

Medium and Mystery:
Byzantine Iconography in Light of the Media Theory of Marshall McLuhan

Louise St. Germain

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Master's degree in Theology

Faculty of Theology
Saint Paul University

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SUMMARY

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Theology, Saint Paul University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Theology. Ottawa, Canada. July 14, 2020

This thesis endeavours to answer, “What does it mean for something to be an icon?” Though this is not a new question, it attempts a unique approach by using media theorist Marshall McLuhan’s four laws of media, as well as his associated tetrad method of organizing the dynamic effects of a medium, as a framework in the analysis. The first part of the thesis reviews contributions from various fields that will inform the inquiry: Orthodox theology (past and present), especially with respect to iconoclasm and iconicity; phenomenology and its study of the experience of art and icons; art theory, including the effect of perspective in art; and media theory, which is the domain of McLuhan as mentioned above. The second part of this thesis proposes an original tetrad for iconography, derived from McLuhan’s existing tetrad for Cubist art and from the theology of iconography. The new tetrad elucidates iconography’s effects on observers, its role in veneration and worship, and its sensitivity to factors such as its environment and the attitudes of its observers. This leads into the conclusion of the thesis, which summarizes the results to date and identifies potential steps for further study of the icon as a medium.

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INTRODUCTION

Since the very beginning of Christianity, Christians have been creating art not only to express their faith, but also to serve as a means of connecting to their religious tradition and deepening their relationship with the divine. This has not been without its controversies; the legitimacy of creating images of the divine has required defence both in interfaith dialogue (e.g., with Judaism and Islam), as well as within Christianity (e.g., factions in the Iconoclastic Controversy, and more recently, ecumenical dialogue with post-Reformation iconoclasm). In contemporary Eastern Christian texts, a distinction is often made between icons and other religious art, indicating that not all such art can be categorized as iconography. It is not usually clear why or how such a distinction can be made, however, especially if the distinction is on the basis of artistic style.¹ Therefore, the key question for this thesis is, “What makes an icon an icon, rather than ‘religious art?’—or otherwise put, “What does it mean for something to be an icon?”

Since this will be a difficult question to answer without any sort of framework to guide the enquiry, Marshall McLuhan’s theory of the Four Laws of Media, and its associated tetrad (a method of displaying characteristics associated with each of these laws), will be proposed as a hermeneutic. Since McLuhan defines a medium as “any extension of ourselves,”² which includes paintings and, by association, icons, the specific investigation in this thesis will be to determine

¹ The role of artistic style will be discussed in detail in the body of this text, but distinctions based on artistic style are often polemical in tone. For example, Archbishop Lazar Puhalo compares two images of St. Christopher—one a traditional Byzantine icon, the other a Western painting—with similar composition and subject matter, saying that in the icon, Christopher is redeemed and transfigured, while in the Western image, he is an ordinary person still bound to the fallen world. [Lazar Puhalo, *The Ikon as Scripture: A Scriptural and Spiritual Understanding of Orthodox Christian Ikonography* (Dewdney, BC: Synaxis Press, 1997), 59.]

² Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, ed. W. Terrence Gordon, Critical edition. (Corte Madera, CA: Gingko Press, 2003), 19.

whether McLuhan's Laws of Media can provide an adequate framework with which to structure a pertinent response to our question regarding the nature of the icon.

Structure and Methodology

This thesis is organized into two major parts. The first provides a detailed overview of the contributions from various fields that will feature in the process of reflecting on icons. This part has two goals. The first is to identify, clarify, and flesh out the concepts, problems, and themes that will be incorporated, either explicitly or implicitly, in the proposed tetrad for iconography. The second is to begin to establish the links between these areas of study, where these links have not been explicitly described before. To begin with, we will probe Orthodox theology, past and present, focussing on two major periods: The Iconoclastic Controversy of the 8th-9th centuries, followed by Orthodox modernity, i.e., the literature spanning the 20th century through to the present. The philosophical field of phenomenology will be the second major area of enquiry, since it offers a unique and pertinent perspective on the ways in which icons are experienced. One theorist in particular, Jean-Luc Marion, has written specifically about icons, constructing an important bridge between theology and philosophy through phenomenology. The third major area of thought to be brought into dialogue will be art theory, especially as it relates to the question of perspective. This will in turn provide a useful segue into Cubism, which will be the key comparison when discussing art and iconography. From there, we will come to Marshall McLuhan's work, especially in the area of media and communication theory: this will show itself to be a useful framework with which to organize discussions about iconology. Especially pertinent is McLuhan's tetrad, a unique tool for analyzing and organizing the dynamic effects of a given medium (whether an icon or a Cubist painting). With all these elements, by the end of

Part I, I have collected and sorted through all the pertinent pieces and relationships that then enable me, in the second part, to build a tetrad for iconography.

The second part of the thesis is the main original contribution of this work, which proposes that a tetrad for iconography can help us to respond to the question, “what makes an icon an icon?” This is the hypothesis, stated specifically according to the framework of McLuhan’s laws of media. This tetrad is populated with insights gained from the theological analysis of iconography in Part I. The rest of Part II proceeds to test the validity and value of the tetrad, this time by looking at the dynamic relationships implied in each of the laws of media (enhancement, obsolescence, retrieval, and reversal). I frequently use Cubism as a comparison in order to determine whether a “tetradic” definition of icons is specific enough to be able to describe icons while distinguishing them from Cubist paintings, which are not icons. The first section of Part II establishes the similarities and parallels between Cubism and iconography, while the second notes the areas in which these two are distinguished or even opposed, pointing out the distinctive characteristics of icons. The third and final section of Part II applies what has been learned through the tetrad analysis to a unique case—the Cubist icon and other Cubist religious art. This “hybrid” case tests the strengths and limitations of the analysis conducted hitherto, leading us to the conclusion of the thesis, where we summarize the results to date and identify potential steps for further enquiry.

This approach is valuable because it allows so many further questions to be investigated as they concern icons. My purpose here is not to carry out all of these investigations, which for reasons of length cannot be included in this thesis. Rather, my purpose has been to demonstrate the soundness of my hypothesis, and to show that the tetrad I have constructed has significant scholarly and conceptual value.

Limitations and Assumptions

Of course, given the interdisciplinary scope of the question and the length of this paper, certain limitations and assumptions are unavoidable. To reduce the topic to a manageable size, the iconography discussed has been limited to that of the Byzantine tradition, though iconography plays a central role in several other expressions of Eastern Christianity (e.g., Coptic and Ethiopian Orthodoxy). Stylistic differences between distinct periods and schools of Byzantine iconography are also not addressed here, in order to keep the focus on its more universal characteristics. Furthermore, though the term “modern art” encompasses a spectrum of heterogeneous and often unrelated movements, I have chosen to focus on Cubism as an illustrative, if not exhaustive, representative for our method. Further studies could certainly extend the comparison both to other forms of iconography and to other religious or secular artistic trends.

One other concern that needs to be addressed is the validity of applying a framework derived from McLuhan’s field of mass communication theory to a theological question. While it may seem unusual to identify icons as a form of technology or medium, McLuhan’s definition is intentionally and even provocatively broad, going well beyond the electrical or mechanical “gizmo” that usually comes to mind at the mention of the word. He does not presume specific content; consequently, our identification of icons as a medium and use of his tetrad for organizing its effects will not entail an automatic secularization of the medium. In short, primarily theological ideas will prove to be amenable to the use of McLuhan’s framework, with the expected advantage that the dynamic relationships developed between them will more readily come to light. If this approach does prove valuable for the description of iconography as a

medium, confirming its place in Eastern Christian Tradition, our methodology may in turn be applied to other theological topics—perhaps not only media as extensions of the person, but also revelation as an extension of the divine toward us.

To do justice to iconography, it is vitally important to maintain a theological focus: Without a grounding in the Tradition in which icons exist and operate, it would be impossible to evaluate them as media inextricably tied to the act of faith. However, just as Christ and his disciples were called to interact with those outside the faith, so here, elements of truth or insight derived from fields outside theology are brought into dialogue: not to dilute the theological ideas at hand, but to offer potential insight into them. Therefore, in this first part of the thesis, we provide an overview of Byzantine iconography, first drawing upon Eastern Christian sources, and subsequently from other fields that may have pertinent perspectives.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Although many studies address aspects of how icons differ from other portraits or scenes, none of them use our proposed methodology which, as previously explained, is to examine the topic through the lens of McLuhan's Laws of Media, incorporating his central concept of the tetrad. Surprisingly, very few studies address McLuhan's tetrads (whether theoretical or specific) in any context. In this section, the state of the question will be examined in its separate parts, subsequently weaving together the individual threads of the discussion. There are four main areas to explore: the nature of the icon from the theological vantage point; the experience of the icon from a philosophical (phenomenological) perspective; the application of McLuhan's theories to religious matters; and finally, existing comparisons between modern art and

iconography. Links between these areas will also be highlighted in preparation for merging the various discussions in my ultimate effort to answer the single question at the centre of this thesis.

Perspectives on the Nature of the Icon

Of the relevant fields of discussion, this one is the most mature, given that the nature of the icon has been debated for over a millennium. A more detailed examination of the arguments presented during the Iconoclastic Controversy of the 8th-9th centuries will follow in Part I. The three main writers of this period to be considered are St. John of Damascus, with his *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*;³ St. Theodore the Studite, with his *On the Holy Icons*;⁴ and Patriarch Nikephoros, with his *Discourses Against the Iconoclasts*.⁵

Iconography has been a much-discussed topic among theologians in the 20th and 21st centuries. The principal authors include Leonid Ouspensky, who wrote *Theology of the Icon* and, in conjunction with Vladimir Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons*, one of the seminal 20th century texts on iconography, and their contemporary, Paul Evdokimov, author of *The Art of the Icon: A Theology of Beauty*. All of these important works will be discussed in greater detail in Part I.

In the 21st century, the conversation about iconography and the nature of icons remains vibrant, among scholars such as Bissera Pentcheva, Arianne Conty, Clemena Antonova, and Bruce Foltz. Pentcheva is an art historian who has specialized in Byzantine art and acoustics. Her

³ St. John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, trans. Andrew Louth, Popular Patristics (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003).

⁴ St. Theodore the Studite, *On the Holy Icons*, trans. Catharine P. Roth (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1981).

⁵ Patriarch Nicephorus, *Discours contre les iconoclastes: Discussion et réfutation des bavardages ignares, athées et tout à fait creux de l'irreligion mamon contre l'incarnation de Dieu le Verbe notre Sauveur*, trans. Marie-José Mondzain-Baudinet, Collection d'esthétique 52 (Paris: Klincksieck, 1989).

2010 book *The Sensual Icon: Space, Ritual and the Senses in Byzantium*⁶ studied how the materials (e.g., gold, ivory), the form (e.g., flat board or relief carving) and environment (e.g., flickering lights, changing shadows, air movement) affect the way icons can be understood in their ritual context. This segues into her 2017 book, *Hagia Sophia: Sound, Space and Spirit in Byzantium*,⁷ which focuses more broadly on the interplay between aesthetics and acoustics in the liturgical life of the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. Her article “The Performative Icon”⁸ addresses similar themes as *The Sensual Icon*, and will inform my examination, in Part II, of Pentcheva’s contribution.

Clemina Antonova, a fellow art historian, has also written on iconography in *Space, Time, and Presence in the Icon*.⁹ However, this book and her research in general are restricted to Russian icons, rather than dealing with Byzantine iconography more generally. In addition to the book just mentioned, she has published several articles on iconological themes, especially with regard to spatial perspective¹⁰ and its temporal counterpart, where she discusses the non-linear flow of time in the icon.¹¹

⁶ Bissera V. Pentcheva, *The Sensual Icon: Space, Ritual, and the Senses in Byzantium* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010).

⁷ Bissera V. Pentcheva, *Hagia Sophia: Sound, Space, and Spirit in Byzantium* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2017).

⁸ Bissera V. Pentcheva, “The Performative Icon,” *The Art Bulletin* 88, no. 4 (2006): 631–655.

⁹ Clemina Antonova, *Space, Time, and Presence in the Icon: Seeing the World with the Eyes of God*, Ashgate studies in theology, imagination, and the arts (London, New York: Routledge, 2016).

¹⁰ Clemina Antonova, “On the Problem of ‘Reverse Perspective’: Definitions East and West,” *Leonardo* 43, no. 5 (October 2010): 464–469.

¹¹ Clemina Antonova, “Florensky’s ‘Reverse Time’ and Bakhtin’s ‘Chronotope’: A Russian Contribution to the Theory of the Visual Arts,” *Slovo (Maney Publishing)* 15, no. 2 (October 2003): 101–114.

Arianne Conty is a philosopher of religion; her “Bending Heaven down to Earth,”¹² examines the medieval icon, its use of perspective, and the more modern idea of the “crossing of the gaze.” In this sense, she and Antonova explore similar themes, although Conty discusses both Byzantine and Western art. In “Absolute Art: Nicolas of Cusa’s *De Visione Dei*,”¹³ she describes an experiment conducted by Nicholas of Cusa with his fellow monks, and from this she develops a “sociology of belief,” concluding that knowledge of God is not only impossible from a single perspective or vantage point, but is also dependent on being in community with others who are seeking a relationship with God. Cusa’s work and the question of perspective, along with the “crossing of the gaze,” are subjects that will be taken up again later in this thesis.

Bruce Foltz is a philosopher writing primarily about the environment, though he also covers several topics in the philosophy of religion. Although his work will not be revisited later in this paper, it is worth noting that in *The Noetics of Nature* he establishes parallels between icons and the Earth, namely, in the way that environment and interconnections (or intertextuality) are important for the being and meaning of both. He argues: “The icons manifest spiritual realities in part through their contextual inter-relations—graphic, poetic, narrative, ontological, and spiritual—within a world seen variously through other icons.”¹⁴ He even dedicates a whole chapter to “The Iconic Earth,”¹⁵ although this idea of iconicity and idolatry in the natural environment and in the liturgical environment are prevalent throughout. If Antonova

¹² Arianne Conty, “Bending Heaven down to Earth: The Medieval Icon,” *Religion and the Arts* 19, no. 1–2 (2015): 1–30.

¹³ Arianne Conty, “Absolute Art: Nicolas of Cusa’s *De Visione Dei*,” *Religion and the Arts* 16, no. 5 (January 1, 2012): 461–487.

¹⁴ Bruce V. Foltz, *The Noetics of Nature: Environmental Philosophy and the Holy Beauty of the Visible*, Groundworks - ecological issues in philosophy and ecology (Fordham University, 2014), 142–143.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 113–157.

represents the specific (i.e., Russian) end of the spectrum, in discussions about iconography, Foltz may represent the opposite, more generalized end, given that he invites not only icons but the entirety of the natural world into the discussion about iconicity and experience. We turn to this perhaps peculiar idea of “experiencing icons,” in our next section on phenomenology.

The Phenomenology of the Iconographic Experience

The phenomenologist who has written most prolifically on the subject of phenomenology in conjunction with icons is certainly Jean-Luc Marion. Among his works, the monograph *The Crossing of the Visible*¹⁶ (originally published in French as *La croisée du visible* in 1989) will be the focus here, since its key theme is to distinguish object, idol and icon. These ideas will be discussed in more detail below. The book just mentioned is not, however, Marion’s only treatment of iconography and its related themes. His 2001 *The Idol and Distance* (originally published in French as *L’Idole et la distance* in 1977) opened the discussion on the “visible” and “invisible,” though his questions were left open-ended; *The Crossing of the Visible* both continues the train of thought begun twelve years prior (and extended in his 1982 *Dieu sans l’être*),¹⁷ one that will prove central to our evaluation of how an icon can be experienced as such, and what might differentiate it from an idol or other work of art.

Marion’s research in this domain also includes articles and conference presentations. One of these, “Le prototype de l’image”¹⁸ formed the basis of what became chapter 4 of *The Crossing*

¹⁶ Jean-Luc Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, Cultural memory in the present (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004).

¹⁷ Jean-Luc Marion, *Dieu sans l’être*, Quadrige 129 (Paris: Quadrige/Presses Universitaires de France, 1991).

¹⁸ Jean-Luc Marion, “Le Prototype de l’image,” in *Nicée II, 787-1987 : Douze Siècles d’images Religieuses* (presented at the Colloque International Nicée II, Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1987), 451–470.

of the Visible. Another noteworthy paper from the same conference is Michel Costantini's "L'Art contemporain : L'idole en quête d'icone?"¹⁹ Here, Costantini introduces modern art and photographic realism into the dialogue, and finds in those media the negation of iconic traits—in place of the icon appears a pretentious idol coming from imitation and manufacture, without any sense of the Creator's giving of self through the icon, nor with any inkling of *acheiropoeisis* (made without hands).²⁰ This abhorrence of imitation or *mimesis* is a theme that will return in Part I, in our discussion of Michel Henry and the work of abstract artist Wassily Kandinsky. Henry also touches on the topic of Byzantine icons, primarily in the form of larger mosaics, in *Barbarism*, where he describes how the power of Byzantine iconography comes from its aesthetic composition.²¹

Also of interest is Marion's "Seeing, or Seeing Oneself Seen: Nicholas of Cusa's Contribution in *De visione Dei*"²² which explores the theology of 15th-century German theologian and philosopher Nicholas of Cusa. In the latter's *De visione Dei sive de Icona*, as Marion notes, there is not only the question of visions of God, but also of visibility generally speaking, which leads to the discussion of phenomenality. To Marion, this means "questions concerning the icon as a type of phenomenon, the reversal of vision into a countervision, the distinction between the object or the nonobject of the seen, and the possibility of seeing the

¹⁹ Michel Costantini, "L'art contemporain : L'idole en quête d'icone?," in *Nicée II, 787-1987 : Douze siècles d'images religieuses* (presented at the Colloque International Nicée II, Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1987), 471–488.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 488.

²¹ Michel Henry, *Barbarism*, trans. Scott Davidson (London and New York: Continuum Impacts, 2012), 32.

²² Jean-Luc Marion, "Seeing, or Seeing Oneself Seen: Nicholas of Cusa's Contribution in *De Visione Dei*," *The Journal of Religion* 96, no. 3 (July 2016): 305–331.

other.”²³ Similarly, Arianne Conty, mentioned above, analyzes *De visione Dei*, concluding that our communal understanding of God must be mediated by the words (and thus experiences) of others, because it is not possible to completely understand God from the vantage point of a single person. This conclusion was based on Cusa’s experiment with his fellow monks, who circumambulated an icon composed in reverse perspective, and discovered each monk to have a unique perspective.²⁴ I do not review Cusa’s work directly in what follows, although he is included to the extent that he has had an influence on Marion. Further studies in this area, however, especially those inclusive of Western religious art, would benefit from a closer engagement with Cusa’s text.

Returning to modern philosophy: although Marion is a major figure in the phenomenology of icons and art more broadly, he is not the only one writing on this topic. Fellow phenomenologist Michel Henry published *Seeing the Invisible*,²⁵ a book on the oeuvre of Kandinsky. While not pertaining to iconography directly, it explores many of the same themes as Marion’s work, such as the visible and the invisible, which form layers of meaning and connection in a painting.

In “Iconic Wonder,”²⁶ Alexander Kozin discusses the phenomenology of Pavel Florensky—an early 20th century Orthodox theologian who had critiqued the thought of Husserl, but died (in 1937) before several important phenomenological works were written, particularly those with religious themes, in the wake of the so-called “theological turn.” Kozin cites Lévinas

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Conty, “Absolute Art,” 461.

²⁵ Michel Henry, *Seeing the Invisible: On Kandinsky* (London ; New York: Continuum, 2009).

²⁶ Alexander V. Kozin, “Iconic Wonder: Pavel Florensky’s Phenomenology of the Face,” *Studies in East European Thought* 59, no. 4 (2007): 293–308.

and his insistence on the importance of the presence of the Other, especially the Face of the Other.²⁷ Although not figuring directly in this thesis, we will encounter Lévinas' legacy in later phenomenologists such as Henry and Marion.

Finally, not all phenomenology relating to our topic has an explicitly spiritual bent. Maurice Merleau-Ponty has written extensively on aesthetics, though not explicitly in regard to icons. Key essays include “Cézanne’s Doubt”²⁸ and “Eye and Mind”²⁹: the former deals with the role of the senses and sensations in the experience of both producing and viewing a painting, while the latter touches on the representation of the invisible—a conversation continuing in the work of Henry and Marion. Merleau-Ponty is discussed in further detail in Part I.

Up to this point, we have mentioned resources associated with what might be called the traditional dialogue between theology and philosophy concerning icons. The next two categories present atypical interlocutors: first, Marshall McLuhan, and his impact on the way the world sees media (including iconography), and second, modern art, which though seemingly opposed in both content and context, in fact provides a valuable perspective on what iconography is and is not.

²⁷ Ibid., 299–300.

²⁸ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Cézanne’s Doubt,” in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, ed. Galen A. Johnson and Michael B. Smith, Northwestern University studies in phenomenology & existential philosophy (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 59–75.

²⁹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind,” in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, ed. Galen A. Johnson and Michael B. Smith, Northwestern University studies in phenomenology & existential philosophy (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 121–149.

Marshall McLuhan, Religion, and Liturgy

Marshall McLuhan, best known for his work in mass communication and the social impact of technology, was a professor of English Literature at the University of St. Michael's College (University of Toronto). He was also a convert to Catholicism, who remained devout throughout his academic career, as witnessed by the series of letters and essays compiled in *The Medium and the Light: Reflections on Religion*.³⁰ This book is in four parts, treating: his conversion; the church's current understanding and relationship to media (i.e., electric/electronic media such as television); Vatican II and its relationship to liturgy and media; and the future of the Catholic Church in an electronic or digital age. Sections of other key works, such as *The Gutenberg Galaxy*³¹ and *Understanding Media*³² also use religious contexts to explain a given concept—such as the breaking apart of a cohesive unity of senses when the visual sense is favoured nearly exclusively³³—even where religion is not the primary focus of his arguments. In particular, *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, which focuses on the effects of the printing press on human society, extensively evaluates the effects of the printing press on the Catholic Church and the subsequent rise of Protestantism.

