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TITLE

By

Douglas Miller
B.F.A., University of Louisville, 2009.

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of the
College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Master of Fine Arts
In Studio Art and Design

Department of Fine Arts
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky

May 2018

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A Thesis Approved on
April 25, 2018
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DEDICATION

To

Abbie and Lila

Thank you for your love, support, and patience.

In memory of my Dad who taught me the importance of education and the love for knowledge.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Hite Art Institute, University of Louisville

Simona Bertacco
Mary Carothers
Ying Kit Chan
Mitch Eckert
James Grubola
Susan Jarosi
Jessica Kincaid
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ABSTRACT

TITLE

Douglas Miller

April 25, 2018

Title is a series of drawings that explores the aspects of failed projects and the complications of representation within literary and visual practices. This series is informed by preliminary drawings, marginalia, and written notations that are inherent in the formulation processes of both visual and literary compositions. Through an investigation of the 19th Century Russian author Nikolai Gogol's unfinished novel *Dead Souls*, I situate this series of drawings as a means to conflate literary theories with visual representation. In this way, the *Title* series presents fragmentary images, texts, and digressive narratives that demonstrate intermediaries between propositional states and reconciled concepts. With this intention, the *Title* series of drawings reveals a metaprocess that examines the strategies and procedures in creating a series of drawings. Ultimately finding interchanges between the methods of representation and what is represented, this series underscores the ruptures in the production of meaning.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“He never wrote a book. He only prepared to write one, resolutely seeking the exact conditions that would allow him to write it. Then he forgot even this plan. More precisely, what he was seeking—this source of writing, this space in which to write, this light to circumscribe in space—demanded of him, affirmed in him inclinations that made him unfit for all ordinary literary work, or made him turn away from it...preferring the center to the sphere, sacrificing results to the discovery of their conditions...”

-Maurice Blanchot from *The Book to Come*

Indeterminacy was the origin of this research. Analyzing the concept of indeterminacy is a perplexing and tautological endeavor that asks: How do we clarify a concept that intrinsically eludes a definitive understanding? This series of drawings and the basis of this thesis, examines the overarching concepts of indeterminacy by recognizing the fallible and inconclusive nature of this process of interpretation. Lacking a conclusive solution provides these inquiries with a particular challenge; specifically, how do we propose to resolve the irresolute? The notion of failure seemed intertwined in that mode of questioning strictly by the fact that a definitive answer could not be found.

Informed by this entangled approach, I focused my attention on researching the 19th century Russian author Nikolai Gogol whose writings engage in the dilemma of indeterminacy and provoke a broader discussion on the formation processes and actions of authors and artists. Examining the overarching conditions of failed projects, by way of Nikolai Gogol’s fragmentary novel *Dead Souls*, I will concentrate on the intrinsic textual components of Gogol’s work that informs the ~~Title~~ series of drawings. Specifically, I

outline the aspects of metaprocess that are exhibited in Gogol's writings as well as what will term "apparitional intertext" that imbues his writing. Modeling this series of drawings on methodologies typically constrained to literary texts, I intend to identify parallels between the process of developing drawings and the formations of literary texts.

Central to this thesis and the accompanying series of drawings is an emphasis on the disruptions of meaning and the digressive characteristics that adversely occur in the development of projects and how these disruptions function to create more diverse, complicated, and ultimately uncertain interpretations. In this way, the ~~Title~~-series demonstrates a fictive series of narratives that are preparatory and indeterminate in anticipation of a larger conclusive work that is never reconciled.

CHAPTER II

DEAD SOULS: A BOOK ABOUT HOW IT IS WRITTEN

The ~~Title~~ series of drawings explores the writings of Nikolai Gogol as a framework for examining the conditions of failure in long-arc projects. Within this area of research, I find the most relevance in the practice of metaprocess and intertextuality revealed in Gogol's writings. First, before investigating the characteristics of metaprocess, intertextuality, and failure in my series of drawings, it is necessary to examine similar themes found in Gogol's work. While prevalent in most of his writings, I will primarily focus on these features in his 1842 masterwork, *Dead Souls*.

Dead Souls is a wildly ambitious work that has mystified and fascinated readers from its first publication in 1842. Most intriguingly, the novel vacillates between a standard narration and a distinct intercalation of the writer's voice. This authorial voice, interjected throughout *Dead Souls* is a component of Gogol's most lauded and preeminent short stories including among others, *The Nose* and *Ivan Fyodorovich Shponka and His Aunt*. Through the use of this voice, Gogol destabilizes the structure of *Dead Souls* and shifts the novel away from traditional tropes of a linear narrative by reflecting on the performative act of writing the book itself. This self-reflectivity eclipses *Dead Souls* by Chapter VII, approximately half-way through the novel, when Gogol's author/narrator digresses into an explanation and defense about the characters in the novel as well as his motivations for writing the book. In essence, Gogol's narrator

becomes an indistinguishable contortion of both the author-as-writer and author-as-narrator.

Gogol's author/narrator voice functions as both an organizer of the narrative and an interior voice of the author himself. In this way, Gogol's author/narrator voicing interrupts passages in *Dead Souls* to comment on both the fictive components of the story and the operations of the writer of the narrative. The intercalations grow and begin to overwhelm the novel as early as Chapter III when Gogol's author/narrator abruptly breaks from the narrative and asks, "But what does it all matter? Do not let us pause here! Why talk about it?"¹ Gogol continues this introspective trend throughout *Dead Souls* with sporadic interruptions that expose the apocryphal modes of fiction writing. Discussions are "not worth discussing"² or when characters innocuously scratch the back of their head Gogol interrogates this action by beseeching, "What did that scratching portend? And what in general did it signify?"³ as if to ask the reader for direction and to lend significance to the events that Gogol sketches with fleeting outlines.

Additionally, Gogol provides an interior viewpoint as author/narrator, and includes insight into his writing process when he explains, "These comments I have interposed for the purpose of explaining to the reader why, as our hero conversed, the maiden began to yawn."⁴ In essence, Gogol deviates from the predominant role of authorship by revealing an interior monologue as author/narrator, and in doing so,

¹ Gogol, Nikolai Vasil'evich, and Bernard Guilbert Guerney. *Dead Souls*. New York: Modern Library, 1997.59

² *ibid.*, 185.

³ *ibid.*, 233.

⁴ *ibid.*, 188.

displaces his supremacy as controller of narrative action and originator of events within his work.

For Gogol, the role of the author as omnipotent voice is displaced. Gogol makes this displacement explicitly clear in his preface to *Dead Souls*, “From the Author to the Reader,” in which he asks the reader for “assistance” in “correcting” his already published book.⁵ In this preface Gogol confesses that, “carelessness, inexperience, and lack of time have led to my perpetrating numerous errors and inaccuracies of detail; with the result that in every line of the book there is something which calls for correction. For these reasons I beg of you, my reader, to act also as my corrector.”⁶

For Gogol, the novel was not a finalized work but rather a series of fragments that exist in a continually changing and alterable state. In a letter to a friend, the author expresses his unique views on revising and editing when he bluntly states, “I do not at all consider a matter finished even if the work is printed.”⁷

In this way, Gogol’s preface, by imploring the reader for assistance in revising the book, disarms the perceived role of authority as an author and invites participants to see the inner workings of the novel. Additionally, Gogol considers the text to be transformable and unsettled. As a result, Gogol’s writings undermine the artificiality of fiction and supplant the primacy of the authorial role.

Much in the same manner that Gogol contorts the position of author/narrator, he likewise entangles the reader in his text, thus, demystifying the act of fiction writing. Gogol describes his idiosyncratic process of authorship in the preface to *Dead Souls* as he

⁵ *ibid.*, 1.

⁶ *ibid.*, vii.

⁷ Gogol, Nikolai Vasil’evich, and Carl R. Proffer. *Letters of Nikolai Gogol*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1967.

meticulously implores the reader to, "...annotate in detail the book, without missing a single page, and undertake to read it precisely as though, laying pen and paper before him, he were first to peruse a few pages of the work, and then to recall his own life, and the lives of folk with whom he has come in contact, and everything which he has seen with his own eyes or has heard of from others, and to proceed to annotate, in so far as may tally with his own experience or otherwise, what is set forth in the book, and to jot down the whole exactly as it stands pictured to his memory, and, lastly, to send me the jottings as they may issue from his pen, and to continue doing so until he has covered the entire work!"⁸ In this passage, Gogol is fundamentally explaining the actions of a writer, yet he is displacing his obligation as that writer and repositioning this role to the reader.

