sketches, or “Little Pictures”: “When I wander about the streets I enjoy examining certain total strangers, studying their faces and trying to guess who they are and how they live, what they work at, and what is in their minds at this moment.”¹⁴⁸ Myshkin appears to share this hobby with his creator, and he wants Adelaida to depict these kinds of facts about the condemned man in a painting, which seems absurd to her. But Myshkin’s suggestion is only absurd for Adelaida’s realist painting style. We know from the same conversation with Myshkin that she focuses primarily on landscapes. It is impossible to imagine a coherent painting in a linear perspectival

¹⁴⁷ In a letter to his daughter Olga, sent from Solovki on 13 May 1937, Florensky writes, “The secret of creativity lies in the preservation of youth. The secret of genius lies in the preservation of something infantile, an infantile intuition that endures throughout life. It is a question of a certain constitution that provides genius with an objective perception of the world, one that does not gravitate towards a center: a kind of reverse perspective, one that is, therefore, integral and real” (*Beyond Vision* 29).

¹⁴⁸ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *A Writer’s Diary, Vol. I*, trans. K. A. Lantz, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1993), (216; PSS 21:77).

style that meets all of Myshkin's demands; the painting would have to span time and portray complex tales within tales; it would have to convey on one face several facial expressions corresponding to the emotional reactions to various experiences.¹⁴⁹ Yet this is precisely what Myshkin would like to see.¹⁵⁰ The content of Myshkin's painting transcends the formal limitations of Adelaida's painting style. Myshkin's suggestion is not absurd on its own. It simply reveals his reverse perspectival way of seeing things, which clashes with the prevailing artistic vision of his time. Art is a means to empathy for Myshkin. He wants Adelaida's painting to connect the viewer to the personalities (artist and painted subjects alike) that inspire the painting. The painting should depict a multi-faceted, personal human experience empathetically. His suggestion challenges the perspectival foundations on which Adelaida's realism is constructed.

Myshkin's paintings do not require a literal human subject. In fact, it is Myshkin's descriptions of two Swiss landscapes that inspire Adelaida to ask for a subject to paint. He describes the landscapes according to his humanizing artistic principles. In the first landscape, he describes looking at a waterfall (not unlike those depicted in François Diday's *Chute inférieure du Reichenbach*, which Dostoevsky reviewed in "The Exhibition" article, discussed below) from half a mile away; the second is of a view atop a mountain that overlooks his Swiss village. He describes the landscape in response to Aglaia's claim that Myshkin "knows how to be happy" and should therefore teach them how to be happy. Myshkin teaches by juxtaposing his two descriptions. In the first one, he looks at the waterfall and feels profound sadness. In the second,

¹⁴⁹ This desire to depict the face of the condemned man at different times in his life also borrows from the Byzantine tradition, in which a series of small vignettes frame the central image of a given saint in order to tell that saint's story. The vignettes depict various holy deeds over the course of a saint's life for which he or she has gained renown.

¹⁵⁰ Myshkin's proposed picture recalls Gorianchikov's "strange picture" before the play.

he discovers a way out of his sadness by discovering an “immense life” beyond the horizon. I quote the passage in full here to allow Myshkin’s verbal paintings to stand on their own:

We had a waterfall there [near the Swiss village], not a big one, it fell from high up the mountain in a very thin thread, almost perpendicular—white, noisy, foamy; it fell from a great height, but it seemed low; it was half a mile away, but it seemed only fifty steps. I liked listening to the noise of it at night; and at those moments I’d sometimes get very restless. Also at noon sometimes, when I’d wander off somewhere into the mountains, stand alone halfway up a mountain, with pines all around, old, big, resinous; up on a cliff there’s an old medieval castle, our little village is far down, barely visible; the sun is bright, the sky blue, the silence terrible. Then there would come a call to go somewhere, and it always seemed to me that if I walked straight ahead, and kept on for a long, long time, and went beyond that line where the sky and the earth meet, the whole answer would be there, and at once I’d see a new life, a thousand times stronger and noisier than ours; I kept dreaming of a big city like Naples, where it was all palaces, noise, clatter, life... I dreamed about all kinds of things! And then it seemed to me that in prison, too, you could find and immense life. (1.V.58)

Myshkin’s isolation is apparent in his verbal representation of the Swiss landscape. In describing the waterfall, he seems to be unconsciously trapped in the confines of his own linear perspectival painting. He senses that in order to be happy, he must break through the landscape’s visual limits but he does not know how. He longs to transcend the landscape by tearing down the visual artifice that imprisons him. From the mountain top, he becomes conscious of a way out of the visible artifice, precisely at the place where vision breaks down at the horizon. The horizon is a visual ellipsis, a seam in the visual landscape that lures his imaginative thought to dwell on what lies beyond. He begins to fill in the ellipsis as he becomes conscious of the visual construct that his physical viewpoint determines. The “immense life” opens to him, or rather, it opens up within him in the act of imaginatively consummating the visual ellipsis. The sky and the earth do not end before his eyes, but rather they extend infinitely into his imagination. The physical beauty of the Swiss landscapes strikes Myshkin, but this beauty induces sadness in him until he realizes that he has a hand in its co-creation. Just as the feuilleton writer’s existence began upon discovering the city made of smoke above St. Petersburg, Myshkin’s existence as an artist begins

at this moment. In both instances, the artists become aware of their creative role in constructing the visible world, and they begin to consciously recreate it. Here, Myshkin begins to sense his own creative hand in the act of seeing, and through the visible limits of the Swiss landscape's horizon, he finds the "immense life" of the dreamer's vision. This life exists beyond the confines of a strictly perspectival worldview.