Despite a tendency to engage various aspects of religion and the senses, McLuhan never directly discusses icons as a form of sacred art for the purpose of prayer. While making the occasional, passing reference to an icon or to the iconic, his concept of the icon can only be

³⁰ Marshall McLuhan, *The Medium and the Light: Reflections on Religion*, ed. Eric McLuhan and Jacek Szklarek (Toronto: Stoddart, 1999).

³¹ Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1962).

³² McLuhan, *Understanding Media*.

³³ McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, 139.

marginally correlated to a religious icon in the Byzantine sense.³⁴ Still, many of the aspects of liturgical practice, and Christian faith more broadly, which he does treat, pertain also to the context of iconography. In *The Medium and the Light*, McLuhan refers to the Christian East as the portion of the Church that split from Roman Catholicism when the latter became too literate or “visual” (meaning text-driven), and consequently too centralized.³⁵ He also raises the possibility that as the West re-enters a more “acoustic” (non-text-based) world with the introduction of electronic media, the East may meanwhile begin to emulate the West’s visual culture, thereby losing the very acoustic or tactile culture it had hitherto preserved.³⁶ This would have been the ideal opportunity to discuss iconography as an important element of the East’s less-text-based focus (similarly characteristic of the West and its sacred art up to the Renaissance). Curiously, however, McLuhan does not discuss this at all, preferring to focus on the musical or sung aspects of the liturgy, the centrality of the sacraments, and the use of the vernacular. Therefore, I will be using McLuhan’s thought on visual and acoustic space, and its

³⁴ For example, McLuhan states that “women’s dress and hair styles have abandoned visual for iconic—or sculptural and tactual—stress.” (McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 164.) Inasmuch as McLuhan’s point is that the iconic moves away from the purely visual, i.e., text-based, this aligns with the understanding of a Byzantine icon. However, McLuhan uses this term much more broadly, usually with reference to something that revives the tactile experience of a medium. See, for example, *Ibid.*, 334, 442.

³⁵ McLuhan, *The Medium and the Light*, xxviii, 60. On page 60, he writes, “It would be a good time to be Russian Orthodox: they split off from Rome because it was too literate. The Eastern Church is an ‘ear’ Church; Rome was always very far along the visual road to visual power.” This is arguably a drastic simplification of the theological and political complexities of the Schism of 1054, and he does not attempt to explain how these complexities can be boiled down to a disparity in the “visuality” of the Christian West and East. However, it does shed important light on the possibility of causing major social changes through the favouring a certain sense (in this case, visual or text-based) above all others.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 207. McLuhan writes, “While we [Roman Catholicism] are rediscovering our inner-directed spirituality under electric influence, the Oriental world as a whole is marching toward Western values and its external trappings. Isn’t the East about to lose its inner richness in order to put on what we ourselves are abandoning? Instead of borrowing from each other what we each lack, each keeping what is good, we risk completely exchanging sides and discovering that we are still opposed.”

relationship to art and liturgy (if not to iconography specifically), and applying it in turn to the question of where iconography is to be located within Christian theology.

Secondary source material on McLuhan and religion is similarly void of overt links with iconography. Shortly after the publication of his two major works—*The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962) and *Understanding Media* (1964)—a few articles appeared, attempting to apply McLuhan’s thoughts to the perceived state of society. However, these were rarely authored by theologians. Jesuit John M. Culkin’s “A Churchman’s Guide to Marshall McLuhan,”³⁷ is largely a summary of “the medium is the message” expression, explaining how a text-based society can result in linear thinking. When evaluating the application of McLuhan’s theories to the church, Culkin aligns the need for a more sensory experience in liturgy with liturgical reforms promoting congregational participation, and the introduction of new technologies (e.g., modern musical instruments, slides, films) into the liturgy.³⁸

Another contemporary article, “Liturgical Medium in an Electronic Age,”³⁹ follows a similar rationale, predicting a reversal of the linear, uniform format of visual liturgy towards a more creative and participatory experience—worship as a work of art. Oddly, the author even goes so far as to consider the fourth Eucharistic Prayer, based on the Byzantine Rite’s Anaphora of St. Basil, as illustrative of a nostalgia for the more aural and tribal bonds maintained in the Eastern tradition.⁴⁰ In neither article is there any direct evaluation of the new media and their associated unified sensory experience, with respect to the sensory experience exemplified in

³⁷ John M Culkin, “A Churchman’s Guide to Marshall McLuhan,” *Religious Education* 63, no. 6 (November 1968): 457–462.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 461.

³⁹ Charles C McDonald, “Liturgical Medium in an Electronic Age,” *Worship* 44, no. 1 (January 1970): 27–39.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 36.

Eastern Christian liturgy and in traditional Roman rites. There is also no discussion of the theological appropriateness of electric or modern media in a liturgical context.

This question of the appropriateness of technology in liturgy was taken up in 2005 by Martha Smith Tatarnic⁴¹: she uses McLuhan’s work to evaluate the seemingly contradictory messages often heard about the church today, namely that it is irrelevant even as religion remains important.⁴² She argues that these two messages are in fact one and the same, with the confusion stemming from the bias of television toward an individualism foreign to the church. She explains: “[T]he primary message of the mass media serves to legitimize this idea of the church as irrelevant simply because the demands of the gospel do not make sense in a television value system that upholds the satisfaction of individual desires as being of utmost importance.”⁴³ The question becomes whether Christianity can be effectively transmitted through any and all media, since it appears that the message—the social effect, as McLuhan defines it—of some media (in this case, television) is inherently incompatible with Christianity, with the Christian message consequently lost in translation. Tatarnic suggests that some of missing elements in the television age are those that are “provocative, challenging, ancient, and relational about faith as lived out through a religious institution, elements such as mission work and service, social justice, sacramentality, community, tradition, ritual, or self-sacrifice,” arguing further that these have been replaced by a religion demanding nothing of its adherents.⁴⁴ Like others, Tatarnic references McLuhan’s work only insofar as it relates to the church and electronic or modern

⁴¹ Martha Smith Tatarnic, “The Mass Media and Faith: The Potentialities and Problems for the Church in Our Television Culture,” *Anglican Theological Review* 87, no. 3 (2005): 447–465.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 450.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 459.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 461–462.

media. Although I will be applying McLuhan's theories to the traditional "medium" of the icon, I take as valid Tatarnic's critique that nothing is being demanded of Christian adherents; I will return to this theme when discussing the phenomenology of the icon and the crossing of the gaze.

The final part of this literature review will provide a high-level overview of the topic of modern art as it relates to iconography. This may be seen as a natural partner to McLuhan's communication theory; while certainly aware of icons (inasmuch as they warrant the occasional mention in his work), McLuhan applied his laws of media to modern art, particularly Cubism. Thus, scholarship treating the link between Cubism and iconography should prove especially useful to our own project.

The Relationship Between Iconography and Modern Art

As previously noted, McLuhan mentions icons only in passing, and even then, with a meaning only loosely connected to Byzantine iconography. He does, however, discuss modern art (and particularly Cubism) in relation to his communication theory. I will analyze this in much more depth in Part II, providing an extensive discussion of the similarities and differences between Cubist art and iconography, in an attempt to apply McLuhan's framework for media effects to iconography. I have yet to come across any academic work with this objective, although there are certainly a number of texts which compare modern art with iconography (or other religious art) in other ways.

Andrew Spira's book *The Avant-Garde Icon*⁴⁵ explores the connection between the iconographic tradition and the development of the Avant-Garde artistic movement⁴⁶ in Russia. Spira recognizes that it may appear that icons and avant-garde art share little in common, with one deeply rooted in the Christian tradition and the other based in the rejection of Christianity and an antipathy toward religion generally speaking. However, Spira argues that it is the tradition of icons in Russia that actually made avant-garde art possible; despite rebellion against the Church, local artists were influenced by icons in a variety of ways because of the historical importance of iconography to their culture. Similarities do exist at the surface level, such as the use of unconventional (non-realist) frames of reference; they may also exist at a deeper level, such as the quest in both instances to express, in and through art, something of the transcendent.⁴⁷ While Spira focuses specifically on the Russian traditions of both iconography and of avant-garde art, I will be considering iconography more broadly.

Clemena Antonova has also compared Russian iconography and modern art, specifically Cubism, in her 2016 book *Space, Time, and Presence in the Icon*.⁴⁸ Unlike Spira, however, the parallels between icons and modern paintings are not her primary focus, although she similarly restricts her geographical scope. Antonova covers three themes that pertain to the understanding of icons, beginning with an exploration of time, and the dearth of academic study on the topic of time in art, then highlighting its importance to iconography. Among other notions, she treats

⁴⁵ Andrew Spira, *The Avant-Garde Icon: Russian Avant-Garde Art and the Icon Painting Tradition* (Aldershot, Hampshire and Burlington, VT: Lund Humphries, 2008).

⁴⁶ The Avant-Garde movement is largely connected with modernism, and is an umbrella term for a large number of forms of art, including Cubism but also Impressionism, Dadaism, Suprematism, and many more. For a general overview of Avant-Garde art (including writing, fine art, and music) and its premises, see the Introduction to Richard Kostelanetz, *A Dictionary of the Avant-Gardes*, second edition. (New York: Routledge, 2001), xix–xxii.

⁴⁷ Spira, *The Avant-Garde Icon*, 8–9.

⁴⁸ Antonova, *Space, Time, and Presence in the Icon*.

Florensky's concept of reverse time, i.e., the experience of time flowing backward, followed by Konstantinos Kalokyris's connection of icons with the idea of liturgical time.⁴⁹ She proceeds to a description of space in painting, which lies at the heart of the classical criticism of paintings in general and iconography in particular, given that perspective and viewpoint are key to the experience of a work of art. Finally, Antonova compares Cubism with iconography, noting that they share a similar structure of multiple simultaneous views of the person or object depicted. Whereas Spira identifies the key difference between the two as the rejection (or not) of organized religion (and of Christianity specifically), Antonova notes that Cubism rather rejects the Western system of (linear) perspective. This could not, of course, be the goal of the iconographic tradition, since it largely predates the Renaissance popularization of such perspective.⁵⁰ Though it is true that chronologically-speaking, the ancient use of reverse perspective in iconography could not have been a direct response to Renaissance innovations, it is still possible that it was consciously used to oppose a purely immanent worldview; I will discuss this prospect further in section 3 of Part I.

Several other authors have also compared iconography with modern art. Sergei Bulgakov, in "The Corpse of Beauty"⁵¹ also identifies a transcendent component to Cubist art, though he believed it pointed to the demonic rather than to the heavenly. Paul Evdokimov also includes a chapter titled "Modern Art in the Light of the Icon" in *The Art of the Icon*,⁵² where he

⁴⁹ Ibid., 15–16. The ideas of both Florensky and Kalokyris regarding time in iconography are revisited in more detail later in this paper.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 110–111.

⁵¹ Sergeĭ Nikolaevich Bulgakov, "The Corpse of Beauty," in *A Bulgakov Anthology* (London: SPCK, 1976), 67–72.

⁵² Paul Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon: A Theology of Beauty*, trans. Steven Bigham (Redondo Beach, Calif.: Oakwood Publications, 1990), 73–95.

likewise points not only to the absence of a religious dimension in modern art (including Cubism), but also to a devastated soul, devoid of the interiority necessary to encounter God.⁵³ Interiority and perspective are key foundational principles which will be revisited later in Part I.

Having reviewed the state of the discussion, the question of what differentiates an icon from other forms of art—particularly modern art that shares similar characteristics—is still only partially answered, and without any consensus. There is also no existing study applying McLuhan’s ideas, such as his laws of media, as a framework for this question. What follows will therefore be the first attempt of this sort, and will hopefully be a catalyst for subsequent research.

PART I: THE QUESTION OF ICONS AS MEDIA

Since the goal of this thesis is to bring together resources from multiple fields—theology, phenomenology, art history, and media theory—in order to propose a new framework for developing our understanding of the icon and what differentiates it from a secular⁵⁴ or even religious painting, I will begin by exploring the pertinent conversations in these fields. Section 1 provides an overview of what has been said about icons within Orthodox theology, especially at the time of the Iconoclastic Controversy, which forced Orthodox iconographic doctrine to be articulated in great detail. Texts from the Byzantine liturgy, especially the propers for the Sunday of the Triumph of Orthodoxy (commemorating the end of the Iconoclastic Controversy), will

⁵³ Ibid., 76, 78.

⁵⁴ In this thesis, unless otherwise stated, “secular” refers to the non-religious, or that which is concerned with the worldly, rather than with religion or the transcendent. (Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 265.) Other meanings of the word exist, which Charles Taylor has treated at length in *A Secular Age*, and are summarized in his introduction. (Ibid., 20.)

also be examined. We will then hear from influential Orthodox theologians of the 20th and 21st centuries, especially Paul Evdokimov, Leonid Ouspensky, and Vladimir Lossky.

Section 2 provides a precis of phenomenology as it relates to the possibilities for experiencing an icon. After an overview of phenomenology and the so-called “theological turn” that appeared in a field originally conceived in “perceptual” terms, I will turn to Jean-Luc Marion, notable not only for exploring the role of the transcendent in human experience, but also—and more importantly for our purposes—addressing iconography explicitly in his work, particularly in *The Crossing of the Visible*.

Section 3 highlights contributions from art history, especially with respect to the role of perspective in a work of art (or an icon) and its effect on the experience of the viewer. This extension of phenomenology is important, and Cubism will consequently be introduced as a “dialogue partner,” given its superficial similarities to iconography in both appearance (e.g., the non-realistic representation of object or person) and in purpose (i.e., portraying that which is invisible in symbolic or otherwise visible form).

Finally, Sections 4 and 5 provide an introduction to the thought of Marshall McLuhan, and to a lesser extent, of his son Eric with whom he collaborated in the latter part of his career. The ideas of medium, figure-ground relationships, and the laws of media all form an important basis for the tetrad—the framework to be developed and applied in the second half of this thesis, with respect to both the ontology and the dynamics of the icon.

Section 1: Orthodox Theology and the Theological Role of Icons

The Iconoclastic Controversy: The Development of Historical Arguments for Icons

Within Orthodox theology, much has been said about the nature and role of icons, largely due to the Iconoclastic Controversy that rocked the Byzantine Empire in the eighth and ninth centuries. The Iconoclastic Controversy began to gain momentum in AD 726, when Emperor Leo III decreed the destruction of icons; he reinforced this with a further edict in 730.⁵⁵ Matters were not resolved until 843, when Empress Theodora ordered the re-establishment of icon veneration—an event still commemorated by Byzantine-Rite Christians today as the Triumph of Orthodoxy.⁵⁶ The controversy covered two periods, separated by an interval of relative calm between the Seventh Ecumenical Council (Nicaea II) in 787, at which iconoclasm was condemned, and 813, when iconoclastic Emperor Leo V the Armenian rose to power.⁵⁷

Four major primary sources pertain to this controversy, all of which aimed to define and validate the role of icons as a vital element of Christianity. During the first period, St. John of Damascus (ca. 676-749) wrote three treatises against the iconoclasts, which articulate the most important theological arguments in favour of icons. The exact dates of the three treatises are not known, but estimates are that the first treatise was written between 726 and 730, the second shortly after 730, and the third in the early 740s.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Daniel J. Sahas, *Icon and Logos: Sources in Eighth-Century Iconoclasm*, Toronto medieval texts and translations 4 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 25.

⁵⁶ Nicephorus, *Discours contre les iconoclastes*, 37.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁵⁸ John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, 10.

Two councils led up to the temporary reprieve already mentioned: an iconoclastic council in 754, convened in Hiereia by Emperor Constantine V, and one condemning iconoclasm—the Seventh Ecumenical Council—convened by the Empress Irene in Nicaea in 787 (also known as Nicaea II). Because of the widespread destruction of iconoclastic writings in the wake of the controversy, there are few extant records from the 754 Council, though fragments survive in later iconophile documents (including the Acts of the Seventh Ecumenical Council treated below).⁵⁹

In the ninth century, two writers are notable for their defence of icon veneration (iconoduleia): St. Theodore the Studite (759-826), and Patriarch Nikephoros of Constantinople (ca. 758-828). Mirroring the three-part structure of the Damascene's treatises, St. Theodore and Patriarch Nikephoros each wrote three refutations of the iconoclasts. The latter wrote between 818 and 820,⁶⁰ and although exact dates are not known for the former's refutations, they generally receive a similar dating.

Although some scholars have characterized this second period of iconoclasm as a spiritually exhausted, diluted repeat of the first, historian Paul Alexander argues otherwise, calling it the “philosophical climax of the entire Controversy.”⁶¹ While several of the respective arguments and counter-arguments overlap, the second period represented an evolution in Christological sophistication and nuance on both sides.⁶² In particular, the nature of the authentic religious image became the central object of debate,⁶³ as evidenced in the *horos*

⁵⁹ Sahas, *Icon and Logos*, 32–33.

⁶⁰ Nicephorus, *Discours contre les iconoclastes*, 36.

⁶¹ Paul J. Alexander, “The Iconoclastic Council of St. Sophia (815) and Its Definition (Horos),” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 7 (1953): 37.

⁶² Theodore the Studite, *On the Holy Icons*, 9.

⁶³ Alexander, “The Iconoclastic Council of St. Sophia (815) and Its Definition (Horos),” 37.

(definition) of the iconoclastic council of St. Sophia (815), as well as the writings of St. Theodore and Patriarch Nikephoros. Let us now turn to essential arguments and counter-arguments put forward in these sources: these will lay the foundation for our subsequent dialogue with the modern theologians and philosophers introduced above.

St. John of Damascus and the First Period of the Iconoclastic Controversy

Soon after the advent of iconoclasm in 726, St. John of Damascus wrote his first treatise,⁶⁴ in which he critiques the iconoclasts' literalistic interpretation of the biblical injunction against graven images (Ex 20:4-5),⁶⁵ and their blanket extension of it to all imagery, including icons. John's later treatises cover similar ground, though varying in presentation and sophistication: the second treatise is a condensed version of the first, with almost identical florilegia,⁶⁶ while the third is further simplified, even as it elevates the arguments to a new level.⁶⁷ To distinguish idolatry and worship of the one true God, John repeatedly delves into three areas: the nature of images, whether God is circumscribable, and the possible forms of interaction with sacred imagery.

⁶⁴ Jacques Paul Migne and Ferdinand Cavallera, *Patrologiae cursus completus*, Series Graeca 94 (Paris: J.-P. Migne, 1864), 1232–1284. Note: in this document, all further references to this series (the *Patrologia Graeca*) will be abbreviated as *PG*, followed by volume number and column range, e.g., PG 94, 1232-1284. St. John of Damascus's second oration can be found in PG 94, 1284-1317, and the third oration *ibid.*, 1317-1420.

⁶⁵ "You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them . . ." Biblical quotations in this thesis will be from the Revised Standard Version (RSV) unless otherwise indicated.

⁶⁶ A florilegium is a series of passages strung together from Patristic sources, as a way of reinforcing the authority of the argument. All three of John's treatises contain one, and those from the first two treatises are largely identical; however, they are unusual in that John inserts comments between each passage. See Andrew Louth's comment on this in his introduction to the *Three Treatises*, pp. 14-15.

⁶⁷ John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, 14.

Before getting into specifics, John examines the nature of the image, and provides an overview of six types, as follows:

1. Natural images: what is by nature is then followed by that which is through begetting or proceeding; e.g., the Son is begotten by the Father, and thus the Son is a natural image of the Father.
2. God's pre-eternal will: God's will contains that which is predetermined and shall infallibly come to be.
3. Humankind: that which God brings about through imitation, i.e., we are made in the image of God.
4. Depictions of the invisible in bodily form: Scriptural forms and shapes that provide a conception of the divine and angelic, such as the Trinity being represented by the sun, sunlight, and the sunbeam.
5. Prefiguration: Symbolic representations of what will come to be, e.g., the burning bush prefiguring the Theotokos.
6. Memories of past events: Scripture or items that exist as memorials, such as the twelve stones from the River Jordan used as a figure to remember the priests of the twelve tribes of Israel.⁶⁸

Given these variations on the theme of the image being a likeness of the original, the next question is whether a likeness of the divine is possible, i.e., whether the divine is even circumscribable. The Damascene agrees that in the Old Testament, when the commandment against graven images was given, it was indeed not possible to make an image of God, because

⁶⁸ Ibid., 96–100. Treatise III, §§ 18-23.

He was invisible and thus could not be depicted. With the incarnation of Christ, however, God had chosen to take the form of man, which could indeed be depicted.⁶⁹

The final major argument is that there are multiple forms of veneration and worship, and it is crucial to distinguish them. John proposes twelve types of worship and veneration, grouped into two broad categories: worship of God, and veneration of creatures. Worship is due to God alone, and can take the form of formal services (e.g., liturgy); wonder and desire at God's glory; thanksgiving for good things; supplication for needs, and repentance through confession. On the other hand, creaturely veneration—a symbol of submission and honour but not worship—is appropriate in certain cases, with John indicating seven: persons assimilated to God through theosis; things or places through which God wrought salvation (e.g., Golgotha); things dedicated to God (books, chalices, etc.); items prefiguring things to come (e.g., Aaron's rod, the jar containing the manna); other people, as made in the image of God; and those in authority, such as masters (to be venerated by their servants).⁷⁰ The conclusion is that inasmuch as veneration causes honour to pass from the image to the prototype,⁷¹ and since God has determined to become circumscribable in Christ, icons and their veneration must continue to be an important part of existing Church tradition.

