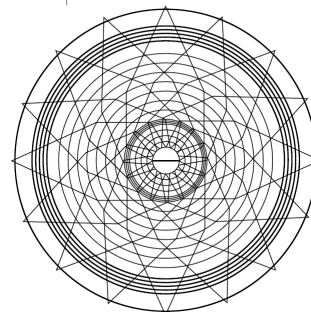


[Scientific Articles]

Omelchenko E.

Fascination Signals in Rene Magritte's Painting Titles



FASCINATION SIGNALS IN RENE MAGRITTE'S PAINTING TITLES¹

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Abstract:

The article deals with the art of the famous Belgian surrealist artist René Magritte in communicative aspect. A painting and its title are considered as the special type of a text in which speech persuasive potential is realized. Conceptual bases of the research are the theory of interpretation by Y.M. Lotman, the theory of dialogue by M.M. Bakhtin and the idea of empathic, fascinative perception of a text. The author proves the major fascinative means of Magritte's paintings are metaphor and paradox.

Keywords: fascination, visual metaphor, interpretation, ambivalence

Any art is always a text, a message. The question is only in ability to read it.
(Victor Pivovarov)

Introduction

The study attempts to connect Rene Magritte's paintings (visual artistic communication) with their titles (verbal artistic communication). A painting and its title are considered as the peculiar type of text, where verbal and non-verbal components realize their persuasive potential.

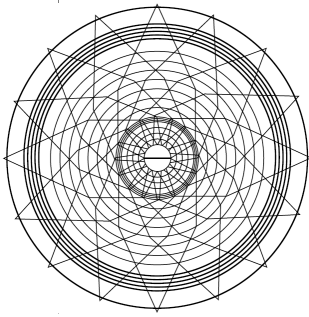
Rene Magritte expressed the idea of his arts in the following way:

Between words and objects one can create new relations and specify characteristics of language and objects generally ignored in everyday life.

(as cited in Foucault, 1999, p. 47)

Rene Magritte considered his artistic style as magic realism and paid special attention to the new vision of common things. He combined unrelated objects in his paintings in paradoxical and metaphorical ways. Signs, symbols trigger an interpretation of an art phenomenon — Magritte's images need to be decoded. At this point his art is based on the principles of mystery, breaking stereotypes, changing view on familiar

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[Scientific Articles]

Omelchenko E.

Fascination Signals in Rene Magritte's Painting Titles

things, void of special kind, linked to silence, contemplation, and development of a viewer's imagination, logic thinking, emotions and associations.

Magritte's art is metaphorical due to transformation of meanings of objects and paintings titles. This transformation pushes a viewer to dialogue with the author through his paintings as visual texts.

Interpretation Features

The title is the thing that changes a viewer's perception and comprehension of a painting. One looking at an apple is proposed the new paradoxical way of perception and comprehension by the author.

The author says: "It's not an apple". At this moment, the author directs the process of perception guiding exploration of artistic narration by a viewer.

Magritte provokes destruction of stereotype, change of point of view, seeing a new quality of an object, an alternative interpretation of a phenomenon. In this case, a word in a title determines the following perception. "An object needs to be covered in order to be recognized at all" (R. Magritte). The title of a painting becomes fascinative signal for a viewer to start his interpretation.

Let us define the concept "interpretation" in the study. Valery Demyankov (1989) considers it as a cognitive process, a result of making sense of speech and non-speech activities.

In the process of interpretation (Gadamer, 1988; Shchirova & Goncharova, 2018) the intentionality of the creative process (the author's intention) and personality (as a categorical property of the personality of the addressee perceiving the text) are conditionally combined. On the one hand, it is a process of perceiving the meaning of information and fascination (Omelchenko, 2013) — both contained in a creative phenomenon. On the other hand, it is a subjectively organized process, depending on the personality of an addressee (his background knowledge, motivation, experience and perception). The success of understanding is harmonized with the author's intention.

