



Footnotes. Every Artwork as
a Different Entry to the Same Show

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Illustration: Maurice Sendak

I admit my lack of imagination. When I go to an exhibition, I very often catch myself feeling as if I'm in a famous scene from the 1999 movie *Being John Malkovich*. In this scene, the protagonist John Malkovich, impersonating his fictional self, enters his own consciousness through an unexpectedly discovered portal and meets all kinds of his own alter egos – in this scene, every Other (including language) is an equivalent of Malkovich's character. You must have seen it. Why do I feel this way? I will explain shortly.

I suggest you conduct a small experiment and imagine an exhibition not as a sum of all the physical works that make it up, but rather as a space for the viewer's encounter with the works, where the exhibition is an indivisible unit, a qualitatively new integral space. How can we speak about such a subjective space?

Vladimir Nabokov's novel *Pale Fire* (1962) consists of two structural parts – the 999-lines-long heroic poem *Pale Fire*, written by the fictional author John Shade, and the commentary to this poem by the scholar Charles Kinbote, Shade's neighbour and colleague. Together these two parts form a narrative in which both authors are simultaneously the protagonists. Similarly, returning to the topic of exhibition-going, any exhibition is at the very least a binary system. First, the works in an exhibition are comments of the exhibition space, collectively created by all the featured works, and, second, they are works in themselves, because, apart from a few exceptions, they were such before the exhibition and will remain such after it is over.

Or let's say that a work of art functions as a teleportation machine (or a footnote). The theoretical model of a teleportation device is based on the idea of a copy machine, rather than on one of a means of transportation – e.g. a wormhole between different spacetimes. For instance, if you wished to be teleported, you would first be scanned, and then the data describing you would be sent to the desired teleportation destination, where a new you would be printed. Thus, at least two versions of you would exist – albeit in two different spacetimes.

Let us continue this experiment. Imagine yourself simultaneously entering the same space – say, an exhibition space – through different doors: six of them, for instance, or, better yet, twelve, and all of you meeting inside. Twelve of you, almost identical, in one space. Almost – because all of you would have come in through different doors, and therefore a minuscule portion of the information you have would be different. I'm curious what kind of conversation you would have.

I must repeat: I lack imagination. But you certainly know what you would be talking about, don't you?