The Seventh Ecumenical Council: Nicaea II (787)

Some forty years after the last of St. John of Damascus's treatises on holy images, and 33 years after an iconoclastic council in Hiereia, an opposing council was convened in Nicaea to definitively remedy the situation. Of the eight sessions, the most interesting for our purposes is

⁶⁹ Ibid., 24. Treatise I, § 8.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 104–110. Treatise III, §§ 28-39.

⁷¹ Ibid., 112. Treatise III, § 41.

the sixth, in which the *Horos* from the iconoclastic council of 754 was read and, item by item, refuted.⁷² Several refutations echo those presented by St. John of Damascus, though he is not mentioned by name. For example, the iconoclastic council had suggested that an icon of Christ either attempts to circumscribe the uncircumscribable, or else confuses the unconfused union (perhaps by only portraying his human nature)—either way, a blasphemy. The new council proceeds to refute this by means of the arguments advanced by John, pointing to Christ who became visible through his humanity, while maintaining a perfect union of his two natures.⁷³

Interestingly, just as John made liberal use of florilegia to support his treatises against iconoclasm, the iconoclastic council of 754 also used a florilegium to support its position, citing a number of passages from venerable authors such as St. Gregory the Theologian and St. John Chrysostom. However, the council at Nicaea neutralized each of these in turn by demonstrating how these patristic passages had been misunderstood, taken out of context, misquoted, or twisted to suit an argument.⁷⁴ For example, the 754 *Horos* quotes Amphilochius of Iconium that “we should not endeavour to depict on boards with colours the carnal faces of the saints; we do not need these. What we need, instead, is to imitate their conduct through virtue.”⁷⁵ The new council retorts that this is only a fragment of what Amphilochius said, thereby misrepresenting his position. Instead, they suggest, “we do not praise the saints, nor do we represent them in painting, because we like their flesh. Rather, in our desire to imitate their virtues, we retell their

⁷² Sahas, *Icon and Logos*, 38, 40.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 83–85.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 117–146. This is the full fifth volume of the sixth session, which is almost entirely dedicated to these refutations of patristic passages. The fourth volume (*Icon and Logos*, pp. 97–115) contains a similar quotation-and-refutation format, but with the biblical, rather than patristic, passages quoted by the iconoclastic council.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 125.

life-stories in books and we depict them in iconographies, even though they have little need to be praised by us in narratives or to be depicted in icons.”⁷⁶

The *Horos* of Nicaea II, defined in its seventh session, sums up the mature position of the Church by anathematizing the heretics identified by previous Ecumenical Councils, restating the fourth-century Nicene Creed, and reiterating the importance of traditions of the Church, including the making of iconographic representations.⁷⁷ It seemed that the matter had been settled, but as previously indicated, the controversy re-ignited in AD 815, despite the conclusions of Nicaea II. We will next examine the two key defenders of icons from this second period of iconoclasm.

St. Theodore the Studite and the Second Period of the Iconoclastic Controversy

In his three refutations against the iconoclasts,⁷⁸ St. Theodore the Studite does not present any arguments not already advanced by St. John of Damascus and the Council of Nicaea II, although his writing is stylistically different. As John Luis Antonion de Passalaqua puts it in his comparative study of the two writers, “St. John addresses the Iconoclasts as brothers who need to be shown the error of their ways, to eventually lead them back to Orthodoxy. St. Theodore is an angry man.”⁷⁹ Much like the *Horos* of Nicaea II, Theodore equates iconoclasts with heretics, writing in turn to prevent the faithful from being led astray. In his first refutation, Theodore uses

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 177–179.

⁷⁸ Theodore the Studite, *On the Holy Icons*. These three refutations can be found in their original Greek in PG 99, 328-352 (first refutation), 352-388 (second refutation), 389-436 (third refutation).

⁷⁹ John Luis Antonio de Passalaqua, “A Comparative Study of the Theological Approaches of Saint John of Damascus and Saint Theodore of Studion to the Iconoclastic Heresy,” in *Following the Star from the East: Essays in Honour of Archimandrite Boniface Luykx*, ed. Andriy M. Chirovsky (Ottawa, Chicago, Lviv: Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky Institute of Eastern Christian Studies, 1992), 146.

a style of argument-and-riposte similar to that already seen in the sixth session of Nicaea II. His arguments are nonetheless more articulately expressed, and with more forceful logic and cohesion than those of the Damascene's.⁸⁰

In his first refutation, Theodore returns to the idea of Christ being one person with two natures:⁸¹ since these are distinct and yet inseparable, portraying the circumscribable humanity of Christ does not and cannot divide his divinity from his person.⁸² Theodore then reiterates the relationship of the image with its original, distinguishing the copy as having an identity by name (e.g., an image of Christ is named “Christ”), but not by nature (i.e., an image is a copy relative to the prototype), thus negating the criticism that an image of Christ engenders a polytheistic situation in which two Christs are worshipped.⁸³ Revisiting ground covered extensively by John, the Studite further refines the concept of veneration and its appropriate uses.⁸⁴

Theodore's second refutation covers much of the same theological ground as the first, but is instead written as a dialogue between an iconoclast and an Orthodox iconodule. His third refutation again revisits the same general arguments, but he now presents them in a significantly more sophisticated and systematic way, although only in reference to the possibility of an icon of Christ; he does not expand into the rationale for images of the Theotokos or the saints. These

⁸⁰ Ibid., 145–146.

⁸¹ As defined in the *Horos* of the Council of Chalcedon in AD 451: “So, following the saintly fathers, we all with one voice teach the confession of one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ . . . acknowledged in two natures which undergo no confusion, no change, no division, no separation; at no point was the difference between the natures taken away through the union, but rather the property of both natures is preserved and comes together into a single person and a single subsistent being . . .” [Norman P. Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. I (London and Washington, DC: Sheed & Ward and Georgetown University Press, 1990), 86.]

⁸² Theodore the Studite, *On the Holy Icons*, 21–23. *First Refutation*, §§ 3-4.

⁸³ Ibid., 28–29, 32. *First Refutation*, §§ 8-9, 11.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 33–35, 38–39. *First Refutation*, §§ 13-14, 19.

latter are covered (among other things) in the three refutations of Theodore's contemporary, Patriarch Nikephoros of Constantinople.

Patriarch Nikephoros of Constantinople: An Unlikely Ally of St. Theodore the Studite

Much like the Studite, Patriarch Nikephoros of Constantinople wrote three refutations of the iconoclasts,⁸⁵ also in a polemical “angry man” tone, though his work in its entirety is longer and arguably more wide-ranging than Theodore's. The first text treats the same questions addressed by his forebear: the nature of the icon in relation to its prototype, whether God is circumscribable, and the Christological question of the hypostatic union. In his second and third refutations, he explores new territory, with a discussion of icons of the Theotokos and of the saints. He brings up an important point about images of human subjects: as with the possibility (or impossibility) of portraying Christ's divinity alongside his humanity, there exists the possibility (or impossibility) of portraying a saint's dual ontology—human, yet the subject of divinization. Similarly, every person has an invisible soul and a visible, circumscribable body. Therefore, it is arguably impossible to portray all aspects of a person, whether Christ or a saint. However, because of the very inseparability of the visible and invisible in each of these, they may still be portrayed.⁸⁶

This idea of circumscribability, and that of the unity of the visible and invisible in both the divine, i.e., Christ, and the human leads to one of the central phrases from Nikephoros's refutations: “It is not only Christ, but the whole of existence that disappears, if He may never be

⁸⁵ Nicephorus, *Discours contre les iconoclastes*. These can be found in their original Greek in PG 100 205-328 (first refutation), 329-373 (second refutation), and 376-533 (third refutation).

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 157. Second Refutation, § 4.

circumscribed nor portrayed.”⁸⁷ The Patriarch is speaking here not only of Christology, but also of cosmology, justifying the assessment of Paul Alexander that the second period of the Iconoclastic Controversy revolves around the nature of the image and all the consequent implications. For Nikephoros, as Marie-José Mondzain-Baudinet put it, “the christomach⁸⁸ is an iconomach, by which one must generally understand, and the Greek pronunciation lends itself to this, that he is an ‘*economach*.’”⁸⁹ In other words, the icon cannot be forbidden without simultaneously rejecting Christ and his Incarnation in Creation, along with the Church that also exists in the created world to continue God’s work therein. This positioning of icons, as linking creation and the transcendent, the visible and the invisible, is still celebrated and defended today by Byzantine Christians (among others). In the next section, I will provide an overview of the role of icons in the Byzantine liturgy—an important part of the *oikonomia* mentioned by Baudinet-Mondzain.

The Integration of Icons in the Byzantine Tradition

Undoubtedly, as just mentioned, the cosmological aspect present in Patriarch Nikephoros’s defense of icons is mirrored in the Byzantine Divine Liturgy. Paul Evdokimov (d. 1970), for

⁸⁷ Ibid., 86. First Refutation, § 20 (244D). Translation is mine. The Greek reads, “μᾶλλον δὲ οὐδὲ Χριστὸς, ἀλλὰ τὸ πᾶν οἴχεται, εἰ μὴ περιγράφοιτο καὶ εἰκονίζοιτο.” Mondzain-Baudinet’s French translation is, “ce n’est pas le Christ, mais c’est l’univers entier qui disparaît, s’il n’y a plus circonscriptibilité ni icône.”

⁸⁸ The *-mach* suffix comes from the Greek verb μάχομαι (*mákhomai*), to fight, and this suffix creates a noun meaning an opponent of that to which the suffix is appended. An *iconomach* is often used as a synonym for *iconoclast*, although the latter specifically means someone who not only opposes images, but actively seeks to destroy them (suffix *-clast* derived from the Greek κλάσις (*klásis*), meaning breaking).

⁸⁹ Nicephorus, *Discours contre les iconoclastes*, 20. The original French of Mondzain-Baudinet’s quote reads, “le christomaque est un iconomaque, par quoi il faut entendre globalement, et la prononciation grecque s’y prête, qu’il est un ‘*économaque*’.” The Greek words *iconomach* (εἰκονομάχος) and *economach* (οἰκονομάχος) are homonyms; the latter refers to someone fighting against the Divine Economy, i.e., the plan of salvation and its practical implications. For a further overview on the Christian and specifically Byzantine understanding of *oikonomia*, see John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, 2nd ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 1979), 88–90.

instance, observes that “the Church’s liturgy is not simply a copy of the heavenly liturgy, but is rather the eruption [sic] of the heavenly into history.”⁹⁰ Thus, he can say that icons and other architectural elements of the church (the building, frescoes, objects) are an integral part of the liturgical mystery, participating in a single mystical life. The icon’s role in this mystical life is to sanctify time and space by uniting meaning and presence. Evdokimov stresses the importance of presence both in icons and in the liturgy; not only do icons act as a focus or target through which one can be made aware of God’s presence and turn to prayer, but “icons” in the Church are also not limited to painted boards. The faithful (*synaxis*) themselves are indeed living icons of the assembly of angels who participate in the eternal liturgy, as described in the Cherubic Hymn which inaugurates the Liturgy of the Eucharist: “Let us who mystically represent the cherubim. . .”⁹¹ In this sense, as St. John of Damascus originally explained, both people and painted⁹² icons, among other things, are images of God in their own ways, with a corollary place in the liturgical life of the church. For this reason, both icons and people are incensed during Byzantine services, as a sign of God’s blessing through the grace of the Holy Spirit.⁹³

Though they are already intrinsic to Byzantine services, as described above, icons also receive a dedicated feast day; the Sunday of the Triumph of Orthodoxy commemorates the victory of the iconophiles in 843, and is celebrated on the first Sunday of Lent. The festal *kontakion* (thematic hymn) sung at Matins and at the Divine Liturgy reads: “The

⁹⁰ Evdokimov, *Art of the Icon*, 120.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 175–176.

⁹² In the Byzantine tradition, icons are usually said to be “written”—iconography is εἰκόν (image) + γραφία (writing), to emphasize that they are Scripture in visual form. However, I am using “painted” in this instance both to draw attention to its physical form, and to distance the icon from McLuhan’s idea of visual space, which is primarily the domain of the written word. McLuhan’s visual and acoustic spaces, and the situation of icons therein, is discussed in more detail later in this thesis.

⁹³ John Anthony McGuckin, *The Orthodox Church: An Introduction to Its History, Doctrine, and Spiritual Culture* (Malden, MA ; Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 357.

uncircumscribed Word of the Father became circumscribed, taking flesh from thee, O Theotokos, and He has restored the sullied image to its ancient glory, filling it with the divine beauty. This our salvation we confess in deed and word, and we depict it in the holy ikons.”⁹⁴

Although the Sunday of Orthodoxy is a feast explicitly dedicated to the end of the Iconoclastic Controversy and a celebration of the freedom to continue the veneration of icons as a central part of the Christian faith, this is not the only liturgical occasion on which attention is drawn to the importance of icons. The Sunday of the Seventh Ecumenical Council (October 11th or the nearest Sunday thereafter) also emphasizes the theological significance of iconography in its *kontakion*: “The Son who ineffably shone from the Father was born two-fold of nature from a woman. Beholding Him, we do not reject the image of His form; but depicting it, we revere it faithfully. Therefore the Church, holding the true faith, kisses the icon of Christ’s becoming man.”⁹⁵

Other feasts, though they do not explicitly mention icons, provide important insights into the theology of the icon. One example is the Feast of the Holy Transfiguration (August 6), in which Christ’s physical appearance is illumined by the uncreated Light.⁹⁶ This idea of

⁹⁴ Mother Mary and Kallistos Ware, trans., *The Lenten Triodion*, The Service books of the Orthodox Church (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1978), 306. The *aposticha* (hymn sung with psalm verses) for the feast is even more explicit in its rejection of iconoclasm and its celebration of icons: “Advancing from ungodliness to the true faith, and illumined with the light of knowledge, let us clap our hands and sing aloud, offering praise and thanksgiving to God; and with due honour let us venerate the holy ikons of Christ; of the all-pure Virgin and the saints, whether depicted on walls, on wooden panels or on holy vessels, rejecting the impious teachings of the heretics. For, as Basil says, the honour shown to the ikon passes to the prototype it represents. At the prayers of Thine undefiled Mother and of all the Saints, we beseech Thee, Christ our God, to bestow upon us Thy great mercy.” Ibid., 301. The reference to Basil is from St. Basil the Great’s treatise *On the Holy Spirit*, chapter 18, § 45. [See for example Saint Basil, *On the Holy Spirit*, trans. Stephen M. Hildebrand, Popular patristics series 42 (Yonkers, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011), 81.]

⁹⁵ Peter Galadza, Joseph Roll, and J. Michael Thompson, eds., *The Divine Liturgy: An Anthology for Worship* (Ottawa: Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky Institute of Eastern Christian Studies, Saint Paul University, 2004), 708.

⁹⁶ Leonid Ouspensky and Vladimir Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons*, trans. G. E. H. Palmer and E. Kadloubovsky (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1982), 35.

transfiguration is especially important in the way figures are depicted in icons—not in naturalistic form, but in a transfigured way. In the next section, we examine the Transfiguration as a source for reviewing the theology of Byzantine iconography as it stands today, elaborating on the fundamentals established during the Iconoclastic Controversy, especially as these are represented in the stylistic characteristics of Byzantine icons.

Theology of the Byzantine Iconographic Style

Although the term “transfiguration” most obviously applies to the revelation of Christ’s glory on Mount Tabor, it applies equally to the principles governing the theology and techniques of Byzantine iconography. As Leonid Ouspensky and Vladimir Lossky write:

[T]he icon is a likeness not of an animate but of a deified prototype, that is, an image (conventional, of course) not of corruptible flesh, but of flesh transfigured, radiant with Divine light. . . a temporal portrait of a saint cannot be an icon, precisely because it reflects not his transfigured but his ordinary, carnal state. It is indeed this peculiarity of the icon that sets it apart from all forms of pictorial art.⁹⁷

In other words, the authors would answer our thesis question with the notion that an icon depicts a saint (and, by extension, the Theotokos and Christ) in a state transfigured by the Divine. Still, one might ask how this state can be shown through ordinary artistic materials. Although not exhaustive,⁹⁸ two techniques in Byzantine iconography are worth discussing in this regard: the use of colour and gold to depict radiance, and the unusual proportioning of bodily sensory organs such as the eyes, nose, and mouth. We will begin with the link between gold and the divine light or radiance.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 36.

⁹⁸ Of course, not only have iconographic techniques changed through the centuries, but they have also varied by geographic region. It is outside the scope of this thesis to cover the details of these variations. However, a useful overview of the history of Byzantine iconography and art (e.g., mosaics, frescoes) can be found in André Grabar, *Byzantine Painting: Historical and Critical Study*, trans. Stuart Gilbert (New York: Skira Rizzoli, 1979).

Several techniques have been used in iconography to depict the radiance of transfiguration through the grace of God. One is the use of gold to represent the divine light, whether in the form of gold leaf or gold assist (lines painted in gold). An icon's background is often covered in gold leaf, and is even called "light" by iconographers.⁹⁹ Another typical use of gold is in the halo (also known as a nimbus), which represents the aura of a glorified saint, evoking the radiance possessed by Moses after his descent from Mount Sinai (Ex 34:29-35). It is important to note that in Byzantine iconography (and indeed theology), the so-called "uncreated light" radiates outwards from within the saint, and therefore cannot be depicted as an external, separate entity floating above the saint, as it sometimes appears in Western sacred art.¹⁰⁰ Finally, gold assist is occasionally used, usually on garments, to indicate the influence of the Divine Light. For example, the clothing of Christ might be coloured with gold assist in scenes such as the Transfiguration or the Descent into Hades. The garments of the Theotokos, similarly, might be highlighted with gold assist, in order to show her radiance—due to being bathed in the Divine Light.¹⁰¹

A second technique used to indicate a radiant light is the use of thin white lines that form highlights on the figure or the garments through a technique similar to hatching. This represents a light coming from the interior, and is uniform across the figure, thus avoiding the shadows or chiaroscuro which would otherwise indicate that the light originates from an external source.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Evdokimov, *Art of the Icon*, 186.

¹⁰⁰ Leonid Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1978), 205–206.

¹⁰¹ Constantine D. Kalokyris, *The Essence of Orthodox Iconography* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross School of Theology, Hellenic College, 1971), 68.

¹⁰² Jean-Claude Larchet, *L'icône et l'artiste*, *Théologies* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, Cerf, 2008), 13–14.

As Ouspensky and Lossky put it, “The Divine Light permeates all things, so there is no source of light, which would illumine objects from one side or another; objects cast no shadows, for no shadows exist in the Kingdom of God.”¹⁰³

The proportion of bodily features in icons is also symbolic of the transfiguration through Divine Grace, especially by means of the sanctified sensory organs. The eyes are large, because they have seen great things, and are adapted to better take in the divine law and the Creator’s works. Likewise, the ears (when visible) are large, to hear the Lord’s commandments and attend to the divine economy; they are in essence an extension of the ears of the soul. Even the nose is typically lengthened, in order to smell the fragrance of the Holy Trinity and other spiritual fragrances. In contrast, the mouth is small, since the need for spiritual food has supplanted the need for material food.¹⁰⁴ Nicholas Conostas usefully summarizes these stylistic changes by stating that “in the icon, the body and all its senses are imaginatively restored to their true function as modes of relation with both God and the viewer.”¹⁰⁵

It could be argued that though these stylistic elements are applied to an iconic figure, and indicate something of the divinized, transfigured nature of the person, they are not sufficient, or even successful in this regard. To this end, two further aspects of the icon will be discussed in the next sections. First, I will provide an overview of phenomenological discourse on the possibility of depicting the invisible within the visible—a central consideration for icons, whose very purpose is to make accessible something of the transcendent. This will be brought into relation with Marion’s concept of the crossing of the gaze, between the observer and the one depicted in

¹⁰³ Ouspensky and Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons*, 40.

¹⁰⁴ Kalokyris, *The Essence of Orthodox Iconography*, 53–54.

¹⁰⁵ Nicholas Conostas, “Icons and the Imagination,” *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 1, no. 1 (1997): 120.

an icon. Subsequently, I will look further into perspective as a tool for manipulating space and time, given that Byzantine icons very often use inverse perspective in order to open up dimensions through which an observer could experience God.

Section 2: Phenomenology and the Depiction of the Invisible

When speaking of the theology of icons, Orthodox writers commonly return to the idea of *presence*—that sense of gazing into an icon not being a matter of staring at an object, as one might look at a secular painting, but rather of encountering the divine such that one is simultaneously also encountered by it. While this dynamic of mutual encounter is certainly a central theme in Christianity, it is also an important topic in philosophy, particularly in the field of phenomenology, especially as this has developed over time from a focus on *things* to one on *persons*.

Phenomenology and the Question of a “Theological Turn”

Linking Orthodox theology with phenomenology may seem viable to some and problematic to others, especially since phenomenology has had a history of being rooted in atheist philosophy, and originally excluded the possibility of the divine as a factor in phenomena and their perception. The groundwork laid by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) in this domain contributed to Jean-Paul Sartre’s (1905-1980) development of existentialism—a far cry from the type of Orthodox experience described in this paper thus far. However, not all phenomenologists could agree with this limitation, beginning with Emmanuel Lévinas (1906-1995), and extending into the thought of Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005), Michel Henry (1922-2002) and Jean-Luc Marion (1946-), among others. This was a large enough shift in French phenomenology that in 1991, Dominique Janicaud (1937-2002) wrote the

essay “Phenomenology and the Theological Turn,” criticizing French phenomenology (under Lévinas and others) for its departure from the immanent or atheist phenomenology of Husserl and Heidegger and its opening to the invisible, the Other, and/or to a pure givenness—a departure that he dubbed the “theological turn.”¹⁰⁶ In response to Janicaud, four phenomenologists penned their own essays in defence of the spiritual in phenomenology—Ricoeur and Henry, already mentioned, as well as Jean-Luc Marion (1946-) and Jean-Louis Chrétien (1952-2019).¹⁰⁷

Of these “theological phenomenologists,” Jean-Luc Marion is especially important for our purposes, given his study of the icon, especially in contrast to the object and the idol. Thus, we now turn to an overview of his thought. In particular, his discussion of the “crossing of the gaze” will be foundational, because it is a *someone* and not a *something* that can originate a gaze, bridging the gap between object (painting, canvas, board) and person.