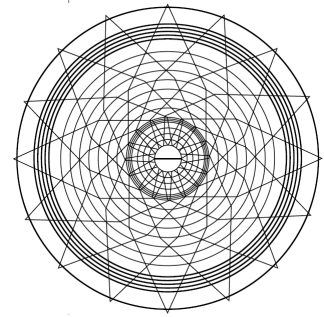
The category of dialogism and the phenomenon of dialogue of cultures, discovered by Mikhail Bakhtin (1979), imply an insight into the meaning of an artistic phenomenon, the subsequent comprehension of this meaning with the expansion of semantic fields and an increase in information. The intent of an author can be not only perceived, but also expanded. The viewer himself, who becomes a co-author of the text, deepens the meaning of the artistic phenomenon.

Magritte's paintings can be viewed as an embodied word, as an endless, open, interpreted text. Magritte admitted that "The titles of the pictures were chosen in such a

[Scientific Articles]

Omelchenko E.

Fascination Signals in Rene Magritte's Painting Titles



way as to keep anyone from assigning my paintings to the familiar region that habitual thought appeals to in order to escape perplexity" (Foucault, 1994). It was of great importance to him. Names were assigned to the paintings after completion of a work. And they were often the subject of discussion with writers.

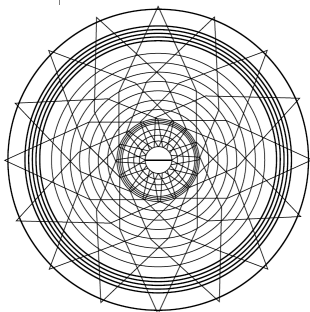
René Magritte was one of the first who placed a word on a picture, arguing that words and images are of the same nature: "In a painting the words are of the same substance as the images". In his understanding of naming paintings, Magritte was close to Michel Foucault. Foucault in his work "The Order of Things" (Foucault, 1994) created the concept of a calligram, the purpose of which was to introduce a contradiction, to separate the form and the text ("to confuse all traditional relationships between language and image"). This led to the choice of a painting title regardless of its plot, which were the source of interpretations and associations. Magritte: "I think that the best title of a picture is a poetic one. The poetic title has nothing to teach us, but it must surprise us and enchant us". According to Magritte, it is the title that does not just "ask" a picture at random, but makes you "heed" it, that is, perceive and understand the painting in a new way in a long contemplation and comparison of an image and its title.

In this sense, Magritte's painting is a game with meanings. He established different relationships between words in their connotative manifestations. "An object is not so attached to its name that we cannot find another one that would suit it better." Foucault, reflecting on the painting of Magritte, deciphered the calligram as a combination of a word and an image, turning into a "word-and-picture", which comments on both the language and the image. Similarly as a letter is an image which at the same time fixes and writes down a word ("represents and speaks, shows and names"). Magritte made a metaphor visible.

The concept of "Lotman's Flower" is a productive way to understand the mechanism of appearance of additional meanings in a text perception.

"Lotman's Rose" (Alpatov, 2005; Voloshinov, 2001), "Lotman's Flower" (Shubnikov & Koptsik, 1972) is a model of relations of meaning and text, the fractal flower-like figure, each of the petals of which reflects an infinite number of self-similar variants of reading a text (Picture 1).

Flower petals are semiosphere or semantic fields conditioned by the increment of meaning to the author's intention (core of meaning). This model helps us to understand how additional meanings ("semantic plasma") arise, taking into account the cultural context and the "otherness" of the text is formed (a plurality of associative chains arising as a field of text interpretation).



