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~~A~~ Personal Aesthetic Experience as the Basis  
for Reflection on the Teaching of Art

Svetlana Miskovic

A Thesis  
in  
The Department  
of  
Art Education

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts at  
Concordia University  
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## ABSTRACT

### A Personal Aesthetic Experience as the Basis for Reflection on the Teaching of Art

Svetlana Miskovic

The major consideration of this thesis is the significance of the personal aesthetic experience and the levels of significance it plays when teaching art. It has four chapters: introduction, description, interpretation and reflection. Introduction explains the structural formation of the aesthetic experience, image and word, closely associated with the function of the specific meaningful object from the childhood, an icon of Bogorodica. Description tells about three levels of that experience, the process of awareness that differs in terms of the spatial orientation such as "of", "from", and "by". Those three levels are ordinary and extraordinary or aesthetic experience. Second level is emotional while the third is synthesis of both. The fourth part of description is about experiences other than mine as the comparative device and the purpose of objective teaching. Interpretation explicates Bogorodica as the major theme, the

meaningful content, consisted of its sub-themes as the internal units expressed in their syllabic relation and connected by the myths surrounding genesis. Reflection is about teaching approaches. It is based on the substance of the roles of artist, woman, mother in the identity of educator, who uses aesthetic, authentic content by the means of imagination and common sense. It is the grounding unity for the teaching of the "language of one's own". Throughout the thesis creating and demonstrating was two way, simultaneous process, as the approach in itself for the teaching of art, about art and through art.

---

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I thank my son's father whose poems and critics were my continual reference in many moments of moral loneliness. Once, he quoted the words of another poet: "Without the synthetic task and search for the primordial symbols and images that have power, poetry can disappear."

I thank my loving son to whom I dedicate this study. His genuine understanding for our forced isolation helped me to be mother first and art researcher second.

I also thank all those who worked so hard on blocking my way toward freedom of mind; that has brought attention to my own values and determination to endure and contribute to education including this study.

Special thanks to Dr. Natalie Pervoushin-Labrecque who informed me on types of Bogorodica previously unknown to me. -

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## PREFACE

Experience is the subject of this thesis. The chosen quote represents an example that speaks about the focal point in experience - inarticulate state when creative mind goes beyond the barrier of language.

This quote is from my interview with Rachel. When I replayed the tape and heard the murmur of the meaningful words I became fully aware of the significance of the dialogue that exhibits this state. By bringing it into the focus, I believe, I articulate here its meaning and its presence in the context of the creative process.

Rachel: "Just, I am amazed, it's like something. You're like . . . living there, it looks like you're nowhere. It looks like they're, they're thinking all sorts of things. How'd you do it, you the artists?"

Interviewer, whispering: "It is between listening and what you can really see."

from my interview with RR

## Chapter One

### INTRODUCTION

The present enquiry is a personal reflection on the aesthetic experience I have been "living" ever since I learned about numerous dramatic events that occurred in my early childhood, later adolescence and maturity.

#### Personal Aesthetic

As I look back, I've come to feel that the roots of my personal aesthetic lie in the presence of a specific object, an icon. I was born, brought up and educated in a Slavic culture where icons are engrained in the human spirit. As a result, every time I make art or encounter a work of art, I see it in terms of the iconic, inner images that I experienced in my childhood. And the presence of those images seem to pervade even my everyday experience.

### Meaning of Bogorodica

In my acquaintance with the objects in the world, one particular childhood icon has always had for me a dimension more profound than any other. I can say now that I regarded it not only as an object but also as a subject. It seemed to represent for me a sense of the wholeness of the world. The meaning that springs from this both the icon and the principle of wholeness form can be expressed in the word Bogorodica. While each syllable has its specific meaning ("Bog" is God, "O" is of, "Rodica" is the feminine form i.e. the one who gives birth) the word as a whole embodies the experience of a richness of faith; Bogorodica is the one who gives birth to the faith, fruit to God and from God and the home where God abides.

My strongest memory of imaginative activity with the icon occurred when the candle was lighted up for the first time. This experience has enabled me to stretch my mind as if without limits and without fears; my eyes and my mind were as one in this newly discovered aesthetic event. It has become my way to art, my point of departure, the hole through which I dared to peak to see the world as one.

The following pieces illustrate the manner in which everyday experience, in other words the world of objects, becomes the world of subjects transformed by my personal aesthetic.

Promethean light symbolizes both - the process and the act of transformation or translation of the common physical level to an aesthetic plane.

#### Carrying the Promethean Light

A tree, as all nature does, bends, bows, breaks, defies the storm, gives shade and shelter; the wood becomes homes. When man perceives a tree, he sees life. He paints it, decorates it, embellishes it; and, what is most important, brings out of it an image, a whole fresco of life. By protecting it, by covering it, man shield it out of desire to maintain life in Time. By illuminating image with a quiet flame, man illuminates it with a world of peace and thus discovers the possibilities of life. In the domain of art, one opens at such a moment the door of the Aesthetic.

---

I am watching the light through the window of my small, box-like room. A flash of sunlight has pierced through the clouds and given a strange sharp outline, a shine, to the metal covering of the neon street-light atop its pole. It looks like a torch facing the ground on the narrow strip of soil there. Next to this light there is the twisting, ascending single meander of the metal railing which accompanies the curving, descending stairs. They have the same glittering dazzle that is focused on the small rounded surface. That focus shines like a twinkling star in the human darkness. The electric cables next to it create a matted weave connecting the distances and nearnesses of people's interiors and add to this framed net of forms and

roundness one line with a dazzling point that shines intensely; the wind helps to rock it gently, adding to the glittering a trembling and a moving to-and-fro. And at once, all this seems to me like the shinning of the stars twinkling somewhere far off in the universal light. I see not one tree, nor a single human being. But down below, all the way down, nature peeks through the lattices of the spiral stairs, peeks through in the shape of a bouquet of yellow and orange flowers, well cared for on their green, grassy plateau. The walls of the surrounding houses, the windows and some remnants, are only parts going before, announcing the whole, criers of houses and homes, criers of our icons rooted in the past. And as I look at the wall of bricks, so painstakingly organized and plastered to make buildings, I return to my image, my icon, hanging on the far wall back there in my home and I see my babuska (my grandmother) carrying the tiny light of the candle. And then I see the Promethean torch I've been carrying for ever so long. I have been carrying it since a time before I was born, from a world deep in the past, from a time before broken lives, before broken swords, before lacerated, tattered birds. And I lift the torch of the light of my beginning in a room with a view, in a room full of bouquets and crowns of trees and happy little birds, those tiny whirling comets coloured with the laughter of their joy.

---

I see that once  
 Light entered my home  
 I took the torch of light  
 From a distant vanishing world  
 And brought it up  
 Into my abode  
 And I opened the space  
 For a tiny new face  
 And the crowns of the trees  
 Were in our embrace  
 And birds sang for us a dance  
 And I was holding it  
 All at once in my hands  
 My son my icon  
 And my Mother of Christ the child  
 Her hands hidden in prayer  
 And keeping our Silence together



My grandmother's tiny settling light  
Changed the external past all in fire  
Into the twinkle of the flying laughter  
And the breath of the grandfathers  
And captured my silence with melody  
From my torch full of colours

## Chapter Two

### DESCRIPTION OF THE PERSONAL AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE GENERATED BY THE ICON

My visual-emotional and "spiritual" experience has been shaped by the icon. Both the icon itself and the experience which it engendered seemed never to become detached from my childhood. The description which follows is intended to illucidate this process of "becoming". The unity of seeing, thinking and feeling exists on three levels which show the degrees of development in my awareness of the "paths" of the icon.

#### I. Description of the First Level of the Awareness of the Icon in Terms of Personal Experience

The first level of my awareness is one of immediate naming, as this occurs in ordinary experience. This is the identification of the physicality of the objects. It is purely descriptive.

## A. Description of the Icon

### 1. Front View

My icon was probably painted like all other icons. Traditionally, icons were painted with tempera - - although occasionally it was oil. Basically the medium<sup>1</sup> was a permanent chemical compound. Part of the process included mixing pigments with egg yolk. For this reason, it was crucial to use an appropriate wooden surface such as linden, oak or cypress; these woods did not crack, bend or produce bitumen. The plank of wood was "grounded" first with a layer of glue and then with a layer of ground-alabaster, dissolved in a liquid glue. Sometimes this layer was not applied directly to the plank, but to a piece of canvas that was soaked in a solution and then stretched over an already-dry surface. The next step was the tracing or the drawing. Sometimes this process included a "mechanical dusting" on the prepared surface. This "dusting" was made through tiny pin holes that followed the contour of the drawing. The rest of the pigments were dissolved in yeast or water which contained a drop of egg yolk. When the "dusting" was completed and the pigments dissolved, the next process was the painting. This was

done usually with thick brush strokes; the first layer was a gold background which usually covered the whole surface. Palaces, trees, mountains or other architectural details were marked off with dark tones, thus providing a dark ground for the lighter tones to be applied to the process. In the second phase of the painting the image was developed monochromatically. In the third phase, colours with lighter tones<sup>2</sup> as well as white served to build up a sense of the third dimension of the figures and faces. When finished, the whole surface received another layer of "olif", i.e. a specific varnish for protection. Many icons have even one more layer, a solution of honey or riza. Usually, golden or silver plate was applied at the end, but it did not cover the faces or hands. Finally, riza was sometimes applied partially, i.e. only to the crowns in the image. The application of riza onto the icon was an old tradition which started in the seventeenth century and became a popular technique, especially in Russia.