Myshkin's landscapes recall Dostoevsky's ekphrasis of two of his favorite paintings in "The Exhibition at the Academy of the Arts in 1860" — the works of two Swiss painters: François Diday (1802-1877) and Alexandre Calame (1810-1864). Both artists meet Dostoevsky's demands for the "true artist" by infusing their visually realistic landscapes with humane feeling, thereby allowing the viewer to connect with the life beyond the painting in the form of the empathetic artist. The paintings that he admires are Diday's *Chute inférieure du Reichenbach* (1834, see fig. 6 below) and Calame's *Lake of Four Cantons* (1852, see fig. 7 below).



Figure 12. *Chute inférieure du Reichenbach* by François Diday.¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ Diday, François. *Chute Inférieure Du Reichenbach*. Digital image. *Artnet.com*.



Figure 13. *Lake of Four Cantons* by Alexandre Calame¹⁵²

Dostoevsky praises both paintings not only for their verisimilitude, but also for their capacity to transmit the personality—“mind” and “soul”—of each artist to the viewer. He writes of Diday’s *Chute inférieure du Reichenbach* that “It is not a naked photograph of a waterfall. Diday was searching neither for the supernatural nor for fortuitous enlightenment; he neither fussed over the

¹⁵² Alexandre Calame, *Lake of Four Cantons* (c. 1850). Digital image. *Wikimediacommons*.

effect nor painted a portrait of his waterfall, but rather transmitted that impression and that disposition of mind (*dukha*), that the Reichenbach [Falls] produced in him with its grand scenery” (my translation; *PSS* 19:164). The viewer can sense the living artist, as opposed to the camera lens, behind the painting. He praises Calame’s *Four Cantons* for similar reasons:

Apart from the astounding fidelity to nature, apart from how every part, every detail is executed absolutely painstakingly, the painting impresses by the fact that the magician-artist poured his soul into it. There is nothing even special in the painting: mountains and peaceful waters in a gentle mist. But every viewer, without exception, will fall to thinking profoundly and sweetly about this painting, and each one will see that the artist himself was immersed in a kind of sad reverie, peering into the faraway mountains, the clear sky and the misty distance. How exactly he managed to confer all of this to the painting is a secret that belongs to the artist; still it is clear that he did not photograph nature, but merely used nature as a means to evoke in the viewer (*naveiat’ na zritel’ia*) the personal, meek, peaceful, sweet-pensive disposition of his own soul. There would be nothing easier than to copy (*skopirovat’*) a similarly simple painting, but it is doubtful that one could transmit the soul of the original. (My translation; *PSS* 19:164)

Dostoevsky’s praise of Diday and Calame provides the theoretical context for Myshkin’s artistic advice for Adelaida. He invites her to use realistic detail as a medium for the revelation of her soul as she paints.

Myshkin encourages the landscape artist, Adelaida, to paint “everything” that pertains to the execution not only from the embodied perspective of the condemned man, but more importantly, he encourages her to animate the painting with her personality. He models this practice by infusing his ekphrastic portrait of the condemned man with the compassion he felt as he witnessed the criminal’s execution. This personal feeling creates a sense of connection to the living reality beyond the painting by making the viewer aware of the inner worlds of both the person to be executed as well as the artist who witnesses and paints his execution. Myshkin recommends Adelaida to simply “look and paint,” because he does exactly that with words: he looks and conveys his own subjective, multi-perspectival experience of the scene, as a composite of images, from a place of profound empathy. Like Dostoevsky’s, Myshkin’s objective details serve to humanize their subject, whether the realistic details of his Swiss landscape or a the face

of a condemned criminal moments before his execution. If only Adelaida could paint the condemned man's face, or her landscapes, for that matter, in such a way as to transmit her subjective feeling to the viewer through the medium of the realistic image, then she would never be at a loss for a subject to paint. Like Myshkin, she would simply "look and paint." Myshkin's unfiltered way of speaking permeates his descriptions with personality. He animates the descriptions with feeling. Adelaida commits the error that Dostoevsky ascribed to the realist artist Yakobi: she wants to hide her personality behind the camera lens and paint an objectively interesting or beautiful painting. She lacks a subject to paint because she does not know how to infuse her emotions into her paintings. Myshkin gives her a subject that only he is capable of painting because it is specifically *his* painting. Adelaida has to find *her own* painting, but the subject is only visible to the artist who knows "how to look." Adelaida's name means "obscure" or "unclear," and it reflects her struggle both to see and to express herself clearly as an artist. She does not "see" what she needs to paint.¹⁵³

