A Symbolic-Realistic Guide for Image-Makers:
Performing the Contemporary Byzantine-Inspired Iconic Vision
from the Spectacle

Adrian Gorea

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By: Adrian Gorea

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ABSTRACT

A Symbolic-Realistic Guide for Image-Makers: Performing the Contemporary Byzantine-Inspired Iconic Vision from the Spectacle

Adrian Gorea PhD
Concordia University, 2015

This practice-oriented research examines the presence of the image in an artistic vision from the Byzantine perspective of an icon-maker. To do so, I extract a list of Byzantine canonic guidelines and explain how the technical (realistic) and conceptual (symbolic) construction of an iconic/idolic vision performs at the level of an aesthetic judgment.

Using the epistemological definition of the image affirmed by the Second Council of Nicaea (787 CE) in conjunction with Jean-Luc Marion's phenomenological framing of the icon and idol, I outline three underlying modes of artistic vision that expose the metaphysical issues of representation within today's spectacle of technological screens: 1) a symbolic (Platonic) seeing of the invisible as totally absent from the visible, 2) a realistic (Nietzschean) seeing that claims the invisible as really present in the space defined by a viewer's perspectival gaze, and 3) a symbolic-realistic (Byzantine) vision of evoking the presence of an absent, invisible image through a tangible creative experience—specifically, although the image stays ontologically transparent, it becomes a visible trace of its absence left on a frame for representation.

While delineating the three visions in terms of abstract and naturalistic depictions, I also present my own Byzantine-inspired method of painting on wood panels to point key iconic elements for evoking an image in a concrete aesthetic context. I particularly do this through a performative inquiry (as video documented in *Portrait of an Icon Maker* and *Performing the Icon*) into a canonically contextualized aesthetic experience that is sensitive to the Incarnational dimension of the image. This Byzantine artistic framework opens up an interdisciplinary field of artistic research into the metaphysics of presence that bridges visual criticism, performance theory*,* and Byzantine theological convictions pictured by a range of contemporary thinkers, such as Fischer-Lichte, Nanna Verhoeff, Eric Jenkins, John Lechte, and Nicoletta Isar. It not only

places visual criticism inside of what it means to iconically craft an image, but also allows image-makers to see, in a non-referential way, how the symbolic and realistic visions look through a kind of keyhole towards images of reality in order to constitute them in a metaphysical perspective.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

The icon has as its only interest the crossing of gazes—thus, strictly speaking, love.[1]

Concerned with the Nietzschean state of metaphysical iconoclasm today, the philosopher Jean-Luc Marion points to the concept of icon as a mode of seeing that resists the spectacle of idols within our commoditized audiovisual culture—a site of representation shaped by commercial techniques of image production.[2] Specifically, the spectacle reverses the Platonic logic of mimesis, in which the material world (a copy of the ideal world of Forms) functions as a referent for visual representations, in order to generate self-referential (idolic) images.[3] The image is trapped in the visible through self-idolatry when it acts as its own origin (or it refers to its own visibility) before an idolic human gaze that emphasizes the visible just for mirroring desires. From a phenomenological perspective, this idolic process manifests within the limits of the constituting power of the knowing subject. The importance of the self-idolatrous image in shaping human identity within our age of consumerism and technological communication is revealed in the viewer's wish to become an image in a world where the act of seeing and of being seen is the formula through which one experiences his/her own existence.

In this contemporary context, Marion suggests that we should look to the Byzantine icon (and the modes of its perception) as a point of departure for our interpretation of contemporary iconoclastic gestures. According to the Second Council of Nicaea (Actio 7), the icon is a type of representation that erases its visibility in order for the invisible (the prototype) to intersect with

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[1] Jean-Luc Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, Trans. James K. A. Smith (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004), 87.

[2] Metaphysical idolatry is a mode of claiming a definite image of existence or reality that is ultimately criticized as idealistic. When the metaphysical idol is assimilated with a material object, the iconoclastic gesture can turn into a violent physical act. In its religious sense, iconoclasm is directed against the sin of idolatry as a wrong way of seeing and venerating God or the worshiping of illusory gods/idols. Since its first use in the Hebrew Scriptures, the word *idol* has taken various non-religious meanings through time (as in philosophy or entertainment industry), however, from a metaphysical iconoclastic perspective the idol connotes a false image of reality.

In the *Crossing of the Visible*, Marion refers to the term televisual screen as a general mode of defining the idolic state of contemporary visual culture—in the sense that the image is used through various modern technologies (from print to digital media) for commodifying the visible phenomena and trigger materialistic desires and consumption. The Marxist theorist Guy Debord has originally coined this commoditized world of images as the spectacle.

[3] Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, 87.

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the visible.[4] For the Byzantine thought, this relationship between the type and prototype disrupts the Platonic logic of mimesis, whereby the visible is frozen in the material and the invisible in the ideal world of Forms.

While Marion indicates the counter-intuitive power of the icon to disrupt today's metaphysical spectacle of images through the intersection of two gazes (the viewer and the icon's gaze), this thesis argues for a new epistemological understanding of the icon that takes a creative (artistic) practice approach to the Byzantine theology of image. It claims that in order to define and negotiate iconoclastic controversies, the icon and viewer's physical bodies do not have to evaporate into thin air. Seeing an image is not just a mode of accessing symbolic meaning, away from the senses and the visible world. In fact, the Byzantine iconophiles defended the epistemological mode of experiencing the icon to claim that the communion between the visible and invisible takes place when the prototype is perceived in the type by means of all bodily senses.[5]

As a Byzantine iconographer, I bring a practical inquiry to the debates surrounding the notion of image within the academia. Specifically, in building an iconic vision through the Byzantine canonic way of painting an icon, I propose to demonstrate how an iconic image differs from an idolic picture (seen as a semi-transparent image) in light of the current metaphysical state of imagery. Beyond the teachings about icons formulated at the Second Council of Nicaea, as re-contextualized in Marion's phenomenology, the Byzantine icon can show us many things about vision—not least among these, the power of the hierotopic aspect of an image and the particular aesthetic and spatial elements that form an iconic vision.[6] By considering these aspects of an image, we might be incited to reflection upon the nature of our own relationship to various consumer goods and/or to the cult value of screen media images on which these are borne. A more specific consideration of the Orthodox concept of symbolic-realism (which is, as I will explain in this thesis, the compositional structure of an iconic vision), might even encourage us to re-evaluate our disposition toward images in general with perhaps a greater appreciation for the ideological implications they can carry.

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[4] The Second Council of Nicaea is also known as The Seventh Ecumenical Council, which took place in 787 CE.

[5] Recent studies by art historians Alexei Mikhailovich Lidov in 2001, Nicoletta Isar in 2009, and Bissera Pentcheva in 2010 have also approached the Byzantine icon from an epistemological view.

[6] Alexei Lidov, "Hierotopy. The Creation of Sacred Spaces as a form of Creativity and Subject of Cultural History," *Hierotopy. The Creation of Sacred Spaces in Byzantium and Medieval Russia.* (Moscow: Progress-Tradition, 2006), 32-58.

The Nietzschean/idolic relationship with images (as I discuss in Chapter 2) marks an essential target of contemporary iconoclastic criticism surrounding the metaphysical limits of screen-mediated images (as well outlined in Marion's critique of the televisual spectacle). This thesis investigates these critical responses to the technologist/consumerist mode of seeing reality as holding viewers captive in metaphysical illusions. It focuses on how the practice of seeing emerges as idolic (or as its counterpart, the iconic) from the relationship between the material world (seen realistically as visible through the natural perception of the two eyes), the human thought and affect (the inner capacity to invest with symbolic meaning the realm of senses) and the image (the ability to imagine or represent the world as derived from both the visible/realistic and invisible/symbolic realms). It also positions the iconoclastic critique of the image as unable to be driven exclusively by a metaphysical imperative to conceptualize reality away from the contemplative practice of seeing both idolically and iconically. The actual meditative practice of seeing is an activity that involves all bodily senses, therefore, an iconoclastic judgment requires a more complex approach to the image that involves the modes of seeing both symbolically and realistically.

In light of recent studies on the Byzantine icon's performative aspect and its relevance to the present-day Western conceptualization of visual images by a wide range of contemporary thinkers, such as Marie-José Mondzain, John Lechte, Eric Jenkins, and Nicoletta Isar, I continue and probe, at a visual-aesthetic level, the metaphysical beliefs on the way images should be made, seen, and desired in commoditized viewing conditions. As such, this research explores the possibility of the Byzantine theology of the icon to act as a contemporary artistic mode of image making (beyond the limits of religious thought) to better understand iconoclastic/consumptive discourses directed at ways of seeing, conceiving, and using images (religious or otherwise). Particularly, I investigate from a theological (in Chapter 1), phenomenological (in Chapter 2), technological/performative (in Chapter 3) and artistic/aesthetic view (in Chapter 4), how the Byzantine symbolic-realistic way of simultaneously seeing an image conceptually (symbolically) and practically (realistically) might offer an Incarnational approach to critiquing the human urge to build metaphysical pictures of reality.[7]

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[7] While the word performativity means different things based on who is using it and for what reason, in this thesis I will employ Erika Fisher-Lichte's version of the term, as I explain in Chapter 1, section 1.2.5 A form of performativity in the Byzantine performance. For Fisher-Lichte, performativity is the transformative power of self-referential acts (physical acts that do not represent an original model or event) within an art performance that draws

By redefining the Byzantine model of vision as an alternative to visual criticism, I do not suggest an end to metaphysical iconoclasm. Instead, I create an opportunity for incorporating in today's iconoclastic judgments what the metaphysical language overlooks: an iconic vision that includes a multisensory experience of images as being completely immersed in a particular time and place. I am not concerned with offering new types of Byzantine icons to be critiqued/worshiped over the idols of the technological era we are living in. Through the lens of an ongoing icon-making/seeing activity that incorporates a mix of handmade and technological image processes, this dissertation offers, at the visual, audio, and video documentary level, a chance for seeing how an icon performs and is performed. Hence, the creative exploration of this study is a meditation on the dynamic between matter and form, signifier and signified in our (living) practices of seeing symbolic values with iconoclastic implications—a dynamic that reflects not only metaphysical principles, but the actual embodied experience of seeing.

It is important to note here that my Byzantine reflective artistic activity is framed at the technical level of painting on wood panels in relation to the Platonic (symbolic) and Nietzschean (realistic) ways of representing form and matter—to opposite modes of circumscribing/uncircumscribing a picture of reality that, according to Marion, trigger metaphysical controversies.[8] By defining the Platonic and Nietzschean modes of image making (in Chapter 2) in terms of artistic production, it helps me explain how the symbolic-realism inherent in the Byzantine icon forms a phenomenological orientation that depicts the transcendent in a tangible embodiment, allowing viewers to revere the message behind images while deflecting the fear aroused by its ideological implications. More specifically, it allows me to discuss how the Byzantine painting technique constructs a unique type of resemblance between the image and its signified meaning in order to embody the abstract aspect of a symbol in a naturalistic, yet non-mimetic representation. And it is with this canonical mode of seeing

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the audience (together with the artist) into a creative state—thus forming new meanings and realities. The transformation of the audience into a source of creativity is expressed at the level of "perceptible physical expressions" (Fisher-Lichte 12).

[8] Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, 78-83. The Platonic idea of the image imposes an irreconcilable distance between an unreal/earthly signifier and a real/divine signified. Since reality is beyond the visible, I identify Plato's view of reality as symbolic. This form of Platonic symbolism was questioned by Nietzsche for its ideological implications in imposing moral values that enslave humanity and stop creativity. In order to re-evaluate predefined (Platonic) values, Nietzsche takes a radical approach to the image of reality by eliminating the distance between a signifier and signified. In other words, Nietzsche's quest for reality is not somewhere in an illusory symbolic world, but within the concrete world of human experiences. I identify the Nietzschean view of the image as realistic for the reason that the signifier and signified are brought into the same world of visible phenomena.

(which balances the abstract and the concrete) that I argue in my artistic research for an alternative mode of understanding iconoclastic issues around the objectification or idealization of reality in the age of screen-mediated consumption.

Another essential point to make is that it is possible to develop an artistic symbolic-realistic vision, insofar as we actively see how the Byzantine image economy is performed through the practice of seeing and making an icon. This sort of vision (which I endeavor to video document) reveals how the Byzantine icon functions as an image in space to enact/perform (in its making and viewing experiences) the presence (tangible/type) of absence (intangible/prototype). The icon turns every spatial element involved in its performance into a hierotopic space by constructing a non-referential relation of similitude between ontological dichotomies, such as subject and object, signifier and signified.

To sum up, this practice-oriented thesis takes up the challenge of considering the Byzantine theology of the icon as a contemporary mode of shaping an artistic vision that will incite viewers/image makers to see through the uncertainty in the metaphysical meaning of an image. First, it will analyze the transparency of the image, as it was understood by the Byzantine iconophiles Patriarch Nicephorus and St. Theodore the Studite in the 8th and 9th centuries. Second, this research will build on Marion's critique of the idolatrous regime of the image imposed by technological screens to outline the symbolic and realistic lenses that are used within metaphysical iconoclasm for positioning the image in a mimetic relationship to two extremes: a visible and invisible spectacle. In isolating these two conflicting interpretive lenses (the symbolic and realistic), it will allow us to understand the icon in relation to the iconoclastic implications of seeing an image as a metaphysical visualization that unlocks notions of truth, reality, or objectivity. It will also help us to know how my icon practice could create a hierotopic space for symbolic-realistic experiences in a consumer-driven society and reveal why a theory of iconicity should be addressed at a practical, artistic level. Third and fourth, this research will define a symbolic-realistic criterion of analyzing and experiencing imagery within a visual culture that constantly questions the relations between viewers and images for their metaphysical significances. In particular, it will formulate, through my Byzantine canonized practice of image making, symbolic-realistic aesthetic guidelines for image-makers in our rapidly developing consumer industry and technological screen culture.

Therefore, by shifting the tradition of icon making from a mimetic practice to an interdisciplinary analysis and practice that encompasses art criticism and theological/metaphysical studies, I expect to craft and identify: 1) a symbolic-realistic mode of viewing images that challenges their representational/metaphysical limits and 2) a canonized artistic practice that facilitates a concrete, aesthetic understanding of the visual language within and beyond consumer/screen culture. Moreover, this thesis offers (and this is where it makes an original contribution) an alternative to contemporary metaphysical iconoclastic accounts of the visual by analyzing the solitary Byzantine practice of constructing an iconic artistic experience, which I call the performance of a Contemporary Byzantine-Inspired Iconic Vision.

CHAPTER 1: THE BYZANTINE DIMENSION OF MY ARTISTIC RESEARCH

This chapter covers the theological and methodological part of the dissertation, which sets a Byzantine framework of my artistic practice that regards the notion of the image as invisible. With this theological understanding of the image, I define the following nine key visual and theoretical terms of my research-creation project into the meaning of the Contemporary Byzantine-Inspired Iconic Vision: the Byzantine icon, Byzantine image, mimesis, symbolic-realism, economy, hierotopy, performance, performativity, and orthopraxis. Since some of these concepts are widely discussed with alternative and meandering connotations according to the theories in which they are presented, this chapter is essential for clarifying their exact meaning as I employ them in my icon practice through a hierotopic vision and critique. Firstly, these notions are presented to describe what, I see, is constituted in the Contemporary Byzantine-Inspired Iconic Vision (together with its iconoclastic implications)—a concern that is at the core of this thesis. Secondly, they will help in outlining the methodology (for both the theoretical and practical investigations) and in situating the main research question within today's iconoclastic/consumptive debates. Specifically, how might the Byzantine theology of the icon offer a practical artistic/hierotopic means for crafting an iconic vision in order to understand iconoclastic gestures directed toward ways of seeing, conceiving, and using images in our present commoditized viewing conditions. I explore this question at a practical level by testing various Byzantine canons that bring the iconic image to presence for the beholder.

It must be mentioned to my readers from the start that, on the one hand, this thesis is not a comprehensive history of iconoclastic/metaphysical debates regarding the notion of image as containing reality (real-presence). This thesis is a companion study to my icon painting as a form of making an iconic vision. On the other hand, it is not just a descriptive analysis of the concepts employed in my creative process either. Both my icon practice and writing contribute equally to understanding what it means to create a contemporary iconic vision based on the Byzantine canons—a merging of theory and practice that will be explained later in the notion of orthopraxis. So, I must ask my readers a little effort of creativity and interdisciplinarity in the textual analysis of the nine proposed concepts not only as a traditional scholarly/scientific examination of specific theological and metaphysical ideas in a text, but as a mode of

recollecting (and not simply collecting) past and recent information.[9] In doing so, it will help in clarifying the solitary artistic mode of experiencing the stages of making a Byzantine icon and that these concepts come from various academic disciplines where they acquire particular meanings.

1.1 Why the Byzantine icon and a (hierotopic) practice-oriented research?

Before discussing the Byzantine iconoclastic debates surrounding the image and how the nine concepts reveal where the icon meets and diverts from contemporary art, I need first to address how does this theological past reverberate within today's theorization of the image. In other words, given the strict theological nature of the iconoclastic crisis, it is fair to ask why it is important to focus on the Byzantine icon to understand the status of the image in our commoditized screen culture.

First, in her 2004 book, *Image, Icon, Economy: The Byzantine Origins of the Contemporary Imaginary*, Marie-José Mondzain provides a study of the Byzantine iconoclastic debates that sets the term divine economy—the distribution of the invisible in the created world or God's administration of the invisible in the visible—as an explanation to understand the contemporary development of imagery. Her contribution to visual criticism reveals how the image acts, outside the realm of the theological debates, in a transparent way for humans to experience the world as present. She also makes known that iconoclasm did not disappear after Second Council of Nicaea (787 CE), but rather it assumes various guises. Mondzain's analysis helps to explain more clearly what type of presence really remains following image making in the age of the spectacle. I do not look at the Byzantine understanding of divine economy for an absolute arbiter in deciding what is an icon (as this would be a metaphysical endeavor). My position is less about outlining a binary opposition between the iconic and idolic, but more about finding a set of Byzantine principles to guide me in my practical judgment as to what modes of art making might lead to a contemporary hierotopic experience.

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[9] The intention behind my request will become clearer later in the methodology where I elaborate on the specific characteristic of the artistic research in relation to the mainstream scholarly research.

Second, the postmodern interrogation of the image has a fixation with the problem of commodities' cult value, which has the effect of objectifying/commodifying human identity and blocking the access to reality. More specifically, corporations employ the ideological power of images to market their abstractions as reality and prompt consumers into not only buying them, but also worshiping their brand images. This concern comes from the consumer's conviction that what we see must be the truth, that an attractive label represents the actual physical body of a commodity. In the visual criticism of today's spectacle, the image has reached its highest level of simulacrum—an idolic state of the image that merely mirrors the viewer's expectations. One of the leading postmodern philosophers to theologically address the issue of (metaphysical) idolatry is Jean-Luc Marion. In his four essays entitled, *The Crossing of the Visible*, Marion analyzes various works of art (from abstract to representational) to develop an iconic (phenomenological) mode of seeing the dominance of the televisual spectacle over human perception of reality, which in turn affects the metaphysical understanding of the image. While openly iconoclastic, he offers a subtle Byzantine analysis of the image as structured by three visible instances: the work of art, televisual/screen culture, and icon.[10] In a Marionian sense, the icon differs from the metaphysical mimesis by way of addressing the viewer (at a phenomenological level) with an opposing gaze. The icon does not create a new spectacle because its *"*visible spectacle (a painted face) is radicalized to its prototype, type of an invisible counter-intentionality (a gaze in person)."[11] Thus, the aesthetic boundary between idol and icon is founded on the power of the iconic gaze to disrupt the viewer's intention of gazing at his/her own desires. The viewer's gaze is directed through the icon "beyond its own reality"[12]—towards a referent unconstituted by the power of the thinking subject or the *Übermensch*'s will to constitute the world.[13] As opposed to the idol, which only reveals a sense of divine according to the measure of human perspective, the icon inverses the logic of perspective in a counter-intuitive experience of love so that the viewer is constituted by the other as gift. Although Marion refers to the icon's transformative power of challenging the dominance of vision in contemporary society, his meaning of the icon overlooks its performative and tangible aspect, namely that the icon exists in an actual place from where it

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[10] Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, 105, 58.
[11] Ibid., 84.
[12] Steven Grimwood. "Iconography and Postmodernity," *Literature & Theology* 17, no. 1 (2003): 77.
[13] In his book, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Nietzsche refers to the *Übermensch* as connected to the human body that accounts for its own existence: "[b]ut the awakened and knowing say: body am I entirely, and nothing else; and soul is only a word for something about the body" (1954, 146). The *Übermensch* is the *overman*'s *will to power*.

engages the viewer as a participant. Marion's abstract way of seeing the icon will be discussed in Chapter 2, where I emphasize his tendency to vaporize materiality (both the icon and the viewer's physical aspect) in the crossing of the invisible gazes between the icon and the viewer.

Finally, the visual media critic, Eric Scott Jenkins initiated a new Byzantine-inspired method of analyzing the commoditized image's quality to creatively perform an iconic vision. He suggests that the Byzantine practice of the symbolic-realistic mode of seeing is employed in the advertisement industry to facilitate unique (quasi-hypostatic) consuming experiences. However, Jenkins notes that what visual criticism fails to observe is how corporate image-makers play with the Byzantine quality of the image (by manipulating specific symbolic-realistic elements for the production and reception of products) to subvert materialistic claims and how consumers become devoted to particular brands such as Apple. It must be stated here (which is an argument that I emphasize in this dissertation) that an image needs not be in its specific Byzantine form to activate a symbolic-realistic mode of seeing. Moreover, Jenkins argues that the main emphasis in visual criticism has been on seeing what triggers a hypostatic event that celebrates a commoditized identity by questioning the validity of a symbolic or realistic interpretation. Instead, Jenkins points to the techniques of the Byzantine icon to unveil the reason for the cult following of products. Marion also describes the entire history of visual representation and iconoclastic/consumptive debates as revolving around these two modes of seeing (the symbolic/Platonic and realistic/Nietzschean)—a row between two interpretive lenses which culminated into a Westernized spectacle of televisual idols. For this reason, Chapter 2 elaborates on the symbolic and realistic as a certain dualistic conception of representation that has triggered metaphysical iconoclasm.

Despite all of the above assessments of how the Byzantine icon might break the authority of the spectacle and liberate postmodern experiences of the image from its metaphysical determinations, there is still work to be done. Specifically, in understanding how the Byzantine icon's performance might function as an artistic mode of seeing what visual elements and techniques contribute to forming an iconic vision (or to claiming notions of real-presence) in art spaces (such as in art-gallery settings) or advertisement/corporate environments. Understanding the construction of such an iconic vision through my version of a Contemporary Byzantine-Inspired Iconic Vision is the major scope of my study. In my research practice, I do not question the importance of hermeneutical legitimacy in the critique of images (particularly the spectacle

of idolic images), as this is an essential metaphysical issue of all iconoclastic interpretations within academia, politics, and culture. But this limitation to metaphysical matters, which questions the aesthetics of representation based on its realism and truthfulness does not explain the basic visual techniques of constructing the cult value of images (religious, artistic, or commercial). Besides being a mode of visual perception aimed at material or spiritual gain (just as Jenkins and Marion were attempting to do when defining the icon), a hierotopic experience involves the ability to make or perform in the iconic/idolic event. The Byzantine physical senses such as touch, smell, and sound should all be literally included in the academic debate—therefore, the necessity to include the actual monastic practice of painting the icon as an essential component of this thesis.

In her analysis of monastic practices of meditation, termed orthopraxis, Mary Carruthers explains that "people do not 'have' ideas, they 'make' them."[14] Orthopraxis refers to a monastic[15] way of imitating specific meditational techniques of crafting mind imagery for a mode of living and understanding the world that would potentially lead to a hierotopic experience. Such ritualistic practices, passed down from a monk-mentor to an apprentice, engage all bodily senses to craft prayers from a combination of visual and audible media (from architecture to chants, liturgical objects and paintings). These monastic techniques of crafting knowledge can also be found in various non-monastic trade activities such as carpentry. However, the final goal of orthopraxis within a monastery (particularly in the Christian Orthodox monastic tradition) is not to achieve aesthetic or technical excellences in producing an object per se, but to compose a prayer from a set of "cognitive 'pictures,'"[16] shared by the entire religious community. A prayer or the making of an icon, then, is a creative way of visualizing the *mneme*[17] (memory) of God. The memory of God is the experience of continuously making thoughts as prayers/icons.

The monastic aesthetic of *memoria* should not be confused with a form of reproduction of some original events encoded and later retrieved when cued by a trigger (a memorial object or anything that is used to recall a memory). A monastic memory is not located in an outside object

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[14] Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought, Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images*, 400-1200 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 5.

[15] I expressly refer here to the Christian tradition; however, monasticism is practiced in various forms in other faiths such as in Buddhism and Hinduism.

[16] Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought,* 3.

[17] Ibid.

(books, paintings, photographs, etc.) in the sense that it calls back information recorded in the brain. In other words, the memory of God is not set in the brain (symbolically) or in the object (realistically), but in the experience itself of imitating His image. For that reason, the memory overcomes dualistic thinking by incorporating both the cognitive (internal/symbolic) aspect of thinking/meditating and the physical (external/realistic) activities of learning and practicing various skills/techniques (painting, writing, praying, etc.) in relation to material media (books, pigments, wood panels, liturgical objects, etc.). Carruthers clarifies that the composition of the prayer is not based on the rules of Platonic mimesis (the art of representation); rather, it is formed by the activity of *mneme*. The goal is to reenact a pattern of actions based on an intense physical labor as in meditative reading or icon painting so that the sacred text or painted image is embodied in the monk's experience.

These ritualized performances are learned and mastered in imitating a monk-mentor to achieve a type of knowledge that can never be completely defined into words or from any mode of interpreting notions of realism and representation. Instead of stressing the mimetic verisimilitude of a representation, orthopraxis draws attention to the tools of monastic aesthetics (books, brushes, pigments, etc.) to "'thinking about' and for 'meditating upon'"[18] the divine image. For example, an icon does not function as an art object in the sense that the final product, produced by human hands, becomes the center of the viewer's aesthetic interpretation. Orthopraxis is not about hermeneutics. It concerns how knowledge is constructed as (mental/invisible) images in the process of making and using the meditative tools. Carruthers explains that:

> The emphasis upon the need for human beings to "see" their thoughts in their minds as organized schemata of images, or "pictures," and then to use these for further thinking, is a striking and continuous feature of medieval monastic rhetoric, with significant interest even for our own contemporary understanding of the role of images in thinking.[19]

By considering my studied practice of icon painting as a critical activity, I hope to bring into our consciousness that the locus for understanding an iconic experience in commoditized and artistic environments is in the cognitive uses and the instrumentality of images. In an age of televisual screens (and mass-produced products), I believe that the role of images in inducing an iconic vision (whatever their content, religious, artistic, or commercial) can be best understood

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[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.

through the lens of symbolic-realism, not metaphysical interpretations. A closer look at the Byzantine canonized *chōraic* movement of evoking images (as Nicoletta Isar and John Lechte exemplify with icons and artworks) may also question the notion of performativity featured in contemporary art, which in turn impacts discussion on iconic vision. In particular, how the lack of the iconic gaze in artistic-performative strategies against the spectacle reveals the metaphysical problem with the imposition of subjectivity onto the material world. If, indeed, the production of commodities has evolved into a mode of making images based on the logic of the iconic gaze (as Jenkins suggests), the artist must see beyond an ideological or materialistic explanation of the spectacle—specifically, how the image acts like a Byzantine icon in stimulating the desire for participation in consumptive/aesthetic experiences.