My particular icon has a candle attached outside, in front of the box in which the icon dwells. The wooden black box, 21 cm x 24 cm, has a glass door in front that opens. The icon is stabilized with an

inside golden frame behind the glass door. The image is of a woman and child. The icon is covered with silver plate, called riza<sup>3</sup>, except for the two faces and the child's right hand. Both faces are painted in monochromatic neutral, earthy tones. The hands of a female figure are not visible in the icon. Her head is covered with a hood which seems to be part of her dress. The hemline that outlines the drape of the hood, forms the neckline of the dress and is ornamented in the same manner as the cuffs on the sleeves. The only variation is in the way the wavy motif is organized. There is a disc around each head: the woman's halo extends above the frame at the top of the icon; the child's extends on the right; the left hemisphere merges with the woman's. There are several styles of ornament decorating the riza, as follows:

the waves of the background, hemlines and cuffs; (il.no.1)  
the spiral on the woman's dress; (il. no.2)  
the radial waveline on the haloes; (il.no.3)  
the palmettes on the disc crowns; (il.no.4)  
the border heart shape palmettes on the mounted frame; (il.no.5)  
the star on the woman's right shoulder and a half on the hood (il.no.6)  
the O and N symbols on the child's halo; (il.no.7)  
the cross on the child's halo; (il.no.8)

## 2. Frames

There are six frames around the icon. Firstly, the biggest one, i.e. the one on the outside of all the others is the black box; secondly comes the glass door. The third frame is the wood with which the glass door is fixed; the fourth one is the inlaid brass square on the wooden frame. The fifth one is the golden removable wooden frame that holds the icon. Finally, the sixth one is a mounted, ornamental border that frames the icon itself as part of riza. On the bottom of that frame is the following inscription/in cyrillic alphabet: КАЗАНСКИѦ ПБ. The golden frame has red grounding. A crack appears on each corner except the top right one.

## 3. Candle

The brass pole supports a brass cup. The simple pink glass chalice fits inside the brass cup. In order to light the candle one has to place the wick on a cork base; then one places it on the surface of the water-oil mixture. When one lights the wick, it usually floats around and stops at the center of the chalice to shed the candle light on the icon.

#### 4. Open View

The box opens quite easily. The golden frame can be removed in order to take out the icon. The wood on the back is covered with pink velvet that seems to have once been red. Riza is fixed with six tiny nails, two on each side and one each on the top and the bottom. There are two layers of riza. The bottom layer is all of one piece, while the top one, that of the halo and the crowns, is intricately cut and glued. There is a paper sticker on the back of the icon. The inscription, written in ink, is in cyrillic as follows: "mag cerkov veshei I.N.Babakina M BJelisavetgradje 9216".

#### II. Description of the Second Level of the Awareness from the Icon in Terms of Personal Aesthetic Experience

The second level of my awareness involves my aesthetic experience. This is an emotional level that includes possibilities of seeing things grow beyond their factual "reality". At this point I rediscover beauty and meaning in the particular details of my icon. I begin to see many paths from and toward my icon. I begin to experience a transformation of the

icon from object to a subject, and at that point the icon begins to "speak" to me. The following is a description of my dialogues with the icon, in other words they become dialogues between two subjects. My intention is to disclose in images generated by the icon the most significant feelings of my childhood.

## B. Description of my Aesthetic Experience from the Icon

### 1. Entering the Gate

I see my icon dwelling in the black box, framed and protected. Reaching the icon is a dramatic event for me. I pull the pink candle out of its base and then unlock the box to open the glass door and free it. I realise then that the lock mechanism of the box resembles many rural garden gates. The mechanism has a tiny arrow with a hole in it to fit the miniature pin-like nail that is used to lock and unlock it. The lock itself is an "H" shape. I am remembering the gates I opened as a child and the reverence I felt when I stepped into the orchard. Those gates were part of the fence made out of vertical and horizontal spats: one plank on the top and the other on the bottom of the



verticals, both defining their space in their surroundings, just like this tiny lock. I remember some slats were painted and some had pointed tops. Those pointed wooden laths seemed to me like the spears dug into the ground when a soldier is at ease. And, sometimes gates and fences were "dressed" in lilac trees, or accadias or ivy, climbing plants or rambling rose or jasmine, adding to the bouquet of the orchard a special circle of fragrance.

## 2. Fragrance

When entering a new space I often remember that fragrance of my childhood and my own garden. Then, the garden was almost like an entrance into the beginning of all things, an alpha. Now, I experience that similar feeling when opening the icon box. The fragrance I recognize is the one of the resin and candles and of dry wood in the grove.

## 3. Liberation

Still, there is that excitement of discovery, the resemblance of feelings. I decide to take the icon in my hands and free it from all the frames, those disturbing limits. I see Bogorodica for the first time

in Her glory and brilliance of light. It is like one of those splendid colourful bouquets in the orchard.

#### 4. Beauty of Light

While I hold the icon so that it is exposed to direct sunlight, I blink for the moment looking at the flickering colourful event, and I listen to the birds chasing one another and settling in the crown of a nearby tree. I am reminded of the same vigor of excitement as when my grandmother lit the candle. Now once again, I am the happiest of children in this newly discovered world. I realise that the woman<sup>②</sup> in the icon must be the mother of the child. I know the feeling of holding my child.

#### 5. Motherhood

I know how it feels when I hold my child. It feels warm. It is a sensation of the fullness of my heart. It is like a wave, or overwhelming tenderness or the excitement of the discovery of peace in the orchard. I hear his breath; it is so close and so soothing. I know now that I am present in his breath; that breath which represents the wholeness of Life to me. And feeling him in my arm is like touching a

moment in Time, entirely unknown yet so familiar. I respond to my son's white warmth and his frail little body that grew in me. He swam out of me. My child swam out from his previous space as if pointing out with his right stretched arm into something he recognized, another cosmos, i.e. Mother Earth.

#### 6. Bogorodica

Recalling the birth of my son is beautiful. His birth is sacred in my life as I live and relive it through my icon. It is as if I behold for the moment Life inside beauty and Soul inside Time. I recognize my response to my Universe in the moment of motion. It is almost like recognizing a new horizon. It is an immediate call for and from the continuity of Life. I notice at the same time that Mother God in the icon does not have hands, and I realise that by holding the icon in my hands I find myself coping with the question of why these hands are absent. This sudden awareness of the absence is for me like meeting the sacred. When I place the icon back on the wall, I am filled with tranquillity.

## 7. Colour

While placing the icon back on the central wall, a drama of light takes place again: the icon is exposed to the bright sunlight that transforms earthy tones on the faces into a rainbow of colours. The silver plate that covers the rest of the icon is luminous through its own reflection. At that moment, I recall the experience that I had as a child when I saw it with a similar glow. Now, as well as that time, the whole image sparkles with vitality. I find myself thinking that the impressionists had a similar experience of surface light transformation, of light "transpassing" through the object, almost like an x-ray of a landscape, or of an object, or the birth of the image itself.

James Joyce in his Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man describes the transformation of his experience to the aesthetic level and discloses in images the significant feelings of his childhood:

The peace of the gardens and the kindly lights in the windows poured a tender influence into the restless heart. The noise of children at play annoyed him and their silly voices made him feel, even more keenly than he had felt at Clongowes, that he was different from others. He did not want to

play. He wanted to meet in the real world the unsubstantial image which his soul so constantly beheld. He did not know where to seek it or how: but a premonition which led him on told him that this image would, without any overt act of his, encounter him. They would meet quietly as if they had known each other and had made their tryst, perhaps at one of the gates or in some more secret place. They would be alone surrounded by darkness and silence: and in that moment of supreme tenderness he would be transfigured. He would fade into something impalpable under her eyes and then in a moment, he would be transfigured. Weakness and timidity and experience would fall from him in that magic moment.

### III. Description of the Third Level of the Personal Aesthetic Experience with the Icon: Personal Narrative

The third description of my icon is a narrative. It is the story of my experience with the icon over the years. The account reflects my thoughts, feelings, memories and perceptions with the icon. These are the "pathways" through which I explore the narrative that was within the icon itself. Different events with the icon invoked for me different images. Whole sequences from my past experience brought forward what was significant, i.e. gave the formless a form. I discovered the unknown through the known.

On this level of description, I am telling the history of my family as it relates to the icon and also the history of Kazan Bogorodica. The ritual associated with the icon gave me an awareness of the sense of faith and duty and my responsibility in the world. On this narrative level, the awareness of factual, living experience brought knowledge and poetry to my art. My images were transformed into metaphors, and instead of the icon speaking to me I now spoke through the icon.

### C. Narrative

#### 1. Parachutes and Silk

I remember once as a child, I went to spend my summer holidays in the mountains. There was a small lake and on a little island stood a small church. Around, were the high Alps; the tallest peak was called Triglav. It was like the background of the picture I still have in front of and "behind" my eyes. The lake was called Bled, which means "pale" in my language. At that time, many years ago, there was an annual summer parachuting contest. I recall vividly the airy performance between the silk and the men, the two dancing a unique flight.

First, a plane came and slowly circled around the area where all the jumps ended. The next moment the parachutist jumped out of the plane and rapidly traversed the air. The huge comet-like blast appeared on the sky soon after him. And, silently, by coming out of its cocoon to spread its grand silhouette out in the blue sky, this white transparent shadow floated and swung graciously through the air; it slowly approached the ground. Then, to my surprise and to others around, the man jumped to rid himself of the string of the parachute that had made his flight safe and smooth, and leapt. While he was leaping, the man arched his body into a stretch in order to reach the ground where the center was marked by the chalk. At the same time, the parachute continued to perform on land. This magnificent huge discus appeared like a comet far up in the air and portrayed for me the face of the earth; this bulky umbrella had swayed and had drifted away and across the flat landscape nearby the lake. It had lost its control of its shape and randomly followed some invisible path. Somehow, this veil had landed with the hubbab of many voices and many sounds captured within its skirt. Now it rested motionless on the flat earth

with the perfect shape and the mass of wrinkles all over it.

A running man came, pulled and gathered the silk mass into a sizeable heap, carried it away, and it all disappeared. Variations of the jumps and landings that came afterwards did not make much difference to me except one that went into the lake. I stood close to the water watching water lilies float like little colourful crowns on the surface of the lake. I was amazed to see other possibilities for landing, onto the water, and to see this garden so distressed. But, I noticed that the parachutist could have done very little about it. The air streams had carried him off course. He tried to manipulate the strings, to swing his body fiercely; yet he had to end his flight by jumping into the water. In the meantime, the silk skirt had been wiggling and struggling with wind streams around and from within its own grandiose form. His life preserver had quietly soaked up the water absorbing unevenly the moisture of the green lake that had painted the picture on it; it had shown graphically what was left of the flight. The man in the boat had paddled close to it and pulled it into the boat along with the parachutist who had struggled within his



splash to maintain his balance; but in the end he had come out dressed in water lilies.