Jean-Luc Marion and the “Crossing of the Gaze”

Marion’s *The Crossing of the Visible* (*La Croisée du visible*, 1996) is dedicated to the phenomenology of painting, and focuses on understanding the difference between an idol and an icon. Although this is not the first time he has engaged the question, having previously done so in *L’Idole et la distance* (1977, later published in English as *The Idol and Distance*) and in *Dieu*

¹⁰⁶ Dominique Janicaud et al., *Phenomenology and the “Theological Turn”: The French Debate*, trans. Bernard G. Prusak, Fordham Perspectives in Continental Philosophy (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 17.

¹⁰⁷ These four essays form the second part of Janicaud et al., *Phenomenology and the “Theological Turn”: The French Debate*. While a complete history of phenomenology and the development of theological ideas within it are beyond the scope of this paper, this book is a useful resource for a summary of the position of critics and supporters of the “theological turn” within phenomenology. Another useful overview of the role of several phenomenologists (including those already mentioned here) in the development of a Continental philosophy of religion can be found in Christina M. Gschwandtner, *Postmodern Apologetics?: Arguments for God in Contemporary Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012).

sans l'être (1982, later published in English as *God Without Being*), in *The Crossing of the Visible* he gives sustained attention to the *painted* image, whether in the form of iconography or in modern art.

Early on in the text, Marion establishes the connection between the visible and the invisible in his treatment of perspective, touching upon what might be considered *incarnate* vision. Vision is not limited to simply seeing shapes and colours without any regard to the physical act of seeing; rather, the body is in space, the eyes move in response to a scene, and the invisible space between visible objects (walls, floor, etc.) is knowable because of the experience of the body moving through such spaces. Therefore, through this connection, the visible organizes the invisible and results in what he calls the “paradox of perspective,” in which the visible is directly proportional to the invisible.¹⁰⁸

Building on the interwoven visible and invisible, Marion begins to distinguish three forms of the visible: the object, the idol, and the icon, all of which differ by their characteristic forms of gaze. Objects are simply seen and valued in a utilitarian way, tied to production and manufacture, without any connection to personhood.¹⁰⁹ Idols and icons, however, both involve a *returned* gaze. He defines the idol as that which dazzles the gaze and lives in the realm of spectacle; like a mirror or radar signal, it reflects the originator’s gaze back upon itself. Its being is thus contingent on the desires of the viewer and, to a certain extent, on the ability of the idol to conform to those desires.¹¹⁰ The icon, in contrast, returns a separate gaze, such that the two can

¹⁰⁸ Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, 3–5.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 33, 52–53.

participate in a crossing of the gaze. Whereas the idol exists in proportion to desire's expectation, the icon stands beyond this; its gaze toward us replaces ours towards it.¹¹¹

To further characterize the icon, Marion outlines three important traits. First, an icon makes itself available to another's gaze, and does so independently of any space created with the use of perspective. In other words, although the invisible can inhabit the space modelled through perspectival drawing, the invisible works through the gaze of the figure in the icon without the need for a perspectival system. Second, the icon is not only seen by a gaze, but gazes back—and this is always through a human face. As Marion puts it, “the painted gaze invisibly responds to the invisible gaze of the one in prayer, and transfigures its own visibility by including it in the commerce of two invisible gazes—the one from a praying man . . . the other the gaze of the invisible saint.”¹¹² Marion inextricably links the visible with the invisible, since the gaze is the invisible within the visible; in the icon, this forms the basis of the spiritual exchange. Through it, the face-to-face encounter is made possible, such that two invisible gazes can cross between two visible bodies. Finally, the icon does not just insert the invisible into the visible, but it does so more radically than is the case, for example, in Suprematist painter Malévich's *Square*.¹¹³ Here Marion invokes not just the crossing of the gazes, but the play of the gazes, which engage in

¹¹¹ Ibid., 33.

¹¹² Ibid., 20. In other words, through the icon, an observer's gaze is engaged with that of an otherwise invisible—though living—saint. This is distinct from the idol, where there is no “other” to return the gaze.

¹¹³ Kazimir Malévich (1878-1935) was a Russian painter, famous for his paintings consisting of a simple square on a square canvas. Malévich painted several variations of a square on a background—black square on white background (*Black Square*, 1915), red square on white background (*Red Square*, 1915), white square on white (*White on White*, 1918), etc. However, the specific painting to which Marion is referring is likely unimportant since here Marion previously made a point about the invisible made manifest through such squares. He writes, “The square reproduces nothing, does not satisfy any aesthetic need, nor is it the deposit of the experiences of consciousness . . . The invisible, from that point on, plays no longer between the aim of the gaze and the visible but rather, contrary to the gazing aim, in the visible itself— and is merged with it, inasmuch as the white square is merged with its white base.” (Ibid., 19.)

prayer and love. The icon also pulls away from the spectacle, which comes from an objectivity foreign to it.¹¹⁴

In summary, Marion begins with the idea of perspective and the way in which the visible and the invisible are inextricably linked through it. From there, he goes on to distinguish the simple object (something that is simply seen) from the idol (something the gaze desires) and the icon (something—or someone—that gazes back). Although Marion is the phenomenologist who has written the most extensively about icons, he is not alone in considering what happens when painting and observing a painting. The next section will elaborate the parallels presented in the thought of Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

Merleau-Ponty: The Idea and the Icon

Merleau-Ponty wrote a number of texts that form what could be described as an “aesthetic phenomenology,” several of which pertain to the philosophy of painting, including his essays “Eye and Mind”¹¹⁵ and “Cézanne’s Doubt.”¹¹⁶ Unlike Marion, Merleau-Ponty does not ascribe any type of divine or transcendent dimension to the iconographic, nor does he specifically treat icons in their Byzantine (or other religious) form. Nonetheless, he shares the notion that the visible and the invisible co-exist inseparably in a painting, and that this is in turn an essential feature of the iconic. As Jenny Slatman argues, although Merleau-Ponty does not directly follow Plato’s classical distinctions of *eidōs*, *eikōn*, and *eidōlon* (parallel to idea, icon, and idol),¹¹⁷ he does use the term *icon* to describe an image containing the invisible within the

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 21–22.

¹¹⁵ Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind.”

¹¹⁶ Merleau-Ponty, “Cézanne’s Doubt.”

¹¹⁷ Jenny Slatman, “Phenomenology of the Icon,” in *Merleau-Ponty and the Possibilities of Philosophy: Transforming the Tradition*, ed. Bernard Flynn, Wayne J. Froman, and Robert Vallier, SUNY series in

visible, thus using this term in contrast to Cartesian representational thought.¹¹⁸ In this sense, both Marion and Merleau-Ponty are aligned in the conviction that “the icon is an image that transcends the visible of the representational ideology, and this image can be realized in the art of painting.”¹¹⁹

In “Eye and Mind,” Merleau-Ponty is also concerned with the relationship of the painter to the subject of the painting, and to the world in which the painter exists. In this sense, he brings in a third party: not just the icon’s observer and the one depicted in the icon, but also the one who created the icon. He indicates that painter and painting inevitably switch roles, such that artists often feel observed by things: “We speak of ‘inspiration,’ and the word should be taken literally. There really is inspiration and expiration of Being, respiration in Being, action and passion so slightly discernable that it becomes impossible to distinguish between who sees and who is being seen, who paints and what is painted.”¹²⁰ These claims approximate Marion’s crossing of the gaze, though also implying the potential anthropomorphizing of natural objects, such as trees, in a way that Marion would not have countenanced. In their own ways, both Marion and Merleau-Ponty reject the notion that there is a barrier separating a person’s inner world from his or her outer environment. Therefore, they—and arguably the iconographic tradition as well—respond to the question of how the self and the other (and even the divine Other) are interconnected, even mutually dependent. and in a sense, part of the same whole.

contemporary French thought (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2009), 198. Here she refers to Plato’s *Politeia*, which describes a three-level hierarchy through which reality can be understood: *eidōs*, *eikōn*, *eidolon*.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 199.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 202.

¹²⁰ Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind,” 129.

Marion and Merleau-Ponty further agree that a painting or an icon can portray something beyond the visible—whether transcendent or a simple intangible such as shadow or certain effects of colour. The final phenomenologist to be introduced in this section is Michel Henry, who like Marion is also concerned with aesthetics, although writing primarily about abstract art, especially the work of a pioneer of abstractionism, Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944).

Michel Henry: Seeing the Invisible Through the Eyes of Wassily Kandinsky

To continue with the theme of invisibility in art, as described in the works of Marion and Merleau-Ponty, it is worth mentioning Michel Henry's *Seeing the Invisible: On Kandinsky*.¹²¹ Although Henry does make reference to painting (and even Byzantine iconography) in other works,¹²² it is primarily here that he develops his theories concerning the depiction of the invisible in works of art. The book systematically examines each aspect of painting—form, point, line, colour, composition—but the overarching interest of Henry—and his relevance to our present inquiry—is the idea that art exists to provide access to that which is invisible. Kandinsky's works are an ideal test case for Henry because in their abstraction they lack the obvious figurative or “visible” aspect that is usually present—and usually taken for granted—in other styles of art, thereby evoking the *invisible* as the primary subject of his paintings.

Kandinsky not only painted, but also wrote about the theories underpinning his artistic methodology, and Henry in turn engages with Kandinsky's texts as much as his paintings. The artist's formula of true reality, as Henry describes it, is as follows:

¹²¹ Henry, *Seeing the Invisible*.

¹²² See, for example, Henry, *Barbarism*, 29–38. In this passage, Henry describes the Byzantine mosaics at a monastery in Daphne, and the incomprehension of science toward the invisible essence of life contained within artistic expression.

*Interior = interiority of absolute subjectivity = life = invisible = pathos = abstract content = abstract form*¹²³

This effectively equates interiority, life, and the invisible with the abstract, wherein something is abstract “when it is separated from the reality to which it belongs.”¹²⁴ Of course, a large part of the discussion consists of deciding what abstraction actually means. On the one hand, Henry points to a form of art such as Cubism, in which objects are reduced to simple geometric shapes that may be rearranged almost beyond recognition; this form, however, is unquestionably worldly and thus figurative, since the visible object still dictates the rules of deconstruction and reconstruction to the artist.¹²⁵ On the other hand, by the end of his book, Henry proposes that *all* painting is abstract. Noting that Kandinsky associated realist and figurative painting with the materialism of the world and the scientific method of viewing it,¹²⁶ and used the abstract as a way to allow life to regain membership in the world to which it belongs, Henry extends Kandinsky’s theories of abstraction to what would normally be called figurative or even realist sacred art. For example, a painting of the Adoration of the Magi could be considered purely abstract since no one was there to paint it when it originally happened, with the artists who painted the scene centuries afterwards making their compositional choices (e.g., spatial considerations, objects depicted, colour choices, garments) in response to abstract problems—such as the development of tone and inner resonance with the aim of invoking a certain pathos.¹²⁷

¹²³ Henry, *Seeing the Invisible*, 27.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 94.

¹²⁶ Here, Henry is referring to Kandinsky’s thought related to art. However, the idea that a purely objective viewpoint, as proposed in the scientific method, results in a culture of death (i.e., excludes life by excluding the subjectivity of the viewer) is a key thesis in Henry’s book *Barbarism*.

¹²⁷ Henry, *Seeing the Invisible*, 129–130.

Henry's description of all paintings, and especially the sacred art he describes, as being abstract is important to the discussion of iconography, to the extent that portraying the invisible—including the transcendent—is essential to religious and liturgical art. According to Kandinsky, "every work of art is the child of its time; often it is the mother of our emotions. It follows that each period of culture produces an art of its own, which cannot be repeated. Efforts to revive the art principles of the past at best produce works of art that resemble a stillborn child."¹²⁸ The revival of certain forms of art, that is, can occur when periods share similar inner moods, but it is the emotions, or inner form, that drive the outer expression—as in speech with thought driving the use of words—and not vice versa.¹²⁹ With such claims, Kandinsky appears to separate body and soul, especially in his description of the desire of men to build statues of their departed, "as though there were any intrinsic value in the bodily existence of such divine martyrs and servants of humanity, who despised the flesh but wanted only to serve the spirit."¹³⁰ This separation of body and spirit is reminiscent of Manichaeism, and although Henry's text largely focuses on the invisible, as does Kandinsky's art, Henry draws the visible and the invisible back together, acknowledging that even with the application of abstract principles to a work of art, the visible and invisible are inseparable. He concludes that "every pictorial element involves a dual aspect: external and internal . . . It follows that the reality of the world is the same as the reality of art, exhausting the division between the visible and the invisible."¹³¹

¹²⁸ Wassily Kandinsky, "Concerning the Spiritual in Art," in *Art, Creativity, and the Sacred: An Anthology in Religion and Art*, ed. Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, New revised edition. (New York: Continuum, 1995), 3.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 4, 7n1.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹³¹ Henry, *Seeing the Invisible*, 136.

Another separation brought into question, relative to the phenomenology of painting, is that between the artist and other observers of the work of art. When comparing Marion and Henry with regard to their philosophies of depiction of the visible and the invisible, Christina Gschwandtner remarks that both assume the artist has privileged access to truth, in a near-oracular sense—a “gift” or “genius” that others do not possess. She thus questions how or why only artists would have exclusive access to this genius.¹³² While her question is left open-ended and unanswered, it is one well worth addressing to Byzantine iconography, as it may shed important light on the tradition. New icons are expected to be unsigned copies of existing icons already belonging to the Byzantine liturgical and spiritual tradition, with the artist in turn presumed to be an active participant in the faith community; arguably, then, any distinction between artist and observer is effectively non-existent. The icon is by and for the Church community—the body of Christ. Therefore, it is important to turn to the more general question already asked by Henry and Marion, among others: how can the invisible truth be depicted in a visible painting? Without being able to answer this question, or if its answer is that the invisible truth cannot be depicted, then there can be no icon; all that can exist is the idol. This phenomenological question is thus a vital key to our overall discussion of iconicity, and we will return to this question later on.

Having engaged theological and phenomenological perspectives, it is worth exploring one more field, in order to properly grasp the issues in play: our next section will thus investigate the use of perspective in a work of art from the vantage point of art theory.

¹³² Christina M. Gschwandtner, “Revealing the Invisible: Henry and Marion on Aesthetic Experience,” *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 28, no. 3 (2014): 311–312.

Section 3: Art Theory and the Question of Perspective

Having established at this point that *presence*, and in particular the crossing of the gaze, is a central condition for a painting to be considered an icon, the next question relates to the use of perspective and its relationship to the notion of presence. Nicholas Conostas argues that “contemplating the icon of the person . . . places the viewer within the locus of a dynamic, personal presence. It produces in other words a space, a relational space conditioned by the communion and union of persons. The iconic construction of space suggests that the world is not a world of things, but a world of persons, constituted by their shared relations and activities.”¹³³ In a world of persons, where one both sees and is seen by another, it is not a case of a single observer viewing an object (or even a person) in a self-contained, separate reality. Rather, in the icon, a greater reality encompasses both the observer and the one depicted, and this reality is not specific to a fixed point in space or time. Inverse perspective is used to communicate this reality of liberation from space and time by focusing on movement not towards a distant vanishing point, but rather on movement from within the image toward the viewer.¹³⁴

While it can be tempting to place the icon’s reverse perspective, or its mix of perspectives, in contrast with the linear perspective of the natural world introduced during the Renaissance, it can be argued that the situation is more complex; even linear perspective is itself only one of many ways of representing the natural world. As such, various forms of perspective, including linear and reverse, are intrinsically tied to the worldviews of those who depict their

¹³³ Conostas, “Icons and the Imagination,” 121–122.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 122–123.

worlds in these ways. In the next section, this hypothesis will be explored further through the work of Erwin Panofsky.

Perspective as Worldview

The idea that perspective—whether in a work of art or in an icon—can be used to represent a specific worldview is not uniquely Christian or Orthodox. In his seminal book *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, secular art historian Erwin Panofsky traced the development of perspectival systems from antiquity through the Renaissance, and arrived at the counterpart of Condas’s conclusion: “the history of perspective may be understood with equal justice as a triumph of the distancing and objectifying sense of the real, and as a triumph of the distance-denying human struggle for control; it is as much a consolidation and systematization of the external world, as an extension of the domain of the self.”¹³⁵ In other words, whereas the use of inverse perspective in iconography was a means by which a person could enter into a relationship with another subject, and participate in a space rather than control it, the popularization of linear perspective beginning in the *quattrocento* (1400s) served to place full control of the image into the hands of the person and create a clear subject-object relationship that does not reverse. Panofsky notes further, “the vision of the universe is, so to speak, detheologized . . . the result was a translation of psychophysiological space into mathematical space; in other words, an objectification of the subjective.”¹³⁶

Although texts about iconography can tend to contrast the reverse perspective of icons with linear perspective, indicative of natural or mathematical space, Panofsky argues that linear

¹³⁵ Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form* (New York : Cambridge, Mass.: Zone Books, 1991), 67–68.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 66.

perspective is itself only one way of depicting natural space. As he points out, antique optics as developed in the Greco-Roman world used the sphere as the basis of its field of vision, knowing that the retina in the eye was not planar, but spherical; correspondingly, its associated geometry was based on relationships of angles and arcs rather than distances and lines, which Euclid explicitly stated in the Eighth Theorem of his treatise, *Optica*.¹³⁷ Furthermore, even within linear perspective, one-point, two-point, and three-point perspective (enumerating the number of vanishing points) all exist, and all result in slight variations in the final appearance of the scene depicted.

In the theology of icons, multiple perspectival systems have also been identified. Along with the inverse perspective already mentioned, there exists a multi-view perspective, where several sides of an object are visible, including ones that would not normally be simultaneously in view. There is also isometric perspective, where parallel lines determine edges and items do not shrink in the distance toward a vanishing point. Although this is often used in contemporary drafting, it sometimes features in iconography to preserve the uniformity and integrity of a given subject, regardless of how the senses might normally perceive it. Tipped perspective allows the items on a surface to be viewed as if from somewhat above, while maintaining a more frontal view of the remaining scene. Hieratic perspective, for its part, arranges and sizes people and objects in the order of their spiritual importance.¹³⁸ In summary, then, both within and outside

¹³⁷ Ibid., 34–35. See also Panofsky’s extensive notes, pp. 87-105, which describe not only the Eighth Theorem, but the history of how it came to be often misquoted or mis-paraphrased during the Renaissance, once linear perspective became established as the norm for depicting natural space.

¹³⁸ David Clayton, “How the Form of Byzantine Icons Relates to the Christian Worldview,” in *The Turn to Aesthetics: An Interdisciplinary Exchange of Ideas in Applied and Philosophical Aesthetics*, ed. Clive A. Palmer and David Torevell (Liverpool, UK: Liverpool Hope University Press, 2008), 89.

Orthodoxy, perspectival systems can be chosen such that they correlate with a specific experience that the creator intends to communicate to the viewer.

Speaking of art and paintings generally, and their potential connection to the divine, Panofsky comments, “perspective, in transforming the *ousia* (reality) into the *phainomenon* (appearance), seems to reduce the divine to a mere subject matter for human consciousness; but for that very reason, conversely, it expands human consciousness into a vessel for the divine.”¹³⁹ It is unlikely that Byzantine theologians would agree with the second part of Panofsky’s statement, especially given his earlier statement that mathematical space results in an objectification of the subjective. Since a large body of religious art exists in non-iconographic styles, however, Panofsky’s comment begs the question whether there is room for an encounter with the divine in forms of art outside iconography.

Although an exhaustive exploration of the potential for religious encounters in non-iconographic art is well beyond the scope of this thesis, we will briefly address the topic by examining Cubist art. On the surface, Cubism and iconography share a similar rejection of linear perspective, and arguably for similar reasons. Therefore, in the next section we turn to an overview of Cubism and its spiritual narrative. This will form the basis for our subsequent development of a tetrad describing the dynamic effects (“messages”) of icons, using McLuhan’s tetrad on Cubism as a starting point.

Cubism: A Spiritual (Re-)Awakening from the Renaissance’s ‘Mathematical Space?’

The early twentieth century was a time of rapid change in almost every way; political revolution and instability, scientific discoveries (such as Albert Einstein’s Theory of Relativity in

¹³⁹ Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, 72.

1905), and a taste for experimentation in artistic and cultural endeavours. This period witnessed a number of artistic movements falling under the umbrella of “modernism,” including Cubism; like many modernist movements, Cubism is characterized by a tendency toward abstraction.¹⁴⁰ The spark for this new movement is usually taken to have been Pablo Picasso’s *Les Femmes d’Alger (O.J.)*, painted in 1907: a life-size painting which portrayed five nude women in geometric form with hard angles and sharp curves, against a background similarly broken up into angular components. Although this painting was not generally well received by either Picasso’s friends or his critics, fellow artist Georges Braque took inspiration from the style, and together they developed the distinctive style of Cubism.¹⁴¹

In contrast to linear perspective as developed in the Renaissance, which had the effect of fixing the observer to a set point in space and time, Cubism sought to break away from a singular viewpoint. As art historian Dorothea Eimert describes it, Cubists circled around the objects of their paintings, analyzing every facet and assembling the resulting fragmented image onto the canvas. These deconstructed and interwoven surfaces blend space and time, perhaps in response to contemporary changes in traditional notions of space and time.¹⁴² At one level, then, Cubist

¹⁴⁰ Marilyn Stokstad, *Art History*, revised 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson Education, 2005), 1021.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 1034–35.