1.2 The Byzantine Icon

1.2.1 Before the Byzantine iconoclasm: the Platonic view about the image

The challenge with the theorization of the image in Byzantine iconoclasm resonated with the ancient Greek issues (as revealed in the Platonic framework of mimesis) of imitating an invisible model or essence through a visible representation or appearance embedded in the finite, material world of substances.[20] Therefore, I will begin by presenting Plato's metaphysical view of the image.[21]

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[20] Byzantine iconoclasm took place between 730 and 843 CE and involved a critical response to the devotional practices surrounding icons and their physical destruction. Besançon explains that the "iconic arguments relied both on the biblical prohibition and on the Greek philosophical critique" (3). In his analysis of John Damascene's doctrine of the image, Schönborn states that "it has been asserted time and again that the Eastern Church derives its concept of the image from Plato's doctrine of Idea and Phenomenon" (212). For more on the influence of the Platonic theme of representation within iconoclasm see: Alain Besançon, *The Forbidden Image: An Intellectual History of Iconoclasm*. Trans. Jane Marie Todd. (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2000), 1-5. Jaś Elsner, "Iconoclasm as Discourse: From Antiquity to Byzantium." *Art Bulletin* 94, no. 3 (September 2012): 369, Christoph von Schönborn, *God's Human Face: The Christ-Icon*. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 161, 229-30, Marie-José Mondzain**,** *Image, Icon, Economy: The Byzantine Origins of the Contemporary Imaginary*, (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005), 73, Bissera V. Pentcheva, "The performative icon." *The Art Bulletin* 88 (2006): 636.

[21] In this specific Byzantine (mimetic) context, I take the word *essence* to mean the Platonic notion of Idea/Form. In his *Republic*, Plato refers to the notion of Form as a true universal being or first principle that transcends time and space. Although separate from materiality, the Form (such as the idea of tableness) corresponds to a multitude of particular objects (various physical versions of a table) (Republic 596). Also, the term substance as *a kind of stuff*, that materially grounds (under the same name, e.g. table) the copies (objects) of a Form, does not

The Platonic critique of mimesis conceptualizes the image as *eikōn*—an appearance-being that bears a likeness to a real Form (essence) or prototype. An *eikōn*-appearance is similar to the Greek word *ousia* (being), which stands for the appearance of essence in material substances. Plato's *eikōn*-appearance is imperfect. It is, then not identical to its model (essence or true being) due to its existence as likeness—a referential property of the *eikōn*-appearance in the temporal phenomena of materiality. It is essential to underline that the *eikōn*-appearance refers to a being that copies the essence of a real given model and that it does not relate to anything imagined (unreal). A being that does not make any reference to the world of essences turns into an *eidôlon*-appearance-being (idol or false being). Examples of *eidôla*-appearances, for Plato, are the Greek mythological gods, which are illusory images of something non-existent and without essence.

The contemporary social theorist, John Lechte further clarifies that the Greek word *eikōn* differs from the Latin word *imago* (image). While the Roman meaning of the image regards the visual perception as confined to the viewer's faculty to imagine, the *eikōn* is an imitation of a "real model" that appears independently from the perceiving subject.[22] For Lechte, this "post-Roman" position towards the image has a direct genealogical link to the conceptualization of

have the meaning of a universal driving force of reality. Since the Platonic material world is not actual/real, the material substance is not perceived in a pre-Socratic sense of fire, water, air, etc. that governs and constructs the world. From a Platonic view, the pre-Socratic concept of substance can be interpreted in two opposite ways: it can either turn into an instance of non-being, restricted to what constitutes a temporal *thing* that appears in the world of material phenomena or it can be assimilated into the notion of pure essence or Form, in the sense that it stands for the First Principle of reality.

Furthermore, in taking an Aristotelian view, Saint Thomas Aquinas explains that essence possesses existence in acts of both material and immaterial existences that give shape to substances. Essence is, then, the force that defines (individuates) existence while it is distinct in nature from it (one can comprehend the essence of a star or a bird without any knowledge of its existence). Essence represents and defines what a substance is, and it can also denote what Plato sees in the unmoving Forms. On the other hand, for Aquinas, a substance is the material or immaterial result of the essence's participation in existence or what is made up from a combination of an essence and existence. Examples of material substances are the animal species, which includes acts of existence such as humans and cats. Examples of immaterial substances are spiritual beings such as angels. Both material and immaterial substances cannot exist without the participation of an essence in an act of existence. For an extensive explanation regarding the difference between essence, existence (*esse*), and substance in Thomas' metaphysics see Chapter 4 in *On Being and Essence*.

In the modern history of metaphysics, Marion clarifies that the notion of substance was generally understood as a material medium for existence (an incomprehensible existence contingent on outer actions/accidents for its existence) on which events as properties occur by chance. From its Aristotelian meaning as *ousia/οὐσία* (a being constituted by essence and substance), substance came to be successively interpreted in light of Descartes, Kant, and Nietzsche's philosophy as a material substrate, a category of epistemology, and finally, a metaphysical idol (2002a, 5). Marion concludes that after Descartes, the notion of essence in philosophy became insignificant (2002a, 6), thus underlying the source of metaphysical iconoclasm.

[22] This might be explained by the fact that the ancient Greek philosophy did not have a fully developed concept of a person. Historical theologian, Lucian Turcescu demonstrates this fact in his book entitled *Gregory of Nyssa and the concept of Divine Persons,* New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

"the image in Western thought," in which the viewer is perceived as the center of consciousness, volition, and cognition.[23]

There is a contradiction in Plato's ontological position towards the *eikōn*-appearance that can be phrased as follows: although an *eikōn*-appearance is a representational image in the material world, it somehow exists between reality/being and unreality/non-being.[24] This ontological paradox comes from placing the image in a space between two irreconcilable worlds: the visible false reality (*ousia*) and invisible true reality (*eidos* or essence*)*. An *eikōn*-appearance acquires the properties of both worlds, but does not belong to either. It is not a totally true being or totally false being. First of all, Plato makes a distinction between *eikōn*-appearance and *eidôlon*-appearance. On the one hand, an *eidôlon*-appearance is fully immersed in the world of material substances from where it poses as its own reality of non-beings that are completely removed from essences. On the other hand, an *eikōn*-appearance is always formed in the appearing of essence in substance. The *eidôlon* is a non-being for the reason that something without essence can never appear. An *eidôlon*-appearance*, thus,* is an illusion of an appearance-being (a mere copy of the *eikōn*-appearance*)* that forms its own simulacrum of non-beings. Simulacrum denies *ousia* by simulating its possibility to appear without any relation to the real-presence of essence—an impossibility presented as appearance. Plato's idea of *eidôlon*-appearance is as relevant in today's critique of the idolatrous spectacle, particularly in Marion's concern regarding our disastrous relationship with televisual screens.

While the *eikōn*-appearance appears in the unpredictability and temporality of material substances, it has as well the crucial role of imitating the eternal unchanging true/real being. It is an appearance that relates to some degree of likeness with the true reality of Forms, thus an *eikōn* cannot be exclusively understood in terms of an idolic connection to materiality. As opposed to the *eidôlon*-appearance*,* the *eikōn*-appearance is not all in the visible since it becomes transparent, through a camouflaging technique (dubbed likeness), in the process of imitating its original model. However, although *eikōn*-appearance has some invisibility, it is not similar to the essence since this would defeat its purpose as a signifier—an appearance exists only in the virtue of indicating an essence.

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[23] John Lechte, *Genealogy and Ontology of the Western Image and its Digital Future* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 12.

[24] Plato, "Sophist 240a10-11; b1-16," *Complete Works*, Ed. John M. Cooper. (USA: Hacket Publishing Company, 1997), 261.

Seeing that the *eikōn*-appearance is not entirely cut off from the visible and invisible realities, while at the same time, is placed outside of both realms, Plato wonders if it is, in fact, unreal or non-being. But then, one can question how something false/unreal is able to mediate a sense of true reality in the phenomenal world. Plato never found the answer to this dilemma of the image, and therefore, he underestimated the *eikōn*-appearance in the process of attaining true knowledge. Since no form of appearance-being can fully access the reality of essences, Plato believed that only a believer, as opposed to a philosopher, can be mislead in thinking that an appearance can easily approximate the Idea of the essential form.[25]

Plato's difficulty in positioning the image either in the world of false/visible/non-beings or in the true world of invisible beings proves that he never thought of a genuine mediational power of the image in merging the two radically separate worlds. The Platonic image remains in a state of non-being from where it provides some access to a true being (essence), but is condemned as deceiving. From a metaphysical perspective, this ontological ambiguity of the image as a situation of being and non-being has been the source of the Byzantine iconoclastic debate.

In the next section, 1.2.2 The Byzantine view about the image, I will elaborate on the importance of Christ's image for the Byzantine iconophiles to explain how the *eikōn*-appearance can have a form of being. Through the iconicity of Incarnation, appearance and essence form a hypostatic union that overcomes the Platonic paradox of the being of non-being (*that which is not* as also an instance of *that which is*). The Byzantine version of the *eikōn* (icon) liberates the image caught between real and unreal through faith in the *eikōn*-appearance—the very method of gaining insights into notions of truth that was despised by Plato. The Byzantine faith-based method saves the image from metaphysical iconoclasm without claiming any real-presence of essence in appearance, thus avoiding the simulacral effect of the *eidôlon*-appearance. Christ's being affirms through His Incarnation the realness of both the visible and invisible worlds by forming a communion (economy) of love between appearance and essence.

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[25] Plato, "Republic 476b," *Complete Works*, Ed. John M. Cooper. (USA: Hacket Publishing Company, 1997),1102-1103.

1.2.2 The Byzantine view about the image

Before examining how the Platonic ontological problem of the image came to resonate in Byzantine iconoclasm and provided the vocabulary for the icon, it is important to summarize three dilemmatic questions regarding the mimetic appearance as existing between the visible and invisible. Firstly, does the *eikōn*-appearance of a statue, for example, exist as an opaque object (that is, an appearance-being containing or belonging only to materiality) in the spatio-temporal phenomena of the sensible world? This is a question about the real-presence of the prototype in a human-made image.[26] Secondly, does the *eikōn*-appearance retain, by necessity of its nature, a sense of transparency in order to provide access to an abstract model (a prototype on which a being is formed in the material substance)? Here, the point of inquiry is not about the image as a material object per se, but about its role as an instrument for likeness through which it acquires invisibility. Thirdly, when the *eikōn*-appearance appears as its own double—that is, a simulation of its material being—does it turn into an *eidôlon*, an idolic/false visual representation with a ghostlike appearance? This latter question is still a pressing issue in contemporary visual criticism—as stated above, Marion thinks that the *eidôlon*-appearance forms today's spectacle of empty media simulations, which have no referent (essence) and pose as reality themselves.

The aforementioned mimetic dilemmas, at the very center of the Platonic thought, translated into a specific question during the Byzantine iconoclastic period: Can the materiality of the *eikōn*-appearance be impregnated with invisibility (divine presence) in the representation of Christ? The answer is in the creation of the Byzantine icon. The icon is formed on the role of the image to preserve the memory of Christ's divinity as an imprint (type) into the *eikōn*-appearance's materiality. It is crucial to emphasis here two key aspects of the Byzantine icon, which were used at the end of iconoclasm in 843 CE to articulate a non-essentialist[27] response to

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[26] The power of the image to convey memories, in a way that it projects someone's existence into posterity, has often contributed to iconoclastic events in human history. According to the art historian Jaś Elsner, "iconoclasm in all premodern contexts from antiquity to the Byzantine iconoclastic controversy was about 'real-presence.' The damage done to the image is an attack on its prototype, at least until Byzantine iconoclasm, and it presupposes some kind of assault on real-presence as contained in the image" (369).

[27] According to art historian Bissera V. Pentcheva, the Byzantine theory of the image developed in two consecutive models: the essentialist and non-essentialist (2006, 632). The essentialist definition of the icon takes the ontological claim that the essence emanates in the material substance through image. The non-essentialist approach perceives the image as one with the essence and separate from the material substance. In the latter case, the image as essence appears in the material substance only through an epistemological relation between the human and the visible.

the Greek ontological paradox of the image: 1) the image of Christ is identical to His essence and 2) although the image is imprinted in the icon's pictorial medium, the real-presence of essence remains absent.

If for Plato, the material (unreal) and non-material (real) worlds are separate, the icon then essentially brings both worlds together into one single reality. Plato's dualistic view comes from his mistrust in the visible phenomena that portrays the material existence of the *eikōn*-appearance as an instance of non-being (unreal) and its non-material existence as an instance of being (real). The Byzantine holistic view of reality (as it was developed based on the Byzantine canons in the post-Iconoclastic era) comes from associating the instance of being in the *eikōn*-appearance to the image of Christ as essence, and the materiality of the *eikōn*-appearance to the icon's existential role of carrying the imprint/form of Christ's image. Particularly, the Byzantine iconophiles (those who loved the icons) justified the existence of the non-being (unreal) part of the *eikōn*-appearance through the Incarnational logic of the icon: the Son of God became flesh/form, thus uniting (but not mixing) the divine essence and material substance.[28] The Incarnational construction of the Byzantine icon merges the two irreconcilable, Platonic aspects of the *eikōn*-appearance by declaring them both necessary and real as follows: 1) the *eikōn*-appearance-being stands for the participation (presence) of the invisible image/divine essence of Christ in the icon and 2) the *eikōn*-appearance-non-being stands for the participation of matter as an imprint (absence as form) of the invisible image (Christ's presence).

The manifestation of the divine image's form (*eikōn*-appearance-being) in materiality (*eikōn*-appearance-non-being) is a tension "between absence and presence*"* that "lurks on the icon's surface" to underline the participatory role of the beholder in bringing both the visible and invisible into one existence.[29] Christ's image is not realistically seen as real-presence or symbolically seen through a Platonic copy of an original, but acknowledged as absent in the icon's imprint of form through the direct and tangible interaction between the icon's wood panel and the human body.[30] The Byzantine image stays ontologically transparent[31] in order to saturate

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[28] I will return to the Christological/ontological argument when discussing John of Damascus's defense of the icon, which is based on the fundamental teaching that "the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth" (John 1:14, American Standard Version (ASV)).

[29] Pentcheva, "The Performative Icon," 632.

[30] This form of action mimics the invisible image (the memory of God incarnate). It should not be understood too hastily as a mimetic representation of the original (Incarnational) event, but rather as an interaction intended to manifest the divine as present.

the material substance of the icon (the painted object) with divine presence (essence) for an image cannot be seen—thus, avoiding the ontological paradox of the image. By extension, the Byzantine icon is not an embodied (circumscribed) or a disembodied symbol, but a hand-made physical object that mimetically records a trace of the invisible image in the material phenomena. Referring to the essential role of the viewers' physical engagement with the icon in feeling the absence of presence*,* the art historian Bissera Pentcheva clarifies that there is a difference in meaning between the Byzantine icon as a portable wood panel painting[32] and the wider description that includes various visual media, from large-scale paintings and mosaics to small-scale coins and seals.[33] Compared to the monumental and other iconic representations that are designed mostly for public and narrative/didactical use, such as for political, ceremonial/commemorative, or commercial reasons, the wooden panel icon is precisely crafted to engage the worshiper into a direct tangible and intimate experience through gazing, hearing, touching, kissing (*aspasmos*), holding, bowing (*proskynesis*), and smelling. My particular attention to the practice of portable wood panel painting is given for its rich pallet of material and symbolic elements that are specifically choreographed by the Byzantine iconographer for its devotional/liturgical role of performing mimetically the logic of Incarnation—a solitary, epistemological, and hierotopic view on the use of images that is essential for investigating the meaning of the Contemporary Byzantine-Inspired Iconic Vision at the artistic level.

The defense of the Byzantine icon was articulated in two subsequent stages of interpretation: the ontological position (seeing the icon in terms of God's being) initiated by John of Damascus (ca. 675-749 CE) and the shift towards the epistemological definition (using the icon as a mode of thinking/knowing God) as developed by Patriarch Nikephoros (ca. 750-828 CE). In the next two subsections, I will focus my attention to each stage of defining the icon.

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[31] Pentcheva, "The Performative Icon," 632. As I will explain in this thesis, the Byzantine sense of the word *image* refers to a natural invisible image that is different from an artificial visible image of a two-dimensional picture or a three-dimensional object (Mondzain 74).

[32] The essential (mimetic) role of the icon-maker in bringing to presence the iconic event of the Incarnation will be explained in the next section <u>1.2.2.2 The epistemological position of the image: the symbolic-realistic vision</u>.

[33] Pentcheva, "The Performative Icon," 631.

1.2.2.1 The ontological position of the image

The ontological justification of the icon aimed at resolving the dispute regarding God's nature in relation to invisibility (essence) and visibility (material substance). Connecting the Incarnation of Christ with the icon, John of Damascus offers an essentialist explanation concerning the rightness of hand-made representations of the holy:

> When the invisible becomes visible in the flesh, then you may depict the likeness of something seen; when one who, by transcending his own nature, is bodiless, formless, incommensurable, without magnitude or size, that is, one who is in the form of God, taking the form of a slave, by this reduction to quantity and magnitude puts on the characteristics of a body, then depict him on a board and set up to view the One who has accepted to be seen.[34]

Damascene's Christological argument addresses the issue of Christ's being both human and divine through Incarnation. This dual nature of Christ provides an ontological legality to the material form of icons in the face of those who emphasize only His divine nature. If Jesus lived as a historical person, having the physical form of a human some 2000 years ago, then He is not without a visible image. Subsequently, His likeness, expressed in material form through icons, is a valid, non-idolatrous, way to be remembered by a believer—thereby linking, through a spiritual experience, the perceptible and intelligible worlds.

For Damascene, the image of Christ manifests the Godhead to humanity. Since "the image of Christ is Christ"[35] and the icon imitates and incarnates His image, the icon is similar to Christ's presence in the world. To avoid accusations of idolatry, Damascene carefully differentiates the image (Christ) from the prototype (Father): Christ is the physical "image of the Father,…equal to him in every respect, differing only in being caused. For the Father is the natural cause, and the Son is caused; for the Father is not from the Son, but the Son from the Father."[36] In this line of thought, the image and prototype are mutually necessary, nonetheless clearly distinguished for the reason that "the image of the emperor is called the emperor, yet there are not two emperors."[37] Damascene also differentiates between the veneration of image-

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[34] Saint John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, Trans. Andrew Louth, (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), 24.
[35] Ibid., 42.
[36] Ibid., 25.
[37] Ibid.

matter (Christ offered in the icon) and the adoration of God. The Creator of matter is worshiped by honoring the matter that formed Christ's image to save humanity.

Nevertheless, in identifying the icon with Christ's body, in the sense that it possesses or incarnates His image as real-presence, the ontological case remained susceptible to epistemological concerns of idolatry. For instance, the iconoclast position of the Council of Hiereia (754) did not focus on the attack of the icon as a blasphemous image that affirms the presence of God; instead, it claimed that the making and viewing of the icon is an inadequate method of knowing and venerating God. According to Hiereia, the icon should be an interiorization rather than an externalization of Christ's image in a lifeless object. This is an epistemological critique over ontological concerns regarding the right way to venerate the prototype. The main objections to Damascene's Incarnational logic of the icon were that it circumscribed and confused the divine and human elements of Christ.[38] The knowledge of God, limited to an icon that is composed of matter, circumscribes the transcendental essence to the materiality of substances. Correspondingly, a painting of Christ's flesh, made out of pigments and other earthly materials, breaks Christ's hypostatic union by mistaking His divinity for His humanity or by totally splitting apart His dual nature.

By the end of the ninth century, which marks the final defeat of the Byzantine iconoclasts, the defense of the icon focused more on the epistemological nature of rituals and how the veneration or prostration before the matter of the image is directed towards the prototype. There is a major shift in Patriarch Nicephorus and St. Theodore the Studite's (759-826) redefinition of the Incarnational arguments to consider the image as fundamentally without material substance (entirely invisible). This epistemological position on icons (rooted ontologically in the logic of Incarnation) enabled an economical[39] relation between the invisible image (the *eikōn*-appearance-being of Christ), visual image (the medium or *eikōn*-appearance-

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[38] Elsner, "Iconoclasm as Discourse," 379.

[39] Stemming from Paul's writings, the term economy, in its broader sense, refers to the relation between humanity and God, whereby the image of Christ is the fundamental link between the invisible and visible, Trinity and human. Also, the Incarnational economy, in which the Son and the Holy Spirit manifests in the historical time and space "the secret will of the economy [that] 'organizes unity into trinity,' invests the icon with a political/administrative power to form the Christian community (Mondzain 26)—an aspect that will be elaborated in the next section 1.2.3 The Byzantine view about economy. Mondzain summarizes the Christian concept of economy in the following terms: "From Paul onward, the economy designated not only the Second Person of the Trinity [Christ manifesting the economy of the Godhead], but the whole of the redemptive plan, from the conception of the Virgin to the resurrection, including Christ's evangelical life and the passion. The notion of a divine plan with the aim of administering and managing fallen creation, and thus of saving it, makes the economy interdependent with the whole of creation from the beginning of time" (21).

non-being) and the model (the Godhead or prototype) that liberated the discourse of iconoclasm from the Platonic issue of mimesis. From the attack on the visual image as referencing or containing a model, the subject matter had become the visual economy of the icon in relation to notions of mimesis and performance—terms that are outlined and explained next in their Byzantine sense.

1.2.2.2 The epistemological position of the image: the symbolic-realistic vision

When Nicephorus questioned the mimetic logic of the image inherited from the Greek philosophical tradition, he disputed that the icon's reference to a model implies a direct relation of identity, in the sense that the goal of a copy is always to replicate an original. What the icon offers, instead, is a novel way to deal with the iconoclastic issue of real-presence in representation through God's Trinitarian logic of relations between persons (God as one will, but triple in organization: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). Specifically, the Trinitarian economy that organizes God's inner, inseparable unity of the three Persons is translated into the iconic realm as the prototype (Father), the image (Son) and the voice (Holy Spirit).[40] It is important to mention here that since my focus in this section is on the image per say, I will limit my discussion on the Trinitarian economy to the icon's Incarnational economy of the Son's image.

The structure of the icon reveals the triple union of the divine persons by subsuming "the properly imaginal character of…the Son and his redemptive iconicity."[41] The icon's formal likeness (also called the Son's artificial image or type) of the Son's natural image (which is

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[40] Mondzain, *Image, Icon, Economy*, 77. For Nicephorus, the Trinity relates to the icon as follows: "Just as the Persons are one and not removed from each other in the Trinity, so the Father [prototype], his image [Son], and his voice [Holy Spirit] are united in the icon…(Mondzain 105). The Trinitarian unity is organized in the icon based on the mode of understanding the imaginal (figural) aspect of the Incarnation without depending on the referential thinking between signs and significations. Instead of connecting the notion of image to meaning via the referential sign, Nicephorus regards the image as directly connected to meaning. Following this thought, the Father has a non-referential relation to the icon through the Son's image that is depicted through the human form (*morphé*)—a form understood as a trace of presence left as absence on the surface of the icon. Moreover, the "incarnation of the Father's Word" is affirmed in the beholders' space by the "breath of the Holy Spirit" through a homonymic relation with inscription of the Son's name (epigraph) in the icon (Mondzain 105-107). Mondzain explains that "*by means of the epigraph's voice, the image pronounces itself*" (102). Likewise, the monadic and dronic Byzantine music that accompanies the veneration of the icon has a homonymic reference to the voice of the Holy Spirit that "rests only on the rhythms of breathing (*pneuma*) (Mondzain 107). I will return to the icon's homonymic relation to the Holy Spirit when discussing the term hierotopy in Chapter 3.

[41] Ibid.*,* 27.

identical to the Father's divine essence) brings to the beholder's presence the invisible face of the Father (the prototype) through the Holy Spirit (the "source of the incarnational operation").[42] It follows then that the natural image is the essential similitude between the Son and Father, apart from the Son's incarnate form. Moreover, the icon carries His human form, which closely links the human nature to the image of God. In Genesis 1:26–27, God said: "Let us make mankind in our [the plural our stands for the Trinitarian unity] image, in our likeness" and, therefore, "God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."[43] Humanity is the image of Trinity and this "imaginal…relationship of similitude" defines the formula of the Byzantine economy, which I further explore in the next section. By the same token, Nicephorus understands the Incarnation not as an "in-corporation" but as an "in-imagination."[44]

The likeness between the divine and human makes humanity an integral part in the historical manifestation of the Trinitarian economy. The role of humanity in fulfilling the Incarnational economy is, then, to mimic their shared image with God. The image is not a signifier or a signified, but the knowledge acquired through the crossing of the human and divine gazes in the icon—it is the highest form of knowledge that envisages human nature as a divine mystery. Said differently, the icon calls two gazes (the human eye and the Trinitarian eye) to contemplate their common image visualized through Christ's in-imagination. This reciprocal contemplation is what Nicephorus understands by mimesis: it is a "christic mimetic…act by which the image [of the human] rejoins the image [of the divine], because it is the image [of the human and divine] that is the prototype."[45]

Like in the relationship between the icon's materiality and Son's form, the relation between the Son's image and His prototype (the Father) does not follow the logic of referentiality between two elements that impose a separation through representation. Instead, they have an intimate consubstantial relation, which Nicephorus calls *schesis*.[46] The meaning of *schesis* defines the casual relation of love between the Father and the Son at the level of the natural invisible image (the Father is the cause of the Son), which, in turn, establishes the intimate relation of the artificial image's form (type) to its symbolic content (prototype) in an

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[42] Ibid.
[43] New International Version (NIV).
[44] Mondzain, *Image, Icon, Economy*, 77.
[45] Ibid., 84.
[46] Lechte, *Genealogy and Ontology*, 37.

iconic representation.[47] According to fourth-century Cappadocian Father Basil of Caesarea, the Son (the image's form) relates to the Father (the image's content) in the same sense that when:

> We speak of a king, and of the king's image…[we do not speak] of two kings. The majesty is not cloven in two, nor the glory divided. The sovereignty and authority over us is one, and so the doxology ascribed by us is not plural but one; because the honour paid to the image passes on to the prototype. Now what in the one case the image is by reason of imitation, that in the other case the Son is by nature; and as in works of art the likeness is dependent on the form, so in the case or the divine and uncompounded nature the union consists in the communion of the Godhead.[48]

In analyzing the above quote in order to define the Byzantine theology of the image, Mondzain connects the Christ's hypostatic image and His artificial visible image to "the king and the image of the king."[49] This parallelism clarifies how the Christian economy works as a "science of relations and relative terms" among the invisible and visible realities.[50] In particular, Mondzain explains that the word *king* connects the image of the king with the original king in a homonymic way.[51] While the form of the word is the same—that is, the king and his image are both called the *king*—the material substance of the king and the material substance of his representation are different. This association, pronounced through the same word/form *king*, does not imply that the original king is duplicated in his image as a different identity. As Theodore puts it, "obviously we do not contemplate Peter's form, for example, in Paul; nor conversely does anyone see Paul's form in Peter's form."[52] At the level of the image, there is only one source for the identity that is consolidated in the economic relation of *schesis* between form and symbolic content. And the identity is preserved from a union between the utterance of the word, the image's form and the prototype signified without claiming the real-presence or total absence of the signified in a representation. Accordingly, the Son does not signify the Father; He is the resemblance of the prototype that takes the form of an imprint in the icon (type) to reveal the Father. The natural image stays invisible and the form marks its presence in the artificial visible image (the icon). Hence, it is impossible to worship the natural image alone, without the artificial

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[47] According to the Orthodox doctrine, "the Son was generated (Gr. *proienai*) eternally by the Father, while the Spirit proceeded (Gr. *ekporeuesthai*) from the Father" (Manastireanu, 177).