By inverting the authorial role, literally, *from the author to the reader*, Gogol's petition to the reader in his preface to *Dead Souls* arranges the text as one that is malleable and prone for revision. Just as Gogol contorts the responsibility of authorship within the text, he equally displaces the writer's function as reviser and editor of the text. Readers are given access to two unique aspects of the author's process: writer/editor of the text and Gogol's introspection as author/narrator. In this way, Gogol's *Dead Souls* is a book about the process of writing a book. This metaprocess activates the text as dynamic and volatile while subverting the traditions of fiction writing. For Gogol, the act of writing is indistinguishable from the writing itself. Therefore, the procedural machinations and the process through which the work was generated are exhibited. This unmasking of the writing process becomes a metaprocess, fundamentally a process used

⁸ Gogol, Nikolai Vasil'evich, and Bernard Guilbert Guerney. *Dead Souls*. New York: Modern Library, 1997.vii.

to define or describe another process. Thus, *Dead Souls* is a novel that incorporates the writing processes through which it was made as its foremost subject.

Preceding postmodernist concepts by 150 years, Gogol's metaprocess finds parallels in 20th century metafictional novels by authors such as Italo Calvino, Salman Rushdie, and Jorge Luis Borges. Metafiction is defined as literature that integrates the writing process into the narrative and is usually integrated in the discourse of postmodernist literature theory. Postmodernism in literature reflects theoretical aspects of both postmodern philosophy and methodologies within literary analysis. While incorporating a wide area of research, postmodernist concepts such as metafiction and metanarration, both involved in the discourse of the narrative over the subject of the narrative, are relevant to a discussion on Gogol's metaprocess. Metanarration stories include active narrators who overtly insert themselves in the narrative while remaining cognizant of their own narration. In the same way as Gogol's metaprocess, postmodernist metafiction functions to expose the structures of fiction writing and ultimately engage with the reader in this act of disclosure.

Identifying the artifice of the act of fiction writing, self-reflexivity, and expanding the role of the author as unreliable or compromised, contributes to a varied and often problematic interpretation of the text. As Linda Hutcheon describes in the *Poetics of Postmodernism*, postmodernism is "art marked primarily by an internalized investigation of the nature, the limits, and the possibilities of the language or discourse of art."⁹ Using Hutcheon's definition, specifically the "internalized investigation" aspect of artmaking,

⁹ Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. New York: Routledge, 1988. 22.

we can clearly recognize in Gogol's self-conscious narrator a postmodernist voice that complicates the motives of artifice by providing commentary, introspection, and implorations to the reader. For Gogol, as made clear in his solicitations to the reader, his writing is most significant when it is troubled by the machinations of the writing process.

By internalizing the writing process, most noticeably by admitting fallacies or exposing inconsistencies in this process, Gogol's book explores the limits of writing and ultimately acknowledges uncertainty over finalization. Finding parallels within postmodernist literary theory, specifically internalizing the processes of writing, Gogol creates a novel that is problematized by its own formation.

To clarify, Gogol's interior point-of-view and metaprocess create an unfixed and dislocated subject that repels clear definitions. Gogol's use of uncertainty extends to his evasive description of Chichikov, the central character of *Dead Souls*, "as a man who, though not handsome, was not ill-favored, not over-fat, and not over-thin. Also, though not over-elderly, he was not over-young. His arrival produced no stir in the town and was accompanied by no particular incident..."¹⁰ While Gogol uses uncertainty in his writing, indeed straining the ambiguity by repetitious word-play and reverse descriptions that describe what a character is not rather than what he is, the author/narrator paradoxically makes implicit aims to the reader to nevertheless understand his obfuscations. For example, Gogol asks in his distinct hypertrophic wording, "it would be an excellent thing if...someone who possesses the power of entering into and developing the ideas of the author whose work he may be reading—would scan each character herein portrayed, and tell me how each character ought to have acted at a given juncture, and what, to judge

¹⁰ Gogol, Nikolai Vasil'evich, and Bernard Guilbert Guerney. *Dead Souls*. New York: Modern Library, 1997.1.

from the beginnings of each character, ought to have become of that character later, and what new circumstances might be devised in connection therewith, and what new details might advantageously be added to those already described.”¹¹

Contradictorily, Gogol then proceeds to admonish the reader by saying, “In passing, my readers must not blame me if the characters whom they have encountered in these pages have not been altogether to their liking.”¹² In essence, Gogol creates a disproportionate transaction for the reader wherein he simultaneously provides minimal descriptions yet demands maximum understanding.

By the contradictory directives that Gogol imparts to the reader, Gogol detaches from the responsibility of authorship and oddly places the blame for any misunderstanding on the reader. In essence, the character Chichikov is so imprecisely described, or unfavorable as a protagonist, because the reader has not given Gogol any information on how Chichikov *should* be described.

As a result, Gogol’s text appears as a work-in-progress, or prone to revision through a direct interaction with the reader. This interaction distinguishes Gogol’s metaprocess from the categorization of metafiction because the author enables the reader in his process more as would-be editor rather than passive observer of the text. Foremost, this relationship with the reader is motivated by Gogol’s compulsion to be understood.

Compounding the significance of Gogol’s metaprocesses within his novel are the engaging ways in which the narrator’s voice permeates the work and insists on being understood. Throughout *Dead Souls* and central to his other texts, such as *The Nose* and *The Overcoat*, Gogol’s narrative voice interrupts the story with monologues, digressions,

¹¹ *ibid.*, vii.

¹² *ibid.*, 241.

and most saliently with direct pleas to the reader for comprehension. His hyper-awareness, near panic at times, for a need to be understood often has a counterintuitive effect to his text. The author/narrator implores the reader to understand what is presented in the novel as if Gogol himself were having a self-conscious interior monologue. This internalization not only disrupts the narrative, but also illustrates the metaprocess characteristics of his text as well. For example, in Chapter XI the narrator interrupts with a lengthy reflection, “Yes, readers of this book, none of you really care to see humanity revealed in its nakedness. ‘Why should we do so?’ you say. ‘What would be the use of it? Do we not know for ourselves that human life contains much that is gross and contemptible? Do we not with our own eyes have to look upon much that is anything but comforting? Far better would it be if you would put before us what is comely and attractive, so that we might forget ourselves a little.’ In the same fashion does a landowner say to his bailiff: ‘Why do you come and tell me that the affairs of my estate are in a bad way? I know that without YOUR help. Have you nothing else to tell me? Kindly allow me to forget the fact, or else to remain in ignorance of it, and I shall be much obliged to you.’”¹³

As the narrator proceeds with the story, he then interjects again, “...the fault is Chichikov’s rather than mine, for he is the master, and where he leads we must follow. Also, should my readers gird at me for a certain dimness and want of clarity in my principal characters and actors, that will be tantamount to saying that never do the broad tendency and the general scope of a work become immediately apparent.”¹⁴

¹³ *ibid.*, 263.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, 263.

Gogol's text creates a paradoxical situation for the reader. Characters are described with only faint outlines and are seemingly in control of the narrative, while the author assumes no responsibility for the character's morality or actions, or indeed the very process of writing, the author/narrator nonetheless interjects throughout the text and implores the reader to understand his work.

Gogol's odd intercalations present an intertwining of parody (mocking the position of omniscient author) and a sincere interior dialogue (one further troubled by the projection of the reader's voice) of the author as he both rejects responsibility for misinterpretation and conversely questions why a reader would question the author. This internalizing of the narration is entangled further as Gogol's author/narrator speculates, "But inasmuch as the conversation which the travelers maintained was not of a kind likely to interest the reader..."¹⁵ Of course, as a reader, one is left to consider these interjections as either the narrator deceptively concealing information or genuinely acting in the best interest of reader engagement.

While Gogol's deceptive qualities as author/narrator are distinct in *Dead Souls*, they are also evident in his short stories; most notably in *The Nose*. In this story, at the end of each chapter, the narrator announces that, "Further events here become enshrouded in fog. What happened after that is unknown to all men."¹⁶ In other parts of the story, the narrator, who we assume is Gogol, evades descriptive features by revealing that characters' names "are lost now" and characters' reasonings or actions are discarded with vague speculations such as, "why precisely he did so is unknown."¹⁷ The narrator of

¹⁵ *ibid.*, 71.

¹⁶ Gogol, Nikolai Vasil'evich. *The Collected Tales and Plays of Nikolai Gogol*. New York: Random House. 1964.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, 494.

The Nose reiterates this unknowingness until finally it is revealed that the narrator was actually a mere passer-by who found newspaper clippings of the story and heard rumors of the tale he has retold. This stranger/narrator then abandons the story altogether and fumes, “Oh, I cannot understand these points — absolutely I cannot. And the strangest, most unintelligible fact of all is that authors actually can select such occurrences for their subject! I confess this too fails to pass my comprehension, to ——— But no; I will say just that I do not understand it.”¹⁸

Gogol uses displacement and contortion of the author/narrator dynamic in a contradictory manner that is both an interior investigation into his writing processes and a repulsion of the authorial role. Similar to *The Nose*, Gogol takes this displacement to extreme lengths in another short story, *Ivan Fyodorovich Shpomka and his Aunt*. In the story, Gogol abruptly abandons his position as narrator when he upends the story by convolutedly explaining that the author cannot finish the narrative because someone had given him the ending of the manuscript, but his friend’s wife, who cannot read, used the papers to line her baking pans.¹⁹ Utilizing contradictions, abeyance, and abandonment in his short stories, Gogol crystallizes these features in *Dead Souls* on a larger scale as he contends with the novel’s scope as an epic project. Moreover, Gogol illuminates his difficulties with the activity of writing *Dead Souls* by investigating his role as author/narrator and laying bare the metaprocesses of his project. As Gogol’s text becomes mired in digressions, suspended narrative action, and the metaprocesses of writing, the central subject of the novel becomes more about the operations of the text than anything else.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, 495.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, 174.