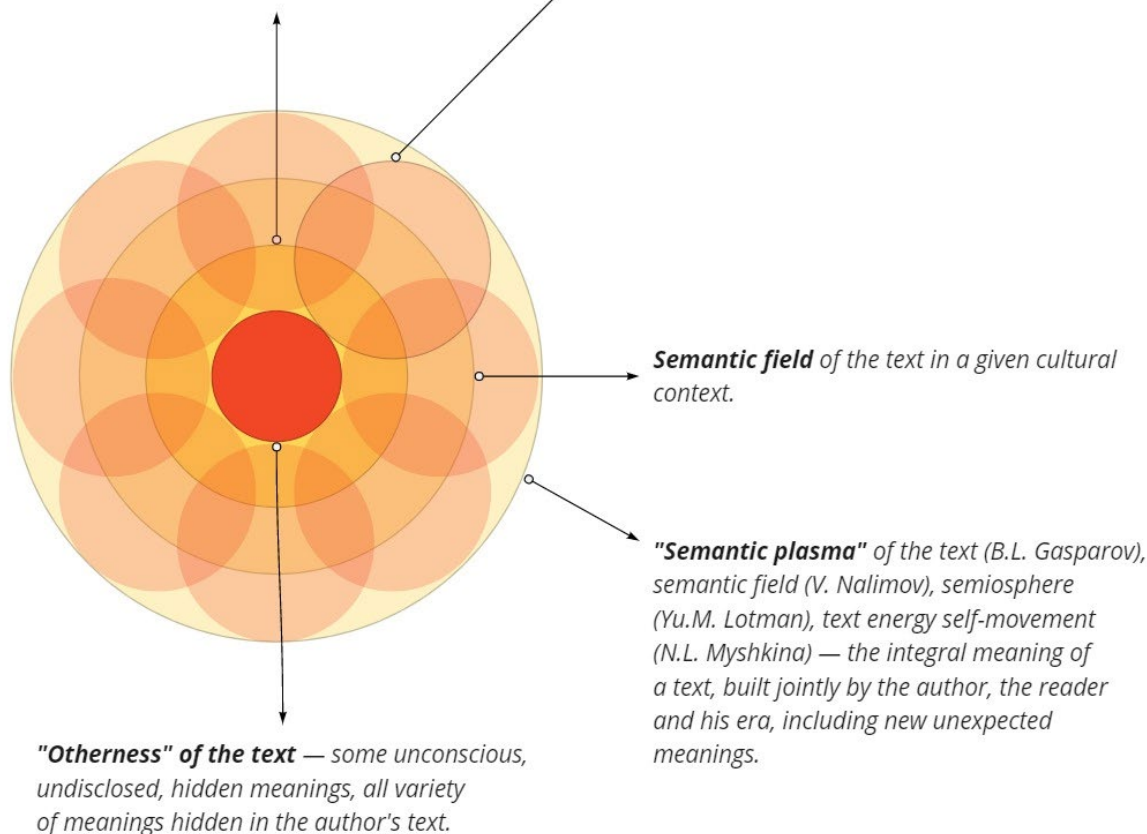
[Scientific Articles]

Omelchenko E.

Fascination Signals in Rene Magritte's Painting Titles

Author's text — material and symbolic embodiment of the author's thought. A set of meanings that in reading may turn out to be deeper than meanings embedded by the author.

Meanings-in-reading — the components of the author's text go beyond its boundaries: embodiment of the ideas that the reader and his era bring to the text.



Picture 1. Lotman's Rose

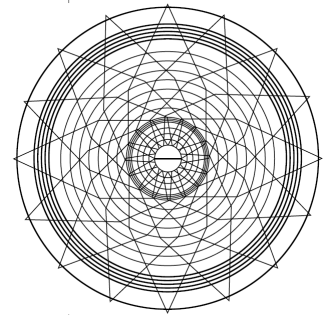
Yuri Lotman (1992; 2016) focused on the fact that culture, by its nature, comes down to a word. Figuratively speaking, a thing in a cultural-semiotic context tends to become a word. We can observe it especially vividly in art, in the depiction of things. Yu.M. Lotman noted that in art a word "grows" with knowledge, signs, becoming an "emblem". Talking about Magritte's art, his ordinary objects, things become the objects of special attention, and the names of the paintings decode and at the same time change the meaning of the pictures: "sometimes the name of an object takes the place of an image". Therefore, the image and the word influence each other, they are dynamic and syncretic (Shredder & Muskhelishvili, 2010).

Umberto Eco (2014), speaking about the openness of an artistic phenomenon, noted that the author represents a completed creative product, and the addressee

[Scientific Articles]

Omelchenko E.

Fascination Signals in Rene Magritte's Painting Titles



brings his experience to understanding the product, using "an individual manner of feeling." The viewer is involved in the interaction of stimuli and response — in a dialogue with the author of a piece of art and the context of his existence. Therefore, a piece of art can be enriched with countless interpretations.