[48] Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit*, XVIII.45. accessed January 19, 2015, http://www.myriobiblos.gr/texts/english/basil_spiritu_18.html

[49] Mondzain, *Image, Icon, Economy*, 30.

[50] Ibid., 20.

[51] Mondzain defines a "homonymic relation" as "an equivalence of signs in the unity of the signified" (77).

[52] St. Theodore the Studite, *On the Holy Icons*, Trans. Catharine P. Roth, (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press Crestwood, 1981), 105.

image's form.

The invisibility of the image is realized by its "*relative* comprehension" in the process of icon painting.[53] Specifically, it leaves, through the hands of the iconographer, an absence of its presence in the visible. Rather than aiming to replace a Platonic model with a quantitative or qualitative copy, the icon painter performs on the materiality of the icon (the artificial visible image) the mimetic act of imitating and marking the form of Christ's natural invisible image. The representation of the form is not an end in itself, but it turns into a method of recognizing that the image is absent. What is presented to the viewer, then, acts as a likeness of the image without claiming equivalence to the essence (real-presence)—the type is a likeness that does not substitute for the divine.

So, the trace of Christ's body in the icon is an impression (type) that has a non-essentialist connection to His image for the reason that they (the icon and the image) are not united through divine essence, but through form.[54] By receiving Christ's form like a wax sealed stamp, which is the absence (negative) of His image's physical (positive) form, the icon becomes a likeness of the image's presence (instead of a copy of a form)—a presence seen as absence. Correspondingly, the icon is also an acknowledgment of Christ's absence. In this non-essentialist manifestation of absence and presence in the icon, the Greek concept of mimesis transforms from a matter of observing a signifier as separated from its signified into a mode of knowing "the image of that Trinity in man."[55] This epistemological approach was Nicephorus' response to Aristotelian notion of relation as *pros ti*, which implies that a signified comes always before a signifier. For example, according to *pros ti* a son is logically linked to his father based on a distance imposed by two succeeding identities—that is, the son comes into existence after the father. Conversely, in the relation of *schesis,* the Father is not detached from His Son, but directly seen in His Son. The Father is intimately acknowledged in the Son "because *homoïosis* [the artificial image's "formal resemblance" to the natural image] is a knowledge (gnosis), [and] the model cannot, therefore participate in the same type of anteriority as the object of science itself."[56] This implies that the image imprinted in the icon does not have a relation of identity with the prototype. Instead, the prototype transforms the icon into a *living* (as opposed to an

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[53] Mondzain, *Image, Icon, Economy*, 75.
[54] See especially Theodore of Stoudios, Antirrheticus II, sec. 11, in PG, vol. 99, col. 357D and Bissera, "The Performative Icon," 634.
[55] Mondzain, *Image, Icon, Economy*, 28.
[56] Ibid., 87.

analytical) relation.[57] A viewer's Byzantine mimetic behavior before an icon is, then, a relation of *schesis* in which the prototype is not seen as a separate identity existing in the past, but simultaneously participating with the type (the imprint of form) in the icon.

In light of Nicephorus' epistemological view of mimesis, it can be said that the matter of the icon is an *object to think with*[58] in which the image withdraws itself to inform the beholder of the presence of an absence. The term withdrawal refers to the interaction between absence and presence that "lurks on the icon's surface…a tension that will be resolved in the icon's performance (mimesis)*:* the way it plays with appearances before the faithful."[59] The performance of the icon expresses the Byzantine visual economy at its pictorial level in the sensorial realm that is present, transforming, material, and tangible. The icon's performance is something that I unveil in the practical component of this thesis. What this study offers is a new epistemological method of subjectively engaging with iconic images that is largely unexplored in the academic discourse[60] concerning the complex of iconoclastic attitudes within our screen media culture. The Byzantine iconic method, as I am using and discussing it in Chapter 4, stems directly from my life experience of painting traditional icons for Christian orthodox churches and monasteries in Romania. I have learned how Byzantine icons perform in rituals to induce a feeling that something powerful and invisible is present in the physical space (an iconic vision). In experiencing the interesting situation of seeing viewers prostrate before the icons I had made, I was left with a longing to paint more icons and understand how viewers connect to images in general. However, the monastic experience of seeing my icon-work venerated seems to be quite a challenging viewing experience in our commercialized visual culture. For this reason, I turned to contemporary artistic techniques to further explore the feeling of an iconic vision and how this vision functions in today's spectacle of screen mediated images. And in doing so, I present the importance of literally including the Byzantine notion of performance in the academic framework regarding the topic of the icon in particular, and the notion of image in general. According to Theodore, the mimetic role of the icon-maker is crucial in the epistemological understanding of the icon. Particularly, in revealing how the icon manifests Christ's form

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[57] Lechte, *Genealogy and Ontology*, 38.
[58] Jaś Elsner, "Iconoclasm as Discourse," 385.
[59] Pentcheva, "The Performative Icon," 632.
[60] The term *discourse* is used here in the way James Clifford described it: an analysis that is not interested "in what *they* [authors] have to say or feel as subjects, but is concerned merely with statements as related to other statements in a field" (270).

without circumscribing and confusing the divine nature: "the crafted icon modeled after its prototype brings the likeness of the prototype into matter and participates in its form by means of the thought of the…[iconographer] and the *impress* of his hands."[61] There are two steps for the appearance of the form on matter: firstly, the icon-maker sees the form of the prototype, as it is preserved through the Byzantine canonical painting techniques since the earliest known depictions of Christ in the sixth century—the time when symbols such as the lamb or Cross were replaced with Christ's human form. Some of Byzantine visual canons of making an image integrate the eternal prototype, reverse perspective, light, color, and gesture. Once the image stamps its form in the icon-maker's memory and the breath of the Holy Spirit touches his/her thoughts, the second stage is to imprint (hand made) or perform the likeness of the image, "like a seal" in wax, onto the surface of a wood panel.[62]

The iconic depiction of Christ is not a simple, static painting or a historical museum item; it is a *living image*. The icon has a face of its own (his/her own gaze) that looks back at the believer's face (a crossing of the gazes that will be discussed later in relation to Jean-Luc Marion's phenomenology). Specifically, the icon performs the Incarnational economy directly with the viewer to construct a (symbolic-realistic) mode of seeing the image that is not entirely imaginary (symbolic) and not totally naturalistic (realistic). In considering the rules of Byzantine iconography through my icon practice, the close connection between the experiences of making and viewing an icon becomes apparent. Each of these acts, for example, are performed from the perspective of a symbolic-realistic mode of seeing; that is, both viewers and makers of an icon recognize the icon as (1) a realistic depiction of a person and (2) as an abstract symbol. It is a hypostatic fusion between the abstract and concrete in the icon that allows for the appearance of the divine without claiming real-presence in the visible.

As noted, Byzantine iconography engages a symbolic-realistic mode of seeing. Byzantine icons are intended to appear as a palpable absence of a metaphysical state revealing a "hypostasis of the spiritual and the material."[63] To engage these icons in a fitting manner, then (that is, to experience the transcendent as present), requires that viewers balance both symbolic (seeing through a screen) and realistic (seeing the screen itself) modes of seeing. Referring on the

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[61] St. Theodore the Studite, qtd. in Pentcheva, "The Performative Icon," 634.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Eric Jenkins, "My iPod, My iCon: How and Why do Images Become Icons?" *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 25. no. 5 (2008): 470.

viewing of icons, Eric Jenkins defines symbolic-realism as seeing with the divine eye.[64] In Byzantine iconography, this divine eye sees with both the physical and the mental components of the eye by creating a union of (1) subject and content, and (2) object and form, both at the physical level in space and time. Such a union makes the icon "neither wholly secular nor sacred, neither body nor spirit, neither concrete nor abstract, neither mere appearance nor mere representation, neither grossly material nor solely symbolic."[65] Ultimately, by its tangible display of a transcendental experience, the icon encourages a viewer's participation in an incomplete scenario where (prior to the viewing of the icon) the missing component is the viewer him- or herself. The scenario becomes complete only when the viewer performs the ritual of seeing the icon in a manner that completes the lack of divine's real-presence within the icon (which is accomplished through the direct interaction with a screen for representation). The symbolic-realistic mode of seeing enables viewers to revere the sacred message of an image by taking part in the void of that image, thereby deflecting any negative ideological implications that an image—as an image made by human hands—might carry.

Therefore, Byzantine mimesis problematizes metaphysical issues to mimesis based solely on a relationship to the real through analogies that stress either the viewer's perception (realistic) or the mind's eye (imaginative/symbolic). The icon's mimesis is not limited to the imagistic quality of material substances in simulating or reproducing (symbolically or realistically) an essence. Instead, Byzantine mimesis is located in a temporal space through a synergy between the viewers and Christ's invisible image imprinted on the icon to perform His appearance in the present time. Again, it is necessary to specify here that for the Byzantines, the term *appearance* does not refer to showing an illusion or reality in itself. The holy trace (the presence of absence) is not an appearance defined by a Platonic distance between a copy and model, as this would place the Incarnational economy of the icon under a metaphysical mode of thinking that questions the real-presence in the image. As the trace of Christ's appearance, the Byzantine icon lacks the real-presence of essence, thus avoiding accusations of idolatry. Since Christ's hypostatic nature overcomes the separation of mortality and immortality, being and non-being, His iconic appearance is unveiled in belief through a symbolic-realistic vision that eludes description and the Platonic notion of appearance-being. I now turn my attention to the icon's

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[64] Ibid., 481.
[65] Léonide Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon.* Trans. Anthony Gythiel. (1. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1992a), 178.

economy in forming a Christian community.

1.2.3 The Byzantine view about economy

As it will become apparent throughout this thesis, the term symbolic-realism (discussed in the previous section) parallels Marie-Jose Mondzain's theological account of the Byzantine iconic economy of vision. She argues that the icon was at the center of all political, social, and ritualistic relations in Byzantine society.[66] The economy of faith positions the divine authority in the world as present in a way that avoids metaphysical idolatry. This parallel between presence and sovereignty is realized by investing the image of Christ with economical organization over both realms of mortality and immortality. In this economical relation between God and humanity, the iconicity of Incarnation becomes the key element in forming and administrating the Christian community.

It is essential to clarify that the Christian use of the word economy differs from its modern, secularized interpretation that originates from Aristotle's pragmatic law of organizing the household. The Aristotelian concept of economy—a term that combines *oikos* (household) and *nomos* (law)—is limited to the management and distribution of wealth within the earthly world of substances, which legitimates unequal social relations based on the master-slave logic. The church fathers reversed this worldly order of inequality to establish a new political and social economy founded on the historical event of Incarnation: "all are equal, including slaves; all are 'brothers,' including women; church administrators are not masters, but themselves 'slaves' who do God's work."[67] In the Byzantine society, the iconophile emperor was not perceived as emanating divine power, but as having the divine duty to bring "into alliance the economy of belief and the economy of power."[68] In prostrating before the icon and subjecting himself to the Incarnational economy, the emperor received a sovereign power to merge temporal and eternal economies[69]—a viewpoint that was used in the defense of icons by the

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[66] Mondzain, *Image, Icon, Economy*, 18-66.
[67] Susan Buck-Morss, "Visual Empire" *Diacritics*, 37. 2/3 (2007): 175.
[68] Ibid., 178. Mondzain states that "God is the first King and natural legislator. The king only becomes him by imitation" (165).
[69] In the political philosophy of the icon, the Aristotelian and Incarnational economies are combined so that "the theocracy of the visual becomes the key to all authority" (Mondzain 166).

Church against the imperial policies that triggered the Byzantine iconoclasm.

In Byzantium, coins were minted with Christ and the emperor's face on each side.[70] This is not to say that the iconic economy was an instrument for political authorities to manipulate the masses. The very Byzantine image of power (Christ, the sovereign figure) stays invisible. As a result, the iconophile emperor did not have control over the presence of truth or real in representation. Without an authority over the image, the earthly rulers cannot be the presence of a true power—a fundamental condition for the legitimization of authority to receive the obedience of the citizens. If power is denied or validated according to the ruler's ability to create his/her own reign of images, then the imperial order that is faithful to the Incarnation cannot lay claim to the world for its own good. Mondzain also emphasizes this point when analyzing the imperial reason behind the attack on icons: "what interests the iconoclast emperors is to become, in the name of a fight against idols, the absolute masters of political, juridicial, administrative and military representation, and the sole practitioners of earthly mimesis."[71]

To this end, all icon venerators take part in the Christian economy "[f]or the people as a whole, the sign of the cross would have to suffice; for the clergy, the celebration of the Eucharistic sacrament; for the king, administration and justice."[72] Since humans embody the image of God, the icon calls for the participation in one visual economy to form a sacred space (hierotopy). The contemporary art historian, Alexei Lidov has already reconstructed the icon's performance as a hierotopic engagement of viewers in space to recall the image of God and preserve the memory of Incarnation. And, it is this creative mode of enacting the image of the divine in a contemporary visual context that will be explored in the next section and throughout this thesis at a practical and theoretical level.

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[70] "The folding of spiritual power into the religious economy finds expression in the public visibility of belief that reached a high point under Justinian I, whose image is depicted as mirroring that of Christ" (Buck-Morss 177).

[71] Mondzain, *Image, Icon, Economy,* 165.

[72] Ibid.

1.2.4 The Byzantine view about the sacred space and Contemporary hierotopy

God paid a great price for you. So use your body to honor God.[73]

The term performance and its transformative power frequently comes into play in the recent spatial/hierotopic redefinition of the Byzantine theory of image.[74] Art historians Alexei Lidov (2011), Bissera Pentcheva (2006), and Nicoletta Isar (2009) link the iconic performance of a sacred space (hierotopy) with the icon's living economical bond between the image and the human body that is grounded in the visible reality.

Lidov has originally coined the term hierotopy to define a Byzantine creative way of making or performing a sacred space that is similar to "pictorial, literary, musical or other arts."[75] The meaning of hierotopy is taken as an *act of doing* sacred images in a physical space, rather than a mode of analyzing and describing various (historical, phenomenological, etc.) aspects of the sacred. Lidov's understanding of hierotopic creativity is based on an epistemological inquiry into the role of the Byzantine iconographer to direct and visualize the Incarnational narrative while guiding the faithful in the attainment of that vision. Thus, he compares the Byzantine activity of creating sacred spaces in interior or exterior public locations, as in Orthodox churches or outdoor (profane) markets during religious ceremonies, with the role of a contemporary film director in staging a film's artistic, conceptual, and technical features. Moreover, a hierotopy is formed when the icon performs like a *living being* (image) to create an environment in which audio, visual, and tactile human perceptions become integral parts and in continual movement

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[73] 1 Corinthians 6:20, Contemporary English Version (CEV).

[74] The word *performance* will appear often in this thesis. This word is considered in a wide spectrum of disciplines from humanities to social sciences. At the center of performance studies is the concept of performativity, which originates from theater studies, anthropology and philosophy of language (some of the primary leading figures are the anthropologist Victor Turner, the theatre scholar Richard Schechner, and the philosopher Jhon L. Austin). As I mentioned in footnote 7, I employ Erika Fisher-Lichte's meaning of performativity as she applies it to contemporary art performances. For Fisher-Lichte, the sense perception becomes the foundational aesthetic resource for the performative act. And the performative act is defined by its innate power to break the traditional meaning/function of a performance to represent a story, myth, or an original event. Although contradicting the Byzantine theology of the image, as it will become apparent in the next section, 1.2.5 A form of performativity in the Byzantine performance, Fisher-Lichte's account of performativity in relation to the self-referentiality of physical acts offers an interesting perspective on both the construction of the Byzantine icon and its transition into an event.

[75] Alexei Lidov, *The Comparative Hierotopy*, Ed. A. Lidov. (Moscow, 2006), 12-13. In 2001, Lidov introduced the notion of hierotopy–a term that merges two Greek words *hieros* (sacred) and *topos* (place, space, notion). A hierotopic space is a sacred space formed through the interaction of the icon and beholder in the physical space—I call this interaction an iconic vision. Nonetheless, hierotopy is a term that emphasizes more the importance of the Byzantine iconographer's artistic skills in making the icons to facilitate such an iconic interaction in 3D spaces.

with a feeling of divine presence. As Pentcheva notes, the icon's performance saturates all senses of the faithful through a play of absence/appearance and presence/essence at its material surface.[76]

Nicoletta Isar employs the hierotopic vision to offer a new approach to the field of performance and installation art in revealing how traditional rituals (modes of incarnating the invisible through rituals as a process of cleansing) are readapted to revitalize the transformative power of contemporary ritual performances. She believes that the Byzantine icon's performance provides essential analytical and practical means for the contemporary aesthetic eye to discover a "metaphysics of presence"[77] (the sacred) that is performed in hidden and unconventional ways. However, this hierotopic analysis should not be an aim of demonstrating that contemporary performances have the power to embed the sacred to the point of claiming real-presence. Such an endeavor is bound to the ontological paradox of the image discussed above—an iconoclastic implication of art performances that is of little concern to Isar. The task is, then, to develop a new resourceful aesthetic vocabulary obtained from the Byzantine hierotopic elements of space, representation, body, and image that would help to comprehend how contemporary attempts to reveal a sense of a real-presence employ "transcendental signifiers" and "ritual patterns"[78]—art performances that break boundaries between the subject and object, artist and audience, thereby creating a transformative event. What the Byzantine icon has in common with contemporary art is the mode of creating imagery in the tangible space by directly engaging the viewers into the act of creation—a mode of meaning-making that brings the absence of the image into presence, thus forming an event.[79] Referring to the relation between multimedia and performance art and the icon, Lidov states that:

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[76] Pentcheva, "The performative icon," 632. I will return to this argument in 1.2.5 A form of performativity in the Byzantine performance, when comparing and contrasting the icon's performance to the art performance's performative/transformative aspect as it stems from its Austian sense.

[77] Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play," *Discourse of the Human Sciences // Writing and Difference*. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), 280–281.

[78] Nicoletta Isar, "Vision and Performance. A Hierotopic Approach to Contemporary Art," *Hierotopy. Comparative studies of sacred spaces*, ed. A. Lidov, (Moscow: Indrik, 2009): 329-330.

[79] The Byzantines did not perceive the icon as art. Buck-Morss explains that the discipline of art history has generally treated the icon as a Christian aesthetic object, which provides an incomplete understanding of how the icon's visual economy works. That is, the two mimetic levels of correlations between Father (prototype) - Son (image), and Son - icon (type). Indeed, one can trace historically how the established Roman art underlined and gave an aesthetic Platonic framework (copy versus model) to the Byzantine visual culture. The historian Alain Besançon describes the various pagan imperial themes that were readapted to Christianity: "The philosopher became Christ, the apostle, or the prophet. The theme of imperial apotheosis was transformed into the Ascension of Christ. The offering of presents corresponded to the Adoration of the Magi, the *adventus* (the triumphal entrance of the

Byzantine 'spatial icons,' most unusual in modern European context, have a typological parallel in the contemporary art of performances and multi-media installations, which have nothing to do with the Byzantine tradition historically or symbolically. What they share is the basic principle of absence of a single source of images, the imagery is created in space by numerous dynamically changing forms. The most significant is the role of the beholder, who actively participates in the re-creation of the spatial imagery. All the differences of the contents, technologies and aesthetics notwithstanding, one may speak about one and the same type of the perception of images.[80]

Based on the above argument that an artwork also performs in the physical space like an icon by mediating invisible images that make the world present to viewers, Isar investigates contemporary forms of hierotopy, ranging from experimental theater to body art and video performances. She explains, for example, how artists as Bill Viola and Marina Abramović develop a performative language of the image that breaks the boundary between the subject and object. The resulting spatial effect between image, artwork, viewers, and artist creates an event/ritual of presence (of absence) beyond symbolic referentiality (a Byzantine analysis that will be done in Chapter 4 of this dissertation). These adapted art forms of hierotopy allow for a broader range of what might constitute an icon's performance, including criteria that represent specific technical, conceptual, commercial, and subjective imperatives.

My concern, however, is that while contemporary art too may present its own version of hierotopy, artists who deviate too far from the Incarnational dimension of the image run the critical situation of creating works that impose notions of reality. Placing an emphasis on the role of the artist's body (as in Abramović's performances), requires a careful analysis of those hierotopic elements that transform the space of a gallery into an creative space. An artistic

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sovereign) to Christ's arrival in Jerusalem…. Just as artists represented [copied] the emperor and empress on their thrones [the model], surrounded by their entourage, they depicted Christ and the Virgin among the saints and angels" (110). However, this historical examination of the shift from the pagan to the Christian art limits the discussion of the icon to an aesthetic referential axis between a signifier and signified. For example, the art historian, Charles Barber, whose area of specialization is particularly focused on the Byzantine icon, takes this very aesthetic approach when resuming the defense of the icon to an artifact of a true "formal cause" that never comes from the icon makers' artistic imagination (2002, 111). Barber pushes aside the core non-metaphysical argument of the economy: the appearance of the essences as presence of absence in substance before the believers gaze. And this economical aspect of the image responds to the ontological status of the image in general. All types of images (religious or secular) require a certain kind of faith/involvement in visualizing them. Otherwise, the image cannot be seen, analyzed, or said to exist. Lechte argues that the image is not "constituted by its non-differentiation (however minimal) with what is imaged" (40). In other words, even in a non-religious experience of the image, the viewer needs to filter what is imaged through a form of conviction. If the art historical analysis of the icon treats the image as an object (artifact) separate from the eye of the analyst, then the innate human condition of being immersed in the act of seeing is disregarded.

[80] Lidov, "Hierotopy. The Creation of Sacred Spaces," 42.

hierotopic project might approach the notion of the icon as an artifact/artwork or consider the hierotopic ritual as a presentation of the sacred that follows the referential (Platonic) logic of myth and ritual,[81] thus constructing an artistic vision that is susceptible to iconoclastic debates and accusations of metaphysical idolatry. The question then arises, what are the effects of incorporating ritual forms of "incarnating the invisible" into a postmodern language of performance/art-installation that moved away "from ritual to anti-ritual of the very opposites: 'the very flaws, hesitations, personal factors, incomplete, elliptical situations.'"[82] Are modern ritual performances as powerful as Byzantine rituals in presenting the invisible? Addressing these questions in this thesis through my own hierotopic practice (see video documentation, *Portrait of an Icon Maker*, Fig. 21)[83] will directly respond to the study of the hierotopic phenomena by probing the limits and possibilities of the language of performance art to manifest and contain sacred dimensions. One of the goals of this dissertation is to show (under both the theoretical and practical framework) that an artistic form of iconic vision is inconceivable without the Byzantine (Incarnational) premise of the image: while the image always stays ontologically transparent, its visibility engages both 1) the bodily senses that make intimate our affectivity and 2) the hand-made icon, which implies the artistic capacity to signify and understand in a non-referential way concepts and symbols. In other words, there is no effective understanding of a contemporary form of hierotopy without a symbolic-realistic vision between the human body and a non-referential depiction of the image.

It is possible to understand the concept of hierotopy in a postmodern re-contextualization of the Byzantine icon that combines performance theory and contemporary art, only after the icon's performance of the economy is clearly outlined in relation to the notions of referentiality and performativity that drive contemporary artistic creativity. This topic will be taken up in the following section where I elaborate on the semioticity and materiality of the aesthetics of a performative act that transforms a work of art into an event. For delineating a performative feature of the Byzantine icon, I will look into the *performative turn* in the arts of which Erika Fisher-Lichte speaks—a transformative experience at the level of sensual perception. Building on such a performative view of the Byzantine icon (through my artistic practice and theoretical

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[81] Here, ritual refers to the repetitive enactment of an original paradigmatic event (myth) in particular locations and times.

[82] Isar, "Vision and Performance," 328.

[83] The video documentation can be viewed at: http://youtu.be/wvF-kDpBtk8.

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investigations), I will put forth (in the last chapter) a series of hierotopic principles for establishing a set of iconic components that help to define a Contemporary Byzantine-Inspired Iconic Vision. However, one of the main points of this dissertation is that although the creation of a Byzantine hierotopic event involves a certain level of artistic skill, the parallel between the icon and artworks must not be pressed too far, since the Incarnational economy can never be fully assimilated into the metaphysical aesthetics of the art. What is unique in the creative power of the Byzantine iconographer is the semiotic status of the hierotopic vision in making a *living icon*[84] that equally integrates the performative and referential use of materiality. Specifically, the idea of a *spatial living icon* differs from Fisher-Lichte's notion of art performance in the way it mediates a "quasi-consubstantial link to the prototype"[85]—an economy of the icon that was defined in Nicephorus' epistemology. This is not a matter of proving that the Byzantine icon is more visually effective than a work of art at claiming the real-presence of an image. Once the non-metaphysical implications of the Byzantine nature of the image is understood, the analysis of those creative (hierotopic) energies in visual arts that challenge any metaphysical limitations (together with their subsequent iconoclastic critiques) will be an important step towards coming to grips with the role of today's images (outside the specific Byzantine context) to actualize the world for us. That is, and as Mondzain also argues, to understand the fundamental function of the image in making the invisible (symbolic/absence) present (real) to human beings.

1.2.5 A form of performativity in the Byzantine performance

We have learned that for Plato, image (*eikōn*) is the appearance of essence in the limitation of the visible. For the Byzantines, image is the invisibility of essence that appears as absence in visibility. According to Fischer-Lichte's analysis of the *performative turn* in the arts, contemporary discourses of performativity perceive the image as the visible itself. This section applies the term performativity to the Byzantine icon to see the theological and artistic possibilities and limitations in describing a contemporary artistic form of a Byzantine transformative vision. And for this, I will draw a parallel between the transformation of art into an event and the role of the icon's performance in forming a hierotopic spatial effect. While I

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[84] Lidov, "Hierotopy. The Creation of Sacred Spaces," 32.
[85] Lechte, *Genealogy and Ontology of the Western Image and its Digital Future*, 44.

will argue for a similarity between the Byzantine icon and the performative act in overcoming notion of dualism, I will also discuss how the image in Fischer-Lichte's analysis of performance art is presented through a metaphysical limitation of the creative (performative) event to the role of the sensual perception.