By contrast, Myshkin, as an artist, sees clearly. In the case of the condemned criminal, he effortlessly incorporates the details of the execution, not only rendering the criminal's face with telling descriptions, but also managing to inspire empathy in his listener-reader both for the condemned man and for Myshkin as a witness. His verbal imagery does not result in a cold, voyeuristic depiction of the prisoner as if through Florensky's "chink in the wall," but rather a co-experiencing of the execution. As an empathetic, reverse perspectival artist, he initiates the act of "summation" in his listener-readers whom he invites to co-create the scene by envisioning the life of the condemned criminal from the various perspectives leading up to his execution. The reader summates the criminal in his imagination, metaphorically embracing him in the moment

¹⁵³ See Knapp's chapter "Introduction to The Idiot Part 2: The Novel" in *Dostoevsky's The Idiot: A Critical Companion*, ed. Liza Knapp (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1998), 30.

before his death just as the artist did in his imagination while witnessing him. Myshkin's realist style connects the viewer to the living personalities beyond his depictions.

What Myshkin Sees in the *Dead Christ* Disturbs But Does Not Destroy His Faith

Like Rogozhin and Ippolit, Myshkin views the reproduction of *The Dead Christ* in Rogozhin's house, but he is the only character to actually see the original. The narrator vouches for the copy's fidelity of scale to the original, but it is Myshkin who vouches for its fidelity to the original in style.¹⁵⁴ Myshkin identifies the painting at Rogozhin's, saying "'Yes, it's ... it's a copy from Hans Holbein [...] and, though I'm no great expert, it seems an excellent copy. I saw the painting abroad and cannot forget it'" (2.IV.218). Not only has Myshkin seen the original, but the memory of the painting also haunts him. He also reminds the reader that the painting exists outside of the context of the novel.

Myshkin "cannot forget" the painting because it persists against his efforts to banish it from memory. This point is reinforced by the fact that when he first sees the painting at Rogozhin's, he feels suddenly claustrophobic and tries to leave the room. The narrator writes, "The prince glanced fleetingly at [the painting] as if recalling something, not stopping, however, wanting to go on through the door. He felt very oppressed and wanted to go out of the house quickly" (2.IV.218). This urge to leave the room reveals the discomfort inspired by the painting, but the fact that he wants to leave the house suggests his willingness to move beyond the painting as if perceiving it as a barrier to faith. Rogozhin, by contrast, does not allow Myshkin to pass immediately through the doorway, but forces him to pause and talk about the painting. Rogozhin dwells on the moment of death depicted in the painting not as a passage, but as an absolute end.

¹⁵⁴ The narrator writes, "Over the door to the next room hung a painting in rather strange form, around six feet wide and no more than ten inches high" (2.IV.217).

Rogozhin is the only character in the novel who appears to derive pleasure from looking at the painting. His reaction differs from both Myshkin's and Ippolit's. The painting disturbs Myshkin, and Ippolit is repulsed by it. Rogozhin's admission that he "likes looking at the painting" catches Myshkin off guard, and the ensuing exchange reveals their fundamental disagreement:

"At that painting!" the prince suddenly cried out, under the impression of an unexpected thought. "At that painting! A man could even lose his faith from that painting!"

"Lose it he does," Rogozhin suddenly agreed unexpectedly. They had already reached the front door.

"What?" the prince suddenly stopped. "How can you! I was almost joking, and you're so serious!" (2.IV.218)

Myshkin does not say that a man *must* lose his faith over this painting, but rather that a man "could" (*mozhet*) lose his faith. Myshkin's response combines the conflicting perspectives of seriousness and humor. He communicates that he is neither joking nor perfectly serious about his comment. He sees what Rogozhin does in the painting, namely, the rotting corpse, which is why Myshkin is not joking entirely, but he also sees more. He sees a way out of the room, a way through doubt to faith, which is why he is not completely serious. Myshkin's half-joke incorporates two fundamentally different ways of looking at the painting. Rogozhin's reply is decidedly one-sided. Rogozhin likes to dwell, not in the "next room," but in this room, the room in which there is only despair, captured for him by his most prized painting.

Myshkin's reaction to the painting further reveals the indissoluble link between art and life in his mind. Apart from his general observation that the copy is well executed, he does not dwell at length on an artistic critique of the painting, as does Ippolit, but rather goes straight to the impact, or the potential impact of the painting on life. For Myshkin, the experience of the

painting is powerful enough for a person to lose faith under its spell. Myshkin does not say that the painting robs one of faith, but rather sees the painting as a test of sorts.