The name of Magritte's paintings is part of his peculiar attitude to the world and the refraction of the world on his canvases. He argued that word and image, word and thing are conditional. There is a kind of unrecognized space between the word and the thing, "the word is freed from the obsession of naming." By renaming concepts into semiotic categories, one can prove that there are many variations between sign and meaning, in other words, it is possible to manipulate meanings in the course of changing their role in contexts. It is the multivariance of the essence and the numerous relationships between the meanings that form the possibility of new knowledge. Ludwig Wittgenstein (1958) called this "meaning in use" — "meaning is revealed in application."

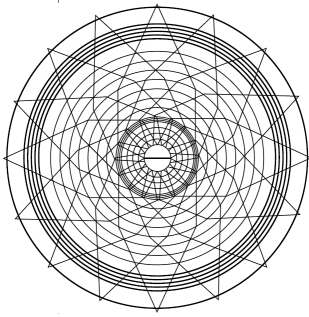
David Sylvester (1992), studied Magritte's painting, an author of a monograph on the artist's work, believed that paintings' title is "an intellectual provocation that makes the viewer compare the incomparable, change the meaning and perceive the canvas in this new aspect."

This approach, combining word and image, made it possible to build up interpretations and conditioned "the insinuity of representation." According to Sylvester, the perception of Magritte's paintings is "a kind of awe that one experiences at the moment of an eclipse." This is a state of super attention, compared to bewitching, "dragging out", "hanging", emotional "whirling". All these characteristics relate to fascination (Sokovnin, 2005) as a neurophysiological and cognitive phenomenon.

Joseph Kosuth (1969), a conceptualist, attached great importance to the word and name. "By naming things, we make the world understandable." Meaning appears at the junction of an object (signified) and a word (sign). The gap between the world of ideas and objects, the signified and the sign highlights "conventionality and convention." This is what makes it possible to present the concept (in this case, the author's intention) as a variability of meanings. From the point of view of Kossuth, the essence of art lies in the concrete presentation of an image with the obligatory presentation in the form of a verbal text. It expands intellectual comprehension and empathic perception of an art. In essence, the concept of Joseph Kossuth is associated with the main ideas of the hermeneutics of the text (Heidegger, 2007).

Memory of a Journey

In the artwork "Memory of a Journey" the Leaning Tower of Pisa is supported by a giant feather. A feather is not only a writing instrument and a symbol of creativity, but



[Scientific Articles]

Omelchenko E.

Fascination Signals in Rene Magritte's Painting Titles

also a sign of the memory's ability to record impressions and to do it even more subtly and filigree than it is recorded on a paper.

We see the paradox: the monumental tower, standing for centuries, is supported by a light feather, as if carried by the wind. The meaning of this antithesis can be deciphered like this: the objects of travellers' interest most often have a solid history and powerful energy, and the impressions from them are light and somewhat ghostly due to their hyperemotionality.

Blood Will Tell (La Voix du sang)

There is also a paradox in the titles of Magritte's paintings, giving rise to new verbal and visual images. Consider the painting "The Voice of the Blood". The title of the painting by the direct meaning of the idiom "blood will tell" is associated with the presence of kinship, genes, common properties passed from generation to generation. These archetypes, the memory of ancestors determine the common way of thinking, perception of the world, and individual characteristics.

From the point of view of human evolution, "the voice of the blood" is a call of ancestors, an inner voice, that makes us remember our roots.

Magritte's painting represents a mighty tree as a symbol of eternal nature, the power of a family, and knowledge. A house inside a tree, which looks like a hollow, can be perceived in different ways, but it is probably the materialization of those ancestral roots, a fixation of the moment of past memories. Memory is objective (gene memory) and subjective (human memory selects certain meaningful memories) at the same time. The tree is a part of the universe, the macrocosm. The house is a microcosm; lit windows convey a sense of peace and confidence to the viewer — the house and the windows are under the "protection" of a gigantic family tree.