Fischer-Lichte's point of departure is John L. Austin's foundational definition of the performative utterance in speech acts,[86] which regards the subject and object of the performance being "self-referential and constitutive of reality"—that is, neither of them can depend upon any predefined meaning assigned to them.[87] From an Austinian view, a performance that refers to an original event (such as a narrative/script in a theater play) is illusory and does not bring anything transformative to reality. A *true* performance creates new realities based on the quality of (speech) acts to be performative:

> When the words "I name this ship the 'Queen Elizabeth'" are uttered while a bottle is smashed against the stern of a ship or when a man speaks the words "I do [take this woman to be my lawful wedded wife]" in the course of a marriage ceremony, these statements do not simply assert a preexisting circumstance [an essence].… Instead, these utterances create an entirely new social reality: the ship now carries the name *Queen Elizabeth*; Ms. X and Mr. Y are now married to each other. Uttering these sentences effectively changes the world.[88]

Differentiating between constative and performative utterances, Austin claims that "linguistic utterances not only serve to make statements but they also perform actions."[89] The term performative is applied by Fischer-Lichte to art performances today in particular relation to the physical acts of the artist and the spectators.[90] These acts are a mode of seeing in which an object is perceived in its specific materiality and sensuality—that is, the object is seen as self-

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[86] Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*, trans. Saskya Jain. (New York: Routledge, 2008), 24.

[87] Ibid., 21.

[88] Ibid., 24.

[89] Ibid., 21

[90] Offering the example of Marina Abramović's performance of *Lips of Thomas,* performed in 1975, 1993 and 2005 at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, Fischer-Lichte points to the transformation of Abramović and her spectators into co-subjects in the experience of Abramović's performance. Through a shifting relationship, she observes, (both of) their action(s) simultaneously determines the course of the art event. In the span of seven hours, Ambramović tested the limits of her body by consuming one kilogram of honey and one liter of red wine followed by whipping herself, cutting a five pointed star on her stomach and laying down in a crucified position on ice blocks shaped into a cross. Embedded with religious symbols, her performance ends when members of the audience cannot stand seeing her pain anymore and finally remove her. This intervention of the public into her performance challenged the modern relation between viewers and artworks. Also, the video documentation of cutting a star on herself with a razor blade became iconic in the history of performance art.

referential. When one perceives an object as self-referential, the secret meaning of the phenomenal world is unveiled "in and through the act of perception."[91] This tangible mode of seeing differs from that involved in a theatrical experience where the performance is secondary to the written screenplay—a similar visual experience might take place in front of a cinematic/televisual screen. According to Fischer-Lichte, the referential relationship between theatrical performance and text emerged from a tradition of religious studies that focused on the role of rituals to simply illustrate myth.[92] In the "hierarchy of myth over ritual," which is a Platonic relation between a copy and model, the object would only exist as a mere sign or artifact[93]—thus impeding the viewer's experience of art as an event. Moreover, the traditional way of viewing a work of art (as a generator of signs waiting to be interpreted by viewers), creates a distance between the observer and the observed—a distance which blocks the possibility of a genuine transformative experience (for both sides). As opposed to a more passive engagement with the object of a performance, when an audience perceives the object of a performance as self-referential, that audience begins to assume an active role in the art itself; in this way, the audience is made a co-producer of the art event.

Based on Austin's linguistic philosophy, Fischer-Lichte classifies a real art performance in terms of materializing its own social/artistic event—the meaning of the image, in this case, corresponds to an understanding of materiality that supersedes its (predefined) semiotic values. Image, therefore, is the performance of the appearance without a connection to an authoritative essence. As a matter of fact, essence becomes the visible itself (image) and the ground for creativity turns into any performative act within spaces of representation that defines human activity, including the presentation of the self or "what was once perceived as 'impure'" or idolic.[94]

Although Fischer-Lichte's analysis of performativity contradicts the Christian economy of the image (as invisible), an interpretation of performativity can be extracted to understand the role of perception in a contemporary hierotopic performance. Fischer-Lichte asserts that when a viewer directly engages in the process of creation, the binary opposition between an artist and a

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[91] Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance,*17.
[92] Fischer-Lichte points out that a similar *performative turn* took place in religious studies at the beginning of the twentieth century, when ritual became the central point of research, instead of doctrinal texts, in explaining the social function of religion.
[93] Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance,* 30.
[94] Isar, "Vision and Performance," 328.

spectator is destabilized.[95] By establishing an oscillatory connection between a signifier and signified or an artist and viewer, an artistic event offers an audience the opportunity to undergo a metamorphosis which generates new meanings and identities. In order to be observed and decoded in this context, an art object must not function independently of either its creator or its viewer. This same form of participation takes place through the symbolic-realistic mode of seeing called upon by Byzantine iconography (where the beholder becomes engaged in the Incarnational event). The non-dualistic relationship between the artist and spectator in the performative act parallels the typical relationship between the icon and beholder in the way they create a transformative artistic/hypostatic experience. The difference, however, is that in the icon's performance the symbolic (the predefined Incarnational meaning) significance of the icon is as important as its sensual (realistic) perception. In Fischer-Lichte's de-semanticization thesis of performativity, symbolism is excluded by redefining the art performance as incorporating acts without referential meaning.[96] Referring to the emergence of meaning in the performativity of an art performance, Fischer-Lichte states:

> Materiality does not act as a signifier to which this or that signified can be attributed. Rather, materiality itself has to be seen as the signified already given in the materiality perceived by the subject. To use a tautology, the thing's materiality adopts the meaning of its materiality, that is, of its phenomenal being. What the object is perceived as is what it signifies.[97]

The isolation of the materiality of an object from any preset contexts is essential for Fischer-Lichte to determine (in different ways) how the various elements of that object are perceived. The bodies of actors or performance artists (and other theatrical elements such as costumes, music, and dance) need to appear in their phenomenal being or self-referentiality in order to perform the performative act.[98] When these elements are apprehended without any predefined meaning, a viewer is able to make a connection to new phenomena, ideas, feelings, and memories. It is clear that in Fischer-Lichte's view, the icon's Christian-symbolic meaning becomes an impediment to the performative act. But, this is true only if Nicephorus' epistemological (non-metaphysical) defense of the icon is not taken into consideration. As previously stated, since the image (meaning) of the divine is revealed as presence of absence, the

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[95] Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance,* 17.
[96] Ibid., 140.
[97] Ibid., 141.
[98] Ibid.

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icon does not impose a notion of reality and does not merely illustrate doctrinal teachings through the logic of referentiality. Hence, it is possible to apply the notion of performativity to the icon due to the Byzantine non-referential (economical) relation between the image and visual representations. I see that Austin's theory of speech acts is equally relevant to understanding the symbolic-realistic way of seeing a Byzantine icon—of course, as long as the iconic viewing in the Byzantine hierotopic event is not considered a predefined act. Due to the economical logic of the Byzantine (invisible) image, the beholder performs the icon without relying on "pre-existing conditions, such as an inner essence, substance" and without expressing any "fixed, stable identit[ies]" and narratives.[99] This is the same sense in which Fischer-Lichte describes the "de-semanticized" appearance of a phenomenal being in a contemporary art performance.

The performative understanding of the Byzantine icon helps to see how a hierotopic space might be constructed as a Contemporary Byzantine-Inspired Iconic Vision. For example, on the one hand, Fischer-Lichte explains how Marina Abramović's gesture in cutting a pentagram on her body in her performance *Lips of Thomas* was not interpreted by her viewers symbolically (that is, it was not understood as a Platonic representation of the historical or religious connotations of the geometrical shape). On the other hand, in respect of her gesture, Abramović's performance "was not perceived as insignificant, but merely as that which it performed," allowing for "an immense pluralization of potential meaning."[100] The multitude of potential meanings generated by this sort of art (as event) facilitates the viewers' engagement in the art event itself. It is this engagement that eventually completes or fulfills the original scenario of an artwork. The semiotic possibilities opened up by the de-semanticization of the pentagram in Abramović's performance offers an instructive basis of comparison with respect to the Byzantine elements employed non-referentially in the creation of hierotopy.

To that end, this practice-oriented research treads very carefully when analyzing contemporary forms of transformative (iconic) visions (such as attempted by Fischer-Lichte's analysis of Abramović's work) through performative explications, acknowledging that artistic interpretations of hierotopy might still mediate images under a metaphysical mode of thought. In order to understand performativity as a way out of the division between the aesthetics of production—semioticity—of a piece of art (on one side), from the reception of that art—

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[99] Ibid., 27.
[100] Ibid., 140.

materiality—by viewers (on the other side), Fischer-Lichte relies on the truthfulness of the sensual perception. Human perception, therefore, becomes a new metaphysical imposition of a first-principle or prototype to claim the real-presence of the image. In other words, Fischer-Lichte fails to acknowledge the nature of perception in constituting reality. The problem of perception in the notion of performativity parallels John Lechte's critique of the contemporary semiotic approach to iconism:

> As concerns the icon, semiotics as [Umberto] Eco practices it is therefore caught up in a spiral of circularity: in an effort to prove the conventional and arbitrary character of all items classified as 'iconic,' recourse is made to the features of the actual prototype. This though, simply displaces the question of how the prototype is perceived. Attention is then focused on perception itself. But in order to demonstrate the realist or conventional nature of perception, recourse must once again be made to the qualities of the prototype, the key question being: is the prototype as I perceive it to be at a given moment?[101]

In short, Lechte explains that the semiotician Umberto Eco's version of an iconic sign (for instance, a painting of Queen Elizabeth) does not have the power to make present the absence of a model (the real Queen).[102] Furthermore, Eco critiques the icon for the reason that no sign can be equal to its signified. If the opposite were the case, then the sign would not exist or transform into the signified itself. As long as the nature of a sign (representation) is determined (conventionally) by its referential relationship or by difference to a model, it cannot record realistically/iconically. This semiotic argument is based on *"the natural iconism of perception"*— a fundamental principle of judgment that is taken as reality itself by semioticians in a similar way as Fischer-Lichte formulates the existence of the phenomenal being at the perceptive level.[103] Thus, Lechte points to the inadequacy of perception in relation to the idea of a prototype when questioning the real (performative) knowledge of a three-dimensional object that is restricted to space (by perspective) at a certain moment in time. The question is if the prototype is more than what is accessed through human perception. Since the nature of the prototype is defined by its impossibility to be fully revealed and understood, the critique of the iconic level of a sign (or any representational object) with recourse to the performative perception of a real model turns into a paradox. This repeats Plato's ontological dilemma, previously mentioned, regarding the *eikōn*'s property to be similar to what it represents. For both the semiotic and Platonic thought, an icon is

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[101] Lechte, *Genealogy and Ontology of the Western Image and its Digital Future*, 45.
[102] Ibid., 43.
[103] Ibid., 45.

an instance of the impossibility to circumscribe/encode the real prototype. Precisely the same argument can be made with respect to the way Fischer-Lichte uses the materiality of a real body in the performative act. Again, what must the image be in order to access the knowledge of a prototype without circumscription? It is a question of mediation between a signifier and signified to which the Byzantines provided an answer to in the icon's economy.

In his/her hierotopic encounter with the icon, the Byzantine beholder does not reenact a predefined notion of the prototype (as the image stays invisible). Additionally, materiality and semiotics are not mutually exclusive, but rather coexist together in the very perception of the icons. Where the performativity of the artistic event excludes any hierarchical structure between a ritual/copy and myth/prototype by denying referentiality in favor of perception alone, the icon performs the original event of Incarnation through performative non-referential acts. On one hand, Fischer-Lichte's notion of performativity presupposes human perception as real-presence, which is in fact a semioticity of self-referential objects that are still related to an original phenomenon—that is, the fundamental metaphysical cause of human perception. On the other hand, the icon includes both the relation between a copy and prototype and the mediation of the image (by avoiding referentiality) through the performative perception of materiality without imposing a first-principle—all of which are achievable through the Incarnational economy of the icon.

1.3 Methodology

1.3.1 Overall overview

This practice-oriented research functions as a testing ground for articulating a Byzantine framework that will help to understand how contemporary images transform into an iconic vision. While drawing from the iconoclastic/consumptive theories and controversies as mentioned in Chapter 1, my hierotopic practice investigates key symbolic-realistic elements in the construction of an iconic vision by applying the Orthodox tradition of icon painting with tempera and gold leaf on wooden panels. Thus, in my attempt to grasp the Byzantine visual technique and poly-sensory (hierotopic) qualities of the icon, the research-creation components of this doctorate will take three forms: a) video documentations of my performances of an iconic

vision, b) an actual hierotopic installation formed of wooden panel paintings, tools, and sound, and c) textual analysis. These three research outcomes will be more thoroughly explained/elaborated in the following paragraphs.

Guided by my written reflections on my practice and the theoretical perspectives (as outlined in Chapter 1) of the icon, I will contrast and contextualize my Contemporary Byzantine-Inspired Iconic Vision to other artistic or commercial forms that incorporate iconic elements. Specifically, I propose a case study that focuses on how Jean-Luc Marion, Nanna Verhoeff, Eric Jenkins, John Lechte, and Nicoletta Isar (among other important scholars of Byzantine hierotopy) interpret works of art and commodities with iconic/hierotopic implications. Following such an analysis, the final research result will consist of a novel hierotopic framework that integrates direct practical insight for analyzing how an iconic vision is performed in an artistic and commercial context.

1.3.2 Artistic research as a valid methodological approach to the Contemporary Byzantine-Inspired Iconic Vision

In order to address the specific methodologies employed in this doctorate, it is important to briefly address the following issue with the doctoral level practice-oriented research in the arts: How should we understand the nature of *art practice as research*[104] in relation to the more scholarly research that claim the power of the true scientific argument? A contemporary authority on the topic of art as academic study, Henk Borgdorff analyses the reflective nature[105] of the art practice in order to explain it as a legitimate, autonomous academic/scientific discipline. By using critical thinking, Borgdorff provides the subsequent definition through a series of ontological, epistemological, and methodological inquiries:

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[104] In relation to various expressions surrounding the notion of artistic research within academia, such as *practice-based research* or *practice-led research*, the art theorist, Henk Borgdorff prefers the term *practice as research* as it denotes the fullest meaning of what is understood by artistic research (2006, 7). While the former two terms refer to a general way of studying art practice as research, he claims that the latter term specifically refers to the unique synchronization between practice and research—a union that parallels Fischer-Lichte's notion of the *performative turn* in the arts. Thus, Borgdorff analyses the expression *practice as research* from a performative lens (which will be explained in this section when referring to his types of art research methods) to define the unique methodological approach in the arts that sets apart artistic research from the more scientific academic methods.

[105] Borgdorff's analysis stems from education scholar, Donald Schön's methods of *reflective practice,* developed in the book *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (1983).

Art practice qualifies as research if its purpose is to expand our knowledge and understanding by conducting an original investigation in and through art objects [an ontological question] and creative processes [an epistemological question]. Art research begins by addressing questions that are pertinent in the research context and in the art world. Researchers employ experimental and hermeneutic methods [a methodological question] that reveal and articulate the tacit knowledge that is situated and embodied in specific artworks and artistic processes. Research processes and outcomes are documented and disseminated in an appropriate manner to the research community and the wider public.[106]

Taking the above definition as a starting point, it is possible to conceive an interdisciplinary doctoral level of artistic research into the construction of the Contemporary Byzantine-Inspired Iconic Vision by considering the following three facets of *art practice as research*:

1) The ontological critique should focus on the invisible element embedded in the icon's materiality and its sensorial role of creating a hierotopic space. Borgdorff explains that "what is characteristic for artistic products, processes and experiences is that, in and through the materiality of the medium, something is presented which transcends materiality."[107] When the ontological research question is applied to an artistic study of the iconic vision*,* then it should particularly address the communion between the visible and the invisible in the icon (taking into consideration how the hierotopic space is formed through mimetic and performative experiences as well as reflecting on the influence of the historical, economical, cultural, and social environments).

2) The type of knowledge embodied in an iconic vision cannot be accessed by intellect only (as in the disciplines of theology and art history). As previously explained in the concept of orthopraxis, the pattern of actions involved in performing the image of God (to create an iconic vision)*,* cannot be pinpointed into conventional academic forms of knowledge. What makes the artistic research method different from other academic disciplines is its access to the performative knowledge involved in the painting of an icon—a practical, nonconceptual knowledge that, according to Borgdorff, can be (coherently) disseminated in the academia only through artistic research.

3) The methodology of researching and unveiling the practical knowledge in an iconic vision poses the question on the academic role of an image-maker's individuality to use artistic

[106] Henk Borgdorff, *The Debate on Research in the Arts*. (Kunsthøgskolen i Bergen, 2006), 9.
[107] Ibid., 13.

means to generate knowledge—a subjective privileged way of seeing the world that might induce the idolatry of the ego. Borgdorff emphasizes this point in stating that artistic research is "inextricably bound up with the creative personality" of the artist-researcher.[108] However, in contrast to other academic disciplines, Borgdorff argues that this personal participation in the artistic research allows to "incorporate a wide spectrum of methods, from both experimentation and participation in practice and the interpretation of that practice."[109] Yet, in order to classify the direct tangible involvement of the artist-researcher in the artistic research as scientifically valid, the personal claim to wealth and artistic fame should not be privileged over the academic activity at issue. Said differently, if the artist-researcher confines the artistic research to promoting his/her own oeuvre, then the artistic research outcome might not be regarded as truly qualified, objective research. This is also an important ethical requirement for a Byzantine iconographer in the sense that the final hand made icon painting should not be a reason to praise the iconographer's artistic skills.

1.3.3 Symbolic, realistic and symbolic-realistic methodologies

With regards to the types of art research methodologies, Borgdorff identifies two methods of assessment that are relevant for this thesis: 1) *research on the arts* or the "interpretative perspective" and *2) research in the arts* or the "performative perspective."[110]

Research on the arts focuses on the research object alone. That is, "the 'work of art': the composition, the image, the performance, the design, as well as for the dramatic structure, the scenario, the stage [hierotopic] setup, the material, the score."[111] Commonly used in the social science and humanities disciplines, this method takes a symbolic or reflective lens through a certain analytical distance between the subject (the researcher) and the object of research—a separation is needed to draw objective conclusions. In the case of my project, on the one hand,

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[108] Ibid., 16.

[109] Ibid., 18.

[110] Both methodologies were originally coined by Schön in the field of teacher and professional education as *reflection on action* and *reflection in action*. Borgdorff adds a third category in the field of research in the arts, *research for the arts* or the instrumental perspective, which informs the artist on the technical/scientific aspects of art materials and develops new tolls for their use in art practices. See Henk Borgdorff, *The Debate on Research in the Arts*. (Kunsthøgskolen i Bergen, 2006), 6.

[111] Borgdorff, *The Debate on Research in the Arts*, 8.

the object of inquiry will be the wood panel paintings, as contextualized in an installation, and my symbolic reflections on their hierotopic aspects as drawn from the creative process of constructing an iconic vision. Additionally, I will employ this method when interpreting other contemporary forms of iconic vision, as described by Marion, Isar, Jenkins, and others. On the other hand, the disadvantage of this symbolic method is that it does not have access to the invisible element that forms an iconic vision.

Research in the arts takes a performative approach to break the distance between the researcher and the object of study, theory, and practice in order to gain a more direct, realistic kind of knowledge. The art researcher's own physical existence and research practice become the very object of inquiry and the basis for the research outcome (as documented through various media). For this reason, I will put into practice the performative method to gain access to the embodied/tacit knowledge in the making of an icon. In visually documenting this experience, I can 1) reflect on how the icon's theological theory and performance inform each other and 2) retrospectively study how the process (the actual artistic reasoning and decisions in the performative act) and context (the space in which I perform) determines the final object/icon. Moreover, the documented material (video or photography) are important descriptive/technical research components in creating future hierotopic practices and installations.

The method of *research in the arts* parallels the monastic method of orthopraxis. Both methods make-visible "the construction of thinking" through an "activity of recollection" which encompasses "the essential roles of emotion, imagination, and cognition."[112] As previously explained, this monastic model of understanding any form of "craft 'knowledge' which is learned" (for making thoughts as images) draws attention to the actual experience of using tools and techniques.[113] The usefulness of this method is that it facilitates important conceptual scaffolding when applied to my practice of externalizing and sharing (through video documentation, wood panel painting, or sound) the Byzantine kind of knowledge that supports the image/meaning making process in the icon's performance. However, the concept of orthopraxis as meditation provides with a more complex (symbolic-realistic) view of the Byzantine icon practice of recalling and mimicking the memory of God (the transparent image). The symbolic-realistic view moves beyond reflective and artistic practices (interpretative,

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[112] Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*, 2.
[113] Ibid., 1.

aesthetic, or performative) to a type of knowledge of the unknown/invisible that eludes classifications and human intentionality.[114] In other words, the practical component of this thesis is not just a method for expanding knowledge and information through hermeneutic results shoehorned into the confines of academia, but also a faith-based search for reacquainting myself with the tradition of icon painting in a commoditized environment—a personal research experience that raises questions about the possibility of a Contemporary Byzantine-Inspired Iconic Vision.

1.3.4 Chapters overview

1.3.4.1 Recapitulation of Chapter 1

Chapter 1 covered the theological part of this thesis, which sets the very Byzantine fundamental principal: the invisibility of the image. This theological foundation provides the necessary knowledge to navigate through my discussion, in the subsequent chapters, on how I use Marion's solution to metaphysics in order to offer (based on my art practice) an alternative/non-iconoclastic mode of critiquing the image. The main concepts described in this chapter are: 1) Platonic mimesis versus Byzantine mimesis in light of the economy of Incarnation and hierotopy, 2) the icon's epistemological solution to Plato's ontological paradox of the image based on the symbolic-realistic mode of seeing and 3) the difference between performativity and the icon's performance. The Byzantine theology of the image will also help to see how my artistic research departs from Marion's dematerialized idea of the icon and how it connects to the spectacle in today's screen culture, Kantian aesthetics, and contemporary art.

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[114] Borgdorff refers to a similar unknown component in the artistic research that evades the more explicit knowledge expressed through customary academic research, however it is not clear how this "openness for the unknown" is determined by the intentional power of the thinking subject in artistic events (8). As we will see in Marion's phenomenological analysis of the icon in Chapter 2, the counter intentionality of the icon in relation to the human gaze has a fundamental implication for experiencing the presence of absence or the unexpected feeling of the unknown.

1.3.4.2 Chapter 2

To outline the possibility of a Contemporary Byzantine-Inspired Iconic Vision as an alternative to the iconoclastic/consumptive critique of the spectacle, Chapter 2 will first deal with Marion's approach to metaphysical iconoclasm. The chapter proceeds by conceptually defining the two modes of seeing, the Nietzschean (realistic) and Platonic (symbolic), out of Marion's phenomenological analysis of iconic and idolic appearances in his book, *The Crossing of the Visible*. I chose this study as it particularly focuses on the artwork—specifically, the iconic versus idolic painting—and the phenomenon of the image in relation to its iconoclastic implications in contemporary visual culture. As Marion's reflections on the phenomenology of the (in)visible in the arts are based on the critique of the abstract versus naturalistic works of art and of Plato, Nietzsche, and Husserl's metaphysical imposition of a first-principle, I shall also refer to selected artist works representative of each style and the teachings of the latter three. I would like to clarify from the start that this dissertation deals with Marion's concept of the icon (and Byzantine theology of the image) for the specific purpose of 1) understanding in Chapter 2 and 3 how a phenomenological perspective of the iconic vision responds to the contemporary iconoclastic critique on human's objectification in the commercialized visual culture and 2) developing in Chapter 4 a critical understanding of how the symbolic-realistic mode of seeing is constructed based on a (subjective) aesthetic judgment

Moreover, this chapter presents the problematic points in Marion's notion of the icon as a way beyond ontology by drawing attention to his tendency to vaporize materiality (both the icon and the viewer's body). This leads to the main argument of this dissertation that the Byzantine theology of the image can provide a non-metaphysical mode of thinking only if we understand the icon at a practical level. Iconoclastic/consumptive controversies are not just conceptual issues, but a mode of human experience and we need to start from the position of *where we stand* and from our embodied experience of images.[115]

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[115] Janice L. Deary, "*A Picture Held Us Captive": Investigations Towards An Iconoclastic Praxeology*, PhD diss., (University of St. Andrews, 2007), 6.

1.3.4.3 Chapter 3

After developing from Marion's reflections on icons the Nietzschean and Platonic modes of seeing that trigger metaphysical iconoclasm, Chapter 3 returns to the notion of the idolic spectacle from the perspective of contemporary iconoclastic gestures manifested in today's screen culture of mobile screens, mass media and advertisement industry. It provides an overview of how metaphysical iconoclasm drives today's status of the image and elaborates on the media theorist, Nanna Verhoeff' critique of mobile digital technology and media theorist, Eric Jenkins' (Byzantine) symbolic-realistic critique of the commoditized visual culture.

This chapter focuses on the concept of performativity in relation to hierotopy by comparing and contrasting Verhoeff' ideas of screenspace to the Byzantine icon to point out in the next chapter those iconic components (canons) that are relevant for the construction of a Contemporary Byzantine-Inspired Iconic Vision.

In contrast to Marion, Jenkins's Byzantine method of critiquing the spectacle (particularly the brand image of Apple products) takes into account the performative aspect of the icon, thus providing the ground for developing a hierotopic/canonized methodology for making a Contemporary Byzantine-Inspired Iconic Vision. More specifically, Jenkins's view of how symbolic-realism opens the visual and commodity to the experience of the invisible allows for an aesthetic reconceptualization of the epistemological and non-essentialist definition of the icon by the Byzantine iconophiles Patriarch Nicephorus and St. Theodore the Studite.

1.3.4.4 Chapter 4

This chapter explores my artistic method of combining Byzantine canons of painting an icon with a (subjective) aesthetic judgment of the spectacle that incorporates pop-culture elements. I examine where the Byzantine icon relates to an aesthetic experience (in its Kantian sense) and how Byzantine interpretations of contemporary artworks inform my practical work into the construction of an iconic/idolic vision. Here, I particularly consider John Lechte's idea of evocation and Nicoletta Isar's idea of *chōraic* movement and hierotopy to see how symbolic-realism extends into what is critiqued as the idolic aspect of the spectacle.

Moreover, based on my Byzantine reflective artistic practice, specifically in the video documentation, *Portrait of an Icon Maker* and the installation, *Performing the Icon* (Fig. 21 and 26) I offer 1) a canonized aesthetic visualization of the Byzantine icon's mediational possibilities between a signifier and signified and 2) a practical/technical estimate of how effective the symbolic-realistic structure of an iconic vision is in providing an artistic alternative to the metaphysical critique of the spectacle. Subsequently, these two research points bring a new Byzantine understanding on how to craft an image within the contemporary art context.

This chapter ends by reflecting on the practical level of this research in meeting the goal of this study, which is to validate and test a contemporary Byzantine version on the image and the arts that exposes them to notions of real-presence. The Byzantine basic rules outlined in my artistic research do not function as a visual experiment in measuring their iconic or metaphysical impact on viewers. Such an approach requires an observational study on the possible aesthetic effects on subjects that is beyond the scope of this artistic research. The task of my icon practice/hierotopic installation is to inform and reinforce through the orthopraxis method the two aforementioned methodologies employed in this thesis (*research on the arts* and *research in the arts*) for analyzing the issue of real-presence in iconoclastic/consumptive debates.