Although Gogol makes the reader less able to complete a definitive interpretation, through aberrant directions in the narrative, disorientation of the author/narrator relationship, and the elements of metaprocess, Gogol constructs a compelling albeit contentious novel. Through metaliterary devices, specifically texts that are self-reflexive and disclose the artificiality of fiction writing, Gogol's work appears fractured and non-conclusive. The problems presented in *Dead Souls*, namely destabilizing normative authorial roles, speaks to a larger philosophical dynamic of postmodernist thought which challenges the conventions and boundaries of literature.

Following a postmodernist and critical literary framework for exploring Gogol's novel, an analyzation of *Dead Souls* through the concept of intertextuality would provide further insight. Although intertextuality is not conditioned by postmodernism, the concept is an approach towards understanding *Dead Souls* within the context of a postmodern discipline.

Intertextual is a term that was first developed in Julia Kristeva's "Word, Dialogue, and Novel" that describes the functionality of texts as relational to other texts. For Kristeva, texts are to be understood as a dialogue between other writings and are shaped by literary, cultural, or historical antecedents.²⁰ Kristeva's theory posits that literature is not a closed-system of meaning and that the interdisciplinary nature of discourse contributes to multifaceted interpretations. While Gogol's writings egregiously incorporate clear intertextual dynamics through parody, epic poetry, and Russian and Ukrainian socio-cultural references, a more nuanced and complicated scrutiny can be found in Gogol's own references to his planned, yet unfinished sequel to *Dead Souls*.

²⁰ Kristeva, Julia, and Toril Moi. *The Kristeva Reader*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.

CHAPTER III

DEAD SOULS VOLUME 2 AND APPARITIONAL INTERTEXT

Gogol had made allusions to contriving the second part of *Dead Souls* as early as 1836. During this period, he wrote to a friend and promised the grandiose continuation of his saga, about which he asserted, “if I can complete this creation in the way it needs to be completed... all Russia will appear in it!”²¹

However grand this projected sequel intended to be, we can find its humble origins nearly half-way through *Dead Souls* Volume 1 as Gogol shifts the tone of the novel to signify that the inadequacies of the text he is currently writing will be absolved in the next installment. Ostensibly, as Gogol has made apparent in the irreconcilability of his writings, primarily through implorations to the reader and repeated editing, it is understandable that the author would indeed be compelled to make corrections or amend the first volume of his novel. Through a continuation in the second volume, it might be surmised that Gogol aimed to rectify his artistic uncertainties. However, Gogol had planned this continuation to be both an artistic and moral restitution.

Gogol foresaw the second part of *Dead Souls* as a tome of redemption to the morally corrupt characters in Volume 1, who “contain elements of ugliness” and “a

²¹ Gogol, Nikolai Vasil'evich, and Carl R. Proffer. *Letters of Nikolai Gogol*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1967.63.

certain dimness and want of clarity.”²² For Gogol, *Dead Souls* Volume 1 was meant to introduce the “ugliness” of the central characters and establish the exigencies for their redemption in Volume 2. By the end of Volume 1 Gogol as author/narrator emphasizes the magnitude and importance of Volume 2 when he hints, “There are two large parts ahead-and that’s not a trifle!”²³ Gogol continues to refer to the unwritten Volume 2 when he makes the audacious claim that the culmination of Volume 1 is in fact the beginning of the next novel by insinuating in the last chapter, “And here’s where one might say, the thread, the opening of a novel begins.”²⁴

As a reader, being aware, even cautious, of Gogol’s manipulations as author/narrator makes some of Gogol’s misdirection seem anemic; however, there is a profound veracity to the ambitions of the proposed sequel of *Dead Souls*. By the 1840’s, Gogol was writing to friends and expressing how Volume 2 was to be vastly different than Volume 1. In fact, Gogol asserts that this continuation will show readers “as clear as day...the lofty and excellent” in his characters.²⁵ Moreover, Gogol’s projected *Dead Souls* Volume 2 suggests that the author aimed to clarify and develop the provisional and disconnected areas of Volume 1.

For Gogol, this continuation would be the resolution for which he had been striving. Through his pleas of understanding to the reader and his investigations into the metaprocesses of writing, it is apparent that Gogol simultaneously celebrated and antagonized the fragmented indeterminacy of his work. Ostensibly, for an author that

²² Gogol, Nikolai Vasil’evich, and Bernard Guilbert Guerney. *Dead Souls*. New York: Modern Library, 1997.264.

²³ *ibid.*, 246.

²⁴ *ibid.*, 205.

²⁵ Maguire, Robert A. *Exploring Gogol*. Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1994. 323.

devoted so much creative energy into digressions, ambiguity, and problematizing the relationship of artifice and reality, the proposed finality and moral rectification of *Dead Souls* Volume 2 was inevitably doomed to fail. Indeed, for ten years Gogol worked fastidiously on the continuation of *Dead Souls* but was never able to complete the planned second volume.

During the years 1842-1852, Gogol reworked and revised sections of the *Dead Souls* Volume 2 manuscript. However, the scope and vision of the plan became an intractable enterprise. Gogol's dissatisfaction throughout the editing process eventually caused him to become ensnared by the magnitude of his own intentions, leaving only fragments of the unfinished manuscript or burning whole chapters in the terror that they remain unrevised. As Gogol realized the futility of his project he finally acknowledged his own limitations and in a moment of candor confessed that, "For a long time I have been preoccupied by the thought of writing a great work in which I would present all that is good and all that is bad in Russian man...though I have seen and grasped separately many of its parts, the plan of the whole has just not unfolded itself to me or taken shape in the form needed for me to write it."²⁶

By attempting to make a cohesive whole, we presume as both a spiritual and narrative unity, out of his incomplete characters as well as the novel's complex and fragmentary structures, Gogol was undertaking a fundamental transition as an author during the decade he worked on Volume 2 of *Dead Souls*. Although partly an outgrowth of Gogol's playful and disruptive means to disorient the reader's expectations, namely by

²⁶ Gogol, Nikolai Vasil'evich, and Carl R. Proffer. *Letters of Nikolai Gogol*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1967.189.

promising a resolve to narrative actions and plot complications, Gogol's allusions to *Dead Souls* Volume 2 can be best viewed through an intertextual framework.

Intertextuality responds to a post-structuralist movement away from authorial control of the text and considers the relationship of language and other texts (and their meanings) as interpretative elements that inform the reader. Features of intertextuality reveal themselves when a text is read within the perspective of another text, in which case the inferences and significations surrounding the other text shape the way a current text is interpreted. Just as Gogol intended to use the unwritten *Dead Souls* Volume 2 to respond to components of Volume 1 and vice versa, he was incorporating an intertextual framework within his novel. However, the context of the referent is lost since finishing his second part was never achieved. It is this "apparitional intertext," or a reference to a non-existent and unwritten "ghost" text, that imbues *Dead Souls* with yet another complicated but fascinating aspect. The referent text is embodied only in its suggestion from Volume 1 and occupies a space within Gogol's novel that is indeed present, but profoundly absent. The "apparitional intertext" exists only as a promissory factor, one that defers to a larger and presumably gratifying experience yet, is never achieved.

Similarly, this "apparitional intertext" negotiates Gogol's novel with other elements of his fractured and disruptive writing techniques. Specifically, because characters have no spiritual or moral redemption and narrative actions are left unrealized, the ambiguous qualities of the plot mimic Gogol's author/narrator disordering and his preoccupations with the metaprocesses of writing. Primarily, Gogol's work fashions itself as a proposed epic rather than a traditional narrative with closure. Characters, plot, and

conventional themes are used only as subordinate elements within a text that is fundamentally about the problems of writing a series of novels.

Gogol foresaw the second part of *Dead Souls* to be a transformative work that would balance the inadequacies of the first volume and atone for the behaviors of his dubious characters. In the same way that Gogol shifts the focus of his book towards metaprocesses and the ideas of textual production in *Dead Souls*, he likewise creates an intertextual dynamic within his novel by directly referring to a second part of the series. However, Gogol never succeeded in finishing the proposed continuation of *Dead Souls*, thus the intertextual designation refers to a text that does not exist. It is this “apparitional intertext” that evokes in Gogol’s writing a promissory, yet ultimately futile tone.