¹⁴² Guillaume Apollinaire, Dorothea Eimert, and Anatoli Podoksik, *Le Cubisme* (France: Parkstone International, 2014), 29. Although Eimert does not explicitly mention to which changes in the notions of space and time she is referring, it may be Einstein’s special theory of relativity, published in 1905 (two years prior to Picasso’s *Les Femmes d’Alger (O.J.)*), which introduced the famous $E = mc^2$ equation. However, it is unclear whether this could have been the inspiration for Cubist painters. As science historian Stanley Goldberg reports, Einstein’s work was essentially ignored in France until 1911. (Stanley Goldberg, “In Defense of Ether: The British Response to Einstein’s Special Theory of Relativity, 1905-1911,” *Historical Studies in the Physical Sciences* 2 (1970): 96–97.) Thus, it seems unlikely to have been an inspiration for French cubists such as Picasso and Braque, whose period of Analytic Cubism mainly spans 1909-1910. (Stokstad, *Art History*, 1036.) Even Einstein himself later wrote that there was no connection between his Theory of Relativity and the method by which Cubists depicted space, although it can be argued that neither a detailed nor accurate understanding is required for artistic inspiration. For more on Einstein’s comments about Cubism and their context, see Paul M. Laporte and Albert Einstein, “Cubism and Relativity with a Letter of Albert Einstein,” *Art Journal* 25, no. 3 (1966): 246–248. Another possible influence could be the work of James Hinton, who introduced the idea of the fourth dimension and produced a series of

paintings and icons share a sense of movement and a rejection of a static, unmoving relationship between the observer and object (or person). However, this may be at least in part due to an understanding of geometric space that was itself in flux at the turn of the 20th century.

The relationship of Cubism to the spiritual is certainly less apparent than what is obvious in the case of an icon, but there is evidence that some kind of spirituality influenced the movement. Guillaume Apollinaire, a poet, art critic, and friend of Picasso, wrote of the Cubist artists: “Above all, artists are men who want to become inhuman. They search laboriously for the traces of inhumanity, traces that are nowhere encountered in nature.”¹⁴³ Apollinaire admits that Cubism is not founded on any specific religious beliefs, but has many characteristics in common with religious art.¹⁴⁴ Hence he comments, “The painter must, above all, give himself the spectacle of his own divinity and the paintings he offers to the admiration of men will confer on them the glory of also, and momentarily, exercising their own divinity.”¹⁴⁵ From this, it appears as though the art is not oriented toward any transcendent divinity, but rather towards man as his own divinity—something that Marion, among others, would call idolatry. Given this and Apollinaire’s comparison of Picasso dissecting the object of painting the way a surgeon dissects a cadaver,¹⁴⁶ Cubism—at least as practiced by Picasso, Braque, and their circle—is not an art of

influential science fiction novels in the late 19th century. Hinton is mentioned in Nicoletta Misler’s biographical sketch of Pavel Florensky, who commented on a Picasso exhibition in Moscow. See Pavel Florensky, *Beyond Vision: Essays on the Perception of Art*, ed. Nicoletta Misler, trans. Wendy Salmond (London: Reaktion, 2002), 59.

¹⁴³ Apollinaire, Eimert, and Podoksik, *Le Cubisme*, 11. Translation mine. The original text reads, “Avant tout, les artistes sont des hommes qui veulent devenir inhumains. Ils cherchent péniblement les traces de l’inhumanité, traces que l’on ne rencontre nulle part dans la nature.”

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 17.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 8. Translation mine. The original text reads, “Le peintre doit avant tout se donner le spectacle de sa propre divinité et les tableaux qu’il offre à l’admiration des hommes leur conféreront la gloire d’exercer aussi et momentanément leur propre divinité.”

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 12.

the same ilk as iconography, with its dependence on presence between observer and subject, along with the implication of honour through veneration.

Although from Apollinaire's description of the Cubist movement one can imagine a type of spiritual art simply emptied of the divine and replaced with a narcissistic self-idolatry, some Christian observers—especially Orthodox but also some Roman Catholic¹⁴⁷—went even further to describe it as evil. Orthodox theologian Sergei Bulgakov (1871-1944), after having visited an exhibition of Picasso's work, penned an essay entitled “The Corpse of Beauty,” in which he admits that Picasso's work has real power, and there is something of the mysterious and spiritual in his work—perhaps even of the iconic.¹⁴⁸ However, Bulgakov believed that the spirituality inherent in these paintings was that of vampires or demons; thus, Picasso had painted icons of the demonic, even going so far as to say that Picasso had “become the plaything of an obsessing spirit, an artistic, and therefore convincing *advocatus diaboli*.”¹⁴⁹

Paul Evdokimov does not hold Cubism in much higher regard. Interestingly, he laments that “cubism decomposes the living unity of things into geometric elements and cerebrally reconstructs a painting like a mathematical problem”¹⁵⁰—a critique reiterating Apollinaire's comment about Picasso's work resembling the dissection of a cadaver. Evdokimov perhaps provides the nuance lacking in Bulgakov, in the latter's description of Cubism as demonic; for

¹⁴⁷ In 1951, the “Tract of Angers” was circulated, which was a letter signed by a group of Roman Catholics criticizing Picasso as a “Communist and Enemy of God.” Picasso had also submitted proposals for a side altar at a church in Assy, as well as a set of stained-glass windows for the cathedral in Metz, but faced opposition on both counts. See Jane Dillenberger, *The Religious Art of Pablo Picasso* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2014), 37–38.

¹⁴⁸ Bulgakov, “A Bulgakov Anthology,” 67–69.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 70.

¹⁵⁰ Evdokimov, *Art of the Icon*, 77.

Evdokimov, iconography is *symbolic*, bridging the visible and the invisible, while Cubist art is *diabolic*, throwing these two apart.¹⁵¹

Although Picasso and Braque are the best-known Cubists, and the focus of most dialogue about Cubism as a religious art (or its antithesis), the work of two other artists is relevant to our considerations here. American Herman Trunk, a devout Roman Catholic, painted a crucifix which arguably does not fall into the same category of paintings described by Evdokimov as devoid of meaning; though also Cubist, it is stylistically very different from Picasso's multiple renderings of the same subject. Second, Ukrainian Myron Levytsky completed iconography for ten Ukrainian Greco-Catholic (i.e., Byzantine-Rite) churches using a modern, Cubist style. These will be used as case studies to test the implications of what can be defined or excluded as iconography. To provide a framework in which to evaluate this, I propose the use of Marshall McLuhan's tetrads, to be introduced in our next section.

Section 4: Marshall McLuhan: “The Medium is the Message”

Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980) was a Canadian media theorist who wrote and spoke extensively about the effects of media, especially electric (and by extension, digital) technologies such as radio and television. Famous for coining the term “global village” and the phrase “the medium is the message,” he is well-known for probing the relationships between media and the changes effected in their respective social milieux. Because he often wrote with “probes” or otherwise provocative rather than conclusive statements, however, his corpus cannot be defined

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 86. Evdokimov points to the common root of the words “symbolic” (σύν (together) + βάλλειν (to throw)) and “diabolic” (διά (through) + βάλλειν, meaning to throw across or to separate, throw apart). Although Evdokimov refers to “-bolos” as meaning “throwing,” it is actually a noun meaning a casting, though it also has its root in the verb βάλλειν. See the entries for βόλος and διαβάλλω in Franco Montanari, *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 395, 480.

as a systematic exploration of media or communication theory, consequently attracting many critics in academia.¹⁵² Nonetheless, he articulated and often revisited several key themes, including the “figure-ground” relationship of medium and message. Toward the end of his career, he developed four “laws of media”—questions designed to retrieve and elucidate the various effects of media on society, the results of which could be schematized in a tetradic structure. These are introduced in *Laws of Media: The New Science*,¹⁵³ co-written with his son and published posthumously.

In the present context, we will explore the pertinence of the tetrad for clarifying the effects of the icon. As already indicated, the tetrad is itself dependent on McLuhan’s notions of medium and message, and linked to those of figure and ground. In the next section, therefore, these key ideas will be introduced, followed by an explanation of the tetrad as a framework for analysis.

The Medium is the Message

McLuhan defines a medium as “any extension of ourselves.”¹⁵⁴ This differs somewhat from definitions given in dictionaries, which define a medium as, for example, “an agency or means of doing something.”¹⁵⁵ McLuhan’s examples of media include clothing as extensions of the skin, the refrigerator as an extension of the stomach, the mirror as an extension of the eye,

¹⁵² For a relatively balanced overview of McLuhan’s career and legacy, along with its reception (both positive and negative) in academia and popular culture, see Donald A. Fishman, “Rethinking Marshall McLuhan: Reflections on a Media Theorist,” *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 50, no. 3 (September 2006): 567–574.

¹⁵³ Marshall McLuhan and Eric McLuhan, *Laws of Media: The New Science* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1988).

¹⁵⁴ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 19.

¹⁵⁵ “Medium | Definition of Medium in English by Oxford Dictionaries,” *Oxford Dictionaries | English*, accessed November 1, 2018, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/medium>.

and the wheel as an extension of feet in motion.¹⁵⁶ One of the key observations for which McLuhan is best known is that media have both content and messages. Content is what a given medium transmits, and is always another medium; for example, the content of radio is speech, which is itself a medium containing thought. Messages, on the other hand, are the effects, whether on a personal or social level, of media (or technologies), such as the elimination of jobs due to the introduction of automation.¹⁵⁷

McLuhan's idea of tying media to their respective effects will play a central role in our discussion of icons inasmuch as our focus here is not on content per se (i.e., the life and context of a particular saint), but rather on how the viewing and venerating of icons has repercussions—whether in the life of the observer or that of the wider community. With this focus, we will in turn be able to distinguish the “messages” (effects) of icons, and the extent to which the effects of icons are distinct from those associated with other paintings (e.g., the Cubist art mentioned above).

One further observation to make, before proceeding, is that McLuhan provides the same definition for technologies as he does for media, even giving the same examples—clothing, wheels, extensions of parts of the body. As with media, he states that technologies create environments that affect human sensory patterns in ways that can be felt without being noticed.¹⁵⁸ Therefore, “medium” and “technology” can be considered synonymous. His uses of the word “technology,” however, usually refer specifically to mechanical or electric devices, or are otherwise references to tools extending the physical capacities of the body. I will therefore

¹⁵⁶ McLuhan and McLuhan, *Laws of Media*, 117.

¹⁵⁷ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 19.

¹⁵⁸ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Me: Lectures and Interviews*, ed. Stephanie McLuhan and David Staines (Toronto, Ont.: McClelland & Stewart Ltd, 2003), 57.

continue to refer to icons as a medium, rather than a technology, in order to avoid any confusion with mechanical, electric, or digital technologies deriving from the realm of machines or automation.¹⁵⁹

Figure and Ground: The Extension and Interplay of Medium and Message

When McLuhan wrote *Understanding Media* and proposed that “the medium is the message,” he was interested in the effects of media beyond the public eye, and specifically the reciprocal relationship of media. The idea of certain aspects of media being visible or in the foreground, while others remain invisible or in the background, was eventually named the figure-ground relationship.¹⁶⁰ The figure-ground relationship, however, is a dynamic one, contingent on a given point of reference, and even in the writing of McLuhan (and his son Eric), statements about what constitutes figure, and what is ground need to be taken in context. In 1975, McLuhan said that “the medium is ground, and the so-called message is always figure.”¹⁶¹ Nevertheless,

¹⁵⁹ Recognizing that by “medium” or “technology,” McLuhan means any extension of the human person and not just an electronic technology like television or computers, is an important distinction. Confusion in this regard may be the source of contention for some of McLuhan’s critics, several of whom consider him to be a proponent of technological determinism, which is a reductionist view claiming that technology defines the nature of society. For an overview of such claims about McLuhan, see Ellen Balka, “Rethinking ‘The Medium Is the Message’: Agency and Technology in McLuhan’s Writings,” *Media International Australia Incorporating Culture and Policy* 94, no. 1 (2000): 73–75. Where “technology” is defined strictly as mechanical or electrical devices, it would be difficult to make this claim about McLuhan’s work, since he does not claim that such devices are the only sources of social influence. However, since McLuhan has defined technology (media) so broadly—any extension of man, including speech—it could be argued that in this sense he is a technological determinist, since it is inconceivable that any type of society could be formed without some sort of extension of persons beyond themselves.

¹⁶⁰ In a November 1975 interview, McLuhan states, “when I wrote this book [*Understanding Media*], I was not using figure-ground. Now I have switched completely to figure-ground. It was implied in here, but it was not explicit.” (Marshall McLuhan, “Interview with Nina Sutton,” interview by Nina Sutton, November 1975, Library and Archives Canada, accessed March 28, 2019, <https://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/obj/030003/f7/030003-009.wma>.)

¹⁶¹ Ibid. It is worth noting that in the context of this interview, “the medium is this huge change that takes place in the world . . . it’s the huge service environment that the medium creates.” In other words, the message of one medium (usually that collection of effects regarded as the “message”, here described as a service environment) is, in McLuhan’s eyes, itself another medium.

this cannot be taken as a rule since, as McLuhan himself later argues, the figure is an area of attention, while the ground is a much larger area of inattention: since these exist simultaneously, they are in flux, with figures rising out of and disappearing back into grounds. Therefore, in order to bring the message of a medium into view, a new situation needs to be created (an “anti-environment”), which will pull the old ground out of invisibility and present it as a figure; he claims this is usually the work of poets and artists, who perceive the inarticulate more acutely.¹⁶²

McLuhan was also influenced in this regard by scientists, who often start with an effect or thing to be discovered, and work backward to the causes.¹⁶³ Extending this pattern of thought into the social sphere, even scientists can become aware of the social effects of technologies; he notes that quantum physicist Werner Heisenberg pointed out that technical change impacts habits and thought patterns.¹⁶⁴ Still, though the McLuhans’ oeuvre acknowledges that scientists and management specialists, for example, can redirect attention from the figure to the ground, and in this way provide valuable information about hidden causes of a given effect, it is the artist who is indispensable for an understanding of the nuances of the forms and structures resulting from the introduction of technology (media).¹⁶⁵ This may be at least in part because McLuhan and McLuhan believe that a visual (i.e., text-based) bias exists in Western society, such that rigorous academic study in areas such as philosophy tends to disregard the audience of the texts (i.e., the

¹⁶² McLuhan and McLuhan, *Laws of Media*, 5.

¹⁶³ An illustrative example of this is Root Cause Analysis (RCA) in science and engineering. In fact, one Root Cause Analysis methodology used in several Fortune 500 companies identifies four elements to the cause and effect relationship, which are strikingly similar to McLuhan’s concepts: “1. Cause and effect are the same thing. 2. Causes and effects are part of an infinite continuum. 3. Every effect has at least two causes in the form of actions and conditions. 4. An effect exists only if its causes exist at the same point in time and space.” [Dean L. Gano, *Apollo Root Cause Analysis: Effective Solutions to Everyday Problems Every Time*, 3rd ed. (Richland, WA: Apollonian Publications, 2007), 3.]

¹⁶⁴ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 93–94.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 96.

ground) almost completely, in favour of a visual fixation on the figure. In conclusion, the arts enable the visibility of the ground; simultaneously, “without the interplay of *figure* and *ground*, no art or knowledge is possible.”¹⁶⁶

Marshall McLuhan, in analyzing the dynamism of figure and ground with respect to a given medium and its effects (or messages), parallels many of the ideas discussed above with respect to iconography, such as the visible and invisible, the crossing of the gaze, and the sense of movement and subject created through reverse perspective. Next, I will highlight McLuhan’s contrast between visual space and acoustic space, one particularly relevant to our considerations of the icon as medium; although an icon is a traditionally visual medium in the popular sense of the word, McLuhan would argue that it inhabits primarily acoustic (rather than visual) space, and this has implications for the senses involved in the experience of icon veneration.

Visual and Acoustic Space: The Icon as a Medium of Acoustic Space

In *Laws of Media*, McLuhan contrasts visual and acoustic space, which are characterized, broadly speaking, by linearity and simultaneity respectively.¹⁶⁷ Visual space, he contends, is built around the eye and vision and, as an extension, represents that which is continuous, connected, linear, homogeneous, and static. He calls this a man-made artefact, in that it is only through man’s use of the phonetic alphabet, with its associated abstraction from the percepts of other senses, that visual space can exist. In this space, a figure exists without a ground—a

¹⁶⁶ Marshall McLuhan and Eric McLuhan, *Media and Formal Cause* (Houston, TX: Neopoiesis Press, 2011), 76. Italics are theirs.

¹⁶⁷ One can call these *diachronic* and *synchronic*, respectively, and McLuhan does make the connection to these concepts especially in relation to linguistics, as in the writing of Ferdinand de Saussure. However, he notes that the use of the term “visual” can be problematic in predominantly visual space, since McLuhan means a text-driven society and not everything that can be seen with the eyes (paintings, natural vistas, etc.). McLuhan discusses this briefly in McLuhan and McLuhan, *Laws of Media*, 111–112.

phenomenon absent from natural environments.¹⁶⁸ McLuhan's argument here seems dubious: as described earlier, he indicates that there is always an interplay between figure and ground, neither existing without the other. In fact, McLuhan even calls the phonetic alphabet "the hidden ground of the figure of visual space."¹⁶⁹ The notion of visual space could be refined as that which is focused on the figure, such that one rarely perceives the (still-present) ground. It is "space as created and perceived by the eyes *when they are abstracted or separate from the activity of the other senses.*"¹⁷⁰

Acoustic space, in contrast, enhances the simultaneous, the resonant, and the multilocal; it is the antithesis of visual space characterized by the sequential, static, and linear.¹⁷¹ It is important to note here that McLuhan does not restrict "acoustic" to the audible or auditory; instead, it denotes anything that can be sensed in synchronous fashion, including visual stimuli that do not resemble, for example, the sequential reading of abstract letterforms as text on a page. Acoustic space also implies a sensory synthesis, since it is "always penetrated by tactility and other senses, is spherical, discontinuous, non-homogeneous, resonant, and dynamic. Visual space is structured as static, abstract figure minus a ground; acoustic space is a flux in which figure and ground rub against and transform each other."¹⁷²

Although McLuhan does not specifically discuss iconography in his writing, his criteria of visual and acoustic space would locate the domain of the icon in the latter. This may seem counterintuitive, since the icon itself makes no sound or use of other senses beyond that of sight.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 22–23, 205.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 22.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. Italics are theirs.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 160–161.

¹⁷² Ibid., 33.

There are two reasons, however, why iconography should be conceptualized in this manner. First, and most obviously, although icons are often said to be “written” and even “read,” understanding and praying with an icon involves a non-linear, synchronous approach to the image as a whole, such that one goes beyond the visible surface, into the presence of the prototype. This movement is further reinforced by the natural environment of the icon, i.e., a place of worship whose light moves with flickering candlelight and a thin veil of incense, (as described by Florensky¹⁷³), supplemented with liturgical chant—elements which form a synthesis of the senses. Second, the dynamic interplay of figure and ground is an apt description for the interaction of the immanent and transcendent, or earthly and divine, in the icon. Historically, the iconoclasts struggled to understand how a depiction of the earthly by earthly means could adequately represent the presence of the divine; analogously, those accustomed to visual space might well struggle with the visibility of the figure and the invisibility (but not absence) of the ground, as described in McLuhan’s works.

With these considerations in mind, we can now turn to an overview of McLuhan’s laws of media and the tetrad, i.e., his method for classifying and displaying the effects of media that can be ascertained through these laws. Cubism will feature as a case study, since McLuhan developed a tetrad to explore the effects of this artistic style. With this baseline established, I will attempt to develop a new tetrad, schematizing the dynamic effects of the icon.

¹⁷³ Florensky, *Beyond Vision: Essays on the Perception of Art*, 108.

Section 5: Introduction to the Laws of Media and the Tetrad

To define a medium, and consequently grasp its potential effects (“messages”), McLuhan sought to systematize the ways that media could extend or modify the senses; he identified only four, termed “laws of media,” that could be tested objectively:¹⁷⁴

1. **Enhancement**—the extension of one or more senses, and the intensification of a situation in some way. In figure-ground terms, this can be either the conversion of a ground element into a figure, or the further intensification of an existing figure element. The key question is, “what does the medium enhance or intensify?”
2. **Obsolescence**—the displacement into impotency of a former situation. This moves a previous figure element to the ground. The key question is, “what does the medium render obsolete or displace?”
3. **Retrieval**—the revival of something that had previously been made obsolete. Like enhancement, this is a ground element becoming figure, though indirectly as a result of the situation created by the introduction of the medium. The key question is, “what does the medium retrieve that was previously obsolesced?”
4. **Reversal**—the result of overload, or taking the process to the extreme. This is best viewed as a dual action where figure and ground change places. The key question is, “what does this medium produce or become when pressed to an extreme?”¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁴ McLuhan and McLuhan, *Laws of Media*, viii–ix.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 7, 227–228.