Myshkin does not enter the “next room,” but he does leave the house, and it is Rogozhin who opens the door for him to the world outside. Rogozhin, himself an emblem of the non-resurrected Christ, opens the door for Myshkin, effectively returning him to the living world outside of the tomb. This symbolic gesture of Rogozhin opening the door for Myshkin indicates that Myshkin’s continued belief in Christ comes not despite, but through the dead Christ of Holbein’s painting. Rogozhin’s opening of the door surprises Myshkin: “The prince was surprised, but went out. Rogozhin followed him out to the landing and closed the door behind him. The two men stood facing each other, looking as if they had forgotten where they had come to and what they were to do next” (2.IV.219). The two men face each other in another threshold space, between the tomb and life. The absence of life in the tomb implies its opposite outside of the tomb and vice versa. Myshkin does not succumb to Rogozhin’s one-sided interpretation of the painting as a tragic death, but restores the tension between the death in the painting and the life that Christ lived, which is implied in the painting. Myshkin’s belief is shaken by his visit to the tomb, but it persists. He states his continued belief appropriately in the threshold space between life and death on the landing to the Rogozhin house.

Myshkin shares four short stories on the nature of belief in a delayed response to a question that Rogozhin had posed earlier in the house: “Do you believe in God or not?” Initially, Myshkin does not answer, but instead he takes issue with the strange, unnatural suddenness with which Rogozhin poses the question. On the landing, Myshkin answers Rogozhin’s question with four stories regarding belief. The first is about a self-proclaimed atheist and scholar. Myshkin is not convinced that the self-proclaimed atheist does not believe in God. He claims that the

atheist's reasoning was somehow "not about that," by which he means not related to the question of religious belief. The second story is about two peasants who are friends. One peasant prays to God for forgiveness just before murdering the other in order to steal his silver watch. The third is about a drunken soldier who sells a baptismal cross to Myshkin for twenty kopecks in order to buy alcohol. The fourth is of a peasant woman who upon witnessing her baby's first smile, declares that "a mother rejoices when she notices a her baby's first smile, the same as God rejoices each time he looks down from heaven and sees a sinner standing before him and praying with all his heart" (2.IV.221). Myshkin concludes from this last story that it contains the "whole essence of Christianity," which is "that God rejoices over man as a father over his own child—the main thought of Christ!" (2.IV.221). For Myshkin, the essence of Christian thought is missing from the Holbein painting, and the "Rogozhin life" (2.III.207). The question of religious belief for Myshkin is *about that*, that is, about the joy of a father whose son has been restored to him. Myshkin is able to look at the painting, to walk into the home resembling it, to see the tomb and the corpse of Christ and then return to the living world, wherein joy and love are still possible. One small affirmation of love comes when Rogozhin asks Myshkin to give him the cross that he bought from the drunken soldier (and still wears around his neck). He offers Myshkin his own cross in return. The exchange of crosses shows that the act of brotherly love that contains the seeds of renewal is possible in the face of certain mortality. The exchange symbolizes spiritual brotherhood and implies the temporary restoration of a common father, the father absent from Rogozhin's and Ippolit's interpretation of Holbein's painting. Rogozhin proceeds to take Myshkin to his own mother and asks her to bless him "as [she] would [her] own son." His mother obliges without hesitation. Myshkin is a restored son of sorts, but the chapter ends on a different note for Rogozhin. The narrator comments on Rogozhin's still twisted lips

and pale face. After seeing Myshkin receive his mother's blessing, Rogozhin embraces Myshkin tightly and then returns to his room, slamming the door behind him. This suggests that Rogozhin's experience of the painting culminates in the tomb and in death. Myshkin returns to the living world outside of the tomb, his escape from the painting culminating in a restoration to life.

Myshkin's capacity to speak ends abruptly at the novel's end. He returns to a state of idiocy. Upon seeing Rogozhin's sculpture, the murdered body of Nastasya Filippovna, Myshkin understands Rogozhin's interpretation of the painting. Rogozhin's sculpture leaves little room for the resurrection narrative: Nastasya Filippovna is unambiguously and irreversibly dead, as is Christ, for Rogozhin. There is nothing more to say. Rogozhin's sculptural version of the Holbein renders Myshkin speechless. Rogozhin, too, has lost his capacity for speech, at least temporarily, in his insanity. Myshkin and Rogozhin cannot reach a common perspective despite literally looking at the body from the same viewpoint. They remain inwardly disconnected despite their physical embrace. Yet even in his idiocy, Myshkin manages to console the mad murderer Rogozhin. Out of wordless compassion, he strokes Rogozhin's cheek in front of Nastasya Filippovna's corpse.

