

Title: Ivanov's Gogol and the Supra-Individual
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Abstract:

Vyacheslav Ivanov's essay on *The Government Inspector* identifies that play with the aesthetics of Aristophanes, and particularly with the Old Comedy and its use of the chorus. This identification moves Ivanov to posit some rather forced equivalencies and to see a kind of phantom-Athens behind Gogol's town. It can seem that Ivanov's own interest in memory, tradition, and ritual turn *The Inspector* into a mere vehicle for his own preoccupations. However, Ivanov and Gogol share an underlying goal: to conceive of the person as potentially distinct from the individual. The Old Comedy, Dionysianism, the theme of the pretender, a town filled with largely interchangeable characters (Ivanov calls it a "human antheap"), and the "self-fashioning of the collective" are in this sense all semiotic gestures expressing the provisionality of human boundaries—something also familiar from *Wednesdays at Ivanov's Tower* apartment earlier in the century, and from his interest in Khomiakov's concept of sobornost. The reading by one writer of another is of course another version of the same phenomenon, Ivanov's Gogol being a composite reducible to neither component author. Thus in the final section of his essay, where he proposes an idea for a production of *The Government Inspector*, Ivanov uses Gogol against Gogol: the playwright's insistence on simplicity and naturalness in performance are undercut, Ivanov argues, by Gogol's own (hardly naturalistic) way of writing. "Gogol" thus becomes a kind of event emerging from the interaction of a set of heterogeneous Gogol-potentials with a set of Ivanov-interests. This paper will explore both authors' attempts to reconfigure "units" of personhood, as well as the confluence of those attempts in Ivanov's essay.