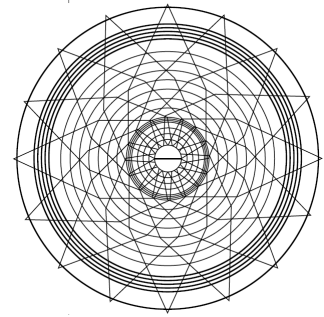
The image of an egg has an ambiguous interpretation. On the one hand, it is a sign, a symbol of birth, the circle of life. On the other hand, it is a small ball-sized universe in human memory, connected with his memories of childhood, with spontaneous ideas about the eternity of everything around and immortality, repetition and the universal structure of life.

Metaphorization, hyperbolization, paradoxicality of the image bring the new meaning, emotive connotations into the semantics of the idiom. The concepts of "nature", "Universe", "protection", "memory", "balance", "birth — rebirth", "infinity of space" continue the associative chain. The idiom is filled with an abstract philosophical meaning. The "small" human world is a part of vast nature. The visual metaphor continuing these associative chain acquires an infinity of meaning: this provokes prolonged contemplation and a special perception of the picture.

[Scientific Articles]

Omelchenko E.

Fascination Signals in Rene Magritte's Painting Titles



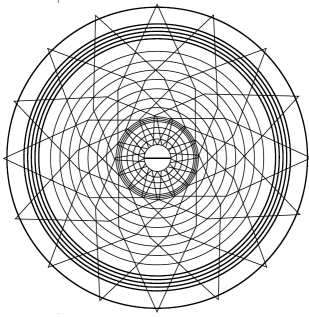
The Art of Conversation

The title of the painting "The Art of Conversation" first orients the viewer to a stereotypical image. However, moving companions to the cloud is the source of multiple associations. Another title for the painting — "Endless Confession" — is a metaphor. A kind of increment of the meaning of concepts is concentrated in it — the sky, the universe, infinity. The semantic field expands: the conversation is associated with communication where time is lost. Communication as infinity, as search for common vision, as revelation, confession, and self-expression.

"L'Art de la conversation marks the anonymous attraction of things that form their own words in the face of men's indifference, insinuating themselves, without men even being aware of it, into their daily chatter". (Foucault, 1994; 1999).

The two are talking against the giant white chess pieces, which take the form of colossal monuments, reminiscent of the columns of ancient Roman temples. The chess pieces are surrounded by giant leaf-shaped vegetation. If a tree is traditionally perceived as a symbol of living nature, a leaf of a tree, in addition, personifies the change of seasons and changes in general. In the painting, the leaf replaces the tree, while the perspective of the canvas reveals the same painting. The conversation takes place against the eternity of chess "sculptures" and leaves, hypertrophied to the size of trees. The persons are much smaller in scale than the landscape, but it is paradoxical that they are the semantic center of the composition.

Contextual meanings emerge, enhanced by visual images. Magritte defined the state of inspiration as follows: "I think it is a marvel to travel through the sky on the earth". Perhaps the artist moved the conversation from the earth to the sky to reflect the fascination of the interlocutors. The perception of the painting "The Art of Conversation" reflects repetition, infinity, hyperbolization, changes in parameters, frames, shift of space. The forest is not a plenty of trees, but giant leaves. Chess pieces, rearranged by a human hand in real life, acquire the scale of gigantic columns. The content of the conversation, dialogue may differ from real information, the subject of the conversation becomes fantastic, the period of time becomes immeasurable and repetitive. Passionate interlocutors do not notice either time or space. The forest on the canvas is relict, the columns are archaic. The semantic field of the stable word combination "The Art of Conversation" expands through the inclusion of the connotative meanings "eternity", "infinity", "space", "time".



The Empire of Light

The title of the painting "Empire of Light" is metaphorical. An image of the universal power of light arises, it is visually confirmed by the image of a clear blue sky. This light is all-pervading.

The central part of the painting is an image of a house with lit windows and a night lamp reflected in the pond. This combination of the incompatible is both metaphorical and paradoxical: the dominance of light is affirmed at night. But it is the light that makes you take a fresh look at the house at night.

Magritte explained: "What is represented in a picture is what is visible to the eye, it is the thing or the things that had to be thought of. Thus, what is represented in the picture are the things I thought of, to be precise, a nocturnal landscape and a skyscape such as can be seen in broad daylight. The landscape suggests night and the skyscape day. This evocation of night and day seems to me to have the power to surprise and delight us. I call this power: poetry" (Magritte, 1956).