Myshkin's Response to Ippolit's Ekphrasis of *The Dead Christ*

Myshkin's idiocy at the novel's end is a return to an earlier state. In the early morning just after Ippolit's "Necessary Explanation" (3.V-VII.387-415), the narrator describes another Swiss landscape that Myshkin remembers. Myshkin is sitting on a park bench in Pavlovsk, surrounded by nature while meditating on Ippolit's speech which included his interpretation of Holbein's *Dead Christ*. Myshkin once more imagines happiness existing at a horizon, but as if under the lingering influence of Ippolit's strictly perspectival interpretation of the painting,

conceives of it as somehow impossible to reach. He also imagines the landscape before drifting in and out of consciousness and experiencing various *snovideniia* that pertain to his conflicting feelings for Aglaia and Nastasya Filippovna. In describing Myshkin's recollection of wandering about a mountain in Switzerland after first arriving there, the narrator notes that he was "still quite like an idiot then, could not even speak properly, and sometimes did not understand what was required of him" (3.VII.423):

Before him was the shining sky, below him the lake, around him the horizon, bright and infinite, as if it went on forever. For a long time he looked and suffered. He remembered now how he had stretched his arms to that bright, infinite blue and wept. What had tormented him was that he was a total stranger to it all. What was this banquet, what was this great everlasting feast, to which he had long been drawn, always, ever since childhood, and which he could never join? Every morning the same bright sun rises; every morning there is a rainbow over the waterfall; every evening the highest snowcapped mountain, there, far away, at the edge of the sky, burns with a crimson flame; every "little fly that buzzes near him in a hot ray of sunlight participates in this whole chorus; knows its place, loves it, and is happy"; every little blade of grass grows and is happy! And everything has its path, and everything knows its path, goes with a song and comes back with a song; only he knows nothing, understands nothing, neither people nor sounds, a stranger to everything and a castaway. (3.VII.423)

Myshkin's former sense of isolation resembles that of Ippolit as death approaches. Myshkin sees the natural beauty and the harmony before him, but he thinks that he occupies a different world. In this moment, he experiences the isolation of Florensky's "realist" painter, who describes and depicts the beauty of the detailed visible world in such a way as to deepen his sense of division from it. Myshkin, who cannot yet speak properly, feels estranged from his surroundings and from others. Myshkin's thoughts return to a fly, which is in quotation marks because he is quoting Ippolit, who took the original idea of the buzzing fly from Myshkin.¹⁵⁵ One consequence of Myshkin's idiocy was that he lacked the capacity to speak properly. It is only when he learns

¹⁵⁵ The fly reappears buzzing over the bed of the murdered Nastasya Filippovna in a scene that I argue is Rogozhin's real life recreation of the painting (606.4.XI).

“to speak out” that he learns how to “look and paint.”¹⁵⁶ Myshkin’s experience of the horizon as a purely visual phenomenon torments him. His attempt to physically grasp the horizon is at some level a grasping for a way out of perspectival isolation, and ekphrasis is his way out. He cannot grasp this outer space because he lacks the capacity for speech that can bridge the gap between what he sees and what others see. Myshkin looks and suffers because he lacks the capacity to articulate what he sees and feels. Myshkin eventually learns how “to look” while gazing out into the Swiss horizon, but he does not know how to look until he masters speech, which enables him to develop his artistic medium as an ekphrastic artist.

The narrator, through free-indirect discourse, establishes the presence of Myshkin, the artist who envisions the scene.¹⁵⁷ The landscape painting becomes a portrait of Myshkin, the artist, as a condemned man. Every “blade of grass” that has its place in the landscape reinforces Myshkin’s loneliness in this moment. The four ekphrastic paintings—Myshkin’s portrait of the condemned man, his Swiss waterfall, his Swiss horizon and the narrator’s depiction of Myshkin in his idiocy—are good paintings because they use realistic objective detail to transmit subjective human feeling as a means to create empathy and escape the all-devouring beast of perspectival isolation and its tendency to sever the artist from his surroundings. The subject of art for Myshkin arises naturally when the artist truly attempts to imagine the world from others’ perspectives, when he renders the visual world imaginatively and when he allows the viewer to sense the interiority of the artist who is the vulnerable agent behind every work of art.

¹⁵⁶ The word “ekphrasis” is composed of two parts in Greek: *ek-* and *-φράσις* (*phrasis*), meaning “out” and “speak,” respectively.

¹⁵⁷ Myshkin longs for this specific solitude before the waterfall when he eventually becomes immersed in the “clatter” and “life” of his native Russia, which overwhelms him. He envisions the Swiss landscape when he feels most disconnected from and most alone in high society. This ekphrastic landscape painting occurs to him once more as a symptom of his loneliness. It is emblematic of his isolation. See 3.II.346-47.

An analysis of the *Dead Christ* painting outside of the context of the novel reveals the visual cues that are ambiguous as to whether Christ triumphs over death or vice versa. Yet the tone of the painting is decidedly anti-resurrectional. It is tempting to see the painting from the perspective of Ippolit or Rogozhin, both of whom are drawn into the confines of the painting itself, without returning to the world wherein the renewed connection to life is possible. The decision to interpret the painting as they do is a question not of what lies within the painting, but rather whether to look at the painting as they do. Their worldviews determine their criteria for interpreting the image. Dostoevsky uses the painting to structure the dialogues that unfold between these characters and Myshkin, and their contrasting interpretations voice the painting's visual polyphony. Rogozhin and Ippolit remain trapped in their own morbid interpretations of the *Dead Christ*. For them, the painting is a declarative statement on the impossibility of the resurrection. Myshkin, however, interprets Holbein's painting as a paradox, one that simultaneously expresses the impossibility and possibility of Christ's resurrection with equal force.