Although these laws appear numbered above, they are *not* to be taken as sequential. As soon as any one of these effects occurs for a given medium, all the others do as well.¹⁷⁶ That said, McLuhan and McLuhan have identified two types of relationships between pairs of laws that should be noted. First, they propose that enhancement and obsolescence relate to morphology, or the form of a medium, while retrieval and reversal relate to metamorphosis, namely, the “embedding of one situation in another.”¹⁷⁷ The strength of these laws is their accounting for the effects of metamorphosis. Enhancement and obsolescence (which one could dub “morphological laws”) may tend to be more obvious since they concern what is either already figure, or being purposely brought in as figure. Retrieval and reversal can be more difficult to perceive, as they require insight into the ground of a given medium—hence the focus of McLuhan’s work. It is perhaps due to the difficulty in gaining this insight that the McLuhans suggest retrieval is both the “keynote or dominant mode” of the laws of any given medium and, as such, can be the most difficult to discover.¹⁷⁸

The second type of relationship to note, and the one that came to govern the format in which the tetrads were presented, is that there is an inner harmony between the laws, such that pairs can be represented as analogous ratios or proportionalities. The McLuhans conceptualized this using the mathematical idea of “A is to B as C is to D.” In the case of the laws of media, they proposed that “enhance is to reverse as retrieve is to obsolesce,” which they visualized as:

¹⁷⁶ Marshall McLuhan and Eric McLuhan, *The Lost Tetrads of Marshall McLuhan* (New York and London: OR Books, 2017), 14.

¹⁷⁷ McLuhan and McLuhan, *Laws of Media*, 228.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

Enhance is to Reverse
as
Retrieve is to Obsolesce¹⁷⁹

It is interesting to note that here, the McLuhans explicitly sought to avoid the analogy, “enhance is to obsolesce as retrieve is to reverse,” claiming these to be incorrect as ratios,¹⁸⁰ although these are precisely the pairs mentioned in *Laws of Media*, as described above. The authors provide no further elaboration in this respect, despite mentioning these same pairs elsewhere.¹⁸¹ It appears that the stated laws are in relationship (or interrelationship) on several levels, although the secondary literature on the McLuhans’ work has yet to produce a complete characterization. For the sake of our argument, it will be understood that all four laws are indeed interrelated, representing different movements in the dynamic perception of figure-ground relationships:

- **Enhancement**—what becomes figure?
- **Obsolescence**—what becomes ground?
- **Retrieval**—what figure had previously become ground, and is now returning to figure?
- **Reversal**—how can figure and ground switch places when the medium is taken to the extreme?

¹⁷⁹ McLuhan and McLuhan, *The Lost Tetrads of Marshall McLuhan*, 26–27. If this is the case, then based on the concept of proportionality, it is also the case that enhance is to retrieve as reverse is to obsolesce.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁸¹ Along with being mentioned by the McLuhans themselves in *Laws of Media*, these pairs are also listed in Pruska Oldenhof and Logan (the latter of whom has previously collaborated with Marshall McLuhan): “The enhancement as figure is to the obsolescence as ground as the retrieval as figure is to the ground of reversal.” [Izabella Pruska Oldenhof and Robert K. Logan, “The Spiral Structure of Marshall McLuhan’s Thinking,” *Philosophies* 2, no. 2 (June 2017): 12.]

As previously mentioned, the laws are not sequential but rather operate simultaneously. In order to display them, the McLuhans developed the format of the tetrad, in which each effect, and any glosses, are displayed graphically. We will now explore this.

The Tetrad: A Graphical Display of the Interrelated Laws of Media

The four laws of media are generally presented in a diagram called a *tetrad*, in which a space is divided into four areas, two wide and two tall. Each law occupies one quadrant, being laid out according to the original proportionalities that the McLuhans identified.¹⁸²

Enhance	Retrieve
Reverse	Obsolesce

Although dozens of tetrads appear in *Laws of Media* and dozens more in *The Lost Tetrads*, the one that will serve as the main prototype in the present context is that developed for Cubism, as shown below in Figure 1.

Cubism <i>(painting) e.g., Picasso, Braque</i>	
Enhances	Reverses Into
Multilocational eye <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A collage of many points of view: the eye used in terms of other senses, moving, penetrating • Re-enter the simultaneous; exit the one-thing-at-a-time 	Iconic image The non-visual <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Icon demands an educated audience? • Sculpture • With no 'object' presented, nothing to look at, the painting becomes a mask for the user to wear, to see by
Retrieves	Obsolesces
The viewer The making process (the genuine fake) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The multisensuous; iconic image • The complex sensibility of many levels simultaneously • Cf. Picasso's <i>Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J.)</i> (ca. 1909) 	Representation: visual space Objectivity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single, fixed point of view, perspective, foreshortening, chiaroscuro • The passive viewer and photographic realism; the cell for citters to cit in [sic]. • Standing on a Paris street in 1914, watching a parade of military vehicles

¹⁸² McLuhan and McLuhan, *Laws of Media*, 129–130; McLuhan and McLuhan, *The Lost Tetrads of Marshall McLuhan*, 27.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The viewer has to complete the image, thereby becoming co-creator. • Rediscovered and up-dates primitive values in everyday objects • The mode of light-through 	<p>using the new camouflage, Picasso said, 'Braque and I invented that.'</p>
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*Figure 1: Tetrad for Cubism.*¹⁸³

Just as media may form chains, where the content of one medium is another medium, tetrads can also be mutually related. McLuhan identifies two possible ways in which this may occur. First, they may form a chain of tetrads, should an element of one tetrad's quadrant be the subject of another tetrad. Alternatively clusters may form, if the given tetrads have similar elements in a quadrant—for example, if they all obsolesce the same thing.¹⁸⁴ As analytic tools, therefore, tetrads have the potential not only to ascertain the figure and ground effects of a given medium, but also to assess the various connections between related media.

The Tetrad as a Tool for Analyzing Iconography

We now reach the goal of the present endeavour, which is to test the usefulness of tetrads for displaying the dynamics of iconography as a theological medium. The hypothesis is that this tool will be a useful means of focusing our attention on the complex and perhaps overlooked figure-ground relationships at play. As the McLuhans state,

Insofar as tetrads are a means of focusing awareness of hidden or unobserved qualities in our culture and technology, they act phenomenologically. From Hegel to Heidegger, phenomenologists have engaged in an attempt to get at the hidden properties or hidden effects of language and technology alike. In other words, they have tackled a right-hemisphere problem using left-hemisphere techniques and modes of cognition. With the tetrads this dilemma is resolved.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ McLuhan and McLuhan, *Laws of Media*, 156–157. I have modified the display format to a tabular form to streamline its presentation in this thesis, but the items are as written by McLuhan and McLuhan, including inaccuracies (*Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* was painted in 1907) and liberties in spelling (“cell for citters to cit in.”).

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 130.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 128. Defining and critiquing the parallels between phenomenology and McLuhan's thought is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, an excellent overview of McLuhan's media theory and phenomenology,

I would contend that the dilemma referred to cannot be completely resolved even with the tetrad, given that the tetrad is itself arguably a left-hemisphere technique for mapping figure-ground relationships and placing them in analogous proportions with each other. Still, the tetrad will demonstrate its usefulness as a method for elucidating not only the figure-ground terrain in iconography, but also the extended chain of media to which it belongs. The tetrad representing Cubism will be used as a starting point for the development of a similar tetrad for iconography, not only because of the many similarities shared by these two styles of art, but also because icons (or the iconic) are explicitly and repeatedly mentioned in the Cubist tetrad. Since these references occur in more than one quadrant (reversal and retrieval), it would appear that the tetrad for Cubism naturally forms a *cluster* rather than a *chain* in relation to the proposed tetrad for iconography. In other words, Cubism and icons share certain properties and processes, rather than one leading to another. In what follows, therefore, we will periodically make comparisons with Cubism, which will enable us to assess the differences in the respective figure-ground relationships defining iconography. Incidentally, other tetrads elsewhere developed by the McLuhans will also be referenced to expand our analysis; specifically, the tetrads for acoustic space, visual space, and perspective in painting will all prove to be highly pertinent.

especially that of Heidegger, can be found in Laureano Ralon and Marcelo Vieta, “McLuhan and Phenomenology,” *Explorations in Media Ecology* 10, no. 3/4 (July 10, 2012): 185–206. In particular, they argue that McLuhan took too narrow a definition of phenomenology, calling it “Cartesian” and failing to distinguish transcendental phenomenology (Husserl) from existential phenomenology (Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre). (195) They further point out that McLuhan’s media theory and the phenomenological movement have the same roots, which are the humanist or anti-positivist artistic movements (art, philosophy, literature) that began to develop toward the end of the 19th century, in reaction to Cartesian intellectualism and scientific positivism. (194) For our purposes, McLuhan’s tetrads will be taken as one tool among others—such as phenomenological theory—with which iconography can be explored, with the qualification that this tool remains itself a medium in relationship with others.

PART II: DEVELOPMENT OF THE TETRAD FOR ICONOGRAPHY

As presented in Part I, the McLuhans developed a tetrad describing the figure-ground relationships and effects of Cubism, taken as a medium. Despite its many similarities with iconography, there are also important differences, ranging from stylistic divergences to perceived theological discrepancies—such that Bulgakov, for instance, could go so far as to label Cubism as demonic. Nonetheless, taking the Cubist tetrad as a starting point, Figure 2 proposes an iconographic counterpart. Because of the interconnection between the four laws of media discussed above, there is no linear path through the discrete sections of our new tetrad. The analysis of its contents, therefore, will proceed in three parts. First, the similarities between Cubism and iconography will be discussed. Next, the important differences will be addressed, particularly, those features in which iconography and Cubism stand in opposition—whether in form or doctrine. Finally, further nuances will be discussed—for example, the effect and role of the icon in its theological, not to say liturgical, milieu. Our focus will be on a properly *theological* discussion of iconography, as a medium bridging the transcendent and immanent. However, contributions from other areas (as described in Part I) will also be incorporated into the discussion where relevant.

Iconography	
Enhances	Reverses Into
Multilocational thought <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The extension of the space of thought • Re-enter the simultaneous; exit the one-thing-at-a-time • Polycentrism – conflation of the one and the all 	Idols <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Movement out of the transcendent into the purely immanent (which may appear transcendent) • Icon demands an educated audience? • Static, controlling subject.
Retrieves	Obsolesces
The viewer Creation In-person relationship <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The multisensuous, especially noetic sense • The complex sensibility of many levels simultaneously • E.g., Rublev's Trinity (15th century) • The viewer has to become part of the scene – “crossing of the gaze” • The Word, acoustic space 	Representation: visual space Objectivity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single, fixed point of view, perspective, foreshortening, chiaroscuro • The passive viewer and photographic realism • The passive object as item to be viewed—still life

Figure 2: A potential tetrad for iconography.

Section 1: Iconography and Cubism as Kin

A number of important parallels exist between Cubism and iconography, as reflected in their respective tetrads. Specifically, six statements from the original tetrad on Cubism carry over into the iconographic counterpart. Three relate to the existence of both Cubism and iconography in acoustic rather than visual space, a topic addressed in greater detail below. For now, it can be noted that the “space” of iconography arguably extends much wider than that of Cubism, including as it does the transcendent, and engaging not only the five physical senses, but also the “noetic” faculty. A further similarity is the apparent need for an educated audience. The final two concern the experience of the viewer, who in both cases lacks a fixed viewpoint as well as a specific point in time. Since the icon arguably creates a “double dynamic,” where the viewer is in turn also being gazed upon from multiple viewpoints by the subject of the icon, our discussion of this feature will segue into the next section, which elaborates on the differences between our chosen styles—the crossing of the gaze being a crucial one.

Simultaneity and the Multisensuous in Cubism and Iconography

Spatial and Temporal Simultaneity

One of the most obvious aspects that Cubism enhances, as noted by the McLuhans, is exiting the sequential (“one-thing-at-a-time”) and re-entering the simultaneous. The use of the terminology “re-entering” as opposed to simply “entering” implies a retrieval of something previously existent, and it is in fact in retrieval that two other, related items can be found: on the one hand, references to the multisensuous and, on the other, to experiences of simultaneity. These will be elaborated upon below. The key enhancement—the movement from the sequential to the simultaneous—is synonymous with leaving visual space and entering acoustic space (to use McLuhan’s terminology as described in Part I): it is in acoustic space that such synchronicity is possible.

The McLuhans appear to concentrate primarily on spatial synchronicity, i.e., viewing an object from multiple vantage points simultaneously, and this leads to the name of the enhancement chosen for this tetrad: the “multilocational eye.” In other words, although synchronicity could mean either juxtaposing multiple spatial viewpoints of a given object, or composing an object from a single viewpoint over a period of time, as though simultaneous, the emphasis in the Cubist tetrad is on the spatial aspect of synchronicity. This is reinforced by the McLuhans’ other gloss in that category, describing the multilocational eye as a collage that assembles multiple points of view. This is not to say, however, that temporal synchronicity is not a factor in Cubism: obtaining multiple points of view does imply movement between vantage

points, and thus a time lapse—even if only over a brief period. Critiques of Cubism have also noted both spatial and temporal synchronicity to be characteristic of this form of art.¹⁸⁶

In a similar way, icons are conventionally characterized by synchronicity, both spatial and temporal, although it has been argued that this applies only to the presentation of the image on the board, rather than to the manner in which an icon is processed by the human eye given its limited visual field.¹⁸⁷ Nonetheless, it is common for an icon to feature multiple facets of an object that would not normally be visible unless one were to walk “around” the scene. Contrary to what an uninformed viewer might presume, Florensky notes that the seemingly inaccurate appearances of elements in an icon are not limitations imposed by a lack of technical skill, i.e., by some inability of the artist to portray them naturalistically. In many cases, the sides of objects otherwise hidden are not only depicted, but are also brightly coloured to emphasize their placement alongside the normally visible facets. This indicates that such synchronicity exhibits the intention of the iconographer, rather than being the result of inferior training in perspective.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁶ Pamela A. Genova, “The Poetics of Visual Cubism: Guillaume Apollinaire on Pablo Picasso,” *Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature* 27, no. 1, Art. 3 (January 1, 2003): 64. In fact, Genova mentions a third form of synchronicity—semantic—that is identified through the work of Guillaume Apollinaire (a contemporary of Picasso) as being an element of Cubism.

¹⁸⁷ Pavel Florensky, for example, in defending the icon against accusations that it is not physically possible to see three walls of a house at once, argues that it is not possible to see two or even one whole wall at once, because the eye can see only a small portion of a wall without moving around to see the rest of it, and that we can see nothing all at once. [Pavel Florensky, “Reverse Perspective,” in *Beyond Vision: Essays on the Perception of Art*, ed. Nicoletta Misler, trans. Wendy Salmond (London: Reaktion, 2002), 271.] This statement is inaccurate, especially as it has been demonstrated that the normal human field of vision, i.e., the space the eye can see instantaneously, extends from 60° (horizontally toward the nose) to 100° (horizontally toward the temple), and 60° to 70° upward and downward respectively. [Robert P. Cubbidge, *Visual Fields, Eye essentials* (Edinburgh and New York: Elsevier Butterworth-Heinemann, 2005), 2.] Since the normal visual field is large enough to encompass the majority of icons and paintings that will be discussed, the analysis in this thesis will be limited to what is *displayed* simultaneously in the image, and will exclude any factors relating to visual field or eye movement related to “taking in” a whole image.

¹⁸⁸ Florensky, “Reverse Perspective,” 202–203.

Although Florensky describes the technique in question, an unusual use of perspective, as intentional, Ouspensky and Lossky delve further into the rationale for it. Returning to one of the main issues addressed during the second iteration of the Iconoclastic Controversy, namely, the relationship of image to prototype, they note that it is important for an icon to avoid the illusion of being the prototype. In other words, the very challenge of the icon is to portray three-dimensional space without artificially creating the impression of going beyond the two-dimensional panel of the icon, so as to avoid any confusion between image and prototype. The use of reverse perspective successfully prevents the eye from being drawn into or behind the panel, instead directing the gaze back toward the observer.¹⁸⁹

The matter of perspective in iconography must be pressed further at this point, because a simple understanding of reverse perspective does not fully encompass the forms of perspective used in iconography. Reverse perspective does allow an icon to avoid naturalistic illusion, but often multiple forms of perspective are adopted simultaneously. This could be a combination of reverse and direct (“normal”) perspective in the same icon, such as in Rublev’s *Trinity*,¹⁹⁰ or it could be a variety of architectural façades that not only converge toward the viewer (reverse perspective), but do so according to several discrete “vanishing points,” all in the proximity of the observer. As Arianne Conty suggests, this technique can have the effect of disorienting an observer who is used to being at an unmoving centre, creating in turn the feeling of being “played upon by the painting.”¹⁹¹ The resulting sense of movement will be revisited below, when discussing the themes of dynamic presence and the crossing of the gaze, but it is worth noting

¹⁸⁹ Ouspensky and Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons*, 41.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Conty, “Bending Heaven down to Earth,” 2.

here how an unusual use of perspective in the layout of elements and figures can be an important contributor to this distinct characteristic of icons.

A further aspect not emphasized in the Cubist tetrad is temporal simultaneity, wherein different points in time are collapsed into a single moment. This is arguably an essential characteristic of iconography, and can be represented in multiple ways. In one sense, any portrayal symbolizing the divine or transcendent necessarily implicates an experience of time other than the linear, chronological sort that is proper to the natural world. This can take the form of a representation of *kairos* instead of *chronos*, but also that of the juxtaposition of elements from different points in chronological time within the same image—representing a spiralling or folding of chronological time. Uniquely, Florensky even goes so far as to posit instantaneous—or even reverse—time, as an analogue to reverse perspective;¹⁹² however, other authors do not echo this idea.

The most noticeable form of temporal simultaneity in iconography is what I term above as the “spiralling” or “folding” of time, a process by which separate events can be seen simultaneously. As Evdokimov writes, scenes can be assembled according to that “redeemed time,” which itself regulates the interior order of the icon. Such time creates links within scenes based on intrinsic spiritual meaning. Due to their placement in redeemed rather than chronological history, even indoor scenes are not typically depicted as being enclosed by walls,

¹⁹² Florensky describes this relative to dreams, which he describes as “images that separate the visible world from the invisible”—straddling visible and invisible in much the same way as icons. In dreams, when one is suddenly awoken by an external sound, he notes that often in the dream, a whole sequence of events can lead up to the sound, even though the person could not have actually anticipated the sudden sound. Therefore, he supposes that in a dream, time can run backward from the sound through to the beginning of the dream sequence. [Pavel Florensky, *Iconostasis*, trans. Donald Sheehan and Olga Andrejev (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1996), 33–44.] Evdokimov would not agree, indicating that time is not reversible, but can rather be opened up [Evdokimov, *Art of the Icon*, 133.]. This is more in line with Florensky’s original idea of instantaneous time rather than the time running in reverse that he develops from it.

so that they might not appear limited by physical time and space. In this way, the icon shows that “everything is subordinated to everything and that everything is immanent to everything.”¹⁹³

Furthermore, as Constantine Kalokyris notes, beyond removing walls that would place a scene indoors, an iconographer also habitually omits such items that might make the scene identifiable, or at least renders them in only a rudimentary manner. For example, a crucifixion tableau might include a small mound with a skull to indicate Golgotha, but would not generally feature an historically accurate depiction of everything that could have been visible to a contemporary observer.¹⁹⁴

Time in the icon can be seen not only as “redeemed” but also as disclosing the “eternal present,” which is echoed in the language and essence of the liturgy—the context in which iconography belongs. As Kalokyris writes, “the individual events of religious history are not to be understood as mere occurrences in the past, but as happening mystically and as events active even today. This means that the worshipper does not merely commemorate, but lives, and himself actually partakes in, the life of the Saviour and of his saints.”¹⁹⁵ Evdokimov would describe the eternal present (i.e., eternity) as a positive form of time, wherein the past, present, and the ages to come are all fully open to the presence of God.¹⁹⁶ In this he brings us again to the theme of *presence* in the icon, especially as it relates to what might otherwise be considered historical figures. Far from simply being a portrait of a person or event of a bygone age, it is understood that in and through the icon, a saint and an observer are brought together into an

¹⁹³ Evdokimov, *Art of the Icon*, 223–224.

¹⁹⁴ Constantine D Kalokyris, “Byzantine Iconography and ‘Liturgical’ Time,” *Eastern Churches Review* 1, no. 4 (1967): 361.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 359.

¹⁹⁶ Evdokimov, *Art of the Icon*, 128.

eternal present, becoming contemporaries. In the icon, mathematical time is thus abolished,¹⁹⁷ just as much as mathematical space. For this reason, in the tetrad for iconography, it can be said to exit the one-thing-at-a-time (mathematical or linear time) and to re-enter the simultaneous—the eternal present.

The Multisensuous Experience in Iconography

In the tetrad for Cubism, the McLuhans identify the multisensuous, and specifically the iconic image, as that which the style retrieves.¹⁹⁸ Defining the “iconic” in a television interview, and speaking of television as an iconic medium, Marshall McLuhan said that an iconic medium “is very low in visual quality, very high in tactile. Active touch, not cutaneous but active touch, as the psychologists say.”¹⁹⁹ Accordingly, the multisensuous is rooted in acoustic space, wherein the simultaneous and the resonance between figure and ground are key.²⁰⁰ In our next section, the multisensuous will be explored first in modern art, and then in iconography, with the goal of clarifying the parallels and differences.

Speaking about iconic art, where McLuhan’s definition of “iconic” (as cited in the previous paragraph) is intended, the McLuhans note that “there is muting of the visual as such, in order that there may be maximal interplay among all of the senses. Such was the painterly

¹⁹⁷ Kalokyris, “Byzantine Iconography and ‘Liturgical’ Time,” 360.

¹⁹⁸ However, the iconic image, along with the non-visual, is also shown as the primary item into which Cubism reverses when figure and ground are flipped. This forms something of a paradox since retrieval creates a figure (iconic image) from a ground, and reversal swaps figure and ground—which should make a ground of the iconic image, not a figure. This is a potential problem with the tetrad. For the purposes of developing the tetrad for iconography, the focus here will be on retrieval of the multisensuous and the role of acoustic space; the iconic per McLuhan’s definition will be considered as belonging to acoustic space.