This event made a strong impression on me. Mainly it came from the bravery of the man who performed his return to ground, and a lamenting sound of the elegy from the silk in its arabesque flight. I was deeply moved, quiet, listening to the echo of many voices fading away, looking at the water lilies and the blue and spotless sky. Everything was once again as it was before the contest; all that remained was the white circle made by chalk. It was there as an abandoned sign that something had happened.

I remember I came back in the following days, expecting to see another wonderful image. But, as the days passed by I had to return home from holidays. I was glad when I came home and stood in front of my icon; I saw Bogorodica holding her Child with the same tenderness, had the same folds on Her dress and the same traces around Her and on Her. The expression on Her face was still warm and silent looking at me to see me back from beyond. My icon, framed and splendid, an arch spanning Time and Life.

An image

Still

Silent

Gentle as silk

My icon.

Did you ever touch silk with your hands? My first sense is that it is very soft. However, its softness is not quite the same as that of cotton, or wool, or moss on a warm summer day. It is simply "silky". Try to touch silk and feel cold. You may be surprised that that is impossible; your skin is drawn into this shiny soft fabric. When touching silk, I listen to it, and I almost hear it as a murmur of fibres. If pressing it on my face, I am carressed fondly by this finest of tissues. When thinking about the bundle in my hand, I imagine the small worm weaving diligently in its lifetime a cradle for itself to sleep in. When wrapping the silk around my body, I am safe, somehow closer to the sound of its murmur; and warm.

Silk folds easily, and a child can crumple and hold it in its hand. It could disappear into the break of day like a fog in the warm early morning; the rising sun disperses this misty sight, when it springs up

faster than the fog expects it to. Now, when one watches the little hand opening slowly, silk keeps its shape for an instant, and then it quietly unfolds and stretches its folds over the child's hand without a trace of a wrinkle. It wraps the hand, and if the other hand gets near to redrape it, then the entire event becomes a real sensation of feeling warm, and safe, the kind of experience which dissolves opacity around us.

Blast and Trace

Phhhhhhhh in Space

Man with Shadow

Jumps

and Fades<sup>6</sup>

Silk is pure, natural and white, the kind our grandmothers liked for their clothing. Parachutes were made from the same kind of silk; its softness somehow suddenly made me think about umbrellas and their enduring protection. Silk too endures air and gravity and can hold the weight of the person. And, again, because of its softness, pliability you can comfortably fold silk into a small envelope that is easy to carry. It is almost unreal how light silk is; it is almost

weightless. Can you imagine this light piece of fabric and a heavy man - the parachutist? together? Up there in the blue sky, they perform an extraordinary marriage of speed and flight, preventing the parachutist from falling.

## 2. Bogorodica

I had no Father  
I had no Mother  
I was left with  
my Grandmother.

And my Grandmother  
made Laces  
and she made Traces  
and all kinds of Faces

My Grandmother made Me

Now traces are Faces  
now faces are Laces  
now laces are Traces  
now traces are Spaces

Oh, spaces, laces, traces

Spaces for Souls  
laces for Hope  
faces for Life  
traces for Eye

Ontology of Love<sup>7</sup>

I was glad to find my grandmother always sitting in her corner, next to the window, knitting or crocheting laces. She asked me in Russian: "Nu, kak tjebjja nrazilos tam?" (Well, how did you like it there?) "Bilo je divno" (It was beautiful), I answered in Serbian, still "seeing" the silk arabesque, the man up in the blue sky. And, I looked at her. She kept on knitting while she listened to my voice. I learned from her about the genuine presence of Grace in life at that instant, and I remember my first discovery of the icon and Her Grace.

It was war time. There were several, quite ordinary boxes made of corrugated paper strong enough to carry heavy contents to survive shipping and transportation. One day, they were brought into our home. These parcels were full of canned food donated for the needy.

When we had consumed the food, these boxes were used for many other purposes. One was used to store things of undetermined use, such as the pieces of silk. These pieces were not mere scraps; they were carefully and very beautifully painted. One was meant to be a scarf, and the others were well shaped and cut pieces for collars and matching cuffs. They were lovely,

painted pieces indeed. The artist was my grandmother's sister-in-law; she was Russian, and had been educated in Switzerland, and had learned there the Eastern skill of painting on the silk. It seemed to me that her favorite medium was silk, since she generally painted on silk rather than on regular canvas. Perhaps, canvas was unavailable at that time, and was almost as big a luxury as food. So, soon after the "UNRA" boxes arrived at our home with food, they were full of silk, books, icons. My grandmother's sister-in-law's other interest was icons. She made them in different sizes, all shiny and colourful. She painted them on wood panels. That is probably how I first noticed an icon as an emerging image from the box full of "odd" things. Various forms of this kind of image reappeared later in my life. I learned from my mother that we moved to this apartment with boxes full of "odd" things, because the previous apartment was on a street that was heavily bombed. It was on the top of the hill overlooking a railway station. This other apartment was located on an insignificant flat street with many trees. The apartment was small. I remember that there was too much furniture for the space, and also, that there, among that mass, was one icon, even though it was

invisible to me at the beginning of my search into the boxes. My grandmother got up from her corner seat and went to the kitchen. She filled the pink cup with the mixture of half water and, half oil, quietly, hardly answering my numerous questions. This ritual of the preparation for an enlightening had brought her back to the beginning of her many journeys, to the many reopenings of the life of her icon.

My grandmother walked from the kitchen through the pantry area to the first room and then to a second where the icon was kept. She walked this long path carefully carrying the lighted candle in her hand. Slowly and graciously, she placed the candle in its holder that was attached to the icon, crossed herself silently and was gone. I followed her into the room. She brought with her a reverent silence that made me keep a distance from her and I saw the icon closely. Gradually, peaceful feelings were replaced by the colourful chameleonic transformation.

The first time I discovered her icon (now my icon and the subject of the thesis) was that silent day when my grandmother lighted the candle. It was probably a day after long years of war and fear, when light could be brought back by the tiny candle attached to the

icon. It slowly disclosed an enlaced image of God, Mother and Child, emerging from a deep silence into the odyssey of existence. My whole world changed. This candle, this spot of light, transformed my entire way of "seeing". By illuminating the image, it added to it a certain spiritual dimension, a life in space and of space I was not aware of before. There was a mystery now, almost a secret power of transformation, from no existence into existence. It appeared to me as an entirely new chalcidoscope of colours. The nimbus of the candle light fused with the finely-chiselled, silver lace nimbus around the heads of Mother, God, and the Child. The anaglyph of meaning was born . . . . .

#### B o g o r o d i c a

This image was gentle in a somewhat familiar way. It had a tender and humane look, soft as silk. It was the image of God, Mother and Child. Here, the Mother had no hands; only the top part of the bodies, and the right hand of the Child were represented. This hand pointed gently to his Mother's face, creating what could be seen as an extension of the Virgin's neck, or even more slightly as a support for her reclined head. The hand of the Child blessed His Mother. A soothing



flame made me wonder, where did they come from, who were they.

### 3. Kazan Bogordica

I asked my grandmother about the icon, but she was not willing to talk about it. It was a sacred object to her, inappropriate for discussion; they went through a stormy time together, my grandmother and her icon, survived the flame of destruction of the years of many wars and the consequences. Let it rest, let peace be with it.

In spite of that I kept on asking the same question until the present day when I was holding the Mother God in my hands "giving" her another life. My mind was orbiting back to the birth, to the ashes of memory: Where did the icon come from?

The story about Kazan Bogorodica comes from various sources. First was the one from the specialist on the Russian Iconostasis, i.e. Dr. Natalie Pervouchine-Labrecque, who I informally interviewed, who provided me with the copy of the Troparion and the xerox of the same type of Bogorodica her mother kept for years.<sup>8</sup> She also pointed out to the literature on it.

Matrjosa, a nine year old girl lived near Kazan in Russia. Two cultures meet there, Slavic and Tartaric. One day she dreamed of a voice calling her "save me . . . save me, . . . come and save me." She awakened her mother, and off they went together to the place she recognized in her dreams. There was a house on fire. In its ashes this little girl found a small bundle; it was hidden under the floor around the cinder. When she unwrapped the bundle she found the icon in it.

This miraculous dream was later pronounced as a divine miracle, and the icon she found in the ashes was placed in the church. It came to have a dramatic significance in the history of Russian liberation.

When the Poles occupied Moscow, the Russians were pushed back to the walls of Kremlj. Dispersed, drunk and quarrelsome, the troops seemed to be destined for the loss of their beloved city in the land of permanent wars. But the moment of revelation came when one of the clergy who were present argued the importance of the Kazan Mother and Child for saving those poor troops, to lift the spirit of all those bewildered in shame and fear of the lost battle, and for their occupied and beloved motherland and Moscow. Duke Pozarski brought the genuine icon among them. The

image reflected the clergyman's prayers. It lifted the spirit of the troops and soon after Moscow was back into the hands of its people. The Poles were out of Russia.

— Ardent Intercessor, Mother of the Lord on high! Pray to the Son, Christ our God for all and save those who have recourse to Thy Powerful Protection. Defend us, O Lady, Tsaritsa and Holder of Sovereign Power when we, burdening with many sins stand before thee in misfortune, sorrow and sickness, praying to Thee with tender sensitivity of soul and contrite heart, shedding tears before this, Thy Most Pure Image, and having steadfast hope in Thee Who deliverest from all evils, grant to us what is profitable for our souls and save us all, Virgin Mother of God, for Thou art the Devine Protection of Thy servants.<sup>9</sup>

In 1633 Duke Pozarski supported the project for Kazanskiji Sabor, and after its completion, he carried the icon from his home to the newly built Kazanskiji Sabor. According to one version of the story of this same icon of the Mother of God and Christ, the one that the nine year old girl found in the ashes of the burnt Christian home in Njiznjega Lamova (nearby G.Penz) around 1300 and enshrined in 1634 in Kazanskiji Sabor in Moscow, was stolen and thus saved from the flame of revolution. Another version says that the icon was destroyed at the beginning of this century. A copy was made, and it is now in Fatima, in Portugal. Around the time when the genuine icon was found and placed in

Kazanskiji Sabor; two others were made. Later on, in the nineteenth century, different variations were manufactured according to the style of the time, in accordance with the orthodox dogma. One of those, I am led to believe, is mine, no.9216.