CHAPTER 2: METAPHYSICAL ICONOCLASM AND THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF ICONIC AND IDOLIC VISIONS

This chapter presents some of the phenomenological challenges of creating an iconic vision in the midst of today's metaphysical debates over the images' ability to depict notions of truth and reality. Jean-Luc Marion connects the metaphysical state of the image with the Platonic and Nietzschean opposing mimetic positions on the visible phenomena, which places the image between two spectacles (the visible and invisible).[116] I see that these two contrasting metaphysical phases of the image parallel the clash between the realistic and symbolic ways of apprehending the image during the Byzantine dispute, as discussed in Chapter 1. While Plato initiated metaphysical iconoclasm, which mistrusts the image as a mimetic representation of an immaterial original Form, Nietzsche freed the image from its Platonic status by reversing the relation of similitude between the visible and the invisible—that is, the image is not an imperfect symbolic imitation of an invisible reality, but becomes the real, visible itself (Fig. 1).
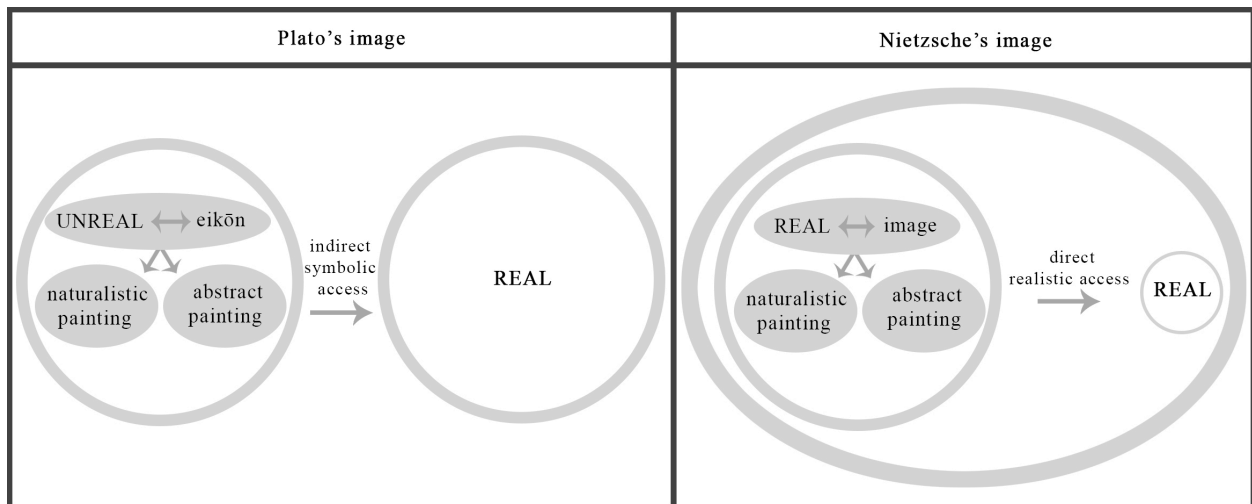
Figure 1: The image for Plato and Nietzsche

As previously noted, Marion believes that Nietzsche's anthropocentric interpretive lens of the image drives our relationship with the spectacle in the age of televisual screens—a world of idolic images turned, in fact, into Platonic idols, that is, pure simulations of reality. In

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[116] Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, 78-83. In today's iconoclastic/consumptive controversies and practices of seeing images, the Platonic and Nietzschean stages of the image construct two opposite spectacles that claim the real-presence of reality.

presenting how the Nietzschean thought defines the nature of our current consumerist environment, it helps to comprehend the symbolic-realistic structure of the Byzantine iconic vision and sets the ground for situating my Contemporary Byzantine-Inspired Iconic Vision (discussed in Chapter 4) within metaphysical visual criticism. For this reason, this chapter explores, through a Marionian lens, how the representational (figurative and naturalistic[117]) and non-representational (abstract) painting styles respond to the Nietzschean/realistic and Platonic/symbolic view of reality. As explained in Chapter 1, the Platonic/symbolic perspective refers to the critique of the image that concerns its mimetic resemblance to a signified meaning. From this symbolic perspective both the naturalistic and abstract painting styles are seen as illusory (idolic). Conversely, the Nietzschean/realistic perspective regards the image as dissociated from any Platonic ideals to the point where it acts as its own signifier, in the sense that the image is both the signified and signifier. From this realistic perspective, a naturalistic or abstract painting is seen as real as long as its meaning is constituted by the power of the intentional gaze. Nonetheless, in order to understand why Marion perceives that both types of artistic representations (figurative and abstract) have the tendency to emphasize the visible (thus inducing an idolic gaze), I elaborate first on his phenomenology of the human gaze to see an artwork through various degrees of linear perspective. For Marion, the perspectival capability of the human gaze and its ability to address an *intentional object* (a referent of consciousness) in spatial perspective becomes more than just a "historically situated pictorial theory."[118] The notion of perspective turns into the essential phenomenological mode of being in the world. Examples of artworks that speak to his view are also included, such as Kazimir Malevich's *Suprematist Composition: White on White* (1918) and Albrecht Dürer's *Lamentation for Christ* (c. 1500).

The major concern with the idolic (metaphysical) vision is that it limits human perception to a Nietzschean mimetic relationship with the physical world in which everything becomes an instrument for satisfying human desires—that is, the image mirrors one's desires, thus of himself/herself. From his phenomenological position, Marion reconsiders the Byzantine icon as a type of image that does not reflect, but counteracts human intentionality through an exchange of invisible gazes between the human gaze and the other. The phenomenon of otherness is given to

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[117] The idea of a naturalistic painting refers to the Nietzschean aesthetics of the *Übermensch*-artist to depict life as it is (realistically), beautiful and ugly.

[118] Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, 4.

intuition as gift through *phenomenological reduction,* beyond the horizons imposed by the *thinking I.*[119] So, the aim in this chapter is to present how Marion opens the painting's phenomenality to take up the role of the icon and save today's image from metaphysical iconoclasm. At the same time, however, it concludes with an account of where metaphysics still maintains a grip on Marion's version of iconic vision—in the sense that his thought surrounding the Byzantine icon as established in the Second Council of Nicaea in 787 CE does not sufficiently merge the symbolic and realistic modes of seeing in order to avoid claims to real-presence. Following these concluding remarks, I point to the importance 1) of discussing in Chapter 3 the hierotopic view of technological screen forms of iconic visions in the Nietzschean age of the spectacle and 2) of my own solitary Byzantine practice of making an iconic vision (in Chapter 4).

2.1 The phenomenology of the idolic vision

> If we entrust our eye to the eye of a painter, as though one were following in the footsteps of a guide, this would only be in order to see something other than what is visible to us….The painter, with each painting, adds yet another phenomenon to the indefinite flow of the visible. He completes the world because he does not imitate nature. He deepens a seam or fault line, in the night of the inapparent, in order to extract, lovingly or more often by force, with strokes and patches of color, blocks of the visible.[120]

In his book, *The Crossing of the Visible,* Marion chooses the phenomenology of painting (in contrast to all other forms of visual media) as the mode of rehabilitating the image from its subjection to the spectacle. Based on two key aesthetic approaches, the figurative and abstract styles of depicting a visual perspective, he provides an analytical reading of several artworks without necessarily defending the phenomenology of the iconic painting against the idolic painting. Both types of painting styles reveal certain intensities of invisibility in the visible, depending on various degrees of fusion between a realistic and symbolic vision of the material world. However, what differentiates an idolic painting (figurative or abstract) from an iconic painting is its lack of a counter gaze that envisages and saves the viewer from his/her own

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[119] Jean-Luc Marion, *The reason of the gift.* Trans. Stephen E. Lewis (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 2-3.

[120] Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, 24-25.

desires and objectification by the idolic gaze of the *thinking I*. The idol, instead, violates the viewer by inducing the desire to become an image of his/her own desires. But, before discussing in more depth Marion's iconic vision, I will further elaborate on the metaphysics of the idolic vision and its iconoclastic implications.

According to Marion's phenomenology of the idolic vision, on the one hand, an artwork is considered figurative/naturalistic when it maintains a spatial contiguity with a material referent (as objectively as possible) through the artist's rendition of shadows, colors, textures, etc.—the aim here is to generate a natural (realistic) vision to see the referent in a linear perspective as if is really present. On the other hand, an abstract artwork involves the symbolic framing (an expressive-aesthetic treatment) of a conceptual or material referent in a way that the viewer's reception is directed towards interpreting what the referent is intended to mean, rather than its 3D appearance in the physical space. For example, a painting might accept or reject the representation of a linear perspective depending on its emphasis on either the visibility of the referent (naturalistically illustrated such as in the work of the Renaissance painter Albrecht Dürer) or the invisibility of the referent (as exemplified by the abstraction of perspective in the work of the suprematist painter Kazimir Malevich). The inclusion or exclusion of the human figure in an artistic representation is also a deciding visual factor in the analysis of an idolic and iconic vision. This particular human element in the construction of both the idolic and iconic vision will be further discussed in the next section 2.2 The symbolic and realistic artistic visions.

In Marion's phenomenological thought, the meaning of the idol is not necessarily perceived in a pejorative or iconoclastic way as the Byzantines' thought from a theological stance. In his attempt to transcend the Platonic dualism between image and reality, Marion redefines the theological view of the idol as a "half-presence of the semidivine."[121] In the idol, the divine invisibility is revealed "by a lack of light" while in the icon it is revealed "by excess of light."[122] This means that the idol (in a material/naturalistic or conceptual/abstract[123] form) can reveal low intensities of divine phenomena, although it is not transparent enough to fully reveal

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[121] Jean-Luc Marion, *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*. Trans. Thomas A. Carlson, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), 29.

[122] Jean-Luc Marion, 'The Saturated Phenomenon,' *Phenomenology and the 'Theological Turn': The French Debate*. Trans. Bernard G. Prusak (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 196-7.

[123] I make a parallel between conceptual and abstract art in the sense that both forms do not make a claim for the real-presence of the referent in the material/sensible world. However, as opposed to abstract art, conceptual art might include, in an installation form, various representational elements, but the main concern remains the invisible (Platonic) concept or idea.

the world beyond materiality, as in the icon. Thus, the idol is veiled in shadows due to its opaqueness in presenting a counter iconic gaze that crosses the viewer's own.

The role of invisibility in an idolic representation demands a more extensive phenomenological explanation of intentionality in Marionian terms. In brief: without the conscious intervention of our gaze to optically define the physical space in which we walk and distinguish a multitude of tangible objects, the visual experience of the world would be a flat plane of color tones and fuzzy shapes. The perception of objects as three-dimensional forms is the result of the power of the gaze to construct physical shapes in perspective from random patches of colors. Particularly, we are able to inhabit the world as things among other things[124] due to the intention of our gaze to insert invisibility in what we see as visible. The invisible opens up certain distances of visible spaces according to the amount of invisibility added by the gaze from different points of view. In relation to a linear perspective, the meaning of invisibility could be related to the transparency of air that occupies the space between the intentional gaze and the intentional object. For instance, in its aim to constitute a tangible object in space, the intentional gaze perceives the air as invisible. In Marion's phenomenology, this relation between the invisible and visible is the foundation of our ordinary vision of reality. Applied to a painting, the intentionality of a gaze forms an ideal space in the flat surface of a canvas whereby the visible increases proportionally with the gaze's insertion of the invisible into the painted/drawn linear perspective. If in ordinary vision the invisible stimulates the visible to perceive a space in which we are able to perform physically, the invisible in a painting works only to create an ideal sense of three-dimensionality. However, Marion does not consider the unreal space produced in a painted perspective as deceptive when compared to the real/physical perspective of the ordinary vision, as both types of spaces are products of the intentionality of our gaze. In actuality, the unreal space in a painting constructs more visibility, thus it expands our perception of reality. This is explained by the fact that the perspectival gaze generates more than one level of visible surfaces when it infuses invisibility into the flatness of a canvas—that is, "the eye sets itself straight by refusing to give in to the appearance of the painting as a mere tabula rasa."[125] And since the concept of the idol is defined by the very power of the perspectival gaze (as I will

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[124] In Edmund Husserl's phenomenology, everything that is physically defined by our gaze is equivalent to an intentional object, which is the outcome of an intentional experience in the same manner "the perspectival spectacle results from the production of the visible by the invisible" (Marion 2004, 13).

[125] Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, 11.

elaborate in the next sections), Marion finds the reason to take a more optimistic light on it in relation to metaphysical iconoclasm.

In analyzing Dürer's figurative painting,[126] *Lamentation for Christ* (Fig. 2), Marion elaborates on the idolic mode of taking perspective,[127] which is the viewer's mode of creating a spectacle through an illusion of depth in a painted surface. Durer's painting (as any other painting that depicts a linear perspective) is idolic for the reason that the mental process of taking perspective solely depends on the aim of the viewers' intentionality. And when the viewer's perception is simply resumed to the *I*'s constitutive power of inserting a void/invisibility in the visible, it means that the painting "does not add anything to the real visible."[128] That is, the painting (as idol) does not bring new visibility in addition to what the intentional gaze can already perceive on its own in a linear perspective (real visibility).[129]

In the *Lamentation for Christ,* Dürer places the real on a stage to create an invisible space as follows: the composition of the painting is constructed in ten successive levels of perspective to portray a number of characters and landscapes. The repeated pyramidal structure of each visible layer emphasizes the invisible depth of the perspective. Conversely, one can notice that at the bottom of the panel, in the foreground, Dürer painted five small figures representing the individuals who commissioned the painting. The five personages are disproportionally small in relation to the rest of the figures, which contradicts the logic of the linear perspective. In noticing this inconsistency in Dürer's

Figure 2: *Lamentation for Christ* (c. 1500) by Albrecht Dürer

depiction of the visual space, Marion underlines that the "perspective clearly acts as a distinct element of the visible, in accordance with a marked boundary that demands it…."[130] The invisible aspect of the linear perspective depends only on the viewer's capacity to see it, thus

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[126] In his paintings and drawings of Biblical events, the German artist, Albrecht Dürer, who converted to Protestantism at around the year 1519, drew influence from the doctrines of Luther.

[127] Kimberly Jackson, "The resurrection of the image." *Theory, Culture & Society* 26. 5 (2009): 34. Marion parallels the process of taking perspective to the "aim of intentionality" in Husserlian phenomenology (Marion 2004a 12). The perspectival vision stems "from the production of the visible by the invisible" in a similar fashion as "the intentional object results from a production of experience by intentionality" (Marion 2004a, 13).

[128] Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible,* 3.

[129] As I will explain later, the icon is the type of painting that adds more invisibility to the *real visible* or to what the viewer's gaze can see in a perspective.

[130] Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible,* 9.

making the *Lamentation for Christ* an idol. The type of invisibility revealed in a linear perspective is just a "simple choreographing of the visible" to produce a spectacle.[131] For an image to become iconic, the human gaze needs to encounter a different gaze that urges him/her to see beyond the physical world. Dürer's *Lamentation for Christ* lacks that iconic gaze. We can observe that the figures in the painting focus towards the center where Jesus' dead body lies. Therefore, the viewer's gaze is directed towards the first level of the perspective painted by Dürer, which is a space in the material world.

On the contrary, the invisible in abstract art exists autonomously from the conscious intentional experience. As mentioned, for the viewer to produce a perspective in a painting—that is, to insert invisibility in the visible—his/her gaze needs to recognize or empirically observe an object and constitutes its form in invisibility. Marion explains that the intentional object does not exist in an abstract painting (as well as in any other forms of nonrepresentational painting). For example, the viewer cannot see in Kazimir Malevich's *Suprematist Composition: White on White* (Fig. 3) any recognizable material objects, thus his/her gaze is not able to find a place in its visibility to insert the invisible—all the viewer sees is a white square on a white background.

Due to its lack of signifiers, therefore, the invisible in abstract painting manifests independently from any act of consciousness. Malevich wished to represent pure reality, and in doing so, he liberated the image from the conscious intervention of the viewer and his/her subjective (impure) aesthetic needs. Consequently, the gazing aim is resumed to recognizing what is already present in the painting without deploying the invisible. In contrast to figurative painting, abstract painting does not allow the invisible to play between "the aim of the gaze and the visible but rather, contrary to

Figure 3: *Suprematist Composition: White on White* (1918) by Kazimir Malevich

the gazing aim, [the invisible manifests] in the visible itself—and is merged with it, inasmuch as the white square is merged with its white base."[132] But this does not mean that abstract art brings more invisibility to the *real visible* (as the icon does) as it still appears within the limits of the viewers' intentional gaze.

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[131] Ibid., 20.
[132] Ibid., 19.

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In summary then, Marion discusses the aesthetic experience in terms of two categories, the idolic and iconic—the iconic viewing being the alternative to the spectacle, which I explore as I progress with my discussion. While both types of experience aim at the divine invisibility, they differ in their phenomenality. A painting functions as an idolic phenomenon when it emphasizes unseen visibilities in order to attract the gaze. Thus, the idolic seeing rests on the power of the viewer's intentionality to add certain amounts of invisibility/meaning in a visual perspective/intentional object. The iconic seeing reverses the relationship between the gazing aim/human intentionality and what is presented to intuition.[133] Marion does not see the idol as opposed to the icon (in theological terms), but as two different intensities of revealing invisibility (in phenomenological terms). His phenomenology attempts to broaden the relationship between the visible and the invisible by examining the role of the idolic gazes (symbolic and realistic) to invest the artistic representation (figurative or abstract) with the presence of the invisible. This reveals the manner in which the viewer constructs an image in the visible with the invisible. Yet, the type of visibility offered through a perspectival or non-perspectival gaze is problematic for Marion, as it does not challenge the viewer's gaze beyond his/her own consciousness to the extent of feeling a sense of alterity (a phenomenological approach to attaining an essence).

In the next section, I elaborate on the two idolic visions (the Platonic and Nietzschean) that either trap or cut off the invisible in and from the material in relation to abstract and naturalistic modes of claiming real-presence. To illustrate the two phenomenological modes of constructing an idolic vision, I will refer to the conceptual artwork, *One and Three Chairs* (1965) by Joseph Kosuth, and the performative narrative-art project *Cremaster* (1994-2002) by Matthew Barney. These examples clarify that: 1) from a Platonic perspective, the image is valued as a resource for symbolic meaning, which leads the viewer (through a mental process) beyond the realistic vision of the world, and 2) from a Nietzschean perspective, the image does not point towards a supersensible world that enforces predefined symbolic values, but to a paradoxical realistic vision that also incorporates the symbolic vision within the perceptible world.

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[133] Robyn Horner explains that "[i]ntentionality is ordered towards intuition (*Anschauung*), which in Husserl's work is basically about seeing, bringing to light, knowing, understanding, or grasping meaning (2005, 28).

2.2 The symbolic and realistic artistic visions

The art critic and curator, Demetrio Paparoni explains that, nowadays, there is a return of narration and representation of the human figure in contemporary art, a growing interest that is becoming more evident in the way artists produce works that reference a Platonic type of invisibility (essence).[134] This brings an interesting art historical perspective on the development of the symbolic and realistic visions in relation to the perspectival and non-perspectival representational approaches to notions of reality. Particularly, the elimination of the human figure in modern art and the consequent renewed interest of contemporary artists in the traditional principles of representation and narration calls for the Platonic and Nietzschean doctrines of the image, which Marion argues, continue to shape today's idolic relation between the viewer and visible world.

Referring to the shift from the figurative painting that characterizes Christian iconography towards abstraction in modern art, Paparoni explains that classical painting rules,[135] such as linear perspective and chiaroscuro, came to be seen as restricting art in conceiving the truth. For modern artists (from the 1860s to the 1970s), the naturalistic logic of a painting underscores a Platonic reference between a signifier and signified that imposes a predefined narrative or an authoritative mode of seeing an essence. Consequently, the naturalistic depiction of the human body, which was particularly developed in Western Christian iconography (as opposed to the symbolic realistic character of Byzantine iconography) to reveal the invisible, was rejected by modern artists due to their ideological power of guiding viewers towards conventional moral values and predetermined modes of thinking. Ironically, the art historian, Maurice Tuchman notes that the distancing of modern art from the traditional figurative art was motivated by an interest in expressing ideas of invisibility that could not be communicated otherwise.[136] Moreover, Paparoni points that when notable artists[137] from the modern time have

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[134] Demetrio Paparoni, *Eretica: The Transcendent and the Profane in Contemporary Art*. (Milan, IT: Skira, 2007)*,* 21. Paparoni discusses contemporary artistic interpretations of classical religious themes by artists as Matthew Barney (*Cremaster* 1994-2002) and Jenny Saville (*Atonement Studies,* 2005-6), Marina Abramovic (*Pieta*, 2002), Damien Hirst (*Twelve Pills*, 2004-05), Marc Quinn (*Angel*, 2006), Andres Serrano (*Piss Light*, 1987), and Ron Mueck (*Angel*, 1997).

[135] In the next section, 2.2.1 The symbolic artistic vision, I explain that the naturalistic rules of representation originated from an incidental link between the signifier and signified activated by the ancient Greek notion of mimesis.

[136] Maurice Tuchman, et al. *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting, 1890-1985*. (New York: Abbeville Press, 1986), 17.

directly referenced traditional narratives, they provided a subjective pictorial and conceptual interpretation of collectively recognized symbolism that entirely excluded the theological function of the human body in art. This break from the Incarnational symbolism of a painting is an implication that avant-garde movements were concerned with generating new (Nietzschean) ways of visual expression that eliminated the human figure—a key motif in Byzantine iconography that reveals the absence of presence (through Incarnation).

By the end of this chapter, it will become apparent that the contemporary artistic move toward narration, perspectival representation, and the human body does not imply a complete separation from the non-Platonic values of the modernist/non-naturalistic artists. But rather, both naturalistic and abstract approaches can be closely associated to a Nietzschean vision in creating one's own aesthetic ideal, myth, and image. This shift to a re-evaluation of metaphysical values was also intensified in today's televisual culture by the increasing experience of reality in response to consumerist desires. Particularly, as analyzed in Chapter 3, the technological mode of seeing the world through mobile (touch) screens inclines the human gaze to lay emphasis on visible reality according to the viewer's intentionality alone. As Marion puts it, the image transformed into a means to see "the satisfaction of…[one's] desire, thus of himself [/herself]."[138] Every image turned into an idol for the viewer based on claims to reality as if really present (realistic seeing) or totally absent (symbolic seeing) in a frame for representation. It is a metaphysical/dualistic frame of thinking in our age of consumerism and technologically fashioned images that triggers ongoing bouts of iconoclastic controversies around the objectification and alienation of human identity. In his book, *The Idols of the Market,* the art historian Sven Lütticken further declares that the viewing attitude of judging/esteeming the truthfulness of images disseminated in the media spectacle thrived in the late capitalist society by taking a fundamentalist form.[139] In fact, commenting on the modern production of images and

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[137] Some of the modern artists enumerated by Paparoni who referenced religious iconography are Max Beckman (*The Descent from the Cross, 1917*), Marc Chagall (*White Crucifixions,* 1938), Paul Gauguin (*The Yellow Christ*, 1889), James Ensor (*Entry of Christ into Brussels*, 1888) Edward Munch (*Madonna With Bare Breast*, 1864) and Van Gogh who was profoundly influenced by the Christian faith (20).

[138] Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, 51.

[139] Sven Lütticken, *Idols of the Market: Modern Iconoclasm and the Fundamentalist Spectacle.* (Berlin; New York: Sternberg Press, 2009),11. Lutticken's notion of the fundamentalist spectacle refers to the radicalization of monotheistic attitudes by political and religious factions in Eastern and Western societies toward mass media images. Due to the events of the current economical, social, and military crisis, the realm of mass media became a global battlefield between far-right politicians, such as the Dutch populist Greet Wilders and terrorist organizations, as Islamist fanatics, who 'exploit' the ideological power of image to promote religious and secular values.

their capacity to incite iconoclasm, French sociologist and anthropologist, Bruno Latour states that the controversy over images reached a point "where being an iconoclast seems the highest virtue, the highest piety, in intellectual circles."[140]

Before analyzing the symbolic and realistic visions in two separate subsections by attempting to delineate them in terms of artistic production, I need to specify that the difference between the two modes of seeing cannot be made clear-cut when applied to abstract and naturalistic paintings. While from a phenomenological perspective there is a straightforward distinction according to the notion of perspective (as explained in the previous section, 2.1 The phenomenology of the idolic vision, abstract=realism and naturalism=symbolism), from a metaphysical perspective the differentiation is less obvious, particularly in relation to the realistic vision.

On one hand, the phenomenology of the idol reveals that according to the amount of invisibility added by the human gaze in a linear perspective, a painting shows an abstract or representational space. The abstract appearance (without a linear perspective) prompts the realistic vision of the visible world in its concrete, measurable materiality and the naturalistic depiction of objects (in a linear perspective) stimulates the symbolic vision as if seeing in an invisible space.

On the other hand, the metaphysical description of symbolic and realistic visions blurs the boundaries between abstraction and naturalism according to the Platonic vision, which I elaborate on in the next subsection 2.2.1 The symbolic artistic vision, and the Nietzschean stage of the image that I analyze in the subsequent subsection 2.2.2 The realistic artistic vision.

The Platonic view of the image can be seen both symbolically and realistically.[141] Firstly, the visible world acquires a symbolic/abstract meaning on the ground that reality is somewhere beyond the tangible (un-real) world. This is the primary Platonic interpretation that I use in the next section. Secondly, the visible world can take a realistic meaning, depending on its mimetic/naturalistic resemblance to the real (the invisible Forms). True art needs to reproduce reality as accurately as possible, without interpretations. While the Platonic sense of the real remains an invisible reality, the realistic vision acts a mode of seeing the real as if in a dream or clouded by illusory appearances. The implication is that an appearance-being acquires a degree

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[140] Bruno Latour, *Iconoclash*, (Karlsruhe, Germany, and Cambridge, MA: ZKM and MIT Press, 2002), 14.
[141] Willis H. Truitt, "Realism," *Journal of Aesthetics & Art Criticism* 37 (1978): 141.

of realism based on its symbolic power to direct the gaze (albeit in a mimetic, imperfect way) in seeing the invisible Forms.

With the Nietzschean stage of the image, the differentiation between the symbolic and realistic visions becomes even more paradoxical than the Platonic view. In his aim to discover reality, Nietzsche rejects the abstract Platonic referent to de-mythologize and re-evaluate the visible world. The image seems to function solely as a realistic form of visibility, freed from the power of pre-established/metaphysical models of truth. This Nietzschean attitude of re-valuating and creating new values affirms the postmodern thought on the disappearance of transcendence. However, as I analyze in the subsection, 2.3.2 Metaphysical iconoclasm: the problem with the death of the Death of God, Nietzsche turns out to impose, yet, another fundamental principle of reality founded on the idea of the *will to power*.[142] In particular, Marion suggests that he simply replaces Plato's essence with the *Übermensch*-artist's will in esteeming his/her own life. So, in the post-Nietzschean state of the image, symbolism and realism persist to manifest as two opposite lenses in seeing reality, but with the difference that now they operate within the limits of human consciousness and desire. And, since the metaphysical thought lingers in its dualistic structure, iconoclastic/consumptive debates continue to drive today's spectacle of image. In short, the Nietzschean realistic vision can be described as bringing the symbolic vision within the world of perceptible reality. The contemporary return to the traditional language of narration and performance art, as I will exemplify in subsection 2.2.2 The realistic artistic vision, can be justified by this paradoxical (postmodern) coexistence of the symbolic and realistic visions within the same Nietzschean condition of the image. Subsequently, the realistic vision, in terms of its phenomenological (mimetic) depiction of a perspective, can be challenging to pinpoint in terms of an artistic production. According to the viewer's *will to power*, the realistic vision applies to both the abstract and naturalistic/performative artworks.