CHAPTER IV

FAILURE

The most pervasive and discouraging conclusions that authors make, both during the writing process and once the work is completed, is that their writing has the potential to be misinterpreted. For Gogol, a comprehensive and well understood text was crucial. In his imploration to the reader, his interior monologues as author/narrator into the process of writing, and his promised resolution to *Dead Souls*, Gogol was haunted by the fear of being misunderstood as well as the panic of failing to complete the second part of *Dead Souls*. Overwhelmed by mental illness exacerbated by his unfinished epic, Gogol burned his manuscripts, starved himself, and died during the winter of 1852.

Gogol's failure can be partly attributed to his own psychological deterioration and a more difficult diagnosis of creative futility. Documented in his literary output between the years 1842-52, namely *Selected Passages from Correspondence with Friends*, while he was writing *Dead Souls* Volume 2, Gogol was struggling both with the scale and direction of his projected sequel as well as a creative and spiritual impasse.

Published in 1847, *Selected Passages from Correspondence with Friends* is a typically strange Gogolian book. Poised as a series of letters, this correspondence is in actuality Gogol writing to himself and responding to himself. In these "letters", we find Gogol attempting to work through the problems that were developing in *Dead Souls*

Volume 2. More broadly, these letters reveal the philosophical quandary for Gogol in his newfound quest for a “purity in language” that will, “capture the essence of reality.”²⁷

Gogol’s obsessive nature created an unrealistic goal in the writer’s mind to uncover in language something transcendent and perfected. While Gogol wrote copiously during this period, he would never find this specter of purity. In the interim between publishing *Dead Souls* Volume 1 and his death, Gogol worked furiously on finishing his epic novel. During this period, as he grappled with looming plot structures and labored on the text, Gogol built the anticipation by dismissing Volume 1 as “nothing more than the entrance porch to that palace which is now being built within me,” presumably to be disclosed in Volume 2.²⁸ As years passed, the author would become increasingly insistent, however grandiose, that his subsequent books would answer secrets “which all at once, to the surprise of everyone (for not a soul among the readers have guessed), will be revealed in the following volumes.”²⁹ At the same time that Gogol was ardently editing and rewriting the book, he remained hopeful throughout this period and wrote, “I am continuing to sketch chaos down on paper, from which the creation is to emerge.”³⁰

However, Gogol’s promised epic became increasingly mired under the weight of his own expectations. Compounding his creative distress, during this period Gogol became manic with religious obsessions that he confused with the goals of his writing. In his continuation of *Dead Souls* he envisioned a book that “...is the history of my own

²⁷ Gogol’, Nikolai Vasil’evich. *Selected Passages from Correspondence with Friends*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1969.102.

²⁸ Gogol, Nikolai Vasil’evich, and Carl R. Proffer. *Letters of Nikolai Gogol*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1967.111.

²⁹ *ibid.*,159.

³⁰ Setchkarev, Vsevolod. *Gogol: His Life and Works*. Translated by Robert Kramer. New York: New York University Press, 1965.247.

soul.”³¹ The ‘chaos’ of his working process, one that perhaps the author once found constructive, was now entangled in a disordered manuscript complicated by grandiose messianic visions that even Gogol’s talent could not save. Ultimately, Gogol’s insurmountable task of writing the continuation of *Dead Souls*, as a long-arc project, consumed him until finally, in a destructive act of editing, he began burning parts of his manuscript.

In the enigmatic book, *Selected Passages from Correspondences with Friends*, we can further uncover Gogol’s burgeoning religious mania. This mania simultaneously lead to his proposed apostolic intentions in the continuation of *Dead Souls* and ultimately to the self-imposed starvation that would tragically end his life. In *Selected Passages from Correspondences with Friends*, Gogol explains his newly perceived status as an author who may only write strictly, “from the state of sin to the blessed future.”³² Undoubtedly, Gogol foresaw his proposed epic as encompassing a grand and totalizing vision that would be both a spiritual and creative achievement.

However, the projected resolution of Gogol’s novel could never in actuality materialize because Gogol, as he himself admits, “has a passion for circumstantiality.”³³ His ingenious craft is built primarily on the tangential, fragmented, and utterly indirect qualities of his writing. Thus, Gogol’s misaligned determination to make *Dead Souls* into a resolved and fully conclusive work that would span multiple volumes would have been

³¹ Gogol’, Nikolaï Vasil’evich. *Selected Passages from Correspondence with Friends*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1969.292.

³² *ibid.*, 59.

³³ Gogol, Nikolaï Vasil’evich, and Bernard Guilbert Guerney. *Dead Souls*. New York: Modern Library, 1997.15.

in direct opposition to his artistry. Ultimately, we are left with another enigmatic question from Gogol: Do we consider his inability to finish his projected epic novel as a failure?

We might approach an answer to this question by examining Roland Barthes' *The Preparation of the Novel*. Barthes' book is compiled from a series of lectures given at the Collège de France from 1976-1980 that includes Barthes' insight into writing a large novel he was in the process of composing called, *Vita Nova*. In the lectures, Barthes explores similar themes that Gogol was contending with in writing *Dead Souls* Volume 2, specifically regarding the problems found in formulating long-arc projects. Barthes' book is posed as the working process, or *une recherche*, towards writing a lengthy novel that Barthes never in fact writes. In Barthes' lectures he outlines a new perspective on the interpretation of the novel that investigates only its preparation rather than its completed form.³⁴ This interpretation of the novel, or as Barthes refers to as inquiries into the "writing fantasy," in the varying stages of development, imparts a view that radically differs from traditional literary criticism and analysis.³⁵

For Barthes, his *Vita Nova*, expressly his "life's work," is the desired novel, however it is a novel which has not been written. This fantasied novel at the level of its preparation, designing, and initiation, represents Barthes' guide to writing. However, Barthes sets parameters to his investigation by acknowledging that his propositions are provisional and contingent on looking at "how something is made with a view to making it again."³⁶ To be clear, Barthes is referring to existing literature, namely novels by Marcel Proust and Leo Tolstoy as designated exemplars of realized novels. Thus, Barthes

³⁴ Barthes, Roland, Kate Briggs, and Nathalie Léger. *The Preparation of the Novel: Lecture Courses and Seminars at the Collège de France*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.

³⁵ *ibid.*, 10.

³⁶ *ibid.*, 13.

immerses himself in the act of discovery of notations, outlines, and plans found in established literature, rather than the achievement of results in the finished work.

Barthes, in a similar mindset as Gogol, sought to write his *Vita Nova*, and this desire towards a culminating long-arc project occupied his creative and intellectual enterprises. However, for Barthes this pursuit motivated a unique and provocative theoretical area to study: How to not write a novel yet prepare as if he were writing the novel.³⁷ Essentially, Barthes is uncovering the essential and overlooked characteristics of the motivations, desires, and objectives that prefigure writing. By an intense scrutiny of the act of *vouloir-écrire*, or “to want-to-write,” namely the desire to write, Barthes decides to “push that fantasy as far as it will go, to the point where: either the desire will fade away, or it will encounter the reality of writing and what gets written won’t be the fantasy.”³⁸ Central to his investigation, Barthes contends with common problems within authorship; specifically, organization, notations, and the negotiation between turning fragments of information into a long consistent text.

Barthes investigates the desirous *vouloir-écrire* as the preliminary conditions of a literary text. Through notations that authors utilize in order to form the structure of the novel, the preparatory actions move from “writing of the instant” to an attempt to sustain this deftness of spontaneity. For Barthes, using notations creates a dilemma for the author in determining what is noteworthy and how to organize a series of fragmentary notes into a protracted and cohesive whole. Finding the essence of the “instant” Barthes asserts, can be best viewed in the form of the Haiku.

³⁷ *ibid.*, 20.

³⁸ *ibid.*, 11.

Short, restrained, and fundamentally fractured, the Japanese poetry form of Haiku is antithetical to the long-arc project of novel writing, yet, provides the imaginative reader with an expansive narrative. Barthes asserts that the art of notation, typified in the Haiku, maintains its poetic capacity for “truth” whereas the novel “in its grand and extended continuity, cannot sustain the truth (of the moment).”³⁹ Barthes argues that the desire to finish lengthy projects drives every stage of development. From drafting, revisions, and corrections Barthes emphasizes the futility in the “impatience to get it over with, then, when it is done a kind of disappointment, the object ends up looking dull, banal; *what, is that all it is?*”⁴⁰ Barthes readdresses his argument in the second part of his lecture series by parsing out the transition from *vouloir* “wanting to” write to *volunté* “will” write. Barthes explains that the *L’Oeuvre comme volonté* “The Work as Will” is often divergent from the desirous phase of *vouloir*, as this resolution has now lost its unrefined shape and adopted the form of the composed novel. Essentially, Barthes anticipates the process of writing a long novel as moving from the abstract form of desire to the actualized composition which implies the lack of the original desire.