#### 4. Abgar and Christ

As the history is told - Abgar, the King of Edessa, was a leper who heard of the miracles of Christ and sent his archivist, Hannan, to Christ with a letter, asking Him to come to Edessa to heal him. Hannan was also a painter and would make a portrait of Christ in the event He could not go to Edessa. He tried to paint a portrait of Christ but was unable because of the indescribable glory of his face. Noting that Hannan wanted to make a portrait of him, Christ asked for some water, washed Himself, wiped His face with a piece of linen, and His features remained on this linen. Christ then asked Hannan to take the linen to Abgar, with a letter in which he stated he was unable to go to him because of a mission he needed to accomplish, but that he would send one of the disciples to him later. When Abgar received the "portrait" he was healed from the worst of his sickness, and after the Ascension, the Apostle Thaddeus went to Edessa and completely healed the King, converting him to Christianity. Abgar then removed an idol from a niche above one of the town gates and replaced it with "The Holy Image". His great grandson, a pagan, wanted to destroy this image but the Bishop of the town walled it into the niche and placed a burning lamp before it, thus causing it to be saved.<sup>10</sup>

#### IV. Interviews with the Individuals about Their Experience from the Icon

I have established three levels of my awareness. Here in the last part of this chapter, I explore the collective experience of the icon. By this I mean exploring awareness other than mine; or, generally, comparing different or similar perspectives of the icon. In regard to this I interviewed two individuals: a fourteen year old boy and a girl of the same age. They are both gifted children.

##### D. Description of the Experience from the Icon by the Adolescent Boy, Stephen

Stephen has already well defined masculine features; his voice is changed. He has a typical look of the student from the school he attends: loose shirt out of the belt. He takes his shoes off, and a pair of lovely, natural woolen socks appear. They have red stripes on the rib. He introduces himself as someone fond of music (he plays piano and clarinet) and sports. He states clearly about art: "Don't know how to draw, but I go to exhibitions". After we decide about the setting for the response, I bring the icon into my son's room, and hang it on the door; he was ready to

respond to the object. Stephen examines the icon in the silence and decides to write rather than to speak about it. Oral dialogue between us comes later. First, he sits in the chair, and then he moves close and decides to open the box; then he lights the candle.

1. Observing and writing about the icon:

"Continuation"

Stephen writes page 1:

- "Mary and Jesus
- Faces look interchangeable
- When illuminated must look like religious apparition
- Old
- Mary's happiness with having a new baby
- Precious, perhaps a gift? Fine metals. Nice carving
- Faces show maybe a bit of sadness
- Three dimensional
- Letters at the bottom
- Finely detailed carving
- Painted with precision
- Faces are a continuation"

Stephen writes page 2:

- "Wants to know more
- Why is she sad -
- They look angels
- Sense of courage they're calm
- I feel baby is motioning
- Everything will be all right
- The carving makes them look  
very dignified and important
- Mother looks like she's worshipping" . . .

## 2. Speaking about the icon: "age"

(Transcription from tape)

Stephen: "I assume that's Mary and Jesus, but I am not quite sure. First-time I thought it was Jesus that appeared, but closely it was . . . believing (he laughs) . . . . It shows kind of, of almost sadness of something, I am not sure of what. I don't know what, and also happiness which is, I don't know, I really don't know; which is by looking, you get the feeling of both . . . Ah, carvings you notice they come out at you like three dimensional . . . which is natural, I assume. The drawing, . . . . I know there is a certain period in

painting which they drew a person of an age with the big noses, . . . kind of this resemblance. . . . They always drew a person of an age with the faces very long . . . He looks like he was escalated or something, but I am not sure . . . It's detailed; very detailed which I am not sure of how they did it as it's very old . . ."

### 3. Lighting the Candle: "Look like alive"

Stephen: "It looks different now; enlightened. The carving stands out; it has shadows - like relief . . . Virgin Mary 'nd Jesus look like alive. His face is like a child's and also like a man's . . . His eyes are dark, and He looks so straight at you, like they penetrate . . . Virgin Mary is sad; probably 'cause she sees Him to be powerful, and He'll leave one day to be a leader. She is also happy; she protects Him the way she looks at Him . . . And the hands! . . . one hand: the other you don't see, . . . left hand's hidden. That makes Him so powerful: He covers His power. Virgin Mary is also happy; I s'pose because she knows He is the leader, and that He might



come back one day . . . ; you see haloes  
around their heads, I suppose those are  
haloes? . . . . Things are standing by  
themselves: confront, that is left sided face  
is very shaded . . . this suggests . . . that  
. . . she's accumulated in her life."

4. "What does it d'to you?": "hope"

Stephen: "It looks like a painting in the church where  
people pray."

Interviewer: "Yes, you're right. That is a kind of  
painted "object" that people pray with.  
But it is more than a painting. It is an  
icon; originally, icon means a portative  
image you carry with you; or within you  
and pray."

Stephen: "This one. It is hope . . . . Well, the  
strength of the picture, just noticing its  
persons and how small it is; looks so strong  
and full of it; that's how strength gets away  
from it. And I feel, like I am strong, and I  
carry kind of hope in this world to succeed  
and to be happy . . . it strengthens you its  
gain . . . beautiful!"

5. Three Dimensional: "You can talk to you"

Stephen: "You can see behind, so it comes out at you; a picture of, . . . three dimensional; you can see all the facets of it. Like a touching three dimensional: it's a kind, it's just that it comes out to you; it's not some kind of flat on the piece of paper, or something: it's a kind that comes towards you, makes you, you can talk to you . . . there's a kind of curves and everything."

Interviewer: "Do you think that layers would do something to an extra dimension?"

Stephen: "It gives more character, and it makes that people are so much more important in it. It just kind of sparkles the canvas."

6. Motion: "Walk"

Stephen: "It looks different in the box kind of, when the light's in the candle . . . Pink glass looks pale and when the light put in, looks more alive, fresh, and if you let the candle walk, if there wouldn't be the glass, I am sure it would look just that much more like a real life."

### 7. Frames: "Tunnel"

Stephen: "Well the frames, they're be: the gold . . . they look, the one on the top that's painted! just gives it back much more class, to really nice frame in gold, the co-frame in silver; it's very neat. And it's box, kind of case in depth before it comes only as the angle, but it frames and gives depth to the picture, it makes it focus on kind of the tunnel . . . . It looks like collided at the end of the tunnel; you walk the tunnel and you finally find something there it is! the child's so sure of himself. Tunnel just makes you focus, because of that but it just gonna zero on it . . . makes the trip worth it . . . when you walk down the tunnel, so the end kind of, if you look back the way of that, just the middle piece, everything else is also dark, and it's kind of hit, . . . the walk down there, to get to see the picture closer."

E. Description of the Experience from the Icon by the  
Adolescent Girl, Rachel

Rachel goes to the same school as Stephen. She drops her trumpet box the moment she enters. She is dressed in black mostly with some light grey tones. She dances, likes to write and reads a lot. She travels a great deal with her parents, has visited Yugoslavia once, and there saw some of the monasteries. She likes to go to the museums, where she likes to walk around all by herself. She explores the icon in my son's room. In the first session she lights the candle, and in the second, she takes the icon out of the frames, and, at the end, puts it neatly back.

1. Icon: "Religious Painting"

(Transcription from tape)

Rachel: "Some things like all icons are religious paintings, like this one: she is always in the same position like looking there at the child, and like, . . . on this icon leaning towards him, and like all the paintings, they're all the same: she is looking down . . . Well, I believe in something; but, I think it's more like within the person. Because if religions

would have lies and boundaries, and say, you can't do this and you, I don't know; I think people should be able to make their own mistakes and find their own religion, 'cause it's the way to expressing yourself, and understanding things."

2. Expressions and Expressing: "Calm and I enjoyed"

Rachel: "Expressions on their faces . . . they look calm . . . well it's different 'cause from here and close up they had, the expressions are different. But if I look at her far away, they look religious calm, relaxed, like not worrying, not . . . I don't know. Not like people now, either when they are relaxed you still see like worries in people's faces, they just look peaceful."

Interviewer: "You said you're searching for your own religion in a way, that is important to you and that's why art is in a way similar to religion, 'cause it expresses some kind of feelings."

Rachel: "Well, when I am calmest, when I'm experiencing, but when I'm dancing, I'm not

calm; I am moving, but inside. I feel, I want to finish dance, and I just feel good, like, I don't know, that I done something that I enjoyed, I just feel very good."

3. Bogorodica: "She is so beautiful!"

Rachel: "It's more of a feeling; if, it's like if you're looking at something you get the feeling that something is beautiful. It's I mean, it's what you see but more how; I don't know, because different people find different things beautiful. It's how you perceive certain things; I mean you can't define, you can't say things are beautiful because! . . . but . . . things are beautiful because like for me, because I make them, I see them as beautiful. I don't know, just can't explain, I mean it's beautiful to me, because I see it how it is, but someone else can look at it; and think it's ugly, that's how they make, may look for themselves."

Interviewer: "They judge, just don't notice that beauty at all. They might wait for another moment or whatever it may be. In another words are you, . . . do I

understand what you are really saying is  
that beauty comes out of you really, out.  
- I demonstrate "outing".

4. Holding: "Small and Old"

Rachel: "Oh, it's small," R. says when taking the icon  
into her hands and out of the frames. "I  
thought I'd be happier!"? she laughs. . . .  
"How old is it?"

Interviewer: "Well, so far my expertise goes, it  
should be around the year your friend  
discovered; it should be around 1884,  
something like that. My grandmother was  
born in 1888, and she was 17 when she got  
married and got it as a wedding gift,  
from her father, so it's possible that  
it's 1884."

Rachel: "There is just a stroke, a strike on her  
face?"

Interviewer: "Yah, I suppose it's the glaze, that is  
sort of cracking a little bit, you know,  
could be. It travelled, you know."

5. When you think, when you dance: "Hand"

Rachel: "There's a little hand there", and she points to Christ's hand blessing His Mother.

Interviewer: "What would you say that hand indicates. Or, . . . do you, how would you describe?"