To that end, while the concern of the next two subsections is restricted to the Platonic and Nietzschean aspects of the symbolic and realistic visions, the remaining sections of this chapter focus on Marion's critique of the post-Nietzschean metaphysical consequence of the image, which is reflected in the cult value of today's spectacle of entertainment imagery. Elaborating on the Byzantine theology of the icon from a phenomenological point of view, Marion proposes a

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[142] Friedrich Nietzsche, "Thus Spake Zarathustra," *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: The Viking Press, 1954), 227. For Nietzsche, the *will to power* stands for humans' natural instincts, desires and aspirations to live and achieve excellence.

postmodern theology without declaring the death of the Platonic referent. Following his phenomenology of the icon, I will propose, in Chapter 4, a Byzantine alternative to visual criticism for seeing how images acquire metaphysical values from the perspective of an image-maker. In this creative context, I suggest that it is neither the realistic nor symbolic visions that offer a non-iconoclastic solution to the contemporary crisis of images (as idols of real-presence). In their place, the performative consideration of the Byzantine technique of creating images allows to escape the metaphysical paradox between the two modes of vision. Specifically, through the performative interaction of my body (image-maker) with a canonically contextualized frame for representation, visual criticism attains a broader understanding of the image when critiquing how an artwork is limited to a metaphysical perspective.

I now return to the Platonic artistic, symbolic vision that triggered metaphysical iconoclasm to provide a framework in understanding Marion's discussion of the Nietzschean idolic art. Moreover, to exemplify the Platonic perspective on the image, I discuss Joseph Kosuth's *One and Three Chairs*.

2.2.1 The symbolic artistic vision

The metaphysical iconoclasm introduced by Plato's theory of Forms downgrades art as three times removed from the eternal Forms based on the example of three ways of seeing a bed.[143] God made the first ideal bed as part of nature, the second bed is the carpenter's imitation of the original one, and the third bed is the painter's imitation of the carpenter's bed. Comparing the Idea of the bed (the truly real and yet invisible bed) and its copy into tangible phenomena

Figure 4: *One and Three Chairs* (1965) by Joseph Kosuth

of three-dimensional objects to the painter's work, Plato claims that the painting of the bed presents an appearance of another appearance (the carpenter's imitation of the ideal bed). A painted image is then, twice disconnected from its referent. The real world distances from human perception based on the level of its imitation in visibility. The light of truth becomes detectable

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[143] Plato, "Republic, 596-599," *Complete Works*, 971-1224.

when the mimetic alteration of Forms by visible intermediaries is annihilated. This imitative aspect of the sensible representation, in correlation with the imperceptible original, defines the metaphysical iconoclasm, which denounces "the image to the rank of an idol."[144]

Plato's model of the three beds is reflected in the chair installation entitled *One and Three Chairs* (Fig. 4) by the conceptual artist, Joseph Kosuth. The work is composed of an actual chair in the manner that a carpenter would build. Displayed on the wall and placed on the left side of the chair, there is a photographic image of the same chair, which stands for the Platonic sense of a pictorial imitation of the physical world. On the right side of the wall, Kosuth positioned a dictionary definition of a chair, a description that invites the viewer to mentally picture the Idea of the chair. Each time the installation is moved to a new gallery space, the artist uses a different physical chair and photograph. The only element that remains unchanged is the textual meaning of the chair. Therefore, in *One and Three Chairs,* the artist presents three ways of seeing a chair to challenge the viewer in asking which one is real. In Plato's view, the real chair is the invisible one described by the text. While its means of presentation in the material world is constantly transforming, the concept of the chair remains invariable and experienced beyond sensory perception. Kosuth's "reverential awe of cognition" conforms to the Platonic cognitive theory in search for knowledge and truth.[145]

The ancient Greek aesthetic idea of mimesis,[146] a recent aesthetic invention during Plato's life,[147] is foundational in understanding how art came to function as a mimetic representation of reality. The contemporary philosopher, Bert Mosselmans, and professor of film studies, Ernest Mathijs, explain that in the beginning of human existence, all forms of artistic representation (cave paintings, dance, stone carvings, etc.) were considered to be reality itself (real-presence) and had the power to re-enact the original sacred event that gave birth to a

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[144] Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, 80.

[145] Thomas Mcevilley, "Ways of Seeing God," *100 Artists See God,* curated by John Baldessari And Meg Cranston (New York: Independent Curators International, 2004), 11.

[146] Ernest Mathijs and Bert Mosselmans, "*Mimesis* And The Representation Of Reality: A Historical World View," *Foundations Of Science* 5 (2000): 61–102. Mathijs and Mosselmans write that between the 5th and 6th century BC, Greek artists invented the aesthetic principles of beauty*,* dramatization*,* and mimesis (72). All these new artistic motives triggered a process of formalization in the representation of cultural reality, history, and traditions, which led to "the classical premises for literature, poetry, and theatre, for sculpture, painting, and architecture…" (Mathijs and Mosselmans 72). The content of art became subordinated to conventional aesthetic forms such as in the case of religious objects that were no longer seen in their original ritualistic function, but as decorative objects. For example, humans transformed (or distorted) sacrificial stones and knives into objects for aesthetic pleasure by embellishing them (Mathijs and Mosselmans 73).

[147] Ernst Hans Gombrich, *Art and Illusion; a Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*. (London: Paidon Press. 1972), 99.

cultural order.[148] The arts had a causal link with the physical existence in the way that it led the viewer into direct experiences with the world through rites and myths.[149] Consequently, with the introduction of mimesis by the Greek artists, the arts acquired an incidental connection with reality that detached the represented from its pictorial representation.[150] If the mimetic image is a copy of the original and not a part of it, then the relation between the image and reality is not causally determined. This process of separation between the depicted and depiction is defined as the aesthetic formalization of art that substitutes the presence of "truth (content)" with the "formal variation (form)."[151] When the Greeks realized the difference between a mimetic representation and the real-presence of a referent, "it led to an accelerated evolution towards the perfect depiction of humans."[152] Finally, in the incidental phase, the artistic image is considered independent from its referent, whereas in the causal stage it is perceived as consubstantial with the real (referent).

Plato's objection regarding the aesthetic rules of mimesis and beauty was that it allows illusion to dominate the link between image and reality. In other words, the distinction between a true (real) and a false image becomes difficult due to mimesis and aesthetic pleasure. This alteration or replacement of reality through formal representation was the reason for Plato to banish visual arts from his ideal city-state as described in *The Republic*.[153] His main concern with mimesis was that the aesthetic motive provides artists with means to depict fictitious forms, characters, and events as real. Hence, these naturalistic illustrations, generated by the artists' imagination, establish a blurring line between the image and its referent allowing appearance-being to conceal the real. As a result, art becomes "a pretension for marveling or contemplation,

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[148] Mathijs and Mosselmans, *Mimesis,* 73. The authors' arguments on the origin of the arts are based on the French philosopher René Girard's theory of the origin of culture.

[149] Ibid*.,* 82. To exemplify the casual relation between art and reality before the 5th century B.C., Mathijs and Mosselmans explain that the Egyptian Sphinx was considered God itself and not a mere image of it. Also, after Nefertite's death, her son ordered all her portraits to be destroyed as they were considered to be Nefertite herself (Mathijs and Mosselmans 84). For that reason, the portrayal of an individual in Egyptian art stands for an identical existence of the original.

[150] Mathijs and Mosselmans, *Mimesis,* 82.

[151] Ibid*,* 74.

[152] Gombrich, *Art and Illusion,* 125.

[153] Plato, "Republic 607e-b," *Complete Works*, 1102-1103. On the other hand, Aristotle's metaphysics appreciated the power of art to realistically depict the material world in order to trigger feelings of wonder. Mathijs and Mosselmans underline that "Aristotle…puts the motive of mimesis forward, to discuss representation's incidental link with reality. He also links it with the emotion of perception, through which some of the original truth is still passed on, albeit obfuscated" (98).

rather than a search for truth."[154] In that respect, therefore, Plato's view of art restricts artist to copying phenomena with imperfect tangible materials that are available to a craftsman. Since art cannot extract anything from the perfect Forms or add to them, a realistic representation is, actually, not realistic.[155] And based on this dilemma of the *eikōn*-appearance, the visible in the Platonic/symbolic vision qualifies only as an idolic spectacle. As Marion argues, this metaphysical reduction of the image to an intermediary, indirect, and mimetic means to invisibility, led to the complete dissociation of representation (signifier) from an original source (signified) in today's virtual reality of technologically fashioned images. Instead of indicating a referent (an invisible Form), the visible becomes its own origin in the new era of the *Übermensch*[156]—to which I turn to next. On the other hand, Michel Henry's phenomenological approach to abstract painting in the early 20th century reevaluated the Platonic symbolic artistic vision in order to revitalize the visible as a response to the Nietzschean realistic artistic vision. I will investigate this shift to invisible Forms in abstract art after discussing Nietzsche's influence on the idolic spectacle of the contemporary visual culture. To illustrate the Nietzschean realistic vision within the representational structure of a narrative, I will refer to Matthew Barney's *Cremaster* (1994), which I discuss next to expound on Marion's phenomenology of the idolic gaze.

2.2.2 The realistic artistic vision

The idolatrous aspect of image achieved its highest level with Nietzsche's announcement of the metaphysical God as dead—the aim of humanity to self-realize in the *will to power*. In his book, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Nietzsche refers to the *Übermensch* as connected to the human body that accounts for its own existence: "[b]ut the awakened and knowing say: body am I entirely, and nothing else; and soul is only a word for something about the body."[157] And so, the body is not an imitation of a real invisible Form, but on the contrary, it is the origin of life that the soul imitates. The soul is just an aspect of the human's corporeal existence. Nietzsche

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[154] Mathijs and Mosselmans, *Mimesis,* 86.

[155] Ibid.*,* 89.

[156] The *Übermensch* refers to the overman. The idea of God as dead is mentioned by Nietzsche in his works, *The Gay Science: With a prelude in German Rhymes an Appendix of Songs* and *Thus Spake Zarathustra.*

[157] Nietzsche, "Thus Spake Zarathustra," 146.

liberates the body from its inferior position as an image (copy) of something invisible in order to subject it to the human's own will to see, evaluate, and create new values. The body acquires its own reality as image according to the viewer's desires:

> Therefore, he calls himself "man," which means: the esteemer. To esteem is to create: hear this, you creators! Esteeming itself is of all esteemed things the most estimable treasure. Through esteeming alone is there value: and without esteeming, the nut of existence would be hollow. Hear this, you creators![158]

Through his/her *will to power*, the viewer creates and esteems his/her own spectacle. In spite of releasing the image from the rule of Platonic values, Marion argues that, in fact, Nietzsche "radicalizes the idolatrous interpretation of every image."[159] The visible does not imitate the invisible through an incidental link between the depiction and depicted, but instead it represents the evaluators' values. Thus, the image imitates its viewer and the visible turns into a spectacle saturated with human emotions and desires. From a Marionian phenomenological perspective, the viewer becomes the origin of the image as he/she manipulates the visible according to the intentional power of the gaze to constitute and fashion images. The viewer is trapped in a visible restricted by the aim of his/her own gaze to comply in self-idolatry. This self-idolization in a spectacle that merely mirrors the viewer's values characterizes the faith of contemporary visual culture.

Nietzsche's statement of the Death of God[160] implies the replacement of a supersensible world with the *Übermensch*. Since the abstract Platonic referent, that is believed to precede the material world, no longer produces values, Nietzsche presents the *Übermensch*-artist as the provider of a new set of values and ways of thinking. The godless artist is the source of his own values and creates "monologue art or art before witnesses" to question the "herd-instinct" of human nature in ascribing standard moral values for everyone in a community.[161] For Nietzsche, those who belong to a social, cultural, religious group will always be attracted to the power of metaphysical theories, myths, and ideas as metaphysics offers comfort and escapism from worldly frustrations. Contrarily, a *Übermensch*-artist is self-sufficient and does not need the audiences' admiration. This admiration parallels a feeling of appreciation that induces a sense of

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[158] Ibid., 171.
[159] Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, 81.
[160] Nietzsche, et al. *The gay science: With a prelude in German rhymes an appendix of songs*. (Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), xiii.
[161] Ibid., 231, 114-115.

consolation—a similar feeling is experienced when believing in the Platonic existence of an invisible, divine original. Through monological work, the artist constructs his self as he desires, and acts as the esteemer of his own life on earth. In a world of values defined by the inversion of Platonism, the Nietzschean-artist's self-evaluation parallels Marion's view of self-idolization in the sense that the creative act is similar to the way of producing an idolic spectacle in which the gaze does not have a single access beyond the visible material world. I discuss now contemporary artists Matthew Barney's *Cremaster Cycle* (Fig. 5) as representative of how monological art can turn into a naturalistic language of the visible world by inverting the Platonic mimesis.[162] His work can be associated with the typical *Übermensch*-artist in fabricating his own image as he constructs and evaluate his own body, self, and desires inside the sphere of visibility in a way that representation stops existing as a counterpart to invisibility.

In his artistic project, *Cremaster Cycle,* Barney redesigns (esteems) himself through an aesthetic determined by modern technology. Creating his own mythology and iconography, Barney performs a narrative through a sequence of passages that involves a test of will to self-transform and overcome his biological condition. He fabricates a fictitious religio-mythical universe to look for the original unity that was lost through gender division after the early stage of sexual development—a time of gender ambiguity and total equilibrium. This implies that the divine reality for Barney is not transcendent as in Christian iconography,[163] but exists within the

Figure 5: *Cremaster 4* (1994) by Matthew Barney

world before the biological split of the human body into males and females. If in *Cremaster Cycle*, the body becomes a mechanism whose components can be manipulated through biogenetics and prostatic effects to overcome death, in Christianity, the human body is a means

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[162] The *Cremaster Cycle* is an art project that Barney began in 1994 and took eight years to complete. It includes five films, sculptures, photographs, installations, and drawings. The meaning of the title stands for the cremaster muscle, which holds and protects the testicles. The conceptual foundation of the art project investigates the idea of creation based on the separation of the male and female sexual organs in their embryonic stage of development.

[163] The professor of philosophy, Jean Grondin writes that Christian theology is "couched in Platonic terminology; and…when the Church Fathers articulated the dogma of the trinity, they relied heavily on the neo-platonic vocabulary of emanation" (98). However, Christianity reconciles the visible and the invisible in the icon based on the crucifixion of Christ. As discussed in Chapter 1, the icon breaks the firm separation and Platonic mimetic relation between the material and immaterial worlds—a topic that is also elaborated when referring to Marion's phenomenology of the icon in the section 2.4 The phenomenology of the iconic vision.

to redemption and eternity[164] through death and resurrection. The effect of sin inherited from Adam and Eve is the death of the physical body, "therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned."[165] The significance of Christ's death on the cross is the salvation of humans from the deadly original sin. As written in the Holy Scripture, humans are freed from death only through the sacrificial death of the Son of God. Thinking that one can accomplish salvation and an everlasting life without God's help, one positions oneself in a state of self-sufficiency/self-idolatry and excessive pride that has the opposite effect of being redeemed.[166] In *Cremaster 4,* the artist relies on science and new media to transcend his original self into a supernatural being that may give him a sense of immortality.[167] Barney reconfigures himself as an animal-human like creature resembling a satyr from Greek mythology. One could also interpret the alteration of his body as an upcoming phase in the Darwinian adaptation of the human body to a new age of highly developed genetics and informatics.

While Barney's naturalistic/performative approach to esteeming his own image exhibits a Nietzschean realistic vision by establishing a new mythical/metaphysical origin within bounds of the natural world, Clement Greenberg's formalist interpretation of art exemplifies how abstractionism also functions in a realistic way by eliminating any metaphysical secrets/signifiers. Influencing modern-art criticism from the 1940s to the late 1960s, Greenberg, for example, praised the formal properties of Wassily Kandinsky, Barnett Newman, and Jackson Pollock's abstract paintings, but disregarded the presence of any invisible, social, or political meaning in artworks. Focusing exclusively on aesthetic issues, the formalists analyzed the

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[164] 1 John 3:2, New International Version, http://www.biblegateway.com, accessed February 2014.

[165] Romans 5:12, New American Standard Bible, http://www.biblegateway.com, accessed May 2014.

[166] Central to Christian faith is the symbolic meaning of the cross as the place of salvation and reconciliation with God: "For He Himself is our peace, who made both *groups into* one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, *which is* the Law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, *thus* establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity" (Ephesians 2:14-16).

[167] *Cremaster 4* was filmed on the Isle of Man, an island located between England and Ireland that is famous for hosting an early road-racing competition. Through visual and sound, the silent film narrates Barney's desire to transcend his biological condition into a sphere of pregenital oneness. As a tap-dancing satyr, Barney is ritualistically prepared by bisexual fairies for a sacred trip to reach a state of pure unity. We see a constant camera shift between the satyr and a motorcycle race. The gelatinous gonadal forms that exude from the rider's pockets symbolize the stage of sexual oneness before the differentiation of sexual organs into female and male. As stated on his official website, *Cremaster 4* is about combining "[m]yth and machine…to narrate a story of candidacy, which involves a trial of the will articulated by a series of passages and transformations" (www.cremaster.net/crem4.htm).

abstract form as indistinguishable from artistic media.[168] Any reference to existential questions or hidden meanings in artworks regarding the colors, shapes, and signs was seen irrelevant. The formalist critique aimed at eliminating any representational subject matter from art to exclude symbolic values from the aesthetic experience. Nevertheless, since the 1960s, Greenberg's materialistic values began to dissolve and more contemporary artists become interested in narratives, myths, and figurative content.[169]

In the next section, I turn to Marion's critique of Nietzsche's view of mimesis in relationship to visible phenomena—a mimesis built on the critique of Plato's mimesis and Christianity that emphasizes materiality as the privilege of the human intentionality.

2.3 The ongoing metaphysical iconoclasm: Nietzsche's real image of reality

2.3.1 Nietzsche and the image of the Christian God

> *The madman*. – Haven't you heard of that madman who in the bright morning lit a lantern and ran around the marketplace crying incessantly, 'I'm looking for God! I'm looking for God!' Since many of those who did not believe in God were standing around together just then, he caused great laughter. Has he been lost, then? Asked one. Did he lose his way like a child? asked another. Or is he hiding? Is he afraid of us? Has he gone to sea? Emigrated? –Thus they shouted and laughed, one interrupting the other. The madman

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[168] From a formalist view, Pollock's work is seen as paint left on a canvas by the free gestures of the artist's body. In this case, painting is not a space of mimetic representation, but a way to act and create events outside of socially constructed values. According to Greenberg, Abstract Expressionism unified the aesthetic experience with the materiality of the artwork. However, Tuchman explains that Pollock's painting method was embedded in Native American spiritual practices and Greenberg refused to see his ritualistic methods of art making (Tuchman 50).

[169] Paparoni, *Eretica*, 21. I would make here a Marxist comment in explaining the reason for the resurrection of the narrative in contemporary art. In view of today's commercialization of art, a commodity never appears to the consuming gaze from Greenberg's formalist perspective for the reason that capitalist ideology is built on role of the product to fulfill more than basic human needs. This deeper meaning of the commodity responds to an innate metaphysical character of the human being, whose consuming gaze constantly strives for something more than the actual product; something invisible which can elevate to human desire to a sublime experience. Therefore, the metaphysical aura of the capitalist system demands the traditional language of narration based on the relationship between a signifier and signified in order to address this transcendental need of the product. A commodity bereft of signifiers would make it difficult for the general public to seek the sublime, which builds the cult value of a commodity. For instance, contemporary artist Jeff Koons' sculpture, *Michael Jackson and Bubbles* is exemplary for the contemporary mode of adapting traditional representational strategies that incarnate transcendental signifiers. Comparing to Barney's realistic vision from the perspective of the artists, Koons addresses Nietzsche's approach to image from the perspective of the viewer. Particularly, *Michael Jackson and Bubbles* includes figurative forms to conform the sublime to new consumerist forms of devotion surrounding the cult status of the pop star, Michael Jackson. In Chapter 3, I will further explore how the Byzantine icon reveals the complex process between a signifier and signified in elevating the status of a product, such as the iPod to the level of a divine experience.

jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. 'Where is God? He cried; 'I'll tell you! *We have killed him* – you and I! We are all his murderers. But how did we do this? How were we able to drink up the sea?[170]

The concern of this section is restricted to how Marion interprets the famous declaration of the Death of God to explain the metaphysical process of creating new idols. It will elaborate on Nietzsche's genealogical project of liberating human consciousness from physiological inventions of Platonic gods, such as the Christian God, that confine the *will to power* into predefined moral values. In conclusion, this section points to the Nietzschean metaphysical framework that drives today's metaphysical iconoclasm—a topic that is carried on in the following section.

The *madman*, in the above quote, indicates a paradox regarding the image of God: while he desires to see God, he proclaims His inexistence (death). In his book titled *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche explains that the believer feels the presence of God in a temple when His sculpture (idol)[171] is veiled in darkness (in the semi-obscurity of the dim chambers of a temple), thus allowing the "inner eye" (imagination) to picture (invent) the representation of the sacred as a mysterious, incomprehensible visible form.[172] The idol can stay as an idol of God without necessarily being seen. Furthermore, when the idol of God is seen in full daylight as carved and painted stone or wood, it seizes to "*harbour and at the same time conceal the god*—to intimate his presence but not expose it to view."[173]

If seeing God is killing Him, then God's death is its concealment as visible image. From a Marionian interpretation, the *madman*'s announcement, *We are all his murderers*, represents the process in which the viewer turns the idol of God into his/her own idol—the human gaze desires to see and possess the idol for itself. As soon as the worshipper directly and clearly sees the idol of God, the gaze becomes enslaved by the idol's own dazzling appearance. Due to the fact that its own visibility competes with its very role of making the divine presence known, the

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[170] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science,* Trans. Josefine Nauckhoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 119.

[171] The *madman* attacks a Christian God that appears as an idol, thus Nietzsche's critique of Christianity remains within the limits of metaphysics. Another point made by Marion is that in its aim towards the divine, the idolic gaze stops to contemplate its own reflection as materialized desires.

[172] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human,* Trans. R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Penguin Book, 1996), 267.

[173] Ibid.

idol has a reduced capacity to reveal God's invisibility.[174] The idol's visibility is a low-quality image of God that induces skepticism in the viewer's mind. This doubt of the idol leads to the Death of God in a material representation and its transformation into the viewer's own idol. Upon seeing God, the *madman* discovers the very nature of the idol as illusory: "how if God were not the truth and it were precisely this which is proved? if he were the vanity, the lust for power, the impatience, the terror, the enraptured and fearful delusion of men?"[175] The *madman*'s suspicion is nothing but the revocation of God as "God."[176] The quotation marks in the word "God" stand for the rejection of God after being touched conceptually or physically or through other intermediary means. When God is a thing to be grasped, it turns into a concept, i.e. "God." Hence, Nietzsche refers to "God" as a lie promoted by priests and theologians as the truth of the scripture that opposes life.[177] In his discussion of Nietzsche's critique of Christianity, Marion points to the importance of referring to what the *madman* or Zarathustra saw as the "God," for the quotation marks frame the concept of God as idol. Otherwise, any analysis of the Nietzschean text would be irrelevant by ignoring the fact that the "'concept of God' can neither permit nor promise anything concerning God, since it is 'a divine privilege to be conceptually inconceivable (*unbegreiflich*)' (Daybreak, V, § 544)."[178]

In his genealogical project, Nietzsche correlates the idea of "God" with the psychological process of inventing the image of Christ as "God." As the mind of an epileptic, the Christian mind sees the physical and mental powers of a strong person as extra human or as given/gifted by a mysterious, supernatural entity. Since the natural condition of the human species is defined by suffering and misery, feelings of faith, bliss, and atonement are seen as out of the ordinary, thus it requires an atypical justification. The psychological invention of an external power becomes the foundational condition for the possibility of a sick person, for example, to feel peace and freedom from sin or for an artist to feel creative and inspired. In undergoing these "conditions of power," the human turns into an "effect" caused by a psychologically fabricated godly authority to account for any "feeling of power."[179] In sum, Nietzsche argues that "God" is

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[174] Marion, *The Idol and Distance*, 29.
[175] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak, Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality,* Trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 54.
[176] Marion, *The Idol and Distance*, 30.
[177] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power,* Trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 91.
[178] Marion, *The Idol and Distance*, 30-31.
[179] Nietzsche, *The Will to Power,* 31, 86.

a Platonic/made-up entity of a split personality disorder, whose image stems from humans' own weakness in recognizing that they are the sole source for experiencing extraordinary feelings. Questioning his integrity as a person through *ressentiment* and moral ideals, the Christian separates himself/herself "into a mean and weak fiction which he calls man, and another which he calls God (redeemer, savior)."[180] In this psychological process, consciousness is altered as an outcome of a hypothetical agent that conditions human will. Consequently, humans as an outcome do not perform willed acts. Faced with *conditions of power*, the Christian creates a product (idol) to picture the "free will"[181] (Christ), which he/she refuses for himself/herself as an external entity. In return, this externalization of the *will to power* in the image of Christ is encountered as grace and love—in Nietzsche's view, an idol of morality.

And so when Nietzsche describes "God" as a byproduct of a physiological process, we are left to interpret Christianity, and all other forms of religion founded on the repression of the *will to power,* that is simply a metaphysical method of creating idols. He argues, instead, for a virtuous mode of employing the instinct of making/inventing gods than human's "self-crucifixion and self-abuse, ways in which Europe excelled during the last millennia."[182] As opposed to the Christian production of "God" that only sterilizes life and the *will to power* based on dissociated personality states, Nietzschean aesthetics proposes a Dionysian lifestyle that favors the senses of the flesh, and that which unites every natural/physical and spiritual impulse. The Platonic/Christian psychological division between man and "God" is merged in one indivisible self and *will to power*.

Contrary to Christianity, the Dionysian meaning of suffering in life signifies the fair method of differentiating the "strong" from the "weak."[183] The *overman* (*der Übermensch)* is powerful and divine enough to embrace pain cheerfully as a healthy attitude to life—the perpetual fertility and recurrence of life generates suffering, devastation, and the will to total destruction. In a world of conflicting forces that relentlessly change life's nature, the *overman*'s will to evaluate and re-create himself remains a constant aspect of his being. If the Dionysian life

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[180] Ibid., 87. One's mind is contaminated by *ressentiment* when it forges a soul to leave in "dark corners, secret paths and back-doors, everything secretive appeals to him as being *his* world, *his* security, *his* comfort; he knows all about keeping quiet, not forgetting, waiting, temporarily humbling and abasing himself" (Nietzsche 2006, 21).

[181] Ibid.

[182] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, Trans. Walter Kaufmann, (New York: Vintage Book, 1969), 64.