Remarkably, Barthes professes the crux of his methodology in *The Preparation of the Novel* while contesting his own previous theories on analysing literary texts. Specifically, in reference to his landmark essay, *The Death of the Author*, a work which argues against interpreting texts through the intended meaning of the author, Barthes now asserts that he “take(s) the completely opposite view” and that a biographical “curiosity” in the writing processes and practices of writers, through their notebooks and journals, is

³⁹ *ibid.*,108.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*,149.

a significant and illuminating endeavor.⁴¹ Barthes new approach is evident in his remarks on the diaries and notes that comprise Andre Gide's *Journal*, Barthes confesses that, "...I was vainly trying to find some connection between these notes. Finally, I decided it would be better to offer them as such --notes-- and not try to disguise their lack of continuity. Incoherence seems to me preferable to a distorting order."⁴²

Applying Barthes inquiries into the processes of writing a novel, that he explicitly was not going to write, towards Gogol's failed continuation of *Dead Souls* is an unorthodox approach. Precisely because Barthes is not offering a methodology, instead he is considering a complex perspective on positioning literary criticism around the formulation of the text which no longer questions the subject of the book, but rather how and why will the author write. While Barthes positions are idiosyncratic they do provide the footing necessary for a process-based understanding of Gogol. This structure requires looking at the text from the point of view of its preparation and so the foremost set of questions becomes: who is the subject which is about to write, or who is the subject of what Barthes designates as *Vouloir-Ecrire* ("To-want-to write") and why does this subject desire to write?

Shifting the perspective to the pre-actions and processes of the text creates a fundamentally different inquiry that circumvents finding a significance in the finished text. Lydia Davis' 1986 essay, *Form as Response to Doubt* elaborates Barthes' concepts and adds to the discourse by questioning, "Doesn't the unfinished work tend to throw our attention onto the work as artifact, or the work as process, rather than the work as purveyor of meaning, of message? Does this add to the pleasure or the interest of the

⁴¹ *ibid.*, 208.

⁴² Barthes, Roland, and Susan Sontag. *A Barthes Reader*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 3.

text?”⁴³ For this new approach, examining the working processes and operations of the text *before* the text is a finalized work, insists on uncovering more questions than answers.

In Gogol’s *Selected Passages from a Correspondence with Friends*, the author contends with similar themes as Barthes in regard to the production of writing and the prospect of generating a long continuous text from fragmentary notations. Moreover, we may likewise investigate Gogol’s process under Davis’ inquiries towards considering the “work as process, rather than work as purveyor of meaning.”

Barthes’ *The Preparation of the Novel* reveals the possibilities of a new relation to the text, a form of analysis where the core of the problem of the novel is the desirous subject of writing and the production of the text. Barthes’ concepts can also serve as a framework in which to explore the overarching condition of failure in Gogol’s unfinished *Dead Souls* Volume 2.

While failure is not explicitly directed by Gogol’s text, it is a critical component in his writings which he makes considerable efforts to avoid; however, this intention to prevent misunderstanding paradoxically expands the likelihood of misinterpretation. For Gogol, failure lies fundamentally in the misunderstanding of the writing. This singular objective creates an obsessive attentiveness in Gogol’s style that is transparent although, it seeks to be disguised. For example, Gogol as author/narrator frequently interrupts the narrative with interjections that are meant to assist the reader in some way by offering details, monologues, and/or supplemental information. But, as Gogol’s interruptions are often mired in lavish hyper-detailed passages posed as explanations meant to expand the

⁴³ Burger, Mary. *Biting the Error: Writers Explore Narrative*. Toronto: Coach House Books, 2005. 36.

story, the outcome is usually confusion rather than clarity. As Gogol strives to make his writing lucid, he is incapable precisely because his extraordinary facility as a writer flourishes in the irresolute.

The method of self-sabotage in Gogol's writings problematize a clear understanding of an author who is contrastingly fixated on a successful text. For the sake of clarity, we can define a successful text as a complete and non-fragmentary writing that conveys its meaning through an arranged narrative. Of course, within the spectrum of definitions of success there are countless variables, however a base level of comprehension is arguably crucial to all determinations. Thus, by the very methodology of Barthes' analysis of the fractured and unresolved texts that defies a complete understanding, an underlying condition of failure is built-in to this approach.

While Gogol is obviously concerned with being understood, he conversely puts pressure on this understanding by the unreliability of his author/narrator through a constantly disruptive text. As Lydia Davis explains in her discussion of authors that use interruptions "either of our expectations...by breaking it off, confusing it or leaving it actually unfinished...rather than as invisible purveyor of meaning, emotion, atmosphere...keeps returning the reader not only to the real world but to a consciousness of his or her own mind at work."⁴⁴ Gogol is indeed shifting his writing to reflect the reader's own perceptions, his method both incorporates Barthes' concept of a new form of literary discourse that investigates the writing process as well as a fascination towards non-teleological texts. However, Gogol hyper-investigates his writing process and in

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, 36.

doing so creates a confused, albeit engaging, text of endless deferrals that point towards a finale but never reaches closure.

Although considered a failure by Gogol, I contend that his incomplete and unrealized continuation of his proposed *Dead Souls* Volume 2 is significant for its very nature as being unfinishable. Through the metaprocesses and “apparitional intertextuality” of his work, Gogol postures his writings as provisional and unburdened from a central determination. In doing so, he situates his writing to appear as a work-in-progress, continuously building and constructing new segments, but nevertheless remaining unresolved and fragmented. By eliminating the continuation of *Dead Souls*, Gogol has shifted the emphasis from a completed epic to a fragmented and incongruous novel that remains suspended in this unfinishable state. In doing so, the reader can unravel the messy imperfections embedded in the text and paradoxically find a sense of completeness and clarity in its fractured form, much in the same manner as Barthes’ positions in his *The Preparation of the Novel*, because the text is no longer bound to the conventions of resolution. Thus, Gogol voluntarily undermines his own efforts to create a cohesive and fully comprehensive body of work in a way that, while frustrating to the author, nevertheless antagonistically succeeds in its failure.

Leaving his narrative with fractures and chasms, where most authors would provide solutions and resolve, makes Gogol’s work challenging, albeit compelling, for the reader. However, the reader is afforded a unique opportunity to engage with the frustrated experiences of Gogol’s writing. The author’s intense and indisputable talent resides specifically in his indefinite prose that is unrestrained by the finality of closure. Gogol underscores the discontinuous, digressive, and disruptive potential of artmaking,

and in doing so, elevates his artform to be reflective not only of its own fallibilities but its own dynamism.

Ultimately, Gogol's great contribution to literature is paradoxically also inherent in his failed continuation of *Dead Souls*. For Gogol, making a novel about the act of writing a novel could never justifiably be completed. Through digressions, the promise of continuation, and unceasing revisions, Gogol's novel is a project that could proceed indefinitely.

CHAPTER V

GOGOL'S AESTHETIC VOID

This chapter looks at the connectivity between the literary and visual arts by accessing Gogol's own visually motivated practices. Furthermore, this discussion serves as an intermediary between characteristics of Gogol's writing and the series of drawings that accompany this thesis. Any reader of Gogol can affirm the author's attentiveness to visual art. While his 1835 short-story *The Portrait*, about an artist possessed by a magical painting, deals directly with visual art, most of his writings incorporate an aesthetic propensity by the use of the author's hyper-descriptive and detailed wording. However, this textual based aesthetic, like most narrative actions in the Gogolian world, serves as a misdirection in his writings. Manifested in the illustrated title page for *Dead Souls*, Gogol's hyper-descriptiveness and effusive details are an indirect means to emphasize the author's fragmentary vision.

In the 1846 edition of *Dead Souls*, Gogol designed an ornate title page for his equally elaborate novel (figure 1). Gogol's illustration pays particular attention to the baroque complexity of the narrative by incorporating a panoply of objects, scenes from the novel, figures, skulls, and an effusion of decorative scrolls. In keeping with Gogol's digressive narrative, the title page image is arranged as a symmetrically balanced composition yet disrupted with wild and eruptive scrollwork that meanders from the centered structure. In the same way that his novel digresses, through the author/narrator

voice and hyper-elaborates while frenziedly surrounding the ordered structure of the plot, Gogol's design places more attention on the decorative aspects, or extraneous details, rather than on a disciplined composition.

Figure 1. Nikolai Gogol's design for the title page of the first edition of Dead Souls, 1842. Dead Souls Norton Critical Edition. Edited by George Gibian. W.W. Norton. 1985.

Certainly, Gogol designed this title page to represent his novel's deviating narrative form. Additionally, the title page is indicative of Gogol's logophilic pursuits.

Gogol was a lover of words and linguistic games that unearth the complexities and fluidity of the Russian language. Gogol made this fascination evident in his design for the title page. For example, in his design for the title page of *Dead Souls*, the author chose to place a hierarchical order to the words: (from top to bottom) “Chichikov’s Adventures” (top center and in a small font) then below that “or,” then “Dead Souls” (in a slightly larger font), and finally “POEMA” in the center of the page and in the largest and most prominent all-capitalized font.