Rachel: "I don't know. I don't like to say, I don't like to kind of analyze."

Interviewer: "It is just, you know, when you think, when you dance, when you think about your movement, what do you do? in that sense. What kind of movement is that for you? that's all."

Rachel: "It looks like he is stopping, but like, he's like ahead of her somehow; like more . . . old, like wiser than her. Say, you know, like mind ahead," and while she verbally explains that she articulates that movement, "that's what would mean to his dancing here," she shows with the gesture, . . . "It's fascinating, the hand."

6. Part of the Reality: "Babysitting"

Rachel: "He looks like a boy I am babysitting," she laughs upon that discovery.



Interviewer: "Oh, oh, that's interesting! . . . you made a discovery, you know. It's part of the reality."

### Chapter Three

#### INTERPRETATION

In this part of the study I am identifying Bogorodica as the central theme with many meaningful elements to its whole. By theme I mean a group of meaningful elements, both semantic and visual, with which we create a significant whole. I shall interpret these aesthetically significant elements and describe the way they contribute to the theme Bogorodica. These elements were embodied for me in the experiences I called "paths from and towards the icon".<sup>11</sup> These paths were aesthetic events that I experienced and which produced enduring iconic inner images for me. I identified these embodiments, or paths, through the process of poetic and mythic<sup>12</sup> thinking. Also, I acknowledged experiences, other than mine, whose differences and similarities were organic in the constitution of the life and nature of Bogorodica. By incorporating the most significant statements from the interviews, I shall explicate the parallels and differences that have educational value which emerge from the aesthetic experience of my informants.

# I. Explanation of the theme Bogorodica

The focal point where all "departures" begin is the inner image of Bogorodica. The meanings of the theme, embodied in the word itself, exist for me as dynamic relationships of the reciprocal visual and sound elements. Each syllable of the word describes something. I shall interpret each syllable as it relates to the visual aesthetic event that was significant for me. Here are the Cyrillic and English syllable-units of the word in upper and lower case letters:

Б О Г О Р О Д И Ц А

B o r o p o g u u a

B O G O R O D I C A

B o g o r o d i c a

## 1. "O", Entering the Gate

"O" is the second syllable of the word Bogorodica, meaning "of".<sup>13</sup> In the description of the ordinary level, in Chapter Two, I exhibit "O" (and "N") as an ornament. In the transcript of the second interview with the boy, Stephen, I explain more of what the "O"

symbol stands for: it is God's pronouncement when asked for His name - I Am Who Am.<sup>14</sup> In the tradition of folk dance in Serbia, "O" can easily stand for the "oro", a dance where all men and women, or both, dance, encircling a space and creating a ring around it. In the sense of entering the gate, which I described in the level of aesthetic experience, I associate this entrance with entering the sacred space, the internal universe, which is surrounded by the "ring of fragrance"; in another reality these are different frames. "Reaching the icon is a dramatic event for me",<sup>15</sup> I say. What I really mean by that is that the discovery of the significant gravital point is a drama in itself. It is a discovery of new in old, within the scale of aesthetic events. This element of inception means reaching the internal image beyond what is presently seen. That dramatic process begins when I open the black box that I associate with opening many gates, which allow entry into the sacred space. In the moment of holding the icon, I become part of the circle which creates that sacred space with the icon. It is the birth of the meaning of the circle and also the metaphor for the Mother holding the Child, the approach and discovery of the way into the sacred space.

On the other hand, Stephen's comment represents a different "walk" through space between himself and the icon: "as you walk the tunnel and you find something, there it is! . . ."; it is an expression similar to mine, about the sense of finding something, of discovery. His act of approaching the icon is the making of the circle, which creates the sacred space. The minute you pass through the "gate" you are "into", but also "out". As it is for me, stepping into the orchard or that sacred space and also out of the mundane world, out of the reality, so for Stephen it is a discovery of another cosmos, another space. This act is the awakening of imagination.

The other interviewee, Rachel, approaches the icon differently. Her approach echoes past experiences in her life. What she discovers is the smallness of the actual object, which is different from her expectations: "Oh, it's small", she says when taking the icon into her hands and out of the frames. The instant of the discovery and the recognition of the permanent values, such as the age of the icon, came when she learned about its real size: "I thought I'd be happier!", she laughed and added, - "How old is it?" This question discloses for me the awakened sense of

the difference between her expectations of the icon and what she found in the icon itself. Here the difference between the imagination and reality "works" for Rachel and allows her to see the relation between now and then.

## 2. "Rod", Motherhood

"Rod" is the third syllable in the word Bogorodica. It has more than one meaning. The word means family, relationship, kinship, relative; i.e., it refers to a person who is of your "flesh and blood". Beyond this definition, other meanings of this syllable of the word imply some kind of close and essential connection or relationship such as: birth, symbolizing a fruit and the sign of fertility. In Chapter Two I speak of the variations of the experience of birth and of my primal relationship with my child:

I know how it feels when I hold my child. It feels warm. It is a sensation of the fullness of my heart. It is like a wave, or overwhelming tenderness or the excitement of the discovery of peace in the orchard . . . my son's white warmth and his frail little body that grew in me and swam out of me . . . . It is as if I behold for the moment Life inside beauty and Soul inside of Time".<sup>16</sup>

My child's presence, even though so young and new, gave me the feeling of "familiar", in other words, of my "rod", or my faith. My personal experience of a universal sense of Life is, in its essence, within Beauty and Soul, the reflection from the concavity of Time in the icon. Translating my feeling of Motherhood and my experience of "Rod" with my son into the visual elements I see as a curve. It symbolizes connectedness, tenderness, caring, love, and also, the nearness of the position emphasizes closeness. Curves create a sense of the mother's tenderness and care, of her leaning toward the child and offering protection for life. Moreover, "rod" being related to my experience of Motherhood, of caring for my child, comes into existence as the universal Motherhood Symbol. It is present in the icon through the closeness of God, Mother and Child, and in the use of curves to emphasize care, closeness, tenderness.

Rachel seems to sense the presence of "rod"; she expresses her experience of the icon like this:

Some things like all icons are religious paintings, like this one: she is always in the position like looking there at the child, and like, on this icon leaning towards him . . .<sup>17</sup>

The other interviewee, Stephen, expresses his experience this way:

. . . the two people, they're inside the frame, and looks like they are stepping out of where the haloes are locked inside the frame, just like getting out of its inside. . . . You also notice the way the baby is all straight ahead, and the mother is kind of looking at an angle, and like it suggests that they, the child is the most important thing in the picture. . . . She is looking at him, like she is looking at the child, the child is looking straight ahead getting ready to leave. . . . Things are standing by itself, confront; left sided face is very shaded; she . . . this is suggest that she is accumulated in her life . . .<sup>18</sup>

The statement from Rachel is a common sense association with the icon. It is less abstract and more factual than Stephen's. As Rachel learns that icons are religious paintings, she identifies this element instantly and translates it further into and towards the meaning of the position "leaning towards him" as the metaphor of motherhood. This sense of protection, at the same time, implies the permanent bond between two people. That bond is "rod", the more profound meaning of Motherhood. The intricacy of the meaning within the syllable "rod", when related to birth, has another dimension. When I recognize the essence of Motherhood it becomes poetic:



. . . my child swam out from his previous space as if pointing out with his right stretched arm into something he recognized, another cosmos i.e. Mother Earth . . . .<sup>19</sup>

Also, when "r" is isolated from "od" in "rod", then it means "f r o m", or "of some origin",<sup>20</sup> more precisely by some origin and of an identity fully expressed in the Bible in God's words: "I Am Who Am".<sup>21</sup> In mytho-poetic language, this expresses fully the meaning of the fruit - the one that is and the one that becomes.

Rachel reads the child's stretched hand on the icon as the gesture of Wisdom:

. . . stopping, but like wiser than her.  
Say, he's like ahead of her somehow; like more  
. . . old, like wiser than her. Say, you  
know, mind ahead.<sup>22</sup>

By gesturing the meaning with her hand, Rachel's recognition of "becoming" gains the full meaning of the child's gesture, the child as coming from, but also as becoming; and she states: ". . . it's fascinating, the hand . . ." I can't speak about Motherhood, without speaking about the child and the child's Wisdom of becoming and of coming from. The connection between the syllables-unit here exists in the form of the sign of hand as it originates in the context of the experience of the image.

Stephen sees the meaning of the hand differently:

Well, his hand, one hand; the other you don't see, . . . left hand's hidden. That makes him so powerful. He covers His power .

### 3. "Ica", Beautiful

"Ica" is the last of the four unit-syllables. It brings the feminine form to the masculine meaning of the syllable "Bog". The word Bogorodica, then resonates with this connection of the inner meanings. Even the sound of the "G" indicates female divine origin. Because of the presence of the "ica", the "G" sound is transformed into a "z" sound. So "God" becomes "Goddess". This interpretation of the syllables is my own, and is in some way, therefore, idiosyncratic. However, I do believe that other speakers would share a similar interpretation. Generally, the divine is considered as an extraordinary virtue, as a unification of the spiritual and mundane beauty. I experience the beautiful, when related to this process of transformation, through colour:

. . . drama of the light takes place again: the icon is exposed to the bright sunlight that transforms earthy tones on the faces into a rainbow of colours. . . . I find myself thinking that impressionists had a similar experience of surface light

transformation, or light "transpassing" through the object; almost like an x-ray of a landscape, or of an object; or, the birth of the image itself.<sup>24</sup>

While I describe the process of the recognition of the origin of the beautiful as an event of colours, I don't pronounce it, I just imply the meaning of beauty. With Rachel it is different. When she takes the match and lights the candle, she pronounces:

It's different now . . . . And so beautiful. That makes it shine . . . . you know, it, you can see it in her crib with tears. . . . Look . . . . at her now she is so mysterious. . . .