[183] Nietzsche, *The Will to Power,* 87.

is affirmed through suffering by making pain just, the innocent Christ died on the cross to indict pain as unfair. For the Christian, life can only be loved if it is made accountable for God's suffering and redeemed. For Nietzsche, this is a salvation from life that is, in fact, a way out of life itself. The *Crucified* dispossessed the Christian of his/her own will to make him/her suffer "from life in whatever form he[/she] meets it."[184] The cross reveals a conflict and the means of dealing with it: Christ condemned humans to a weak position in facing suffering without drawing power from their own will and, in turn, situated them in need of salvation while suffering at the mercy of God's will. Conversely, the *overman* takes control over his own will to overcome the Christian paradox of suffering/salvation and affirm his own life and values.

Marion reinforces that the phrase Death of God is not an atheistic proclamation, for the existence of "God" is its non-existence. Nietzsche's declaration is thinkable only if God is surrounded by quotation marks imposed by the Christian ethos—an idol "of itself—of a self that marks and advances itself therein."[185] In this Nietzschean manner, Christ is the moral "God" that rests upon the Platonic principle that the divine must be the truth, the unquestioned will to truth.[186] However, Marion points that Nietzsche's critique of the Christian faith should not be limited to morality; the "genealogical inquiry" also reveals that "God" operates within the limits of onto-theology.[187] The "God" who died is a Platonic super-being (the absolute moral example) existing beyond materiality in the world of ideal Forms. Christ, the *free will* (the cause) that determines/effects human's will and life (the effect), finds its end as an idol in the metaphysical mirror of morality. This perennial human tendency to constrain the image of God under fundamental notions of reality, exposed in the full light of the day, is the source of metaphysical iconoclasm, which I investigate next in Marion's historical presentation of metaphysics.

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[184] Ibid., 543.

[185] Marion, *Idol and Distance*, 32.

[186] Here, the production of the idol lies on seeking the truth through morality. Nietzsche questioned the Christian moral necessity of the notion of truth. Thus, the Christian image of *free will* (which for Nietzsche is the moral idol that conditions human will) is overcome in the event of seeing the death of "God"; the gaze discovers the source of the moral impulse, the reason for its *ressentiment* and the possibility to become free of any theistic fulfillments.

[187] Marion, *Idol and Distance*, 31.

2.3.2 Metaphysical iconoclasm: the problem with the death of the Death of God

In light of Nietzsche's critique of Christianity, this section focuses on Marion's examination of the conceptual understanding of God, a metaphysical standpoint shaped by the power of the Supreme Subject. In his historiographical review of metaphysics, Marion refers to the idolatrous imposition of the human subject in restricting God according to the measures of thought. In fact, Nietzsche's text reveals the limitations of the metaphysical determination of God, a failure of metaphysics that guides Marion in seeking a decisive break between the image of Christ and the concept of Being. The announcement of the Death of God sets the ground for the Marionian interpretation of the death of metaphysics, which parallels the end of modernism and the primacy of the subject.

In his attempt to overcome metaphysics, Nietzsche produced his own idol based on the Dionysian aesthetics of the *will to power*. The following question exposes his idolatry: is there a contradiction regarding the notion of naturalism as reality at the core of Nietzsche's thought? The contemporary Eastern Orthodox theologian, David Bentley Hart denounces him of randomly choosing words like *life* and *nature* to question the Christian notion of truth based on a sudden outburst of "romantic enthusiasm," a "blind and idiotic…upward thrusting of an empty will."[188] The notion of being in the *overman*'s pagan vision of the natural world has a subtle hint of a metaphysical tone. Nietzsche's anti-metaphysical arguments are based on an ontological conflict between force and anti-force and his rhetoric of life and violence can only be consumed through an opposition of weak and strong elements that perpetually yield, resist, appropriate, and overpower each other. At this point, it is required to briefly outline Marion's historiographical account of metaphysics in order to understand why it has been the subject of criticism from both Nietzsche and Christian thought.

In the first chapter of his book *In Excess*, Marion provides an overview of metaphysics based on three moments. Firstly, he starts with Aristotle's interest in defining a "first philosophy"[189] of things or a first-principle (cause, being, reason, etc.).[190] The objective of metaphysics is to methodically analyze the fundamental nature of being—metaphysics attempts

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[188] David Bentley Hart, *The beauty of the infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans. 2004), 102.

[189] Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*. Trans. Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 4.

[190] Ibid., 17.

to explain abstract notions such as cause, effect, knowledge, being, substance, time, and reality. Aristotle's philosophy is concerned with the nature of being (*onta*) or the science of being as being that is labeled as ontology.[191] Moreover, the absolute knowledge of being relates to an abiding, superior, and immutable Being—a divine form of being that Nietzsche, in his vision of nature (of being), despised as a metaphysical idol. The concept of an unchanging substance/essence (*ousia*) defines the first moment of metaphysics and its limits.

Secondly, Marion turns to Thomas Aquinas who distinguishes three definitions of metaphysics derived from Aristotle:

> It is called divine science or theology inasmuch as it considers the…substances [that are completely immaterial in their being].[192] It is called metaphysics inasmuch as it considers being and the attributes, which naturally accompany being (for things which transcend the physical order are discovered by the process of analysis, as the more common are discovered after the less common).[193] And it is called first philosophy inasmuch as it considers the first causes of things. Therefore it is evident what the subject of this science is, and how it is related to the other sciences, and by what names it is designated.[194]

The Thomistic moment of metaphysics is the purely intellectualized mode of knowing *ousia*; it is the rational discipline that focuses on the nature of being and its causes. Marion takes a strong position in interpreting Aquinas's idea of God as *esse* (being)—the metaphysical thinking of the Christian God that will be violently questioned by Nietzsche. Regarding the

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[191] Robyn Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-logical Introduction*. (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Pub. Co. 2005), 18.

[192] In the prologue to his book, *Commentary on the Metaphysics,* Aquinas explains that theology is the divine science that considers the things that are intangible substances in the sense that they are completely removed from matter and movement. These *divine intangible things* (God and angels) are comprehended only through revelation. On the other hand, metaphysics is a *divine science* insofar as it studies the things (*intelligible objects*) that are independent from signate and sensible matter and movement, although they can be encountered therein. Thus, the proper subject matter of metaphysics is the study of these neutral *intelligible objects,* which are common to all beings (*ens commune*). Such common aspects are "being, substance, potency form, act, one and many" (Kerr). *Ens commune* differs from the *divine intangible things*, which are removed from matter not only at the abstract level of mathematical thinking (*ratio*), but also at the level of their being (*esse* or existence). The difference between *ens commune* (being as being in general) and divine being (totally immaterial substances) is that the latter does not depend on matter/movement for its being and for its possibility to be understood. In Thomism, essence and *esse* in *ens commune* are joined as two separate things while in the divine being they merge in a consubstantial union.

[193] In contrast to the knowledge acquired by means of senses, which only relates to the perception of particulars, metaphysics is the most intelligent science that grasps being as universals—the *ens commune* as the universal aspect of all things that includes the attributes "such as unity and plurality, potency and act" (Aquinas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics*, Prologue).

[194] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Trans. P. Rowan, (Chicago: 1961), Prologue. For Aquinas, metaphysics combines the study of *ousia*, ontology, and causes of beings.

problem whether Aquinas clearly understood God in terms of Being or not, Marion states in his preface to *God Without Being* that:

> He [Aquinas] does not chain God to Being because the divine *esse* immeasurably surpasses (and hardly maintains an *analogia* with) the *ens commune* of creatures, which are characterized by the real distinction between *esse* and their essence, whereas God, and He alone, absolutely merges essence with *esse*: but this *esse* is expressed only of God, not of the beings of metaphysics.[195]

Essence and *esse* (existence) are the two different elements that constitute created beings. All creatures are finite beings that exist as being given in matter (as caused) and determined by an essence, but this is not the case for God. The divine essence is one with its existence, thus Saint Thomas positions God beyond the limits of causality and metaphysics. The divine is not the object, but the principles of the objects studied within Thomistic metaphysics. God is the uncaused absolute existence that causes existence to be actuated by essence as substance.[196] Marion clarifies that although Aquinas spoke of God in terms of *esse*, he did not conceive God as the final destination of the scientific knowledge of the causes. Specifically, the Thomistic *esse* is divine in the sense that it should not be confused with *ens commune*. God exceeds human reason, ontic causality, and the Being studied in metaphysics and Marion aims to continue the Thomistic project to sketch a non-onto-theo-logic path to God as revealed knowledge under "the horizon of the gift itself."[197]

In the modern re-articulation of metaphysics, Aquinas' emphasis on the investigation of the first causes, as well as other related attempts to uncover the absolute nature of what *is* such as God, the immutable *ousia* (substance/essence), or *ens commune,* shift into the epistemological analysis of the pure knowledge. This third moment in Marion's historical account of metaphysics is methodically established by Immanuel Kant and René Descartes, who place at the center of attention, the absolute authority of the thinking individual over Being. The certainty of the being presupposed from ontic mixtures (different essences partaking in acts of existence to shape substances) does not define the priority of metaphysics, instead the truth is derived from things that can be first known as certain by the cogitable being. In this respect, the ontological function

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[195] Jean-Luc Marion, *God without being, Hors-Texte*. Trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), xxiv.

[196] As Aquinas explains in *On Being and Essence*, God is uncaused because his existence cannot be multiplied as it happens with the genus, species or particular things. The multiplication of things is made possible when essence adds a *difference* to existence to create such beings as humans. For example, the *rational* is added to the genus *animal* to create the human. Since God stands for perfection, his Being is not subjected to any additions.

[197] Marion, *God Without Being*, xxiv. The concept of gift is discussed in the last section of the paper.

of metaphysics is reaffirmed through the faculty of the mind to know being as being (*ens commune*) not as it is in itself, but as it becomes conceivable to an *ego cogito*. On the other hand, this epistemological framework, which allows the *noetic*[198] dominance over the etiological discourse, introduces a dichotomy in the ego that, in turn, marks the terminal stage of metaphysics. Following Marion's thought, the modern post-Cartesian metaphysics is premised on the foundational power of the *I* or ego, which takes two forms in the process of exercising "its noetic primacy": the transcendental and the empirical.[199] The *noetic primacy* of the thinking subject (the *empirical I*) depends on the foundational power of the *transcendental I* (being) to detach the ego from the world of objects that it studies (objects insofar as they are known by the *empirical I* in relation to time and space). Without this transcendental status, the ego will be confused with the objects from which it draws self-knowledge, thus losing its legitimacy as the new first-principle of metaphysics. The *empirical I* cannot know the *transcendental I* that gives its being and the power to know an object, for the reason that the latter (*transcendental I*) surpasses the ontic and ontological conditions that make an object possible to be known by the former (*empirical I*). Marion claims that if the *transcendental I* cannot be considered by the *empirical I* as its own object of study, the ego cannot be thought substantially (as Kant argued)[200]—substantially in the sense that what *I am* is an individual character that interacts with other individuals. Since what *I am* cannot be known as an object, my ego is resumed to know everything about the *I,* but what the *I* truly is (the *transcendental I*). In this way, the ego becomes a generalized non-substantial and non-ontic way of seeing the one who exercises the *noetic primacy* (the ego does not have an identity since it cannot be known in its being), therefore, allowing the *empirical I* to strip and decrease one's individual character to the level of an object—people are objectified and dehumanized through the lens of the empirical eye. The irresolvable internal contradiction lies in the fact of promoting *noetic primacy* (empirical knowledge of the first-principle) through an *empirical I* who cannot know "the one who plays the role of first" (the *transcendental I* or the being).[201] This lack of ontic identity and

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[198] Marion, *In Excess,* 10.
[199] Ibid., 11.
[200] Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, 20.
[201] Marion, *In Excess,* 12.

substantiality of the *I* defines the epistemological limits of post-Cartesian metaphysics and its failure to set the *ego cogito* as the foundation of knowledge and primacy for philosophy.[202]

Marion's analysis of metaphysics presents the problem of securing a primacy for philosophy based firstly on a first-principle that would provide an explanation, and secondly on effects (the created world as events, shapes, ontic, and ontological constructions, etc.) which would supply facts and evidence. Nietzsche critiqued this very problem of metaphysics in the most virulent way. He underlined the randomness of choosing a first-principle as the grounds for metaphysical inquiries: "'virtue', 'duty', 'goodness in itself,' goodness that has been stamped with the character of the impersonal and universally valid - these are fantasies and manifestations of decline, of the final exhaustion of life…"[203] Any of the metaphysical convictions advanced by means of *ousia*, cause or *noetic* are destructive of life since their unconditional validity is premised on the "need of the weak" to be respectful and feel dependent or faithful to an external concept of truth.[204] Instead of assuming a goal for himself from out of himself and be skeptical of all other (external) convictions, the *weak* is programmed to understand the world through false constructions of what might be the ultimate reality: "he instinctively holds a morality of self-abnegation in the greatest honour; everything urges him to adopt it, his shrewdness, experience, vanity."[205] The greatest freedom, for Nietzsche, comes from doubting the metaphysical constructions of the world, which are all based on the fear of the beyond, whilst asserting one's own will to choose a meaning for life. Marion associates the proclamation of the Death of God with the erosion of the metaphysical convictions (idols) concerning "God" within the philosophical framework that is defined as modernism.[206] Nietzsche provoked a crisis into the onto-theological structure of the metaphysical thought, which draws notions of truth, real, and morality from an ultimate Being that guarantees the ground for the *ens commune* of created beings. Consequently, postmodernity developed out of the chaos brought by the overman's own

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[202] After the third moment of metaphysics and its crisis of establishing a principle for reality, analytical philosophy placed, instead, an emphasis on the use of language, logic, and pragmatism. Also, within continental philosophy, phenomenology and hermeneutics took a path that analyses the relationship between consciousness and appearance.

[203] Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and other writings.* Trans. Judith Norman, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 9.

[204] Ibid., 54.

[205] Ibid.

[206] In *God Without Being*, Marion argues that modernism used reason to transform God into conceptual idols. The entire Western metaphysical tradition is "littered with idols" because of its limitation of seeing God and subjectivity in terms of Being (Marion 1991, xiii). Postmodernity begins when the metaphysical determination of God is called into question.

values into the idolatrous world of metaphysics.[207]

The "'death of God' implies the death of the 'death of God,'"[208] meaning that Nietzsche solely refers to the collapse of the metaphysical conceptualization of "God." Would this imply then that Nietzsche freed up a non-onto-theological space to save God from any metaphysical functions? In Marion's view, this particular question was not properly answered in postmodernity, for to speak of God outside onto-theology (as Nietzsche and Heidegger endeavored) does not immediately imply that the notion of Being is no longer applied/enforced to Him. Marion suspects that the "'death of God' offers only an inverted face of certain cults of "God": nothing has changed except the violent lighting that freezes the "God" in the stone of its image."[209] Nietzsche does not complete the non-metaphysical project of effacing the idolatrous mask of "God" since he offers only two options: either the *overman* replaces the metaphysical idol with his own idol as a copy of himself (he kills "God" by refusing to imitate him in order to imitate himself) or he makes the metaphysical idolatry to stand out by rejecting it (the idol "God" is affirmed and consecrated in its very negation). Thus, the Death of God announces the production of new (televisual) idols within the onto-theological constitution of metaphysics.

2.3.3 The (metaphysical) consequences of the spectacular image

This section is restricted to two opposing views of the Byzantine icon in the post-Nietzschean age of today's spectacle of metaphysical idols. It will focus on a parallel between Jean-Luc Marion and Jean Baudrillard's views of the Byzantine icon that reveals its paradoxical status within contemporary iconoclastic/consumptive debates. While Marion discovers a way out

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[207] Marion, *God Without Being*, xx-xxi.

[208] Ibid., xxi.

[209] Marion, *The Idol and Distance*, 35-6. The *madman* saw an idol of God that he transformed into an idol of himself. That is, the *overman* inverses the Platonic mimesis to create his own (idolic) image and values. On the same note, Hart agrees with Marion's questioning of the anti-metaphysical strictness of Nietzsche's analysis. Referring to the fact that the noble man has no soul (as Nietzsche states in *On the Genealogy of Morals*), Hart argues that it is not required for the *weak* ones to invent a moral interval between agency and action in order to disapprove of violent acts committed on them. Particularly, the necessity of the *weak* person (the slave) to blame and judge an imaginary soul or an eternal self instead of the actual presence of the *strong* person (the master) in order to cope with suffering. This is based on the argument that there is already a metonymic shift revealed in the actions performed by the noble person. For example, in literally imitating powerful animals and mythological characters, the ancient hunters and heroes took different unnatural personas to be able to manifest great strength. Then, one might deduce that the slave acknowledges the metaphorical nature of the master and contests the need for its aggressive behavior. As a result, the Christians (*weak* ones) took a path that "depends not upon the romance of strength and acquisition but upon the primordiality of love" (Hart 2004, 110).

of the spectacle's idolic mirror in the icon, Baudrillard refers to the icon as the best example of today's spectacle. This section is especially important in introducing my discussion, in the next section, of Marion's apophatic approach to the Byzantine icon for articulating a non-metaphysical experience of the divine image.

When Marion claims that the spectacle has reached a fully developed state of self-idolatry in the Western "audiovisual civilization," he takes an iconoclastic position by making responsible the advances in imaging technology for the "disaster of the image."[210] In providing a historical account of the spectacle from theater and cinema to televisual/digital screens, Marion states that the former screens of representation (theater and cinema) keep a sense of reality/essence. Although theater provides us with images originated from fiction, the actor's body, performing in front of his/her viewers, is always present. In the case of cinema, although the medium of film prevents the viewer in having a sensible experience with what is referenced in the screen, the actors can still be seen in reality such as in film festivals. Televisual image instead, disconnects the real from screen by eliminating the time and space of the events of reality. While cinematic or theatrical events imply that a viewer would sit and watch for a certain duration, the televisual screen has removed "this time; there is neither a first nor a last showing: without interruption the electron gun bombards the screen and there reconstitutes the images, day and night, around the clock…."[211] The homogenization of reality with fiction is also accentuated by the broadcasting of various events from different regions of the world that gives a distorted sense of space—a clutter of spaces that attains its own reality as a TV screen.

So, the technological screen (from TV to the Internet access via the digital touch screens) becomes the origin of the image and abolishes reality by transmitting 24 hours a day an illusory world of images that completely removes the viewer from his/her real space and time—a spectacle that deprives the audience of real experiences.[212] Emitted according to the expectation

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[210] Marion *The Crossing of the Visible*, 82-83. The iconoclastic aspect of Marion's critique of the spectacle, however, will become apparent by the end of this chapter when I pinpoint where the metaphysical thought continues to frame his dematerialized notion of the icon.

[211] Ibid., 48.

[212] Similar to Marion's discussion of the spectacle's simulation of reality that is formed on the dissociation of representation from its original source, the philosopher of religion, Mark C. Taylor states that the real has been concealed and virtualized through computerized/fashioned images: "The infinite play of signifiers dramatizes the death of the signified. This death is not a simple disappearance but a complex refiguring through which the signified returns as signifiers. Just as God dies and is reborn in the believer, so the real disappears only to reappear in fashioned images. With the recognition that the real is a fabrication, fashioning becomes all-consuming and reality is

of the spectator, the televisual image turns into the idol of its viewer. As a consequence, an intimate connection is established between the viewer and the screen in which the image is consumed by the gaze for its own pleasure. This is particularly evident in the latest development of mobile touch screens and their integration into almost every aspect of our personal, social, and cultural life (a topic that I elaborate on in the next chapter). With the interactive screen technologies, the spectacle of images became not only an instrument of satisfying consumptive urges but also a way of imagining/performing the material world as a mirror of the self.[213] Nowadays, we do not have to learn how to paint, draw, or operate complicated photo cameras and use professional image software to expand our ability to create imagery. This is because all screen devices (from laptops to iPads and iPhones) come now with a built in camera and easy photo editing techniques that make image-creation accessible with a swipe of a finger. The screen provides a subjective sense of power over images as it allows to visualize the inner and outer life by means of generating and managing digital files—that is, we can capture, save, name, and crop images of our creative, working, and social life and place them in different categories/folders and websites. This feeling of control recalls the Nietzschean proclamation of the cultural age of the *Übermensch* in which the aim of humanity is to self-realize in the *will to power*. The constitution of individuality through the *will to power* implies that the viewer becomes the evaluator of his/her own spectacle—the creator of images who accounts for his/her own existence. In the age of interactive technology, the image achieves its highest Nietzschean level of imitating/reflecting the viewer's thoughts and desires. Moreover, in this nexus between *image* and the *will to power*, the technological products play almost a sacred role in mediating individualized modes of perceiving reality, which eventually turn the visible into a commoditized spectacle saturated with the self to be seen and esteemed.

Moreover, the technological mode of seeing the world through screens directs our gaze to lay emphasis on visible reality similarly to the way the figures in Plato's allegory of the Cave perceived moving shadows on a wall. While chained to the back of a cave, the figures in Plato's cave saw mimetic representations of reality animated by a wooden fire that also mimicked the true light of the sun. Likewise, the light emanating from media screens mimics reality through

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rendered immaterial. The immateriality of the real is a function of its virtualization. In the world of fashion, all 'reality' is virtual reality" (Taylor 1997, 210– 211).

[213] The historical advancement of media screen technologies (from traditional forms of painting to the latest mobile screen devices) is beyond the scope of this study. My use of the word *screen* takes the general meaning of a site for representation or an interface for mediation as the main target of contemporary metaphysical iconoclasm.

digital reflections that trap today's viewers into a virtual world. This analogy reveals that technological images (like the shadows on the wall in the back of Plato's cave) become their own origin to be consumed as reality itself. However, in contrast to the Platonic viewers who are passive spectators of what they perceive as reality, the touch screen users are free to engage with the *shadows* and esteem them according to their own needs and desires. In a culture of screens, the viewer acts like the doubting Thomas, the apostle whose trust in vision is deeply connected to the sense of touch as the very act of knowing. And by touching the screen, the image transforms into a mimetic representation of the viewers' individuality that is directed towards the cult of the *Übermensch*—the *digital shadows* do not mimic the divine light of Forms, instead they are now reshaped and manipulated to reflect the viewer's gaze. For the Nietzschean viewers, the true/divine light does not seem to be situated outside the *cave*, somewhere in an invisible divine world, but located in the very personal experience of touching/performing one's own self-image. This assumption that the image operates within the limits of human consciousness and desires has triggered bouts of iconoclastic controversies around the objectification and alienation of human identity in our age of consumerism and technologically fashioned images.[214]

In opposition to Marion, Baudrillard considers that the (televisual) spectacle is not a mirror of desires, but the real itself. More precisely, Baudrillard thinks that the actual reality is the spectacle's form as simulacrum. The simulacrum acquires an illusory effect before the human gaze when its quality to simulate masks itself through various forms of representation. Baudrillard pushes the critique of the spectacle to such an extent that even questions the *overman*'s *will to power* to create his/her own images. He says that the spectacle cannot

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[214] While iconoclasm is not always violent, where it does occur the tendency to destroy images seems to erupt with as much vigor and impetuosity as those reverse trends inspiring the creation of art. The art historian Sven Lütticken claims that we are currently witnessing a "fundamentalist version of 'the society of the spectacle'" (Lütticken 2009, 22). In his *Idols of the Market,* Lütticken suggests that Christian, Muslim, and Enlightenment fundamentalists are increasingly imposing their monotheistic values over images projected through the mass media. One of the latest examples of this trend, proffered by Lütticken, is the protests of Presbyterian, Catholic, and Anglican Church leaders against a Christmas nativity scene installed in 2004 at the Waxwork Museum of London, England. Widely advertised throughout mass media, the sculpture features David and Victoria Beckham as the figures of Joseph and the Virgin Mary. The controversy this sculpture has aroused is not incomparable with the intense debates that surrounded the caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad published by the Danish newspaper, *Jyllands-Poster*, in 2005. The controversy engendered by both the wax sculpture and the caricatures of Muhammad seem to affirm a statement made by French sociologist and anthropologist Bruno Latour that, "since 11 September 2001 a state of emergency has been proclaimed on how we deal with images of all sorts, in religion, politics, science, art and criticism—and a frantic search for the roots of fanaticism has begun" (Latour and Weibel 2002, 37).

reference any Nietzschean values or deny Platonic realities for the simple reason that there are no such realities (outside or beyond the spectacle) to begin with. And to outline the role of simulation in the spectacle, Baudrillard poses the following questions in relation to the Byzantine icon:

> But what becomes of the divinity when it reveals itself in icons, when it is multiplied in simulacra? Does it remain the supreme power that is simply incarnated in images as a visible theology? Or does it volatilize itself in the simulacra that, alone, deploy their power and pomp of fascination—the visible machinery of icons substituted for the pure and intelligible Idea of God?[215]

In other words, the Byzantine icon does not reject, but hides the non-existence of God. It simulates its own existence as simulacrum, which misleads the viewers' gaze in locating the actual signified—that is, the simulation itself. As Baudrillard puts it, "we live in a world of simulation, a world where the highest function of the sign is to make reality disappear and to mask this disappearance at the same time."[216]

Without analyzing Baudrillard's idea of the spectacle in depth, it is important to reflect now on the above questions surrounding the Byzantine icon's method of simulation to provide a contrasting view and, therefore, a deeper understanding of Marion's theological use of the icon within metaphysical iconoclasm. Baudrillard notes that all methods of signification (including "the Byzantine icon or the postmodern simulacrum"[217]) not only act "as simulation but also [offer themselves] as a system of simulation….Which means that it [simulation] becomes its own reference. It becomes a kind of pure object or pure event, something like [a performative] act."[218] Simulation seems to liquidate the relationship between the signifier and signified through the illusion that there is such thing as a representation of reality. And in our postindustrial consumer society, all that is left is simulation and its play of signs and codes in various forms of simulacra.[219] For example, Baudrillard points to the dangerous, ideological power of the

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[215] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulations*, Trans. Sheila Faria Glaser, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 4.

[216] Jean Baudrillard "Simulation and Transaesthetics: Towards the Vanishing Point of Art," *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies* 5.2. 2008.

[217] Helena Bodin, "Into Golden Dusk"; Orthodox Icons as Objects of Late Modern and Postmodern Desire," Ingela Nilsson & Paul Stephenson (ed.), *Wanted: Byzantium. The Desire for a Lost Empire*. Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis: Studia Byzantina Upsaliensia 15 (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet 2014), 204.

[218] Judith Williamson, "An Interview with Jean Baudrillard," *The Block Reader in Visual Culture* ed. George Robertson, et al (London: Routledge, 1996), 306–313.