Conclusion

If Myshkin, Ippolit, and Rogozhin are three voices in Dostoevsky's polyphonic choir in *The Idiot*, then Holbein's *Dead Christ* is both the musical score and the key in which they sing. The painting is the meeting place within which the voices struggle between collective thought and individual expression. It also sets a mood for their various conversations. The characters' different ways of seeing are manifested verbally in the novel, but the painting is both a catalyst and an occasion for speech. The Holbein painting, as I show, is a visually polyphonic painting within a verbally polyphonic novel. Using perspective, composition and detail, Holbein conveys both the resurrected and the non-resurrected Christ simultaneously.

Dostoevsky's fascination with vision as an imaginative and embodied experience is central to his poetics. His feuilleton writer's vision contrasts with the objective vision attempted by Yakobi in his realist painting and yet the feuilleton writer's vision does not lack objectivity, but rather incorporates imagination into the written record of what he sees. The feuilleton writer models a kind of vigilant and self-aware experience of art, specifically, that of an adolescent. The "Petersburg vision" named in the feuilleton's title describes and recreates something like the vision that he experienced. The writer combines preverbal empirical data with previously encountered fictional images to form a coherent "vision" of St. Petersburg. The feuilleton writer includes the layered context of his personal perspective in what he sees, thus reminding us of the vision's source. His narrative navigates the middle space between Yakobian objectivity and the apparent hallucinations of an active imagination. Dostoevsky's realism unfolds in this middle space.

Florensky gives us one way to understand the egocentric form of visual realism and the objectifying tendency of linear perspective. The viewer of a linear perspectival painting is

subject to a perspective that shuts one out, cuts the spectator off from the object of contemplation, and enslaves the spectator, but the means of accomplishing it is through the ego. The form of linear perspective induces a radical subjectivity; the viewer necessarily belittles and objectifies what s/he sees. The form of linear perspective also impresses an inherently externalizing perspective upon the viewer, but the viewer does not have to succumb to it. Myshkin is less susceptible to the externalizing form because he is not in the habit of equating what he sees from his tangential perspective with reality *per se*. Instead, as I show, he sees what both Ippolit and Rogozhin see, but he also sees more, and his final analysis of the painting is a conditional statement: one “could” lose one’s faith over such a painting. The corollary is that one could not lose one’s faith. For example, Holbein’s *Dead Christ*, while painted primarily in one-point perspective, is not a completely linear perspectival painting. Holbein breaks with the unified perspective by having Christ’s right hand jut out of the tomb. This break is perhaps the most dramatic visual moment in the painting, but neither Rogozhin nor Ippolit sees it because they are not in the habit of seeing things in ways that differ from their own.

Florensky’s and Dostoevsky’s understandings of realism intersect insofar as each demands the artist and the viewer to be fully present, mind and body, in the act of creating and viewing art. Both thinkers reject the experience of art as an act of passive viewing because, for each, art is a fundamentally empathetic experience. For each, to look at the world and to recreate it unfeelingly defeats the purpose of art. Good art leads to humane feeling, revivifies the viewer’s connection to life and awakens the viewer to multiple ways of viewing a given object. For Dostoevsky, art ought to result in the kind of empathetic experience that he illustrates in *The Dead House* when the musicians, actors and audience collectively perform in the prison theater.

Good art allows the viewer to momentarily transcend the solipsism of perspective: it culminates in shared feeling; and it restores the viewer to community and a sense of shared space.

The reverse perspectival painting urges the viewer to combine several linear perspectival paintings into a polyphonic whole. It induces a cognitive process that involves imagining what objects look like from various perspectives. It predisposes the viewer to an artistic attitude that is inherently open to other perspectives. The form of a perspectival painting reminds the viewer to question the totalizing tendency of linear perspective that lays claim to the label of Realism. Reverse perspective enacts a visual form that frees the viewer from the existential fragmentation imposed on the viewer by the visual demands of strictly linear perspectival art. In short, reverse perspective is formally analogous to Dostoevsky's polyphonic poetics.

In subsequent works, Dostoevsky continued to engage the visual by including more cases of ekphrasis, such as the *Sistine Madonna* in *Demons* and the *Contemplator* in *Brothers Karamazov*, and countless explorations of vision—specifically, instances regarding the pain of others. Dostoevsky's fiction returns to the drama between those who look at the world with a removed egocentric objectivity and those who look at it feelingly and with an understanding of the variety of ways of perceiving. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, for example, Ivan Karamazov shows the dangers of daguerreotypic realism and eye-witnessing, whereas Zosima practices a form of empathetic vision.