¹⁹⁹ Frank Kermode, “The Future of Man in the Electric Age,” television, *Monitor* (British Broadcasting Corporation, 1965), accessed April 11, 2019, <http://www.marshallmcluhanspeaks.com/interview/1965-the-future-of-man-in-the-electric-age/>.

²⁰⁰ McLuhan and McLuhan, *Laws of Media*, 160.

strategy ‘since Cezanne,’ to paint as if you held, rather than as if you saw, objects.’²⁰¹ In his essay “Cézanne’s Doubt,” however, Merleau-Ponty approaches the situation somewhat differently:

Cézanne does not try to use color to *suggest* the tactile sensations which would give shape and depth. These distinctions between touch and sight are unknown in primordial perception. It is only as a result of a science of the human body that we finally learn to distinguish our senses. The lived object is not rediscovered or constructed on the basis of the contributions of the senses; rather, it presents itself to us from the start as a center from which these contributions radiate . . . If the painter is to express the world, the arrangement of his colors must bear within this indivisible whole, or else his painting will only hit at things and will not give them in the imperious unity, the presence, the insurpassable [sic] plenitude which is for us the definition of the real.²⁰²

Thus, for Merleau-Ponty, a painter like Cézanne does not attempt to represent one sense (such as touch) with something observable to the visual sense. Rather, the style of painting begins within the idea that the senses are part of an indivisible whole; if successfully expressed in the work, this indivisible, sensory whole, though perceived visually, will lead to a connection with the presence of the reality represented therein.

In iconography, it can also be argued that a stylized rather than naturalistic portrayal of people and their environment also serves to express a form of “real presence,” through an experience appealing to all the senses together. As previously discussed, the use of reverse perspective, exaggerated facial features and generic environments, among other features, are adopted in order to foster both a sense of dynamic movement and of being connected to the reality of the person or event depicted. However, this appeal to all our senses is not restricted to

²⁰¹ Ibid., 55.

²⁰² Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, ed. Galen A. Johnson and Michael B. Smith, Northwestern University studies in phenomenology & existential philosophy (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 65.

that which appears on the icon board. Icons are also inextricably entwined with their liturgical environment, and thus the symphony of senses extends beyond the icon and into the liturgical experience. Florensky comments that icons are not only associated with the architecture of the surrounding church and the thin veil of incense wafting around inside, but they are also part of an organically connected whole that includes choreography, vestments, the symbiosis of music and poetry in liturgical singing, and the aesthetics of church ritual itself, taken as a musical drama. As a result, “everything here that is coordinated to everything else does not exist if taken separately, or at least it exists falsely.”²⁰³ Sahas reinforces this claim, joining the sight of icons to the sound of music, the smell of incense, the movements of kneeling or the sign of the cross, and the taste of communion, as part of a complete experience of liturgy.²⁰⁴ Thus, the icon is not just a painting, but constitutes a liturgical act—both *of* and *for* the Church—and is conducive to communion with God.²⁰⁵

Still, although all the senses are engaged synergistically when praying with an icon in its ecclesial, liturgical environment, the burning question of the Iconoclastic Controversy remains: how do we both portray and perceive that which is invisible—namely, the sanctity of the saints and the divinity of Christ? In our discussion above, we addressed the key arguments of Patriarch Nikephoros, with respect to the inseparability of the visible and the invisible. Affirming, with him, that both aspects of a person *can* be portrayed, it is not yet evident *how* the transcendent might become perceptible. Although we often mean the five physical senses when speaking of “senses,” from the time of the Church Fathers onward, other spiritual means of perception have

²⁰³ Florensky, *Beyond Vision: Essays on the Perception of Art*, 108–109.

²⁰⁴ Sahas, *Icon and Logos*, 10–11.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

been identified. One of these is the *nous*, which could be translated as “intellect;” however, it includes not just intellectual and moral reasoning (dependent on the ordinary senses), but also the perception of otherwise invisible spiritual realities, extending to the “noetic” aspect of human beings and even to the apprehension of God himself.²⁰⁶ It is especially through the *nous* that one might perceive a *presence*, and not just an object, in an icon. Because the *nous*, in patristic thought, is associated with the image of God in a person, it also forms the contemplative faculty enabling him or her to seek God and approach divinization (*theosis*)—union with God through divine grace.²⁰⁷

Sergei Bulgakov also makes a case for the *nous*, describing an observer’s capacity for noetic vision as the very basis for the icon. Elaborating on what this kind of vision sees, he suggests that in the “proto-thing” or “proto-image”—the iconodules’ “prototype”—the *nous* beholds the “noetic image.” Thus, adapting a quote from Kant, Bulgakov states that “things without proto-images are blind (naturalism) and proto-images without things are empty or abstract (schematism).”²⁰⁸ Bulgakov thereby highlights the importance of the link between the material and conceptual—the visible and invisible—a link that figures such as John of Damascus had already articulated when making the case for the possibility of revealing the invisible through the visible.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁶ Nonna Verna Harrison, “The Human Person as Image and Likeness of God,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology*, ed. Mary B. Cunningham and Elizabeth Theokritoff, Cambridge companions to religion (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 83.

²⁰⁷ Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (London: J. Clarke, 1957), 201.

²⁰⁸ Sergei Bulgakov, *Icons and the Name of God*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 2012), 46–47.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 46.

The result of contemplating an icon with both the physical senses and with the nous will be considered below, in our discussion of presence and the crossing of the gaze; for the present purpose of constructing a tetrad for iconography, it can be noted that both icons and Cubist paintings share the characteristic of retrieving the multisensuous through a visual medium. However, I would argue that iconography is oriented not only to the physical senses, but also to those spiritual faculties expressive of the nous. The integration of all of our potential modes of perception does not occur automatically, however, and requires development and refinement—particularly in the case of the nous. We therefore return to the brief question the McLuhans ask with respect to reversal in their tetrad for Cubism: “Icon demands an educated audience?”²¹⁰ Since the nous is often associated with the intellect, and even at times reduced to it, we will proceed with an examination of the role of education in iconography.

Lex Videndi: The Relationship Between Education and Iconography

When the McLuhans ask “Icon demands an educated audience?” in the Cubist tetrad, they are probing the context of Cubism, with its reversal into an iconic image and/or the non-visual.²¹¹ Although I have already addressed the problems with presenting the icon as both a retrieval and a reversal of Cubism, there is the further question of education: does it precede the experience of venerating an icon, or is it rather through veneration that one comes to be educated in the relevant manner? Michel Quenot, who has written extensively on Orthodox icons, suggests that the dynamic is reciprocal: “Purified by a centuries-old theological development, Christian faith becomes crystallized in the icon according to the previously stated maxim: *lex*

²¹⁰ McLuhan and McLuhan, *Laws of Media*, 157.

²¹¹ As previously discussed, the meaning of “iconic” in McLuhan’s work generally refers to the tactile or to simultaneous, acoustic space. It is used in contrast with the “visual,” by which he usually means linear or text-based. Thus, reversal into the “iconic” or “non-visual” is movement into the multisensuous.

credendi, lex orandi, lex videndi! The icon reflects the faith and evokes it to such an extent that a return to the sources, the reactivation of the ‘Christian Memory,’ today can take that path in reverse: *lex videndi, lex credendi, lex orandi!*”²¹² This interdependence of faith, prayer, and way of life is an important condition that will be considered as we further examine the connections between iconography and education.

To begin with, it is important to recall that the pedagogical value of the icon is consistently acknowledged by the Church East and West. John of Damascus draws a parallel between books and images, proposing that images are to the illiterate what books are to the literate, and that sight is sanctified by images just as hearing is sanctified by words.²¹³ Similarly, the Seventh Ecumenical Council (Nicaea II) referenced the claim of St. Basil the Great, that “that which speech presents through hearing by giving an account, painting does show, although silently, by art of representation.”²¹⁴ In *The Educating Icon*, Anton Vrame points to the mystagogical role of the icon, emphasizing the importance of the Word becoming flesh—i.e., visible and tangible—by providing a visual articulation of the Gospel message. At the time of Christ, those who encountered him both heard and saw him, in a verbal and visual experience. After the Ascension, the spoken message continued through oral Tradition and, ultimately, the

²¹² Michel Quenot, *The Resurrection and the Icon*, trans. Michael Breck (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1997), 67. Both of the “*lex*” statements Quenot provides are variations on the better-known maxim *lex orandi, lex credendi*, (the way we pray is what we believe) from 5th century Prosper of Aquitaine. Both are also a play on words on the occasional expansion of the statement to the tricolon *lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi*. (The way we pray is what we believe, which is how we live.) *Lex videndi* would translate to the “rule of seeing” or “the way we see.” In the traditional statements, *lex orandi* comes first, suggesting a primacy to the place of prayer and worship. In Quenot’s statements, it comes after *lex credendi*, an unusual placement. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to exhaustively debate the validity of this, although I would argue for maintaining the original order, *lex orandi, lex credendi*, not only for the sake of maintaining the traditional order in the statement, but also because of the primacy of worship in Eastern Christian theology. For this thesis, the focus will be simply the reversal of *lex videndi* between the beginning and the end of this chain.

²¹³ John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, 31. Treatise I, § 17.

²¹⁴ Sahas, *Icon and Logos*, 104. The Council is quoting St. Basil the Great’s *To the Holy Forty Martyrs*, Homily 19 (PG 31:509A).

Gospels. To retain the integrated experience that original encounters with Christ had, the Tradition also generated iconography: it is this dual verbal-visual Gospel that is understood to be the most authentic evangelical transmission.²¹⁵

Beyond the educational value of icons, however, there is also an argument to be made that a certain education is itself required, in order to appreciate iconography and honour its proper role in in liturgy and prayer. As described earlier in this section, multiple techniques are used to express something of the transcendent within the limited two-dimensional realm of the icon. Because of this, grasping the structure and symbolism of iconographic elements—what one might call their visual lexicon—is key to an observer’s ability to receive the message, or rather encounter the presence, communicated through the image. Both the historical and contemporary occurrences of iconoclasm are a key indicator of the need for appropriate education: extensive theological debates were required to identify how icons are related to their prototypes, and how (if at all) they should be venerated. Furthermore, given that icons are integrated into the liturgical life of the church, the milieu must be understood as a whole. As Sahas writes in the introduction to his translation of the Sixth Session of the Seventh Ecumenical Council:

The icon cannot be understood apart from the wider cultural and theological context to which it belongs. . . . A familiarity with the essentials of Christian theology and a willingness to draw from and refer to them are prerequisites for understanding the icon as a phenomenon. The reverse is also true. The icon allows one who has a theological and contemplative disposition to see the basic theological principles of Christianity in relief or, in fact, in colour.”²¹⁶

Finally, beyond the cycle of educating for, and being educated by iconography, Vrame points to the teleology of the art form: it serves to lead a person not only to contemplation, but to

²¹⁵ Anton C. Vrame, *The Educating Icon: Teaching Wisdom and Holiness in the Orthodox Way* (Brookline, Mass.: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1999), 52–53.

²¹⁶ Sahas, *Icon and Logos*, 5–6.

action—the imitation of the depicted virtues, and the openness to transformation through the grace of God. Ultimately, the goal of the icon as a medium “is not to *know about* the saints, but to *become* saints.”²¹⁷ Therefore, among the many purposes of the icon is one that is somewhat hidden, namely, to be a companion in the ongoing process of *theosis*.²¹⁸ Since movement, both of God towards the person and the person towards God, is an important aspect of iconography and of *theosis*, this movement will be examined next.

Movement in the Image: The Obsolescence of Photographic Realism

In Part I of this thesis, I provided a brief overview of the variety of perspectival systems used in multiple forms of visual representation, whether in iconography or in secular paintings from the time of the Greco-Romans to the modern period. I have already described the role of non-linear perspective (e.g., reverse perspective) in creating a sense of movement, and this will be revisited shortly. Before doing so, it is worth touching upon McLuhan’s statement that Cubism—and here, I argue iconography also—obsolesces the passive viewer and, with it, photographic realism. Such realism, which those writing about iconography often refer to with terminology such as naturalism, marks an important development in media from the 19th century onwards after the invention and popularization of the camera. It could be approximated in earlier centuries with certain styles of painting, especially those using linear perspective.

The difference between a photograph and a Cubist painting (or an icon) can also be framed in terms of what Marshall McLuhan calls hot and cool media, which differ mainly in their participatory characteristics. A hot medium, like a photograph, targets a specific sense and

²¹⁷ Vrame, *The Educating Icon*, 56. Italics are his.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 54–56.

renders information in high definition, requiring little additional effort from the viewer. In this sense, a hot medium could be considered as one implying a *passive* viewer. In contrast, a cool medium, like a cartoon, modern painting, or icon, does not have the same high definition transfer of information to a given sense (in this case, visual), and requires more active participation from the viewer in order to complete the available information and discern a meaning. McLuhan argues that because of this difference in audience participation resulting from the form of the medium, each one has different effects in society.²¹⁹

It is at this point that the differences between Cubist paintings and icons are worth examining in greater detail. Although both have the property of being participatory, I propose that the role and corresponding responsibility of the viewer differ in these two genres. Furthermore, it is worth noting the significant divergence in the object—or subject, in the case of an icon—of the respective artistic styles, and in their amenability to Marion’s “crossing of the gaze.” The question of reversal for each of these forms of art also requires attention. All of these issues will be discussed in the following section.

Section 2: The Distinction Between Icons and Cubist Paintings

As we have seen thus far, Cubist paintings and icons share a number of characteristics. Nevertheless, significant differences exist: icons cannot be outright considered as Byzantine-style Cubist paintings, even apart from the superficial difference that they are rarely composed of purely geometric shapes. At least three other differences are important enough to warrant further attention. First, I will consider McLuhan’s statement that Cubism retrieves the need for the viewer to complete the image, thus becoming a co-creator in the scene. In an icon, I will argue

²¹⁹ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 39.

that rather than becoming a co-creator controlling a scene, one participates in the scene without acquiring (or even aspiring to) such a status. A second difference, related to the first, is that in iconography the person depicted is never an object to be viewed, but is instead another participant or subject, with whom a gaze can be exchanged. The icon is therefore never the equivalent of a “still life” painting, as might be expressed in a Cubist context, even though both genres obsolesce the idea of a stationary viewer. Finally, McLuhan claims that Cubism reverses into the iconic image or the non-visual, whereas I suggest that the icon reverses into the idol. Taken together, these claims indicate that the similarities between Cubism and iconography mask a crucial distinction in their phenomenological perspectives.

Making a Scene: Co-Creator or Co-Participant?

In the McLuhans’ tetrad for Cubism, they suggest that the style retrieves the viewer as a co-creator who completes the image—likely in contrast to the hot medium of realist or naturalist art²²⁰ that was normative since the Renaissance (with its focus on linear perspective), and whose influence was intensified with the modern invention of photography. Because iconography, like Cubism, displays “coolness” as a medium, i.e., the need for the viewer to actively participate in completing a given scene, it might seem that iconography would likewise place the viewer in a co-creative role. However, the iconographic goal of making accessible a transcendent reality calls this role into question: in both Eastern and Western Christian traditions, there is a clear

²²⁰ “Realist” and “naturalist” are being used here to identify painting techniques that are highly representational or life-like, i.e., relating to *how* the subject is depicted. It is important to note that these terms have also been applied to specific 19th century artistic movements, where *naturalism* was the presentation of ordinary daily life (figures and landscapes), while *realism* was naturalism with socialist (political) overtones—i.e., relating to *what* is depicted. (Stokstad, *Art History*, 971.) This is not the meaning implied by the use of these terms in our text.

theological distinction between Creator and creation, with the viewer included in the latter category.

One indicator of a difference in the role of the viewer in each form of art is the possible range of subject matter. In Cubism, for instance, any object can be depicted; even a cursory glance at a series of Cubist paintings will reveal a range of items, such as violins, bottles, people, houses, and more.²²¹ Most importantly, it is both possible and common for the subject matter in Cubism to be one or more objects, with no people depicted. However, there are no icons that depict only objects.²²² In broader Greek usage, an icon (εἰκών) denotes a portrait; the meaning of the word in the Byzantine theological lexicon is specifically a representation of Christ, the Theotokos, and/or the saints.²²³

Another difference between Cubist paintings and icons is the experiential aspect of icons. As art historian Bissera Pentcheva points out, icons and those praying with them participate in the performative nature of liturgy. Icons are physically venerated with kisses, signs of the cross, and prostrations, while candlelight and incense create a flickering sense of animation in the image. All this occurs in an environment in which the senses are engaged, and in which the faithful not only actively exchange their gaze with that of the icon, but also offer it their touch.²²⁴

²²¹ Many examples are available in online galleries, including those of Tate Modern (“Cubism – Art Term,” *Tate*, accessed July 20, 2019, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/c/cubism>.) and the Guggenheim Museums (“Cubism,” *The Guggenheim Museums and Foundation*, accessed July 20, 2019, <https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/movement/cubism>.)

²²² This is generally not stated explicitly in sources on the topic of iconography, although one can observe this in any reference guide on icons, such as Alfredo Tradigo, *Icons and Saints of the Eastern Orthodox Church*, Guide to imagery (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2006). Ouspensky also notes that indeed in early Christianity, some Old Testament symbols were used in the place of a human image, such as a lamb representing Christ, the Lamb of God. However, the Council in Trullo (AD 692) ordained that Christ should be depicted as a human rather than a lamb, making clear that in Christ, the Old Testament symbols were fulfilled, and their direct meaning should therefore be depicted. (Ouspensky and Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons*, 28–29.)

²²³ Pentcheva, “The Performative Icon,” 631.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 640.

The necessity of immersion in this liturgical and sensory environment for the full experience of, and participation in, the icon appears altogether distinct from the requirements for the experience of a Cubist painting. The latter is native, of course, to the more sensorially sterile environment of the art gallery—even if one could imagine an exhibition in which the other faculties were somehow intentionally engaged.

The differences just discussed, with respect to subject matter and environment, segue into those concerning the varying the role of the observer. Now in one sense, an icon's observer might justly be called a co-creator, as McLuhan says of one observing a Cubist painting. This is because the human being is *imago Dei*—made in the image of God—thus reflecting the creativity of the Creator. But an observer creates neither the physical icon, nor the prototype depicted, but only orients him- or herself towards the prototype through the icon. As Ouspensky comments, “what is gathered into the Church is all in human nature that is inherent, created by God; and this includes creative art, sanctified by its participation in the building of the Kingdom of God, the task of the Church in the world . . . This process does not depersonalise.”²²⁵ Ouspensky simultaneously notes both the creative aspect of humanity and its active or participative role in the Church (and in the Kingdom of God). Without God as Creator or, more plainly, the existence of transcendent Being, the notion that an observer might co-create an icon falls into the category of idolatry critiqued by Marion: creation according to desire, in which the original or prototype (i.e., the divine or divinized subject) disappears.²²⁶ For the proper veneration of the prototype to occur, it must not be an impersonal object; one cannot enter into prayerful relationship with a violin or a bottle. This begs the question of what kind of

²²⁵ Ouspensky and Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons*, 28.

²²⁶ Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, 53–54.

relationship one might expect to experience with an icon, in contrast to Cubist painting; for this, I will return to Marion's concept of the crossing of the gaze.

The Crossing of the Gaze Revisited: Sources of the Gaze

As explained in our discussion of phenomenology in Part I, Marion differentiated the idol from the icon by claiming that with the icon, there is a crossing of gaze: the observer not only gazes at the icon, but also experiences the return of his or her gaze. In other words, the observer is also the observed. I would add that not only do icons always depict divinized (if not divine) persons, but they also depict them in such a way as to resist objectification—the opposite of a painting wherein a mobile observer sees multiple views of a static (observed) subject. A Cubist example of this observed subject would be Picasso's *Dora Maar Seated* (1937), where one can simultaneously see frontal and lateral views of the model's face. This is a characteristic not observed in Byzantine iconography.

Pentcheva provides another appraisal of the risk of idolatry and its mitigation in iconography. She states that in the ninth century, both Patriarch Nikephoros and St. Theodore the Studite emphasized a nonessentialist definition of the icon, in which the icon is imprinted with the divine form while not itself containing the divine essence. Therefore, the icon itself should not be worshipped, since it does not actually contain the divine. Accordingly, one could even say that the icon is the *absence* of the divine, exemplifying Byzantine *mimesis*—imitating presence.²²⁷ With this paradoxical “present absence,” the icon can give form to a sacred figure

²²⁷ Pentcheva, “The Performative Icon,” 632–633. Here Pentcheva also contrasts Byzantine *mimesis* (of presence) with the Western idea of *mimesis*, which is the imitation of form. Kandinsky, as discussed in the section on Michel Henry and phenomenology, referred to the imitation of form as producing art akin to a “stillborn child.” (Kandinsky, “Concerning the Spiritual in Art,” 3.) It would be interesting to investigate further what he would have thought of the notion of imitating presence, especially considering how the extreme non-representational form of his art was aimed at bringing forth the invisible.

otherwise absent. Pentcheva describes this distinction as that which occurs between tangible and intangible absence—reframing the conventional dichotomy of the visible and the invisible. This acknowledged absence also ensures that the icon is safe from idolatry.²²⁸

The question of tangibility becomes even more important in light of miracle-working icons, especially those that display physical effects, such as streaming myrrh, stirring a breeze, or lifting a veil. Pentcheva admits that such (alleged) phenomena contradict the theoretical idea of the icon as an absence.²²⁹ Perhaps this special case of miracle-working icons could be viewed as another manifestation of the Incarnation. As St. Athanasius wrote, “it is a property of God not to be seen, but to be known by his works.”²³⁰ To date, the discussion about the crossing of the gaze in the context of iconography has been purely visual. If the icon is a physical object belonging to a multi-sensory liturgy, as argued earlier, then it is possible that the “gaze” may be too limited a term to capture the way in which the icon connects us with the transcendent. Instead, it is possible that the “gaze” that the divine returns may consist not only of being seen, but also of being touched, or being smelled, or being heard. In other words, perhaps what is being exchanged in these miracle-working icons is not a single-sense gaze, but a multi-sensual experience of the other.²³¹

²²⁸ Pentcheva, “The Performative Icon,” 636. This “present absence” has a similar structure to the Eastern Christian juxtaposition of positive (kataphatic) theology and negative (apophatic) theology. Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite summarizes this position: “Since [the divine] is the Cause of all beings, we should posit and ascribe to it all the affirmations we make in regard to beings, and, more appropriately, we should negate all these affirmations, since it surpasses all being.” [Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibhéid and Paul Rorem, The Classics of Western spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 136 (§ 1000C).] By recognizing an absence or limitation of understanding, the observer is reminded that what is being venerated is beyond the material realm, and is not a construction born of this world.