It's more of a feeling; if it's like if you're looking at something you get the feeling that something is beautiful. . . . It's how you perceive certain thing; I mean you can't define, you can't say things are beautiful because! . . . . but, . . . . things are beautiful because, like for me, because I make them, I see them beautiful.<sup>25</sup>

As she physically puts the "sparkle" in the icon, the mystery of the image exhibits its beauty for Rachel. She reads it as mysterious. The unity of gesture and feeling becomes an expression, her own ability to make it or experience the way she pronounces it as "I make them, I see them b e a u t i f u l". While I understand that for Rachel beautiful is an active state, I find that with Stephen it is more intuitive. His question: "Why is she sad?" shows that he

recognizes a feminine quality. At the very beginning of his observation of the icon, this quality triggers his attention; and he sees another side of it: "Mother looks like she is worshipping".<sup>26</sup> This contradiction shows the essence of the feminine character that Stephen senses rather than actively experiences.

This kind of sensing and experiencing is close to my poetical state, the one that contains "latent" and "hidden values therein",<sup>27</sup> i.e. mytho-poetic value fused in the image and the word. That value is liberated when the whole image and the word form Bogorodica are fused.

#### 4. "Bog", the Light

"Bog" is the first syllable in the word Bogorodica. The word "Bog" went through transformation until it established Slavic form. It originated from old Indian "bhagas" and goes further into the Iranian word "baga". "Baga" means wealth, plentitude, master, or God. In the tradition of the Serbs, "Bog" means sky. One of the folk proverbs speaks about it: "What's of sun is of God too!" (Ono sto je pod suncem i pod Bogom je).<sup>28</sup> In another words, "Bog" is like

sunlight that gives plentitude and dynamism to Life.

In my narrative I describe that:

It could disappear into the break of day like a fog in the warm early morning; the rising sun disperses this misty sight when it spring up faster than the fog expects it.<sup>29</sup>

Another transformation of the word "Bog" is related to the "bor", or pine tree. This tallest and oldest of all the evergreen trees is related to the "Bozic" (which means Christmas).<sup>30</sup> "Bog" does not represent a person or entity in the world. It has only spiritual presence in a variety of the symbolic resonances organically connected within my imagination. For me the word "spiritual" refers to a unique quality. I see it closely related to the "religious thought" that Cassirer speaks about in his Language and Myth; I shall discuss it in the conclusion of this chapter. This relation is the vital essence which enables me to see its extraordinary dimension, in spite of the fact that at the present time this spiritual dimension is devalued by scientific methodology.

In Chapter One (pp.1,2), I interpret the whole word Bogorodica in general, saying that it "embodies the experience of a richness of faith . . .". The syllable and the word "Bog" implies the beginning, the

Faith itself; something Divine that enlightens this world to which we are all connected by our inner experience. Visually, I relate this word to light and colour:

While I hold the icon so that it is exposed to direct sunlight I blink for the moment looking at the flickering colourful event, and I listen to the birds chasing one another and settling in the crown of a nearby tree . . . .<sup>31</sup>

Here I give an example of what I call the "Symbolic resonance", or echo, as the "blink of my eye"; it is the instant experience of the sound of the "birds chasing one another and settling in the crown of a nearby tree", an ordinary event that I experienced many times before this instant and at the specific moment, it echoes another modulation, which is the one of the spiritual, a kind of mystical presence. By holding this icon and listening to some distant silence, I hear this sound as though for the first time. It appears to me like the ode of light to Life. I see the world illuminated, the real garden that once a "tiny flame" spoke metaphorically about the light and colour and which the Life is attached to:

The first time I discovered her icon (now my icon and the subject of the thesis) was that silent day when my grandmother lighted

the candle. It was probably a day after long years of war and fear, when light could be brought back by the tiny candle attached to the icon. It slowly disclosed an enlaced image of God, Mother and Child, emerging from a deep silence into the odyssey of existence<sup>32</sup>

Transformation of the tiny light into the ode to Life shows the structure of my inner image and of my aesthetic experience where "Bog" stands as the metaphor for the unity of that extraordinary experience.

Stephen sees "Bog" like this:

when illuminated must look like religious apparition. . . . It is hope. . . . Well, the strength of the picture, just noticing its persons and how small it is; looks so strong and full of it, that's how strength gets away from it. And I feel like I am strong, and I carry kind of hope in this world to succeed and to be happy. . . .<sup>33</sup>

What Stephen imagines is the idea of hope related to "Bog", i.e. "God"; but what he senses while looking at the icon is Bogorodica as the appearance of hope. When he speaks about "the strength from it" I understand him to mean the spiritual element that advances his perceiving of the quality in the form of Faith reflected in the faces of Bogorodica and Her Child, their "faces look interchangeable".<sup>34</sup>

Rachel speaks about Faith clearly:

Well, I believe in something, but I think it is more within the person. Because if

religions would have lies and boundaries, and say you can't do this and you, I don't know; I think people should be able to make their own mistakes and find their own religion, . . . cause it's the way to expressing yourself, and understanding the things. . . .<sup>35</sup>

Rachel speaks here about two things. The first one is the sense of religion; the other one, which is significant for this interpretation is the inner sense of her own religion: she means "God", the "unbounded", the personal. In this particular sense, "God" has no boundaries but only a dimension that we carry within us and that becomes evidence of the particular spiritual quality. When Rachel looks at Bogorodica with Her Child that has endured since before Time, she perceives that internal and durable quality.

## II. Conclusion

The word Bogorodica is easily divided into the syllables, yet it is a harmonic unity. My interpretation of the meaning of each syllable is parallel to the image it contains. It makes an image equal to the word or sound. When put together, syllables speak about the spirit of the place in which Bogorodica dwells thus making the integration of image and sound a unity, a statement that has a language of



its own. Within and between the syllables, imagination shows relevance of the graceful and silent interplay in the image and word. The "O" symbol "encircles" the beginning and the end of the word (i.e. "Bog" and "Ica"). I interpret it to be a background that unifies the spectator and the object and thus participates in the entire cultural dialogue and the shift between the object and its becoming the subject. It implies the paradox of an active state of Nature and a passive energy of Life in its reciprocal relationship. These significant meanings are disclosed in my experience of the icon. Through poetic crossings, these become the path towards the discovery of our collective experience of interpreting meaning, value, and a new discourse from the icon. This shared discourse becomes a reconfirmation of the spiritual value embodied in the icon. I recognize three major aspects in my aesthetic experience that hold the meaning together. These are myth and mythic thinking, language and poetics. They all organically intertwine to structurally corroborate my aesthetic experience. From the social and individual aspects, it means actively perceiving the significance that brings the level of awareness and understanding to art in practice. In this final

conclusion, I seek to synthesize the major themes of my aesthetic experience of the icon by incorporating the background of relevant ideas from three authors. This synthesis is meant to occur on the level of explicit and also on the level of tacit connections. There are three authors, and in each case one text, that I have come to regard as essential to my ideas. These are Ernest Cassirer and his Language and Myth, Northrop Frye and his essay the New Directions from Old and Ouspensky and Losky and their The Meaning of Icons.

In Language and Myth, by Ernest Cassirer, I find the major theoretical grounding for understanding the significance of myth and image in relation to language and poetics. In chapter four, "Word Magic", the author speaks about this relation given by language and by myth. It is reflected in the structure of the world that beholds symbolic forms such as Bogorodica in my case, and their evolution. Symbolic forms contain contradiction, but also an embryo of a new assertion. This paradox is in the image that connects linguistic and mythico-religious consciousness throughout this verbal evolution. Their symbolic formation is manifested in myths or verbal entities. The unity between myths is in the sphere of the experience of the

"holy", the experience of respect of the content.

Disclosure of those meaningful inner images is the disclosure through the act of naming. The author states:

. . . the mythic consciousness does not see human personality as something fixed and unchanging, but conceives every phase of a man's life as a new personality, a new self; and this metamorphosis is first of all made manifest in the changes which his name undergoes.<sup>36</sup>

This particular genesis determines the type of intellectual content where the process of apprehension becomes human awareness. Image and word then emerge, when immediate intuition is focused on, or reduced, to a single point. The content of experience becomes a mere presence in the sum of all Being. The word then is not only a mere conventional symbol, but we find the potential misinterpretation between "symbol" and "meaning" clarified. The relationship of identity, of complete congruence between the "image" and "object", between name and thing, is disclosed.

From another angle, the typical process in all conscious ideation is the cultural work; it gradually shifts from the direct relation between the man and his environment to an indirect relationship of the spiritual power inherent in language. The word in the

mythic form, as a substantive being and power, is a fundamental function in the construction and development of spiritual reality

In the following chapters, "The Successive Phases of Religious Thought" and "Power of Metaphor", Cassirer explains further the importance of "spiritual reality". He recognizes it as the rudiment to achieving the higher plane of emotion and expression. Individuals create "momentary deities" from the immediate conviction of the senses and bring them out in an active state, to carry them on as "special gods". This element of mystical experience Cassirer connects with the "magic of analogy", which is characteristic of myth, or mythic thought. The subsequent reflection is linked to the discursive or what is called rhetorical form. This continual interaction attests to the mental unity, the principle, that does not exclude the mode of spiritual creativity; on the contrary, it gives the rebirth of the mythic image in a sensuous form as self-revelation. It provokes the utterance of the audible feeling or the silent dialogue one has when the quality of an event is intense, and we become creators of the newly defined world. The crossing point culminates in METAPHOR. Word and image condition each

other. This correlation is reciprocal and manifests itself in an aesthetically liberated life.

Cassirer's ideas about the relationship between myth, language and poetics is relevant to my aesthetic experience of the icon. It clarifies for me the meaning of myth and poetics which the word Bogorodica contains, or what I call the major visual theme of Bogorodica. I perceive the possibility to expand the theme into the inner image(s), into the visual word, and syllable as the visual beginning of the speech into the image, into art. I call it here a new grammar. In that sense I understand Cassirer's saying that poetry is the mother tongue of humanity<sup>37</sup> rooted in the "real" image.

I find another relevant aspect of myth and poetics in the essay "New Directions from Old" by Northrop Frye. He recognizes their common ground in TOPOS. This common place is the primal image that grounds the universal statement of the common human situation. TOPOS is the central element of the poetic mythology. The poet's character creates this kind of mythology which is based on the concrete, sensational, figurative, anthropomorphic, out of which the informing concepts of discursive thought come. The poet seeks

what is typical; he/she finds it mostly in the natural cycle, which means that a poet goes between the upper and lower world, setting off for "the journey of ascent." According to Frye, this cosmology of poetics is not simply a part of the poem's subject-matter, but is inseparably a part of its total form, the framework of the poet's imagery. The structural system depends on the integrity of word and thought, of correspondence between the thought and action. The word becomes almost a mere imitation of action without making a specific statement of fact. The poet keeps the consistency of the verbal structure, unlike the historian. Frye says: "the verbal imitation of ritual is myth, and the typical action of poetry is plot. . ."38

What the author means here is that he can deal with facts, which he calls history, only to the extent that facts, i.e. "history, can supply him with a foundation of comic, tragic, romantic, or ironic myth." The similarity between the poet and historian overlaps.