Ivan writes for a journal under the pseudonym *Ochevidets*, “eye-witness” or “spectator.” His public persona lays claim to an unmediated, non-participatory witnessing of reality. As *Ochevidets*, Ivan writes “little ten-line articles about street incidences” (I.3.29) He is also a collector of bad art, that is, art of a photojournalistic type. He collates a personal album of small articles that contain the most disturbing images of human nature. Among the images are Turkish

soldiers tearing babies out of their mother's wombs and hoisting their dead bodies onto the ends of their bayonets as trophies; allegedly enlightened parents sleeping soundly as they punish their daughter for wetting the bed by stuffing excrement in her mouth and forcing her to spend the night in an outhouse; a Russian general unleashing his wolfhounds on an eight-year-old boy for accidentally injuring the paw of the general's dog; a peasant who is urged to accept a Christian God before he is beheaded for crimes of desperation. Indeed, Ivan Karamazov's strongest challenges to God's world come in the form of images rather than stories. His snapshots disconnect him from any sense of obligation to others and reinforce his withdrawal from life.

Zosima's *prozorlivost'* (spiritual discernment or clairvoyant power) is a creative art form that consists of observing the body language of his confessants, listening to them and rendering their suffering in compassionate speech. He re-authors each confessant's condemning self-portrait by showing them an alternative, empathetic perspective. His recasting is neither purely externalizing nor sermonizing, but rather responsive to their unique torments. He does not project his interpretation of his confessee's sins onto them, but instead offers them an alternative view of their self-objectification. The result: his visitors reorient themselves towards themselves. Hence, Alyosha's observation that "nearly everyone who came to visit the elder for the first time for a private talk, would enter in fear and anxiety and almost always come out bright and joyful, and the gloomiest face would be transformed into a happy one" (1.I.5). Zosima assumes a reverse perspectival approach in relation to those who confess to him and he cultivates this reverse perspectival orientation in others. Zosima, like a good Russian icon, and like a "true artist" in the Dostoevskian sense, restores a sense of connection to life beyond the confines of the ego. Zosima's perspective is the culmination of Dostoevsky's lifelong wrestle with ways of seeing reflecting ways of being.

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Appendix

The basics of linear perspective permit a fuller grasp of the perspectival analysis that follows. Florensky assumes a working knowledge of basic technical terms and concepts. While I use modern terminology, there are no concepts in this explanation that are foreign to Florensky. It simply allows me to use a systemized vocabulary that will clarify my explanation of his art criticism.

To begin, the **horizon line** is a straight imaginary line that runs across the painting at eye-level and establishes the viewer's position relative to the objects painted. In linear perspectival painting, once the horizon line has been established, then the vanishing points may be determined. The three basic types of linear perspective correspond to the number of vanishing points used to construct a painting: they are called one-point, two-point and three-point perspective respectively. The **vanishing point**¹⁵⁸ is a point towards which receding parallel lines diminish. Figure 1 is a diagram of the three basic types of perspective:

¹⁵⁸ Egnatio Danti is credited with being the first to have verbally identified the 'vanishing point' in his *Le due regole della prospettiva pratica* from 1583. He used the Latin *punctum concursus*. *Punctum*, or "point," is combined with the genitive *conkursus*, which has various possible translations ranging from "of union, coincidence, meeting," none of which actually connote "vanishing." See Ivins, *Rationalization of Sight*, 10.