²²⁹ Pentcheva, “The Performative Icon,” 634.

²³⁰ Saint Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, vol. 44b, Popular Patristics (Yonkers, N.Y.: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011), 83 (§32).

²³¹ This opens the question of why some icons are miracle-working or otherwise “special,” while others are not. This is beyond the scope of this paper, but for a useful introduction to miracle-working icons, specifically in the

The idea of absence in the icon is useful in distinguishing the icon from the idol, but the existence and corresponding fame of miracle-working icons open a larger discussion about the possibility of idolatry within the context of iconography and icon veneration. In the next section, this potential for the reversal of icons into idols will be examined more closely.

Reversal: The Non-Visual vs. the Idol

In their Cubism tetrad, the McLuhans note that the Cubist painting reverses into the iconic image and the non-visual, which are the consequences of Cubism taken to the extreme. I have already described the problem with the McLuhans identifying the iconic image as being a reversal and simultaneously as being a retrieval. For this section, I will therefore focus on the other suggestion, which is that Cubism at its extreme reverses into the non-visual. Expanding on this idea, they note that “with no ‘object’ presented, nothing to look at, the painting becomes a mask for the user to wear, to see by.”²³² Although this would appear to mean that the Cubist painting takes the observer completely out of visual space and fully into acoustic space, the idea that the painting would become a ‘mask’ through which someone looks, rather than being an object that one looks *at*, parallels the reversal of acoustic space. For this, the McLuhans propose that acoustic space taken to the extreme “exchanges outer for inner sensibility,”²³³ which is reminiscent of Kandinsky’s attempts to isolate the invisible world of emotional affect in a painting by moving away from representational forms.

Russian Orthodox tradition, see Chapter 6 (“Icons”) of Vera Shevzov, *Russian Orthodoxy on the Eve of Revolution* (Oxford, Oxford ; New York, Oxford [England] ; Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2004), 171–213.

²³² McLuhan and McLuhan, *Laws of Media*, 157.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 161.

By contrast, the very nature of the icon centers around the integration of the visible and the invisible, the tangible and the intangible, the immanent and the transcendent—it is never wholly immanent (an idol), nor wholly transcendent without a visible component (iconoclasm). Theoretically, both of these alternatives could be seen as the icon’s reversals, although they are perhaps more accurately called imbalances between the immanent and the transcendent, or between creation and the divine. However, it could be argued that iconoclasm effects an extension of idolatry, in that it is a reaction to an icon that has been, or is perceived to have been, reduced to an idol.

Marion, as previously discussed in Part I, describes the idol as a reflection or fulfillment of the observer’s own desire, while the icon for its part returns a distinct gaze, causing the observer to be observed by another subject. This crossing of the gaze is the conventional expectation of veneration—an encounter with the divine *by means* of the image, but not *in* it. Historically, iconodules such as St. John of Damascus were focused on this disambiguation—through both the careful definition of the image and the extensive cataloguing of reasons for, and forms of, veneration. In the case where the material icon itself is treated as a divine object, this would be one obvious form of idolatry, and it is this potential—for what I will call here “Golden Calf” idolatry—that the iconoclasts most feared.

In the more secular²³⁴ era in which we now live, influenced as it is by modern art and its associated gallery environment, Marion’s concept of the idol—which I will name “Reflection of Self”—may be a more prevalent form of reversal. Whereas in “Golden Calf” idolatry, the object is mistakenly identified as the divine, in “Reflection of Self,” the observer locks out the divine

²³⁴ Here, “secular” is being used to describe a society where belief in God and practice of religion is in decline. This is associated with Charles Taylor’s “secularity 2” definition. (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 20.)

gaze, thus becoming the only subject. This in turn reduces the divinized person depicted in the icon into an object. The comparatively sterile gallery, and the increasing presence of icons in such environments, undoubtedly facilitates this type of reversal. Vladimir Soloukhin tells the story of negotiating for an icon with a Russian woman, attempting to convince her that far from being disrespected, the icon would be admired. She replied, “Prayers are what they’re for . . . Is an icon some sort of naked girl, that you want to admire it?”²³⁵

A subtler form of idolatry is also possible, which is the idolatry of icons themselves—iconolatry—honouring not the prototype of the icon, but the system in which the icon belongs.

As Arianne Conty writes,

The danger of a univocal appropriating gaze has thus not been spared the icon, which has, at different points in time and for different people, effectively become an artifact, an idol to reinforce the historic incompatibility of the Christian East from the Christian West. There is, in this sense, a hidden iconoclasm in the very rigidity of the iconic transmission. The systematic dismissal of all western art by the Orthodox tradition is itself an example of the invisible mirror of idolatry that iconophiles sought to combat.²³⁶

This wholesale rejection of Western sacred art, often without addressing the reality that such art is extraordinarily diverse, is evident in many Orthodox writers, including Ouspensky²³⁷ and Larchet. In his review of Larchet’s *L’iconographe et l’artiste*, Church historian François Boespflug criticizes the quasi-Manichaean opposition that Larchet consistently sets up, wherein

²³⁵ Vladimir Soloukhin, *Searching for Icons in Russia* (London: Harvill Press, 1971), 161.

²³⁶ Conty, “Bending Heaven down to Earth,” 19n14. In this note, Conty also refers to French historian Alain Besançon, who describes the theology of iconography as a balancing act between iconolatry and iconoclasm: “The danger comes from the fact that, through the exaltation of a particular theology, one allows the honor due the icon to reflect not onto the prototype but onto the system, which is, in fact, the only thing represented. The face becomes a pretext to rejoice in being a disciple of Saint Gregory Palamas rather than Augustine, to be Orthodox rather than Catholic or Protestant . . . That iconolatry, like all idolatry, is worship of oneself and, rather than glorifying in Christ, glories in its own idea of orthodoxy.” [Alain Besançon, *The Forbidden Image: An Intellectual History of Iconoclasm* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 143.]

²³⁷ Ouspensky and Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons*, 48. He writes, “the very principles of Western religious art . . . are alien to Orthodoxy.”

the pure Orthodox tradition is seen as faithful to the Church, while the entire post-Romanesque Western tradition is seen as having betrayed Church doctrine.²³⁸ Other Orthodox theologians, such as Evdokimov and Florensky, are slightly more nuanced, since they recognize the diversity of Western sacred art; still, Evdokimov claims that the well was already poisoned with the Council of Frankfurt (AD 794) and the Synod of Paris (824), in their focus on the didactic aspect of sacred art.²³⁹ Florensky points to the heterogeneity of the Western tradition as the issue: its diversity is taken to represent a fragmentation of meaning, such that any light found within is external to it.²⁴⁰

In *The Forbidden Image*, Alain Besançon explains how easily this reversal can and does occur, and expresses doubt as to whether there even exists a zone of right worship between the extremes of iconolatry and iconoclasm; he suggests that perhaps that zone is where iconolatry and iconoclasm are instead juxtaposed.²⁴¹ He also argues that sacred art proper, such as iconography, forms a desert around itself through its inability and unwillingness to depict most of the profane world; this in turn leads to an iconoclastic tendency to reject almost every man-made image for lacking (a narrowly defined) theological integrity. Besançon calls this the “hubris of the icon” or “hubris of Byzantinism,” driven primarily by modern Orthodox literature on the topic of iconography.²⁴² Although a full analysis of the appropriation of icons by political or national groups is beyond the scope of this thesis, the key point here is that idolatry—or iconolatry—can occur either by missing the link between an icon and its prototype, i.e., creating

²³⁸ François Bœspflug, “Review of L’iconographe et l’artiste,” *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 54, no. 148 (2009): 222.

²³⁹ Evdokimov, *Art of the Icon*, 167.

²⁴⁰ Florensky, *Iconostasis*, 146–147.

²⁴¹ Besançon, *The Forbidden Image*, 142.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 144–145.

an idol of the image, *or* (less obviously) by creating an idol of the context in which the icon resides. In either case, the result is a rupture with the divine through an excessive focus on the worldly.

Up to this point, we have discussed Cubist paintings and icons as separate media, with a work of art belonging to one or the other (or neither). In the next section, I will consider the effects of their hybrids: Cubist icons or, more broadly, Cubist religious art. By examining hybrid cases such as these, we can gain further insight into the strengths and limitations of our analysis of these forms of art, which have been considered as separate entities until now.

Section 3: Cubist Icons and Religious Art

The similarities and differences between Cubism and iconography have been well characterized in the previous sections, as part of the exercise of developing a tetrad to summarize the effects—or messages—of icons as a medium, according to McLuhan’s definition. However, our discussion so far presupposes that we are dealing with Cubism and icons as completely separate media. As previously mentioned, there are theologians, such as Bulgakov, who would argue this to be true; for him, Picasso’s work is as demonically inspired as icons are divinely so. Others, such as Ouspensky, acknowledge that certain icons have been influenced by Western trends—though this is seen as detrimental to the tradition.²⁴³ In light of this, let us examine the special case of Cubist icons (or other religious art), to discover what occurs at the intersection between these two media.

²⁴³ Ouspensky and Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons*, 47-48n2.

Cubist Icons: Blurring the Boundaries between Icons and Modern Art

Several artists have attempted to mediate between Cubism and iconography, producing either Cubist icons (in the Byzantine tradition) or Cubist religious art (in the Roman Catholic tradition). Most notable among Cubist Byzantine iconographers is Ukrainian-Canadian iconographer Myron Levytsky (1913-1993), whose work graces ten churches, primarily in Canada and in Australia, including Holy Eucharist Ukrainian Catholic parish in Toronto.²⁴⁴ His painting is heavily influenced by the avant-garde modern art movement generally, and especially by Cubism.

In the preface to art historian Daria Darewych's book on Levytsky, fellow artist and iconographer Sviatoslav Hordynsky writes that Levytsky "belongs to those monumentalists who have managed to remove from churches the syrupy-sweet type of decoration and to replace it with geometrically simplified, two dimensional design without linear perspective, rich in forms and colours, that do not become a decorative addition to the churches, but are an integral part of the architectural whole."²⁴⁵ This statement would support the claim made earlier in this paper, that iconography and Cubism share the same obsolescence of (linear) perspective with its fixed point of view. However, Hordynsky is praising the change from a gallery-like, decorative understanding of the icon toward a holistic integration of the icon into the church architecture, which is certainly a move away from the conventional Cubist environment. This ultimately begins to address the question, "What if a Cubist painting were moved from a gallery to a

²⁴⁴ Daria Darewych, *Мирон Левицький / Myron Levytsky* (Toronto: Ukrainian Artists' Association, 1985), 120.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

church, where all senses are activated by the surroundings?” It would perhaps not be inappropriate to imagine Cubism deploying its iconographic potential.

Levytsky’s intention, however, may not be entirely aligned with the broader Eastern Christian tradition. Based on her interview of Levytsky, Darewych writes, “As the examples chosen for [his 1985] exhibition demonstrate, Levytsky's religious paintings are modern Ukrainian icons in which he has escaped the constraints of Byzantine art adhered to by less imaginative artists, in order to create a new religious image, rooted in the past but contemporary in form and execution.”²⁴⁶ She further adds, “By doing so he was the first Ukrainian artist to attempt to free church painting in Canada and Australia from the confines of the Ukrainian-Byzantine traditions in sacred art.”²⁴⁷ To see iconography as requiring liberation from the outdated constraints enforced by the less imaginative itself reflects a deficiency: namely, a lack of appreciation for how traditional Byzantine symbolism in icons developed with the specific goal of making visible the invisible. Regardless, the strategy commended by Darewych might also be a way to avoid the pitfall of iconolatry mentioned in the previous section, by using modern techniques to portray the invisible, in conjunction with the Byzantine determination to integrate iconography into a greater and cohesive whole inclusive of both architecture and liturgy.

Still, two of the major distinctions between Cubism and iconography, as we have seen, are the subject matter and the role of the observer. If the observer becomes part of the scene, and crosses gazes with the divinized one depicted, then the medium in question is acting as an icon

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 23.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 24.

should. This dynamic can perhaps be illustrated with another Cubist religious work: *Crucifix*,²⁴⁸ painted by American Herman Trunk Jr. (1984-1963) around 1930. While similar in some ways to the icons of Levytsky, this crucifix differs in several ways, distinguishing it from the iconographic. First, the Christ on Trunk's crucifix does not have a face, nor are there any bystanders; it is therefore impossible for any gaze to be returned to the observer, at least in the way expected in the Byzantine tradition. Second, the crucifix is pieced together such that multiple sides of the crucifix and Christ are visible at once, as though it were assembled based on the observer moving around a stationary object—a Cubist characteristic not shared by traditional icons.

Nevertheless, Trunk's *Crucifix* does convey the desire of the artist to bring forth the invisible, as both modern art and iconography also typically intend. As Fowler writes, the aim of Cubism (and of this painting by association) is to reveal something more profound than just the material representation of an object and, echoing Picasso's contemporary Guillaume Apollinaire, it is to use insight rather than sight to guide the creation of the painting's structure.²⁴⁹ Notwithstanding Bulgakov's previously-discussed claim in "The Corpse of Beauty" that Picasso's work evokes the demonic, in this case Trunk's subject matter is Christ and the crucifixion, without any of the grotesque distortions of Picasso's renderings of the motif (such as

²⁴⁸ Cynthia Fowler, "Herman Trunk's Cubist Crucifix: A Case Study," *Religion and the Arts* 15, no. 5 (January 1, 2011): 628–647. An image of this painting appears on the cover of this journal issue; the cover can also be seen online at "Volume 15-5: Religion and the Arts," *Boston College*, last modified November 29, 2011, accessed July 26, 2019, <https://www.bc.edu/publications/relarts/issues/former/vol15-5.html>.

²⁴⁹ Fowler, "Herman Trunk's Cubist Crucifix," 633. Apollinaire's original text states, "[Le cubism est] l'art de peindre des ensembles nouveaux avec des éléments empruntés, non à la réalité de vision, mais à la réalité de connaissance." [Guillaume Apollinaire, *Les peintres cubistes (Méditations esthétiques)* (Paris: E. Figuière, 1913), 24.]

The Crucifixion of 1930, reiterated in 1932, or his *Corrida* drawings of 1959).²⁵⁰ Although Bulgakov associated Picasso's Cubism with the demonic, therefore, and even though Trunk's *Crucifix* lacks the direct gaze of an icon, the painting may still reveal something of Christ's presence, and cannot unequivocally be considered as opposed to the Christian faith.

Levytsky's icons, such as those in Toronto's Holy Eucharist,²⁵¹ are arguably closer to the traditional iconographic style, despite their Cubist influence. The icons at that church retain the integrated views of the face, with none viewed in profile. The Cubist influence here might more accurately be called a geometric approach to iconography, rather than a fully authentic expression of the style, in which elements are rearranged in both space and time. However, like that of Trunk, Levytsky's *Crucifixion* (1971)²⁵² does not show the face of Christ at all, thus raising similar questions. Is this a medium in which there is the crossing of the gaze, between the observer and the divine (or divinized)? Without a source for the gaze, it would seem implausible that this could be considered an icon, though it would perhaps fall into the category of 'religious art'—which includes icons, but also other art with religious themes. This leads to an even larger question: "Is there a place for religious art beyond the iconographic?" The corollary would be: "Can 'Western art,' as defined by Eastern Christians like Ouspensky, be considered as part of a broader category of 'religious art,' with a rightful place in Tradition, or is it extraneous to

²⁵⁰ Dillenberger, *The Religious Art of Pablo Picasso*, 11, 19, 81. The crucifixion is a repeating theme in Picasso's work, and it is interesting to note the evolution of his crucifixion scenes from the more traditional, in 1896, to somewhat distorted (sketch, 1915-18), to these highly visually- and arguably theologically-distorted Cubist versions.

²⁵¹ See, for example, the icon behind the altar in the sanctuary ("DSCN2642[1]," *Holy Eucharist Ukrainian Catholic Church*, last modified April 20, 2017, accessed July 27, 2019, <http://www.hagiaeucharistia.com/special-events/dscn26421/>). Additional images of his Cubist icons are available in the online Encyclopedia of Ukraine [Daria Zelska-Darewych, "Levytsky, Myron," *Encyclopedia of Ukraine*, last modified 2001, accessed March 18, 2019, <http://www.encyclopediaofukraine.com/display.asp?linkpath=pages%5CL%5CE%5CLevytskyMyron.htm.>].

²⁵² Image available online at Zelska-Darewych, "Levytsky, Myron."

Tradition altogether? What is ‘religious art?’” Answering this question is beyond the scope of this work, as it would encompass a full review of Western and Eastern Traditions (both religious and artistic), but it would be the next logical extension of our reflections.

CONCLUSION

The tetrad for iconography, which builds upon the work of Marshall and Eric McLuhan, has so far been a useful tool for adding to the conversation about the thesis question, namely, determining what makes an icon an icon. The discussion certainly remains open, especially given the necessarily limited scope of the response to the question here.

Based on the development and analysis of the tetrad I constructed for icons, I identify several key points about icons in this thesis. One is that the senses, and consequently simultaneity, all participate in the experience of the icon, and this makes icons an acoustic-space medium using McLuhan’s definition. Here, the senses include both physical senses (touch, smell, sight) and the noetic sense. Icons belong in a liturgical context which is similarly acoustic (i.e., simultaneous and multisensual), and the dynamic relationship between icons as a medium and the Divine Liturgy as a medium would be a rich one to explore in further work on this topic.

Another main point is the subject-subject relationship expressed in the crossing of the gaze. This retrieves the in-person relationship which is otherwise hidden when the transcendent is invisible to us in the immanent world. The relationship between the observer and the one represented is critical; an icon is that which invites openness to a divine or divinized other, resulting in the crossing of the gaze elaborated by Jean-Luc Marion. Furthermore, distinguishing the icon from the idol requires finesse, as an icon can be idolized if that openness to the gaze is lost and the icon is rather used to reflect the observer’s desires back onto him- or herself. By

delving into the accompanying causes and effects, our tetrad has proved useful in furthering discussion about the nature of the icon, especially in contrast to that of the idol.

Point of view is also especially important in iconography, as it contributes not only to the subject-subject relationship just mentioned, but also to expressing certain transcendent or invisible realities. Further, it can remove domination from an act of viewing that might otherwise convert the one viewed from subject to object. The use of various forms of perspective contributes both to guiding the type of relationship expected when praying with an icon, and to the sense of movement inherent to the acoustic space to which the icon belongs.

Finally, structuring these ideas in the form of a tetrad makes manifest in a way that is otherwise not obvious a series of interrelationships between these effects, and this structure can itself be used in an effort to answer the question “what is an icon?” It does not negate answers that have been offered in the past, such as through the iconoclastic controversy and in recent theological works on iconography, but it is a means through which the description of various aspects of icons can be brought into relationship with one another.

As stated in our introduction, the present work has been necessarily limited in scope, both to restrict it to a length feasible for an MA thesis, and also to prove the utility of McLuhan’s Laws of Media—with their associated tetrads—on a relatively small scale. If further work in this vein were to be conducted, several possible avenues exist, many of which have already been touched on, including:

- Can Western religious art after the Romanesque period be considered iconography, or is it true that certain styles of art, independent of their subject matter, are incapable of

transmitting the invisible truths along with the visible? If some forms of art are determined to be unsuitable for iconography, where is the boundary or horizon?

- It has been argued that one form of idolatry—iconolatry—occurs when icons are used as symbols representing political or other worldly social structures. In this sense, icon veneration, taken to its immanent extreme, becomes idolatry. Further work can explore the factors and causes in this reversal: How prominent was this as a factor during the Iconoclastic Controversy in the 8th-9th centuries? During the Reformation? Is this a factor in the argument that Western religious art is not iconography (as per the previous point)?
- Are there characteristics of the Christian Tradition that necessarily require icons in order to achieve its fullest potential? Is aniconic worship (worship without images) simply another form of Christian lower-case-t tradition, equal among others, or is it missing a key element? Is text, such as the Bible, a type of icon, and/or what characteristics does it share with icons?

These are all more complex questions, though they all feed back into the central question driving this thesis. All of these questions would benefit from consideration with respect to a figure-ground relationship, so as to assist in establishing both the characteristics and the effects of icons as a medium—including its very definition. McLuhan's technique of looking at a medium in *relationship* with other media has proven highly useful, these relationships being either synchronic (i.e., involving relation to other media that exist at the same time, such as speech or writing), or diachronic (i.e., involving relation to media from different time periods). Considering the effects of transitions between a medium and the other media with which it is interconnected can provide considerable clarity on the characteristics of a medium. The goal of this work has been to take iconography as a starting point for further

investigation into Christian media, inspired by the scriptural claim that Christ “is the image (*εἰκών*) of the invisible God,” (Col 1:15)—the original and everlasting icon.

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