The painting deprives the word "night" of the connotation "fear", causing associations of "comfort", "calm", "home", "expectation", "warmth". Thus, a visual metaphor, confirmed verbally ("power", "empire of light"), allows us to find a semantic balance. New meanings appear — we read the painting as a text where day and night coexist peacefully. The hidden connection between the title and the image creates the feeling of magical surprise, which Magritte considered the mission of art.

The meaning of concepts is transformed In the metaphor and a calm, natural change of time of day is affirmed. The triumph of daylight merges with the tranquility of the night landscape. This creates both inner balance and ambivalence.

Magritte conveyed metaphors in the titles of his paintings to change a viewer's perception: "Plain of Air", "The Hesitation Waltz", "Time Transfixed".

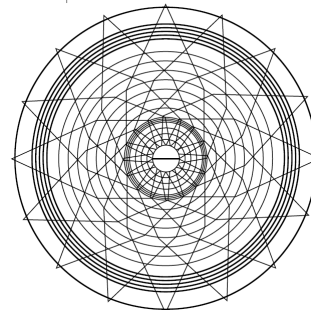
Conclusion

Metaphorization is a powerful fascinating tool that leverages multiple cognitive processes: perception, creative analysis, transformation and building up of meanings, creation of the new images, endowed with immanent influences on a viewer's consciousness / subconsciousness. An image created by a metaphor is always a mystery, requiring a search for a clue and a special, hidden meaning. Magritte realized that "the mind loves the unknown" and that his paintings "evoke mystery." One of the important messages of his work is the following: "Too often by a twist of thought, we tend to reduce what is strange to what is familiar. I intend to restore the familiar to the strange".

[Scientific Articles]

Omelchenko E.

Fascination Signals in Rene Magritte's Painting Titles



The basic principle of Magritte's art is paradox — a fascinating phenomenon. It is fixed visually and verbally. Magritte's paradoxes always dictate a multi-layered interpretation.

Magritte's paintings are a unique world where reality is captured in a peculiar way, emotions and clear logic are combined. The fascination of their perception is manifested in the fine lines of rare aspects of familiar things and images. Julian Barnes (2020), an English writer and essayist, in his book "Keeping an Eye open" highlighted the stylistic features of Magritte's paintings — "coldness and flatness." But in the process of in-depth perception and contemplation they become emotional and voluminous artistic phenomena that make "the eye think in a completely different way."

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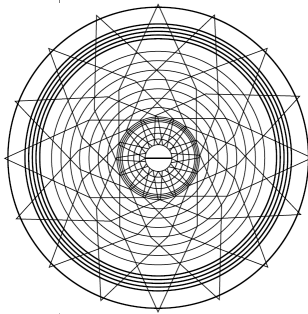
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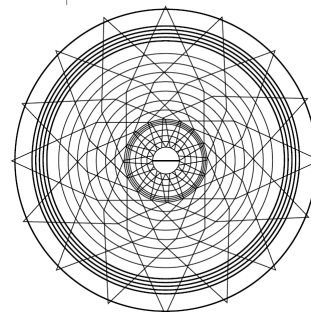
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[Scientific Articles]

Omelchenko E.

Fascination Signals in Rene Magritte's Painting Titles



ФАСЦИНАТИВНЫЕ СИГНАЛЫ В НАЗВАНИЯХ ПОЛОТЕН РЕНЕ МАГРИТТА

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Аннотация:

Рассматривается творчество бельгийского художника Рене Магритта в аспекте коммуникации. Картина и ее название представляют собой особый тип текста, в котором реализуется воздействующий потенциал речи. Концептуальными основами исследования являются теория интерпретации (М. Ю. Лотман), теория диалога (М. М. Бахтин), идея эмпатического, фасцинативного восприятия текста. В исследовании доказано, что основными фасцинативными средствами полотен Магритта являются метафоризация и парадокс.

Ключевые слова: Магритт, фасцинация, визуальная метафора, интерпретация, амбивалентность, René Magritte