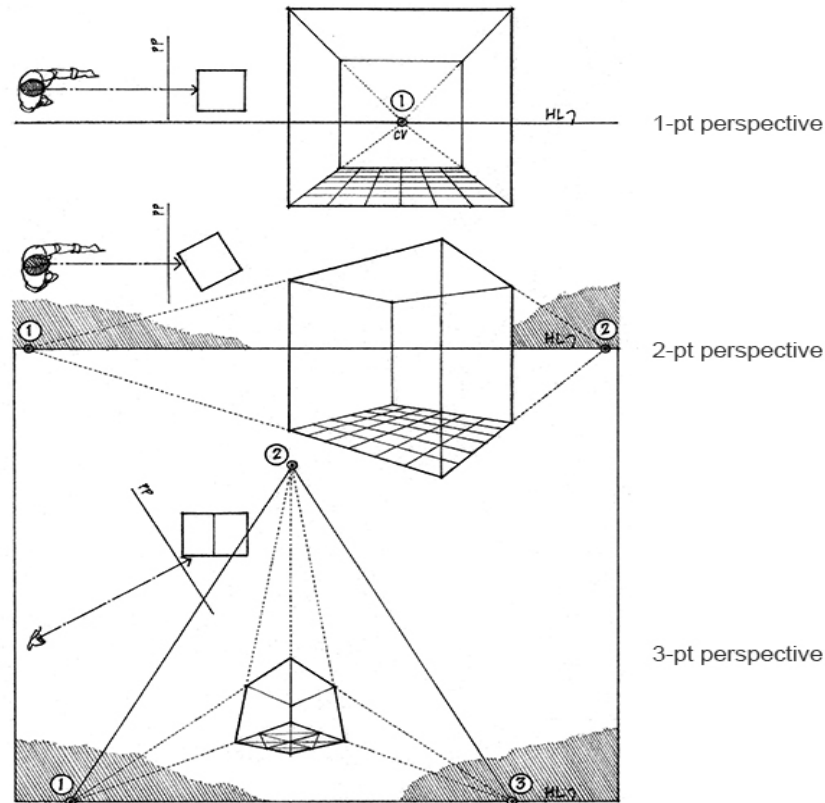


Fig. 14. 1-pt, 2-pt and 3-pt perspective diagram.¹⁵⁹

“PP” in the diagram stands for the **picture plane**, the plane onto which a scene is projected. In the case of painting, the picture plane coincides with the canvas. The arrow that passes from the man in the left of the diagram through the picture plane and onto the painted objects indicates our viewing point, which does not simply indicate where we are standing relative to the painted objects, but more specifically, indicates the position of one of the viewer’s eyes relative to the painted objects. The position of this eye determines the scale of the objects and orients the viewer. This single eye is also of special importance for Florensky’s philosophical understanding of perspectival painting. This eye can view an object from different angles. The different angles can be reflected in the painting by changing the relationship of the single eye to one of three theoretical planes that are oriented by three Cartesian axes—x-, y- and z- axes—in the picture

¹⁵⁹ 1-pt, 2-pt and 3-pt perspective diagram. Digital image. *Studiomaven.org*.

plane. The three imaginary axes are perpendicular to each other and correspond to the three dimensions. For the sake of clarity, let us say the x-axis runs left to right, the y-axis runs up and down and the z-axis runs front to back. If we imagine passing a plane through each of these axes then we create the conditions for depicting a three-dimensional object with the proportionality that is characteristic of linear perspective:

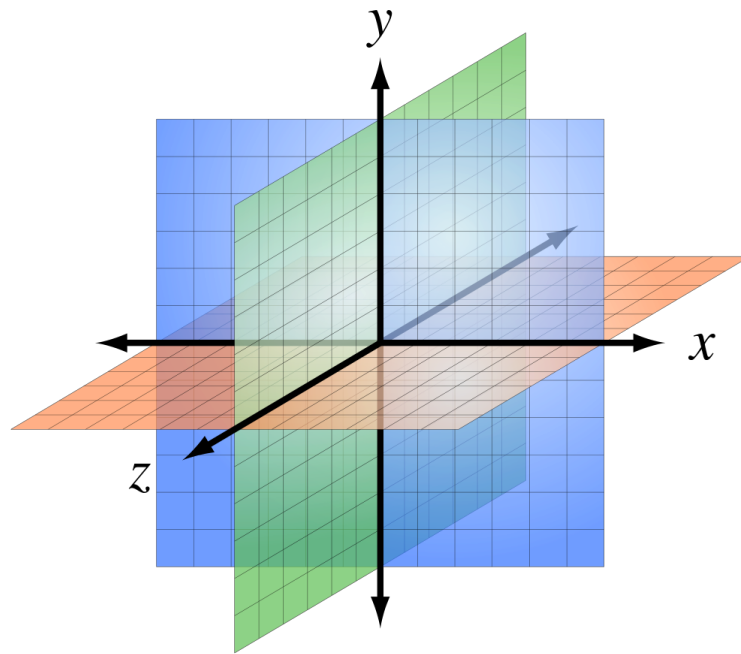


Fig. 15. *Cartesian Coordinate System.*¹⁶⁰

In one-point perspective, two of these axes, typically the x- and y-axes planes (left-right and up-down) are parallel to the picture plane and the remaining z-axis is perpendicular to the picture plane. The vanishing point is directly in line with the eye, in the middle of the painting on the horizon line. This perspective is typically illustrated by how train tracks appear when the viewer is standing in the middle of the tracks and looking down their length all the way to the point at which both the two long rails and the railway ties seem to converge in the distance on

¹⁶⁰ *Cartesian Coordinate System.* Digital image. *Commons.wikimedia.org.*

the horizon. The long tracks are parallel to the z-axis, which runs from back to front. The short railway ties are parallel to the x-axis, which runs left to right and is parallel to the viewer. If we imagine a series of rectangular buildings standing upright on either side of the tracks, then we would also notice that the long edges of the buildings appear to diminish in length towards the vanishing point. The sides of these buildings would be parallel to the y-axis, which runs top to bottom and is also perpendicular to the viewer.

In two-point perspective, the same objects are rotated. The vanishing points can be placed anywhere along the horizon line. For example, if we look at a single building from one corner, then we notice (as in the diagram) that the top and bottom of lines on the right-hand wall of the building appear to be receding towards a vanishing point to the right, while the top and bottom lines of the left-hand wall appear to be receding towards a vanishing point to the left. In this instance, the x- and z- axes are oblique to the picture plane. The sides of the wall appear perfectly vertical because they are parallel to the y-axis (up-down), which is perpendicular to the picture plane.

In three-point perspective, none of the axes are parallel to the picture plane. Looking at the diagram, the left- and right-hand walls still recede to their respective vanishing points on the left and right hand sides of the painting, but a third vanishing point is added above the object to reflect the fact that we are now looking at the building from below. Therefore, all of the perpendicular lines seen from the two-point perspectival painting now appear to be receding away from the viewer towards a vanishing point in the sky.