The first one is involved in history as the starting point for his/her myth. They have a mutual manifestation of the human cause as an instinct even though their perspectives differ. What is unacceptable for the historian becomes a limitless possibility for

the poet. However, the nature of the perceptual structure shows an analogy with historical occurrences. History becomes metahistory.

Northrop Frye's ideas, on the relation between myth and poetics as the structural system that holds image and word together (in its typical imitative action of the natural cycle) are necessary for the clarification of the constitution of personal myth. I describe this in Chapter Two, the third level (Narrative) which presents my poetics. However, the spiritual experience that Cassirer speaks about is a dimension that connects several levels and contributes to the aesthetic experience, I also find in The Meaning of Icons by Ouspensky and Lossky. According to them, the Church Tradition is the principle of life, the principle of the Creator Himself, that beauty is the Kingdom of the Spirit. The Church Tradition expressed the knowledge of the Saviour during His lifetime, in the icon. The icon with Bogorodica came immediately after Him in the icons of God Mother and Child. The church absorbs what is genuine in the external world by noticing what is lacking in it. And, by "seeing" it the church again produces the sacred image and teaches man to "see" the answer. Because it is a long process

in itself, spiritual quality or religion allows truth to "take its own time". It becomes salvation and a dialogue with the image is a prayer.

This process of truth relates to the natural cycle of myth that Frye speaks about. It is that ancestral voyage that personal voyage but most of all the one that culminates in metaphor. The way Cassirer speaks about it as the crossing point between myth and poetry is similar to Ouspensky, who relates it to prayer. It is the sacred space where imagination is free giving birth to the poem, or the work of art. It is then, what I call "the personal myth" the true story of the event.



## Chapter Four

### REFLECTION ON THE TEACHING OF ART

The teaching of art is a serious commitment for me. One needs experience and knowledge if one is to open up avenues for those they teach. As a child and throughout my education, I experienced many blockages that slowed down my growth. My talent and my interest became deviated. The choices I made in life reflect my determination to find a way of my own. By recalling the most positive experiences, I have realized that the most constant value within them has been Bogorodica, the inner image, the context, the content and the aesthetic.

I have also encountered activities that were the most intriguing for me as a child when I found the world of my invention. I have relied much on my common sense and my imagination. I have realized that they both go together. Based on that kind of authenticity, which contains reference to the values of the personal experience painted with imagination, I shall explain the most pertinent roles I play as artist, as woman, as mother, as educator. I understand now that they are

almost equally important in my determined and responsible task of teaching art.

### Artist

I believe that the moment I discovered the mystery of my icon I became an artist. The drama of that discovery intensified my capacity for that quality of experience. I make many images - some are paintings, some are performances, some are poems. In making images, I cross between the senses and mind, and stretch to bring subjective truths together with general principles. Depending on the media I choose, I believe this process helps me to be an independent creative individual and to work with the power of ideas.

### Woman

Having been woman, female, girl; I detected early the "danger" and difficulties of being a woman. I experienced that perennial prejudice against women as sex objects, and the resulting devaluing of identity it carries. In Sanskrit language the word "playing" is closely associated with sex. It implies two sides: the vulgar side of sex which is the degradation of life,

and the other side which is vitality, the positive force of life, or evenmore the woman dreams of life. I recognize that the public dominated space which doesn't value this social role. Only her role at home is valued. Here I see the connection between the two meanings of "playing," and I willingly decided to play out the contrast and introduce the name Respect to it. I discovered pride in being a woman.

#### Mother

In the description of my aesthetic experience, I speak about the birth of my son. For the first time I felt the beauty, love and security of Life as an extraordinary sensation and gift from Nature. I acknowledged a different dimension of Grace in Life, which Motherhood brings along with its specific responsibility, not only about my own child but for the children of the world. I thought about how, as a child, I experienced the devaluing of care and caring in the male dominated society. I have thought, ever since that Mothers personify that care and are designated to be the teachers of those values.

### Educator

Identity with roles of artist, woman, mother has reached the stage of finding objective criteria for describing the value of self knowledge. I encountered its expansion with the specific purpose of looking for the possibilities to teach those tacit values. As a child and later as one of that generation of women which was denied equal opportunity to employ the qualities that each of the above role (as described) carries, this one of the educator enables me to take the path where dialogue with the world is about the inner experience of drama. The context for the process of the discovery of drama comes from the experience of art and woman and mother. This role of Educator is the way to employ those potential values and to put aesthetic experience into practice, and to achieve authentic dialogue with the world. Thus I feel and I know that I am the part of that dialogue in the world.

### Reflection on the Teaching of Art

Bogorodica is the source of the roles I described. Its consistency and uniqueness is evident in the background of my experience and forms my own alphabet of themes and images from which I form repertoire of

many possibilities in order to teach the significance of the aesthetic experience. Whether those qualities are based on the spiritual, the mythic, the poetic, the historic, the media, or all fused in one aesthetic event depends on the aspects the art educator wants to develop. According to Webster's Dictionary, "aesthetic" means sensitive to perceive (beauty). If we are open to recognize the truth (and beauty) around us and within us, then we can choose the course by which we can come to "see" an event, following its most significant path; and then creating the new icon, or new alphabet, in the context of its universality.

The following are two examples of my teaching "approaches" from my repertoire, drawing from the aesthetic experience as I described it in Chapter Two:

(a) In relation to Stephen's desire to learn (at the beginning of the first interview) I recognized that his initial experience of the icon and its media needed to be supported with history and myth but based on personal experience and discovery. This would then bring more significance to Stephen's experience. In my study, the type of knowledge which is based on research, the most comprehensive significance of Bogorodica within the context of art education, serves

to transform internal discoveries into the external principle of fully aesthetic experience, which then becomes individual aesthetic language. For example, with my interviewee, when the official descriptive requirements for this thesis were finished, I told Stephen the Story about Matrjosa, the nine year old girl; the History of Kazan Bogorodica, the role it played in the history in Russia; and lastly, the Cultural History, the History of my Family and this icon.

(b) My teaching "approach" was different with Rachel. I saw the possibility of "teaching" aesthetic experience by connecting two significant realities mythic (Bogorodica), and mimetic (with its hand). Rachel noticed the first one, and she was already familiar with the other one because she is a dancer. I asked her: "when you think when you dance, . . . when you think about your movement, what do you do?" While she experienced what she saw by performing it with her hand, the meaning sprang out and became a synthesis and she stated: "It's fascinating, the hand". It seemed to me she recognized these two realities of the static state of mind the icon itself symbolizes and the one she experiences through her hand. The experience of

the icon and an active thinking she described with her hand made this process a unity between the word and the gesture at a fully poetic level. By inciting her to express the religious myth of the blessing hand, this partial resemblance between the divine and personal aesthetic experience, I feel that I brought the poetic significance into focus. I helped her to bring into awareness the possibility of translating the state into her grammar, into her form of art.

As much as this teaching approach is based on my personal and unique aesthetic experience of Bogorodica, I see that it overlaps with teaching approaches common to many art educators. Another approach to the theme of Bogorodica is the final concept of the existence of "grammar" in it. The theme offers a wide range of possibilities for visual language (or even more "alphabetization", even enculturation) through the authenticity of the teacher and of the student in authentic dialogue. The function of a "language of my own" in the general scope of Education, for me, is encountering the ethics of commitment in the development, knowledge in general. For the specific purposes in Art Education, it means determining what possibility the individual has for connecting common

and extraordinary experience. In that connection, the individual gains specific knowledge and a personal art "alphabet". This idea of "developing the language", i.e. an alphabet of images and themes through the continuity of aesthetic experience is one of the goals in my quest to illuminate the value of personal aesthetic experience.

In Approaches to Art in Education, Laura Chapman states:

The purposes of art education parallel the functions of general education in a democracy. Goals for instruction in art are based on two principles: (1) helping children continue their self-education in art, and (2) developing children's understanding of relationships among their own artistic endeavours, the work of professionals in art, and the social impact of visual forms. Expression and response are interrelated and equally important modes of experiencing art. Approaches to study should reflect major concepts of art in Western culture. . . . Individual school programs in art should be planned with due attention to continuity and variety in experiences as well as to the practical problems teachers face.<sup>39</sup>

My final reflection on the personal aesthetic experience and the teaching of art is to communicate the significance of the function and purpose of teaching the aesthetic of arts. It is one of the approaches to teaching art in its complexity and organic unity with the subject who creates "subject(s)"



not objects. Experiencing is an organic part of developing knowledge. I feel that with practice with aesthetic experience the possibility of developing a refined knowledge increases. The creative process, the cumulative succession and act of creation, the instance of awareness allow the formation of the image and the liberation of personal myths in words and poetics; both are significant as aspects of specific artistic identity. The two ways of knowing, expression and response, are interrelated in this thesis. The description of my aesthetic experience reflects the acquired knowledge and the "language of my own".

I hope that my personal aesthetic experience which is based on a mode of giving a deeper, spiritual dimension to teaching and returning to the authentic expression of the beauty we perceive within us and in our environment will be realized. Teaching art in this way means enhancing our capacity for higher truth -- in art, of art, and through art.