Scholarship has often focused on the enigmatic title of “POEMA” that Gogol distinguished from the other wordings on the title page. In Russian narrative poetry, Poema refers to the genre of long prose most popular in 18th and 19th century verse.⁴⁵ Clearly, the titling of *Dead Souls* as a “Poema” corresponds to Gogol’s preoccupation with contorting the boundaries of genre classification. *Dead Souls* is a novel, regardless of Gogol’s provocative titling as a “Poema.” Although a fragmented and unique work, *Dead Souls* nonetheless falls most certainly within the criteria to be considered a novel by possessing a fictional narrative with characters, plot, etc. By obfuscating definitions between what is considered a poem or a novel, Gogol is urging the reader to regard his work as easily able to move between genres, just as words perform deviating functions and more broadly just as Gogol moves between author/narrator.

Gogol’s illustration for the title page of *Dead Souls* is also a graphic introduction into the novel’s corresponding visual components. As noted by Slavo-phile scholar, Susanne Fusso, Gogol’s affinity for visual art is evident in the titling of his 1834-35

⁴⁵ Fennell, John Lister Illingworth. *Nineteenth-century Russian Literature: Studies of 10 Russian Writers*. Berkeley.: Univ. of Calif. Pr., 1976.

collection of travel journals, short-stories, and non-fictional writings, *Arabesques*. For Fusso, Gogol's *Arabesques* are to be read from an elevated perspective, meaning the reader is to understand the disjointed texts as containing a harmonious structure, in the same way that a landscape is to be viewed from a distance. This positioning allows for a panoramic view that when applied to a more intimate, or close inspection, creates an ordered and clear understanding of the area.⁴⁶ Similarly, the Islamic architectural and decorative patterning, usually containing interlocking geometric patterns, commonly referred to as "arabesque" design, is analogous to Gogol's conception of literary arts. Fusso explains that for Gogol, both literature and Islamic design contain repetition, differing viewpoints, and contextual shifts that form interlocking patterning viewed as a complex, yet ordered, whole.⁴⁷

Corresponding to Gogol's implorations to the reader in *Dead Souls*, Fusso's research into Gogol's visual predilections parallel the author's contradictory oscillation between a desire to be understood and a compulsion towards the esoteric. Just as Gogol presents intricate and complex compositions through his effusive descriptions, digressions, and introspective metaprocesses, he conversely omits traditional fictive order, such as resolution and character development, which ultimately creates a fractured and disordered appearance.

While Gogol's relationship between visual representation and literary arts can be interpreted through his fiction, it may also be explored through his letters and notes. Most discernible in his correspondences during the period 1840-1852, while writing *Dead*

⁴⁶ Fusso, Susanne. *Designing Dead Souls: An Anatomy of Disorder in Gogol*. Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1993. 126.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, 128.

Souls Volume 1 and the unfinished Volume 2, Gogol explains the interrelationships between writing and visual art. Specifically, we can surmise Gogol's inclination towards the fragmented and inconclusive in both literature and art. For example, in a letter to his sister, Gogol includes an incomplete drawing he made of a cathedral in Aachen, Germany, about which he urges, "you can complete the rest in your head."⁴⁸ This letter reflects Gogol's penchant for directive readership and most significantly his fragmentary aesthetic. As examined in the irresolute qualities of *Dead Souls*, Gogol possessed a facility for promissory actions and incompletion coupled with a mandate for a responsible reader.

In a similar way, in a letter from 1847, Gogol requests "verbal portraits" of people. This request mimics Gogol's implorations to the reader in his preface, "From the Author to the Reader" to comprehend his inconclusive text and most strikingly to likewise provide details, information, and corrections to revise the writings. In his letters, Gogol explains his craft as overtly requiring others to provide him visual outlines of characters because they are, "just as necessary to me as are the sketches to a painter who is painting a large picture." The author confides that, "although he seemingly does not include these sketches in his painting, he continually considers them so as not to confuse, not to lie, and not to depart from nature."⁴⁹

Certainly, just as Gogol explored the permeability between reader/text and author/narrator, he also conceived the pliancy of visual art and literature. In another of Gogol's stories, *Rome*, written in 1839, we find what is perhaps Gogol's most direct

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, 114.

⁴⁹ Kelly, Michael R. *Gogol and his "Necessary" Reader*. New Zealand Slavonic Journal 40 (2006): 6.

exploration of the visual and literary dynamic. The unfinished short-story *Rome* received scant critical praise at its publication and is considered by many critics to be a flawed and inconsequential work in Gogol's oeuvre. Although *Rome* is given little attention in Gogol scholarship, the writing can nevertheless be viewed as a prototype for the artistic themes that would follow its publication. Namely, *Rome* can be considered an introduction to Gogol's artistic concentrations on the idea of the fragmentary.

Noticeable in Gogol's *Rome* are the author's motives towards connecting the visual artforms of Greco-Roman antiquity to his lyrical structure within the text. The sculptural and architectural work that are populous in the city of Rome are typically marked by a fragmentary and damaged appearance. Gogol found this connection between the past and the present, the fractured and the whole, to be a fascinating conceptual problem: How do we complete a form that is by its essence a *non-completeable* form? What are ways in which we might complicate that connectivity? Gogol would essentially revel in this conceptual paradox throughout the rest of his creative outpourings. Coming to full fruition in *Dead Souls* and perhaps self-destructing under the tensions of this dilemma in the unfinished *Dead Souls* Volume 2, Gogol found that problematizing incomplete forms held more relevance over finalizing the subject. Through disorder, disruption, and incompleteness expressed directly and indirectly in the text and structure of his writings, as well as an exposure of the processes through which he is writing the text, Gogol emphasizes the overarching theme of fragmentation.

Understanding, or more often investigating, the significance of incomplete forms and ideas, Gogol approaches these questions with a multiperspective eye. However, in doing so, the author turns the questions inside-out by attempting to fill-in the incomplete

voids with hyper-verbosity, lengthy digressions, and authorial internalization. These investigative inquiries, by challenging the structures of writing fiction, inversely create newer and larger voids of understanding. Or, in a more expansive statement made by Vladimir Nabokov, “the gaps and black holes in the texture of Gogol’s style imply flaws in the texture of life itself.”⁵⁰ In essence, Gogol confronts his own self-reflective questioning as he writes and in turn provokes the reader’s desire to follow him through these exquisite, but ultimately empty voids.

⁵⁰ Nabokov, Vladimir. *Nikolai Gogol*. New York: New Directions Publishing, 1961.143.

CHAPTER VI

THE ~~TITLE~~-SERIES OF DRAWINGS

This project began as a rethinking on the premise of long-arc projects in both visual and literary practices. Typically, a series or body of research that explores specific concepts is motivated by a fundamental intention to communicate particular ideas propose a solution to the problem under investigation. Within this impetus to communicate an idea or probe an issue, the scope and proposed magnitude of the project invariably overwhelms the originary concepts. Often, when this happens, a digressive and inconclusive mode of thinking arises. This project looks at this process- both creative and epistemological- through a double lens. Exploring Gogol's *Dead Souls* as well as his unfinished planned epic, *Dead Souls* Volume 2 within the overarching condition of failure, I similarly positioned the ~~Title~~ series of drawings as a proposed long-arc project that never coalesces. By occupying the space of contingency and expectations rather than resolution, this series of drawings is meant to confront fundamental questions about how we experience literary and visual arts. Most importantly, this series of drawings and the accompanying thesis propose the solution that regardless of the acumen posed in the research, preparation, and hypothesis, the problems of misinterpretation and incomprehension are innate in a body of work.

By presenting a narrative of digressions and attending to metaprocesses involved in making a series of drawings, this body of work examines the problematic

characteristics that emerge in the formation of projects. In doing so, I underscore the disruptions in meaning that occur when constructing narratives. Additionally, the *Title* series demonstrates Gogol's use of "apparitional intertextuality" by referencing a proposed, yet absent, projected finalization of the series. While using Gogol's unfinished novels as a framework, it is imperative to clarify this approach through the interrelationships between literary texts and visual art.

Literature and visual art have shared a common lineage throughout history. From Classical Greek poetry the concept of ekphrasis, meaning written description of a painting, drawing, or sculptural object, was a literary device used to enable the reader to imagine or visualize the image that was being described. Of course, by broad definition, the rhetorical device of ekphrasis is the fundamental structure of any writing. Describing characters, places, or objects (whether it is an artwork or not) in visual terms allows the reader to correspondingly perceive and actualize the information. Literature and visual art likewise share a multitude of definitions and critical responses and have been interdependent through centuries of movements and schools of thought. From Virgil's *Aeneid* we find early ekphrastic usage that derives from a descriptive and epic tradition of poetic devices. In the 19th century, John Keats' *Ode on a Grecian Urn* explores the poet's Romantic urge to uncover the psychological implications of classical art. In the Abstract Expressionist art movement of the 1940's and 1950's the commingling of painting, poetry, and music contributed to an interdisciplinary approach towards critical analysis. While the interconnectivity of language, literature, and visual art has been established, little attention has been paid to the characteristics that are common in their formation processes.

littering the pages.⁵¹ In this exact reproduction of the manuscript, we can see the process by which this poem was formed (figure 2). Words are redacted, phrases are added, lines are moved and rearranged. Strikingly, this process of revision is presented in this book as both a poem-as-artifact of literary history and as a visual archive.