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- <sup>1</sup> Description of the medium is based on my free translation from Enciklopedija Likovnih Umetnosti, Zagreb: Leksikografski Zavod SFRJ, 1962, p.649 (7)
- <sup>2</sup> Please refer to illustration no. 13. The white or golden lines are called "ozivke" (i.e. bringing back life) (8)
- <sup>3</sup> Please refer to illustrations no. 9,10,12 for various style of "riza" (9)
- <sup>4</sup> Joyce, James, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Book Ltd., 1977, p.65 (16,17)
- <sup>5</sup> Title of the poem is My Image; I wrote it in 1987 (22)
- <sup>6</sup> Title of the poem is Man with Shadow; I wrote it in 1987 (22)
- <sup>7</sup> Title of the poem is Art Anatomy; I wrote it during the years 1986 and 1987 in Montreal (24)
- <sup>8</sup> Please refer to illustrations no. 9,10,12,13. My purpose with the illustrations is to show the same type of Kazan Bogorodica. By that I mean what is common to this type is: it reduces God Mother's figure to the shoulders and it doesn't show hands (29)
- <sup>9</sup> Personal source of Dr. Natalie Pervoushin-Labrecque, Sheffer, N, Ruska Pravoslávna Ikona, p.64 (24)
- <sup>10</sup> "Mosaic Icon Installed at St. Innocent Church"; The Orthodox Church, 1986, vol.22, no.1, p.4 (32)

## Chapter Three

- 11 Chapter Two, II, p.22 (46)
- 12 Cassirer, Ernest, "The Power of Metaphor" in Language and Myth, trans. by Suzane Langer, New York, 1980, p.99 (46)
- 13 Please refer to illustration no. 11. It is an example of "naive art" representation in the terms of meaning "of" the world--a segment - the "I" (47)
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- 15 Chapter Two, II-B/1, p.12 (48)
- 16 Chapter Two, II-B/5,6, p.14-15 (50)
- 17 Interview with Rachel IV-E/1, p.40 (or in transcript First Interview with R.R. p.1) (51)
- 18 Interview with Stephen, in transcript Second Interview with S.P. pp.14,15,16 (52)
- 19 Chapter Two, II-B/5, p.15 (53)
- 20 Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language, College edition; New York: The World Publishing Co., 1951; p.1038 (53)
- 21 See ft.14 (53)
- 22 Interview with Rachel, IV-E/6, p.44 (53)
- 23 Interview with Stephen, IV-D/3, p.36 (54)
- 24 Chapter Two, II-B/7, p.16 (55)
- 25 Interview with Rachel, in transcript First Interview with R.R., p.23 (55)
- Interview with Rachel, IV-B/3, p.42 (55)
- 26 Interview with Stephen, IV-D/1, p.35 (56)

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- 29 Chapter Two, III-C/1, p.22-23 (57)
- 30 See ft.28 (57)
- 31 Chapter Two, II-B/1, p.14 (58)
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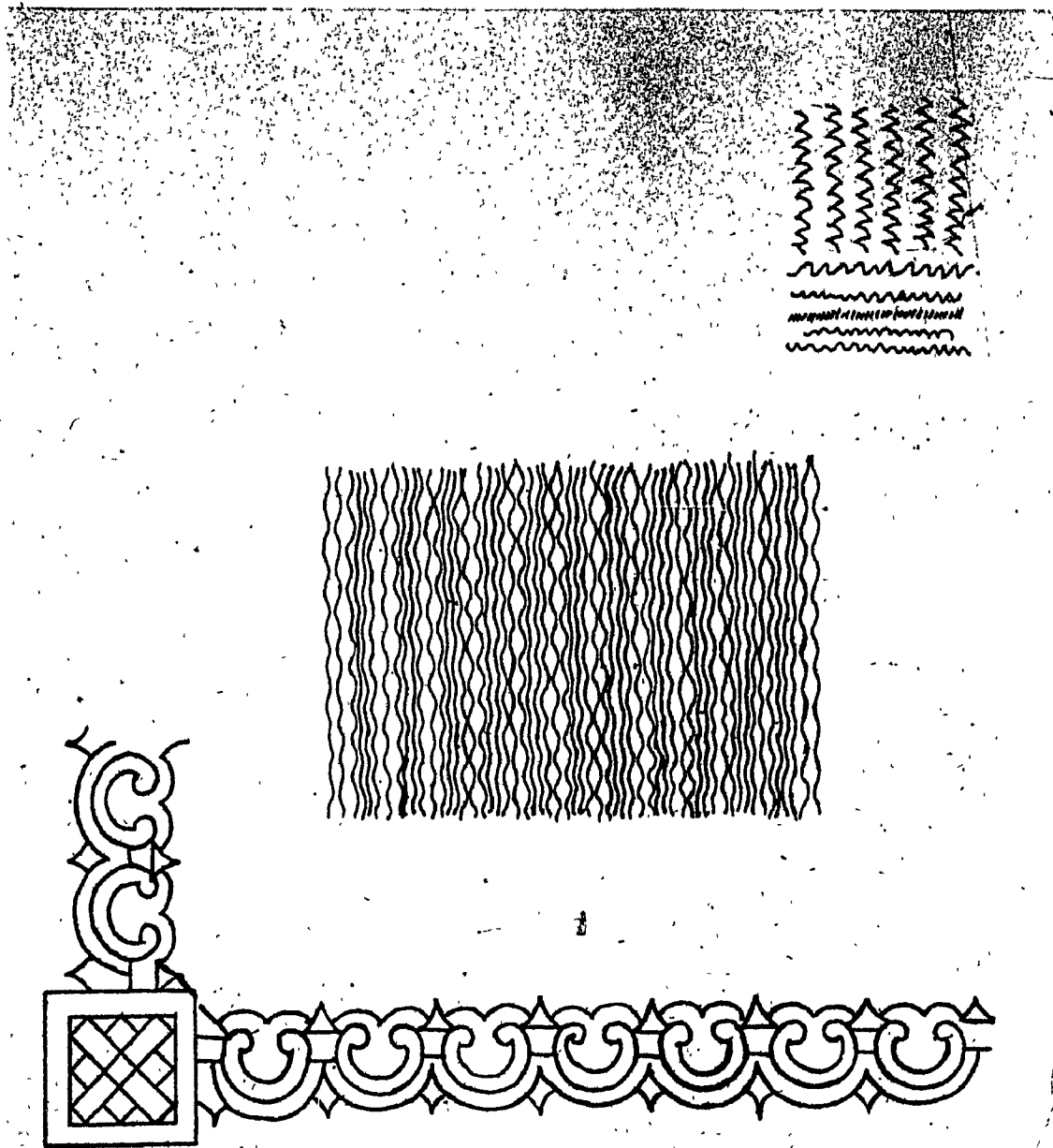
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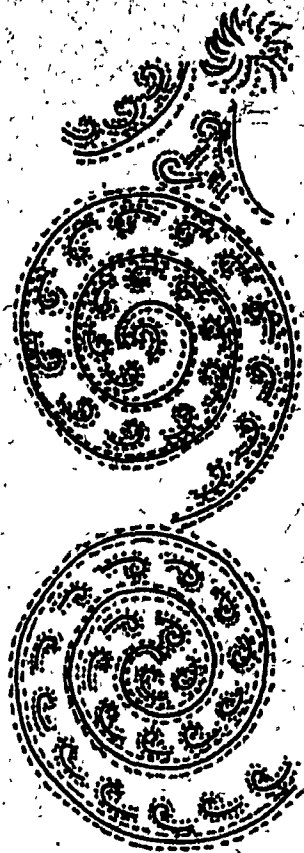
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Sвето Pismo - Staroga i Novoga Zavjeta, Preveo Stari  
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Karadzic, Stetanovic, Vuk, 1956. Biograd, iz:  
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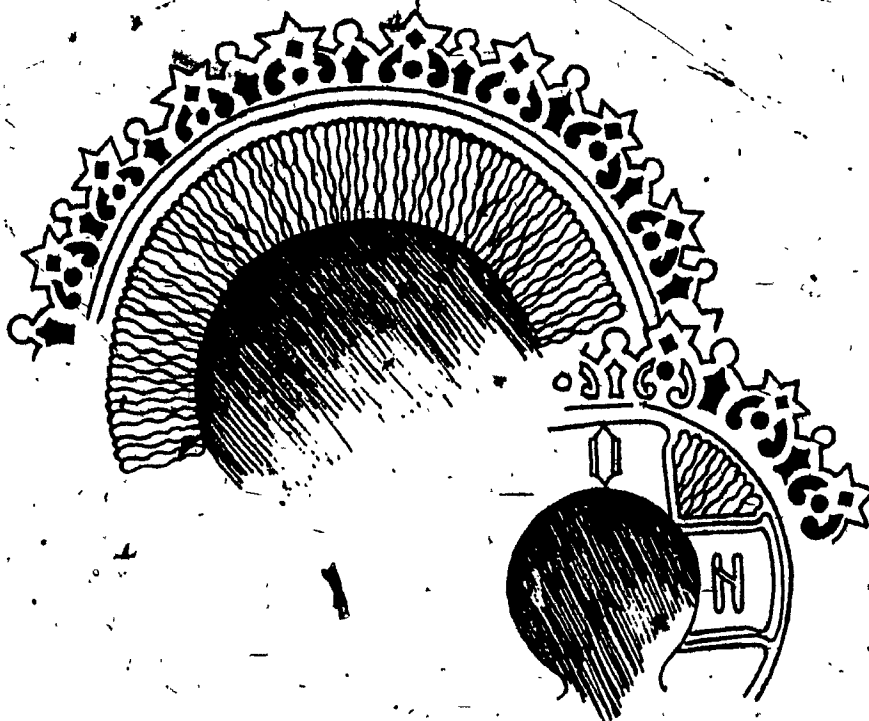
1. Waves (on the background, hemlines, and cuffs of my icon; illustration by author.
5. Border heart shape palmetts (on the mounted frame); illustration by author.



2. Spiral (on the woman's dress); illustration by author.

6. Star (on the woman's right shoulder and a half of the hood); illustration by author.





3. Radial waveline (on the haloes), illustration by author.
4. Palmetts (on the disc crown); illustration by author.
7. O and N symbols; illustration by author.
8. Cross; illustration by author.



13. The Kazan Mother of God, Russian; sixteenth century.



12. Virgin of Kazan, part of the tryptich, Moscow;  
turn of the sixteenth century.



11. Ycaza, Adela de, Ruben Dairo's Poem "I", 1968.



10. Kazan Bogorodica, Dr. Natalie Pervoushin-Labrecque's source.



9. Ikona Kazanskoi Boziei Materi, Russian; Dr. Natalie Pervoushin-Labrecque's source.