However, the book transcends being entirely defined as a typical reprinting of Eliot's poem. Specifically, because the poem in this relatively illegible and fragmented state, cannot be fully read. Yet, neither can this visual record of Eliot's manuscript be wholly deduced as a visual document because the intent of the author and editor was to correct the poem, not to depict an image or visually convey a concept through the markings. Consequently, this publication of Eliot's *The WasteLand: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts Including the Annotations of Ezra Pound* may best be considered as a paraliterary-image. In the context of an ekphrastic understanding, Eliot's manuscript, in this revised and annotated state, neither conforms to the parameters of a text that describes an image, nor an image that necessarily relates to a text. The indeterminate nature of this paraliterary-image provides a theoretical frame for uniting the *Fille* series of drawings and Gogol's unfinished novel *Dead Souls*.

The paraliterary-images found in Eliot's manuscript create an indeterminate text/image conflation. In essence, the text is not wholly accessible as a communicable writing, while it is also not a definable image. The neither/nor qualities of this paraliterary-image exist in a deferred state of completion/incompletion. Through the revision process, a definitive meaning is postponed until, presumably, the text is modified

⁵¹ *The waste land*: a facsimile and transcript of the original drafts, including the annotations of Ezra Pound / T. S. Eliot ; edited by Valerie Eliot
Published:1971. London

and reshaped. In the same way, Gogol's writings explore this deferred state of indeterminacy through the operations of metaprocess, "apparitional intertext," and fragmentation. For Gogol, writing within this indeterminate space of constant redrafting generates a text that is troubled by its own production and engages the reader in this uncertain disorder. Correspondingly, the drawings in the *Title* series reflect the metaprocesses and disruptions involved in making a series of drawings.

I conceived the *Title* series of drawings to present a narrative of digressions. I was motivated to create unrefined images that pose a contradictory space wherein one side is recognizability and the other side is insistent provisionality. In the manner of the paraliterary-image, I was concerned with devising inconsistent images and texts that ask proactive questions about the act of reading and looking rather than offering a decisive reconciliation between the two. Moreover, I considered the paraliterary-image as indicative of the text/image conflation, just as a crossed-out, or redacted word exists in this neither/nor intermediary state as both a word and an image.

Throughout this process, I postured the components of my drawings, specifically subject matter, composition, and text within the drawings to correlate visually with the

structure found in preparatory drawings for larger projects. For example, in the drawing titled, “Thesis Title 6” I began the large drawing as a representational depiction of a goat’s head (figure 3). Then, on the same paper, I incorporated an adjacent drawing of

Figure 3. Douglas Miller. Thesis Title 6. Pencil, ink, and watercolor on paper. 40 X 50 inches. 2017.

another goat in order to reiterate the previous drawing. In this way, the reiteration creates a visual interrogation which questions if the second goat were a redraft of the first, or another independent drawing. Complicating this redrafted image, I made indications of another divergent image in the top left corner of the drawing. In this way, the “Thesis Title 6” drawing becomes more about the process of revision through digressive images,

than a fixed locus of communication. Consequently, identifying a central subject in the drawing becomes problematic as the drawing deviates from image to image in different iterations.

The “Thesis Title 6” drawing also suggests, through fragmented and tentative linework displayed in the right half of the paper, that the images presented are a precursory outline for another fully realized drawing. However, the projected drawing that “Thesis Title 6” is seemingly referring to is not present in the exhibition. This promissory notion of a non-existing referent corresponds to Gogol’s implementation of “apparitional intertext.” By identifying elements such as, errant marks, notations, and inconstant orientation of the images my process mimicked the continuous action of deferred meaning that is exhibited in preliminary drawings. Just as Gogol’s “apparitional intertext” defers to an unseen text, preliminary drawings likewise mediate a proposed image. Additionally, other drawings in this series reflect the metaprocesses displayed in Gogol’s writings.

Other drawings in the *Title* series, such as “Thesis Title 3” are composed to complicate the reader/viewer relationship and demonstrate the metaprocesses involved in making a series of drawings. In the “Thesis Title 3” drawing I deliberately incorporated

Figure 4. Douglas Miller. Thesis Title 3. Ink, pencil, and acrylic on paper. 40 X 51 inches. 2018.

incomplete sentences and fragmented words that contradict and respond to the visual imagery within the drawing (figure 4). Words such as, “Graphite on paper. Ink on paper. Pencil on paper.” and “Landscape. Child’s head. Head of an old man. Allegory” are written on the drawing and contrast the depiction of the image on the paper thereby compromising a thorough understanding of the drawing. In this way, the drawing becomes explicitly about the process of making the drawing as the text surrounding the images suggests divergent imagery that is undisclosed in the actual drawing. Similar to

Gogol's metaprocesses demonstrated in his literary oeuvre, drawings such as "Thesis Title 3," challenges the significance of the imagery by placing the emphasis on its own production rather than its proposed outcome. Consequently, I am asserting that images and text, in their complex relationship, maintain an independence from the structure of representation to which they endlessly refer, but are never bound.

This series of drawings is positioned as a set of unresolved plans. The drawings represent a plurality of images and texts that oscillate within an undefined projected body of work. Similar to Roland Barthes' *The Preparation of the Novel*, I created a set of visual notations and fragmentary information that defers, yet never manifests itself in a resolution. Likewise, using Gogol's failed continuation of *Dead Souls* as well as his complications of metaprocess as a conceptual frame, this series models itself as an envisaged large-scale project that never unites in a conclusive whole because the work is continually in a state of revision.

The drawings in the ~~Title~~ series mimic the degeneration that often occurs in the process of designing a large body of work. In order to reiterate this dissolution, I installed the drawings as if the viewer were experiencing this deteriorating process. The drawings are installed, moving from left to right in the exhibition, much in the same way as English language texts are read. This movement of left-to-right, moves from structured to disordered and demonstrates the degeneration of the series. In the manner of observing an organized structure shifting to a chaotic and disordered presentation, the viewer experiences the actions of a collapsing series. Attending to the notion that viewers of the exhibition would move through the drawings, in real time, and observe the increasing chaotic nature of the work, the drawings become overwhelmingly uneven and erratic

towards the exit of the exhibition space. Demonstrating digressive characteristics over a uniform culmination, I mimicked the disorganization of information that is amplified by large-scale projects and how this discord is often all encompassing. Essentially, there are two parts of the exhibition: an orderly structured beginning and a disordered second part. Much in the same manner as Gogol's failed continuation of *Dead Souls*, I focused on creating a body of work that moves from a structured origin, yet ultimately ruptures from any organizing principle. Subsequently, this rupture frustrates attempts to conceive a unifying subject or theme in the drawings other than a disrupted plan.

Representations are troubled in this series. To create a narrative of digressions posed particular problems that I confronted by immersing myself in a condition of impulsive response to images that I depicted. To explain, I culled from news media images, art history, films, science journals, etc. with the intention of creating fragmented narratives from these disparate sources that lack a central context. Finding inspiration in preliminary drawings made by Hans Holbein (Figure 5a), architectural and nature studies made by John Ruskin (Figure 5b), and marginalia written inside books from authors such as David Foster Wallace (Figure 5c), I made my drawings appear as if they were preparatory work for larger projects. The most challenging aspect in this process was to create an authentic sense of impulsiveness in the drawings. By considering the drawings as visual notations for a larger unrealized project, I was compelled to disassociate myself from notions of consistency.

This disassociation, while unnoticed when writing notations or making genuine preliminary drawings, was difficult to negotiate by the very act setting out to premeditatively draw *unpremeditatively*. This paradox created a difficulty that I

disentangled by covering large areas of the drawing surface with newspapers and essentially ignoring any compositional space within that covered area. This obfuscation of the drawing area introduced an awkward compositional space that can be recognized in preliminary drawings, such as Holbein's hand studies (Figure 5a). Subsequently, once the newspaper was removed, I would direct my attention to the exposed area and incorporate an unrelated image or leave the negative space without any decipherable marks. Thus, the area of the drawing that was obscured became an odd locus for information. Much in the way that preparatory drawings or notations depict irregular compositional spaces, the areas of the drawing that were covered sections appear as negligent and carelessly organized elements within the drawing.

Figure 5. A.) Hans Holbein. Two Studies of the Left Hand of Erasmus of Rotterdam; Study of the Right-Hand Writing. Silverpoint, black crayon and red chalk on grey-primed paper. 10 × 7 inches, Louvre, Paris. 1523. B.) John Ruskin. Arches of the Apse of Duomo, Pisa. Watercolor. 1872. C.) Inside cover of David Foster Wallace's annotated copy of Don DeLillo's *Players*. Harry Ransom Center.

The erratic compositional components, most often at the extreme borders of the drawings, were also drawn to mimic written marginalia that is made during the initial stages of projects. Typically, marginalia made during the research and exploratory process of projects are unbound by any dominant themes other than vague preparations. For this series, referencing a multitude of subjects in the text and images of the drawings demonstrates the disordered, yet dynamic potential of ideas in their formative stages.

Furthermore, by pushing the images and written text to the boundaries of the drawing composition I emulated the act of making marginalia and notations.

The drawings in this series were made to appear as extemporaneous excerpts from the development processes of a large series of drawings. The developmental experience, as noted by Barthes in his *The Preparation of the Novel*, provides a perspective into the creation of projects that is irrecoverable in the finished work. This series aims to recover fragments of this lost experience by allowing access into the formation processes of devising a large series of drawings. However, these explorations are not negotiated by any redeemable determinations other than, as the Maurice Blanchot quote asserts in the opening introduction of this thesis, “sacrificing results to the discovery of their conditions...”⁵² Or, to put it another way, experience overcomes explanations.

In order to convey the experiential aspect of the drawings and the connectivity of literary and visual arts, I incorporated a projected animation near the center of the installation space that demonstrates the act of drawing and writing. Moreover, this hand-drawn animation reiterates the notion of the viewer’s time-based movement through the installation by serving as a connection between the organized beginning of the series to its chaotic culmination. The physical process of the animation, which includes hundreds of drawings made on vellum that are erased and revised until they lack a recognizable appearance, reinforces the overarching futility of the exhibition. To explain, as the drawings that comprise the animation transition from incremental movement-to-movement, their appearance consequently becomes convoluted as the animation advances.

⁵² Blanchot, Maurice. *The Book to Come*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003. 50.

Existing solely as a time-based phenomenon, specifically because the physical drawings were obliterated in the process of drawing each frame, the projected animation reasserts the idea of movement and digression that is evident in the two-dimensional work in the exhibition. Overall, I concentrated on making a time-based component for the exhibit that referenced the two-dimensional drawings in both subject and experience. The images in the animation, mostly hands erasing texts and drawings as well as hands fluctuating between writing and drawing, were animated to appear as predecessors of the two-dimensional drawings. To make the viewer or “experiencer” in the exhibit question if they are witnessing the creation of the two-dimensional drawings or the production of the animation itself in the drawn animation? Or, are they seeing a film that is meant to connect the literary and visual themes in the exhibit by animating the actions of writing and drawing? Perhaps more questions arise from the animation than are settled by its presence. This state of irresolution, much in the same way as the two-dimensional drawings, is explored and demonstrated in the animation both in its process and presentation.

Overall, the drawings and animation in the *Title* exhibition are a narrative of digressions. Each mark, erratic line, and unfinished image demonstrates the actions of both visual artists and authors in their preparatory processes. Correspondingly, the drawings and animation are positioned to represent components of a large-scale project that has devolved into a disorganization of information. Ultimately, this series mimics a failed series. In this way, the series displaces the viewer's understanding of failure by creating a paradox: is a series about failure successfully achieved? Moreover, by the actions of metaprocess and "apparitional intertext" the series self-reflects on its own

production and emphasizes the impossibilities, fallibilities, and deviations that occur in creating a series. By illuminating the preliminary and provisional, I looked towards uncovering the productions of meaning, in all of its misdirected, desirous, and incongruous actions. Capturing fleeting details, however abbreviated, which never form a cohesive conclusion.

CHAPTER VII

(IN)CONCLUSION

This thesis and the accompanying exhibition of drawings explores the relationship between the literary and visual arts through an examination of the overarching concept of failure. While the theme of failure may on the surface appear to be a subject to avoid, I have found that it is often used as a motivating force in the creative process. Samuel Beckett's quotation, "Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better."⁵³ is commonly taped to the messy walls of art studios and author's desks and is poised to encourage the persistence necessary to artmaking.

While positioned as a positive element in the process of formulating artwork, my research has revealed that simply identifying the usefulness of failure does not entirely address the complex relationship of failed projects and the digressive processes involved in formulating large-scale endeavors. Of course, failure is a necessary component of all projects. Indeed, as I am writing this thesis I have deleted words, entire paragraphs, and revised failing passages. Perhaps even this very sentence I should have corrected. But, it is in this mode of revision where authors, such as Gogol, manipulate the text to speak to the very functions of artmaking and reveal a troubled, but arguably more astute significance in the work. The difficulty is identifying that particular significance. Do artists and authors intentionally make work about the processes of making the artwork in order to expose the artifice of representation? If this is so, the question must be do these

⁵³ Tereszewski, Marcin. *The Aesthetics of Failure: Inexpressibility in Samuel Beckett's Fiction*. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013. 21.

self-reflective works necessarily demand a coherent subject? That is, is the process alone the subject?

For this research, I have intentionally avoided contemplating the subject. Taking from Gogol's approach to writing, which arguably is less about the subject of his writing than how he is writing, I have mostly ignored mentioning the plot, the storyline, or other narrative elements in *Dead Souls*. The seemingly irrelevance of narrative structures in *Dead Souls* was made explicit by Gogol while he was in the planning stages of the novel as he wrote to the poet Alexander Pushkin and casually asked "for some plot."⁵⁴ Plot or subject was secondary to Gogol's craft and the drawings in this series, modeled on themes within Gogol's work, are likewise supplemental to the process and problems of representation.

By recognizing the fallible and inconclusive nature of this process of interpretation, I approached this research confident in the capacity to illuminate the features of literature and visual art and where they might intersect. However, I found that most prescient area to research resided in the processes of their arrangements rather than their conclusions.

Predominantly, I discovered that the most intriguing relationship resided in the formulation processes, rather than the outcomes of both literary and visual art forms. In essence, both preliminary drawings and preparatory notes inhabit a similar space that is dictated by fundamental conditions of unknowingness, contingency, and anticipation.

⁵⁴ Gogol, Nikolai Vasil'evich, and Carl R. Proffer. Letters of Nikolai Gogol. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1967. 52.

Under this approach, I located my drawings in this series within this complicated but intriguing discourse.

While its structure may seem unorthodox, namely a lengthy section devoted to the enigmatic 19th century Russian author, Nikolai Gogol, I immersed myself in his writings in order to find parallels as well as discrepancies between literature and visual art.

Literary theorists such as, Roland Barthes as well as a postmodern framework of literary interpretation provided a substantive and insightful methodology that I found beneficial to better understand my own relationship to the processes of drawing. By conflating the aspects of metaprocess and “apparitional intertext” in Gogol’s writings and examining their relativity to visual art practices, I devised the *Title* series of drawings to illustrate the methods by which I might approach an end result. Referencing the drawings to those nebulous states of fragmentation, digression, and disorder found in literary texts expanded my definition of two-dimensional artwork to include themes typically reserved for literary analysis. Ultimately, I found that the distinction between text and image is brought closer by analyzing the procedures and generative aspects of their formation. Within this understanding there is a condition of failure that both drives the creative process and contrarily impedes the process. Anyone who has ever attempted long-arc writings or large-scale projects understands this paradox.

Correspondingly, I fashioned this series around the overarching characteristics of failure that engulf large-scale projects and made the work in this series appear to contend with the irreconcilable nature of failed plans. The topic of failure is not only emblematic to works of literature and visual art, but an issue that most people can recognize in their own lives. From missed opportunities, failing grades, broken marriages, bankruptcies,

etc. the circumstances of failure are universal and formidable. Indeed, this thesis itself is not immune to the very conditions of failure that it espouses. Will this be misunderstood? Moreover, how do I successfully complete a thesis that explores notions such as incompleteness? Have I incorporated all the information effectively? Was this thesis submitted in time?

This research looked at an approach towards ideas of failed large-scale projects and ultimately was most informed by the digressions, deviations, and disorganization of information that swell around the strategies used to resolve problems. The contingency and expectations of unsettled questions provoke a significant intrigue that underscores a perhaps misguided belief that answers will result. It is within that impossible state of deferred signification that this research and the accompanying drawings dwell. While motivated by literary discourse, specifically the operations of authors both in the formation processes of writing and the manipulations of the author within the text, this research lead me to discover a more expansive understanding of problem-solving.

Ultimately, I found that what compels us to find answers, solutions, and determinations is...but, perhaps it is better to conclude such research in the manner through which it originated---indeterminate.

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APPENDIX A: LIST OF IMAGES FROM THE *TITLE* EXHIBITION

1. Installation View 1. Mixed-media on paper. 2018.
2. Installation View 2. Mixed-media on paper. 2018.
3. Installation View 3. Mixed-media on paper. 2018.

1. Installation View 1. Mixed-media on paper. 2018.

2. Installation view 2. Mixed-media on paper. 2018.

3. Installation view 3. Mixed-media on paper. 2018.

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