[219] Here, the meaning of symbol, sign, and code is used in the sense given by the semiotician-iconographer Leonid Ouspensky. According to Ouspensky, a sign indicates and depicts an outer referent, whereas a symbol enacts

Byzantine icon/simulacrum to induce metaphysical beliefs in simulating Platonic ideals, such as God. For this reason, he esteems the Byzantine iconoclasts for their courage in destroying the icons and realizing the vicious way in which simulacra's systems of signification (based of a signifier and signified relationship) mask the inexistence of God. This power to hide the unreal as if real is what Baudrillard calls "the murderous capacity of images."[220] The idea of God is conceived within the images of simulacra and not outside of them. Accordingly, the understanding that God can exist only as a simulacral image "is precisely what was feared by Iconoclasts, whose millennial quarrel is still with us today."[221]

> This is precisely because they predicted this omnipotence of simulacra, the faculty simulacra have of effacing God from the conscience of man, and the destructive, annihilating truth that they allow to appear—that deep down God never existed, that only the simulacrum ever existed, even that God himself was never anything but his own simulacrum-from this came their urge to destroy the images. If they could have believed that these images only obfuscated or masked the Platonic Idea of God, there would have been no reason to destroy them. One can live with the idea of distorted truth. But their metaphysical despair came from the idea that the image didn't conceal anything at all, and that these images were in essence not images, such as an original model would have made them, but perfect simulacra, forever radiant with their own fascination. Thus this death of the divine referential must be exorcised at all costs.[222]

This means that the aftermath of the Second Council of Nicaea stands for the moment when the dualism between the signifier and signified was resolved through simulation, which, subsequently, it impacts human's ability to distinguish between the simulacral images and ideology. Therefore, Baudrillard thinks that if the spectacle, which transcended into simulacra driven by simulation, is not a representation of the real, but the real itself, then the image should no longer be seen in a metaphysical manner or based on a relation between a copy and

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what it denotes allowing the signifier and signified to merge (1992a, 17). Following this differentiation, Steven Grimwood (2003) describes the simulacrum's code as opposed to the symbol since it does not point to anything beyond itself. While not entirely similar, the code resembles the sign in its signifying function. The difference between the sign and the code, is that the latter always points to another code within the space of the simulacrum. Also, the code parallels Marion's idol, which both function as Roland Barthes' concept of studium in a photographic image (Barthes 2000, 27). Like the code, the studium encompasses the culturally recognizable photographic elements that define what is represented such as location, gestures, and clothing. These coded elements that form the studium/simulacrum define specific meanings that constrict the viewing experience. The viewer is prevented from creating new meaning in the image. Additionally, Barthes' concept of punctum resembles the Byzantine icon in the way it directs the gaze beyond representation.

[220] Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulations*, 5.
[221] Ibid., 4.
[222] Ibid.

original.[223] The destruction of metaphysical myths, artificially built by a symbolic vision, is, in fact, tenable through a realistic mode of seeing the games of representation without signifieds. Baudrillard supports the fact that the critical eye should be able to see that reality turns (in the space of a simulacrum) into nothing more than its own simulation as image, dubbed as hyperreal.[224] It is a realistic eye that sees everything as part of a "gigantic simulacrum—not unreal, but a simulacrum, that is to say never exchanged for the real, but exchanged for itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference."[225]

At the core of both Baudrillard and Marion's critique of the spectacle lies the semiotic problem of mediating an image of reality between the viewer and a representation. To conclude, for Baudrillard, the Byzantine icon clarifies how simulation operates within all cultural systems of simulacra by hiding reality (the simulation itself). However, in following Marion's discussion (from the previous section) on the metaphysical imposition of the *transcendental I*, Baudrillard seems to take the term simulation as a first-principle in producing the simulacrum, whereby an origin is placed before all metaphysical binary oppositions. Like Nietzsche's *will to power*, the idea of simulation acts as a metaphysical driving force that unites representation and reality. Since the concept of simulation entails that reality (in a Platonic, symbolic way) dissolves in the space of simulacra, Baudrillard advocates a realistic mode of seeing that perceives the spectacle as no longer an illusion opposed to an ideal/real world, but as a concrete resemblance/simulation of reality—in the sense that the signifier (even if simulated) is one with the signified. This realistic mode of seeing the image as a literal embodiment of a concept is an effect of the new cultural age of the *Übermensch*.[226] Nietzsche's philosophy denies the existence of an invisible reality and reverses the metaphysical dogmatism in conforming the visual image to the truthfulness of an ideal origin. The simulacral image becomes its own origin and is grounded in what it specifically represents. Therefore, Baudrillard can be seen as a metaphysical iconoclast by condoning the proclamation of the Death of God only to position another fundamental source (simulation), prior to the image and reality, for generating "the visible and intelligible mediation

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[223] For instance, Baudrillard challenges the Situationists' understanding of the spectacle as objectifying human desires based on blocking the access to real individual and contextualized experiences. See Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1995), 12.

[224] Jean Baudrillard, "Simulacra and Simulations", *Selected Writings*, Ed. Mark Poster (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 166.

[225] Ibid., 6.

[226] Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, 81.

of the Real."[227] And, the notion of simulation traps symbolism and realism in a place for an idolic kind of desire with no point of contact beyond the limits of the perceiving world.

Opposed to Baudrillard's Nietzschean approach to the spectacle, Marion finds a solution to the closed circuit of signifiers without the signified in the icon's relationship between a type and prototype. For Marion, the Byzantine icon designates the (saturated) phenomenon that, as opposed to the spectacle's "visible freezing of life,"[228] presents "many meanings, or an infinity of meanings, each equally legitimate and rigorous, without managing either to unify them or to organize them."[229] He discovers in the Byzantine icon the necessary semiotic structure to make present a signified through its signifier and, thus, to move beyond the spectacle. Specifically, as I will analyze in the next section, Marion takes the Byzantine theology of the image in an apophatic sense based on Husserl's idea of *phenomenological reduction* to claim that even though the signified cannot be represented, it can be felt as through an experience of the other.[230] I will also develop this Marionian view in Chapter 4, at the practical/Incarnational level of the image.

2.4 The phenomenology of the iconic vision

"Every painting participates in a resurrection, every painting imitates Christ, by bringing the unseen to light." [231]

In this section, I analyze Marion's extreme form of iconolatry as an alternative to the symbolic and realistic modes of critiquing the objectification of consumers in the postmodern (idolic) visual culture. This section begins by analysing how his phenomenology of the icon has developed in response to abstract art. Nietzsche's impact on the objectification of phenomena and his idea of the *Übermensch*-artist contributed to a return in abstract art to Platonic values for rethinking an aesthetic of the invisible in a non-mimetic way. Nevertheless, Marion critiques the

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[227] Baudrillard, "Simulacra and Simulations," 1994, 5.
[228] Debord qtd. in Anselm Jappe, "Sic Transit Gloria Artis: 'the End of Art' for Theodor Adorno and Guy Debord." *Substance: A Review of Theory & Literary Criticism* 28.3 (1999): 115.
[229] Marion, *In Excess,* 112.
[230] Peter Joseph Fritz, "Black Holes and Revelations: Michel Henry and Jean-Luc Marion on the Aesthetics of the Invisible," *Modern Theology* 25, no. 3 (2009): 417.
[231] Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, 27.

limits of abstract art in revealing an ideal reality by rethinking the painting as a *saturated phenomenon* (Fig. 6). It will then discuss his apophatic theology of the icon and how it responds to the idolic nature of today's commercialized visual culture. Through the experience of the other, Marion reaches back to Christianity, specifically to the Byzantine theology of the image affirmed by the Second Council of Nicaea. He aims toward an iconic moment that refuses to be constituted by the human gaze and that forces the viewer beyond his/her own grasp/imagination. The icon is, as I will discuss in detail below, the type of image that solves the problem with the imposition of the *I* in metaphysics.

Finally, it concludes with metaphysical concerns regarding Marion's dis-consideration of the material aspect of an iconic vision. This performative quality of the icon will, then, be analyzed next in Chapter 3 and 4.
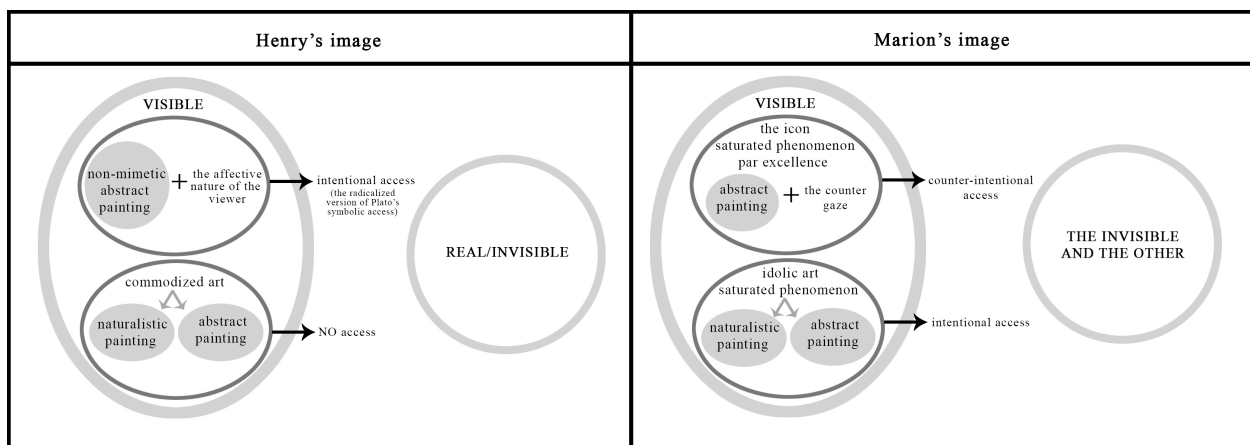
Figure 6: The image for Henry and Marion

2.4.1 Abstract painting as an aesthetic of the invisible

In view of how the icon came to be considered a solution to metaphysical iconoclasm and "the savior of images,"[232] this section contrasts and compares Marion and Henry's aesthetic opinion on how the invisible is revealed in the visibility of a painting. The limitation of the image to visibility in metaphysics—a reduction that corresponds to the importance placed by the

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[232] Fritz, "Black Holes and Revelations," 416.

modern society on "the external [commoditized] world and objectivity"[233]—has determined both Marion and Henry to reassess the power of painting in revealing the invisible. Much like Marion, Henry finds the two contrasting mimetic relationships of the image to either the world of Ideas or the *will to power* too constrictive for the experience of phenomena. More specifically, in Henry's view, these two metaphysical perspectives result in the humans' inability to see the inner force of their own life. Consequently, he advocates the power of abstract art, in particular Kandinsky's type of abstraction, to restore our sensible faculty to experience feelings that awaken subjective consciousness.

At this point, I turn to Henry's mission of rethinking the appearance of phenomena through pathos, to situate Marion's version of the iconic painting within a broader phenomenological approach to painting as a vehicle for invisibility.[234] Discussing the spiritual quest of Wassily Kandinsky's work, Henry argues that abstract art succeeds in freeing the image from the Platonic and Nietzschean logic of mimesis and all the problems associated with the contemporary crisis of image. Kandinsky's abstraction disrupts the aesthetic association of vision with the material world in order to elevate art to the role of revealing the essence of life, i.e. the pure world of Ideas.[235] Moving away from the objective/imitative forms of representational art, Kandinsky desired to visually express the invisible aspect of phenomena in a non-objective way that avoids the metaphysical mistrust of the image.

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[233] Michel Henry, *Seeing the Invisible: on Kandinsky*. Trans. Scott Davidson (New York: Continuum, 2009), ix.

[234] Ibid. In Henry's phenomenology the word pathos/*pathetique* stands for its Greek definition as a *powerful feeling*. The meaning of the powerful feeling correlates with the concept of affect described by Eris Shouse in the article, *Feeling, Emotion, Affect* (2005). *Affect* differs from feelings and emotions in the way that "feelings are *personal* and *biographical*, emotions are *social*, and affects are *prepersonal*" (Shouse 2). Affect cannot be controlled by consciousness. Because of its universal abstract quality as "unformed and unstructured," affect can be transmitted between bodies through various forms of artistic communication (Shouse 15). Moreover, Shouse explains that the meaning of a song becomes meaningless when one experiences affect through music. Likewise, Kandinsky aimed at emptying the content of the painting in order to transmit affect through vision. Thus, it is affect and not feelings or emotions that Kandinsky wanted to transmit through abstract art.

[235] In comparing Kandinsky's abstract painting to the work of other modern artists, Henry claims that the majority of avant-garde movements such as Impressionism, Cubism, and Constructivism were still strongly influenced by the classical Western representation of the human body (1). In fact, even the painting styles of Picasso and Matisse were not entirely liberated from the constrains of the visible/material world. Criticizing the work of Picasso and Matisse, Kandinsky defined two opposite approaches to abstraction that any artists interested in revealing the invisible reality should avoid. While Picasso deconstructed materiality by breaking it into separate "corporeal form[s]," Matisse overemphasized the decorative aspect of color (Tuchamn 35). The use of abstraction in these two extreme forms do not find the right balance between the form and content of a painting—an essential requirement in breaking from the representational art.

From Henry's phenomenological standpoint, the nature of our existence is defined by two modes of experiencing the world: internal and external.[236] On the one hand, our eye detects the external aspect of every phenomenon by receiving light from the visible world. On the other hand, the internal manifestation of a phenomenon appears to us through different intensities of pathos in our body. Although no phenomenological position can apprehend the materiality of the canvas and paint as invisible, Henry believed that the secret of the Kandinskyian abstract style in non-objectively revealing the invisible is to visibly capture the variations of pathos through colors and forms.

To shed light on the phenomenological split between the visible and invisible generated by Kandinsky's work, Henry refers to the internal and external sides of the human body. Our biological body manifests from an outside position in the sense that we are able to sensibly perceive it in the same manner as we relate to other tangible objects. This very ability to see and touch our own body as an external reality determined the naturalistic representation of the human body in Western art based on light and perspective—that is, image was reduced to an illustration of the visible. Conversely, we experience our body from an internal perspective when feelings of pain or pleasure become indistinguishable from our essential being—Henry defines this inside experience as being in a state of "pure subjectivity."[237] As a result of the dual mode of living, the human body becomes the model on which the nature of all phenomena is perceived internally and externally.[238]

Another important idea in Henry's phenomenology is that the external and internal do not manifest in a similar fashion. While the external reveals itself through visibility, the internal is directly experienced in an invisible way as affect. But the invisible interiority "is not the fold turned inward of a first Outside."[239] The concept of interiority does not stand for the interior space of a cardboard box, for example, that appears visibly once it is opened. The internal should not be understood as the opposite of the

Figure 7: *Last Judgment* (1912) by Wassily Kandinsky

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[236] Henry, *Seeing the Invisible,* 5.

[237] Ibid.

[238] Henry does not refer to the content of the phenomena as having an internal and external side, but to the manner in which we perceive any phenomena.

[239] Henry, *Seeing the Invisible,* 7.

external as this would imply that the invisible is part of the visible world. Therefore, the internal "is revealed to itself, in which life lives itself, in which the impression immediately imprints itself and in which feeling affects itself."[240] In sum, the internal is the inexplicable and immediate experience of life as pathos/affect.

A contradiction in Kandinsky's belief in abstract art is that the visible/material quality of the paint and canvas literally exhibits the invisible. Once the painting is considered outside of its mimetic tradition, the answer to Kandinsky's paradox lies in the phenomenological explanation of colors and forms as both visible and invisible. In *Last Judgment* (Fig. 7), for instance, the colors red, yellow, and blue are meant to physically reveal the invisible by affecting the viewer's sensibility through vibrations.[241] The selection of colors do not mimic the colors of the visible objects; on the contrary, the colors are apprehended from an invisible source and combined on the basis of their internal dynamic power to intensify pathos in the viewer's body. Another interpretation of Kandinsky's way of painting the invisible resides in the power of pictorial forms, generated from points and lines, to affectively communicate the sensation of life itself. The black lines in the *Last Judgment* are not the contours of physical objects, but traces of inner forces "pulsating within our body, that is, the bodily powers of moving, feeling and desire."[242] In other words, instead of representing the human body from an exterior point of view, Kandinsky directly expresses the affect experienced within his body when his hand presses the paintbrush on the flat surface of the canvas.

Henry explains that until the development of abstraction, painting (and image) was bound to the visible through "the light of the world."[243] The Greek model of the phenomenon, from which Plato's understanding of mimesis originated, reduced art to phenomena displayed in the natural light of our imperfect/material world. Kandinsky radically challenges the Platonic relation of art with the visible when claiming that the content of painting is not homogenous with material means of representation. The abstract artist's task is not to imitate the form of objects,

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[240] Ibid.
[241] According to Kandinsky's theory of color, the warmth of red has the energy to intensify inner vibrations in the viewer, the light effect of yellow aggressively moves outward by placing the spectator into an uncomfortable position, and the depth of blue allows for a sense of tranquility. White elevates the viewer's feelings and black dissolves them into the silence of death. (Henry 2009, 78).
[242] Henry, *Seeing the Invisible,* xi.
[243] Ibid., 8.

but to find the true content of painting as the original meaning of life, based on the following formula: "Interior = interiority = invisible = life = pathos = abstract."[244]

In the case of Marion's phenomenological analysis of the visible, abstract art reveals a minimum or no amount of invisibility, depending on its degree of staging a perspective. Since the invisible is either connected to the viewer's ability to *take perspective* (in the linear perspective of an idol) or to the iconic interaction of two intentional gazes (a counter-intuitive experience of the iconic gaze that I examine next), Kandinsky's non-figurative work appears to be an instance of *tabula rasa* that emphasizes the autonomy of the visible from the constitutive power of the viewer's gaze.[245] Like Malevich (as previously discussed), Kandinsky desired to release the color (content) from the limitations of form—in other words, from the limits imposed by the viewer's consciousness as in the viewing experience of a figurative painting. But this freedom of content from form indicates "the departure [of the visible] from the perspectival consciousness."[246] And the lack of form in a painting "confuses and distresses consciousness, to the point that it [the human gaze] is rendered incapable of exercising the invisible."[247] Marion's argument depends on the fact that the abstract image, as a "'nonobjective phenomenon,'"[248] lacks the visual elements that define an intentional object, which is essential for the manifestation of the invisible as a play between the gaze and the visible.

In the next section, I discuss how Marion's idea of invisibility in a painting (a *saturated phenomenon*) is further developed through a theological and phenomenological turn to the Byzantine dogmatic affirmation of the icon. Marion argues that the true painting is the form of visibility that "participates in a resurrection…[which] imitates Christ, by bringing the unseen [the invisible] to light."[249] Marion's critique of metaphysics is based on privileging the icon as a type of painting that has a different phenomenality than an abstract painting (an idolic "instance of total visibility" that blocks the insertion of invisibility in a linear perspective through the conscious intervention of the intentional gaze) or naturalistic painting (an idolic intentional object depicted in a linear perspective).[250]

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[244] Ibid.*,* 11.
[245] Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, 17.
[246] Ibid., 18.
[247] Ibid.
[248] Ibid., 19.
[249] Ibid., 27.
[250] Balazs M. Mezei, *Religion and Revelation after Auschwitz* (USA/UK: A& C Black, 2013), 288.

2.4.2 Marion's icon and metaphysical iconoclasm

> …can the conceptual thought of God (conceptual, or rational, and not intuitive or "mystical" in the vulgar sense) be developed outside of the doctrine of Being (in the metaphysical sense, or even in the nonmetaphysical sense)? Does God give himself to be known according to the horizon of Being or according to a more radical horizon?[251]

If the Death of God invalidates the idols of morality and metaphysics to give birth to another idolic mask for the divine, could the icon (the image of Christ that Nietzsche attacked most virulently) then be a solution to overcoming metaphysics? Marion's theological and phenomenological investigations regarding the notion of the icon provide a thorough critique of "God" and its identification with Being.[252] His main concern is not to define God as Being, but rather, to see if the notion of Being can be used to define God. Is Being the conceptual framework that equally determines both the divine and human existence? Can we perceive/contemplate and receive God only within the limits of Being? Advancing from Heidegger's question of being as a critique of metaphysics, Marion grounds his thought on questioning the onto-theo-logical determination of God. In *God Without Being*, he argues that God should not be reduced to anything that defines existence (including Heidegger's notion of Being). Everything that applies to predetermined beings is reversed in God's case, in a way that if "'God is love,' then God loves before being."[253] Humans need *to be* first in order to love. But God, instead, is not conditioned by existence—Being is just the medium through which He reveals Himself as love and gift to finite beings.[254] Although Marion can be positioned among other postmodern thinkers such as Derrida and Levinas, his theological emphasis on revelation through the contemplation of the icon, selfless-love, and charity does not belong to neither "pre-, nor to post-, nor to modernity, but rather, at once abandoned to and removed from historical destiny, it dominates any situation of thought."[255]

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[251] Marion, *God Without Being*, xxiv.

[252] I refer here to *Being* in the metaphysical sense as cause and in the Heideggerian sense as thought that *moves beyond* metaphysics.

[253] Marion, *God Without Being*, xx.

[254] The four theological concepts in Marion's work are the icon, gift, love, and *distance*. These motives are used in describing the way God reveals Himself as free from all forms of metaphysical determinations. *Love* represents the content of faith in Christ. The gift stands for the method and the body of God's revelation—"the Eucharist and the confession of faith" (Marion 1991, xxiv). The meaning of *distance* is difficult to comprehend and should not be perceived in spatial terms since it exceeds the limits of meaning based on concepts to the point of coinciding with God itself (see Marion 1991, 75).

[255] Marion, *God Without Being*, xxii.

As indicated in 1 Corinthians 1:18-31, the "wisdom of God" revealed in "the message of the cross" is foolishness to the "wisdom of the world."[256] The revelatory experience of God, given as love in the form of a gift by God Himself, flows over the limits of thought. For the fact that it operates beyond human control, the gift enters and overflows thought in a non-idolatrous way. Hence, any aesthetic mode of thinking of God outside revelation turns into an idol.

Marion's phenomenological approach to the theology of the icon is a mode of seeing God devoid of Being in a counter-intuitive aesthetic experience of a *saturated phenomenon* that soars beyond mental powers.[257] However, it is important to clarify here the nuances between a theological and phenomenological view regarding the icon and idol. While from a Byzantine theological view the difference between the icon and idol is well delineated at the epistemological level (Fig 8), in the latter view it is less pronounced or important. That is, the phenomenological quality of the icon and idol are both significant in understanding notions of invisibility.

A *saturated phenomenon* differs from all ordinary phenomena in the fact that it is a paradox and never determined/objectified by an *I*.[258] The occurrence of a *saturated phenomenon* implies an intuitive[259] perception of the
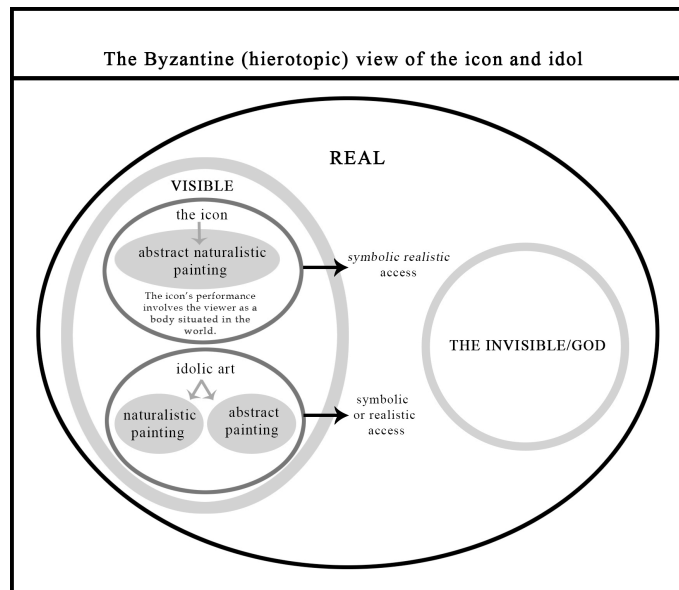
Figure 8: The idolic and iconic image for the Byzantines

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[256] New International Version, http://www.biblegateway.com, accessed February 20, 2014.

[257] *Saturated phenomena* are characterized by various degrees of excessiveness in relation to human intention (the conveyer of meaning) in a sense that parallels Kant's aesthetic experience of the sublime. However *saturated phenomena* differ from the sublime in the way they escape the limitations of concepts. Although Kant considers intuition a deficient way of reaching high-levels of abstract thinking, he referred to the sublime as the aesthetic experience that overwhelms human reason. But the sublime experience in the Kantian thought is taken as a test for the knowing subject to arrive at a state of absolute knowledge. The knower aims to contain the sublime/*saturated phenomena* within the rules of the concept. In opposition, Marion interprets the sublime/*saturated phenomena* experience as the saturation of thought by intuition similar to being blinded by an excess of knowledge that "demands an endless hermeneutics" (Horner 123).

[258] I refer here to ordinary phenomena in the non-aesthetic sense of experiencing the world.

[259] Intuition (the attainment of knowledge) is the making sense of human existence based on mental and physical activities (intentions). Intuition is guided by intentionality towards intentional objects (meanings). Husserl explains that intentionality is formed from noema and noesis (1969, 272). Noema is the cogitated object. Noesis is the process of consciousness that ascribes meaning.

phenomenon in its *givenness,[260]* which is a term that stresses the importance of the phenomenon's state of being given to consciousness without perceptual and or cognitive misconstructions. According to Marion, the icon encompasses and merges the characteristics of three types of *saturated phenomena*: "the historical event, the idol, and the flesh [*face*]."[261] It is essential to mention here that I specifically focus on Marion's icon as the only *saturated phenomenon* that completely (and not partially as it happens with the idol or other *saturated phenomena*) exceeds the aim of human intention. In presenting itself as the face of the other, the icon envisages the viewer with a revelatory light that overpowers and renders sightless the human vision. This is due to the *saturated phenomenon* of the divine light, which God gives as gift to the human mind and senses in the icon, turns into a deep "Invisible Darkness" that "exceeds the visible light."[262]

If in metaphysics, *sure knowledge* depends on a matter of proving that the appearance-beings (phenomena) are certain or justifiable for a belief, in the Marionian phenomenological mode of thinking it is a matter of "letting appearances appear in such a way that they accomplish their own apparition, so as to be received exactly as they give themselves."[263] The process in which the *saturated phenomena* present themselves to intuition involves a purification of consciousness from all theoretical and empirical assumptions. In his analysis of the *saturated phenomena*, Marion draws and redefines some fundamental Husserlian concepts such as subject-object dichotomy, intentionality, *phenomenological reduction* or *epochê,[264]* intuition, and

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[260] A term taken from Husserl, *givenness* (*gegebenheit)* refers to the "self-givenness (*Selbstgegebenheit*) of phenomena, and a consequent recognition that the subject is not first a constituting *I,* but a screen upon which phenomena become visible" (Horner 106). Marion analyses the idea of *givenness* in his book *Being Given* (2002b), from page 62 to 70.

[261] Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*. Trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002b), 234. In *Being Given*, from page 228 to 247, Marion analyses five types of *saturated phenomena*: the *event*, flesh, idol, icon, and *revelation*. An *event* is a *saturated phenomenon* for the reason that no matter how much information is collected regarding a specific historical event, it is impossible to assign a definite cause or meaning: in its aim to the phenomenon of the event, the concept is overwhelmed by it. The flesh (*face*) is the absolute type of phenomena that gives itself to the ego without analogy. As explained in section 2.1 The phenomenology of the idolic vision*,* the idol and icon reveal various levels of invisibility—the former returns the viewer's own gaze and reveals a minimum amount of divine invisibility and the latter reveals a radical form of invisibility. The *saturated phenomenon* of *revelation* integrates all the other four *saturated phenomena* (the *event*, flesh, idol, and icon). Nonetheless, Horner explains that Marion has initially thought of *revelation* as similar to the icon (106).

[262] Clarence Edwin Rolt, *Dionysius the Areopagite: On the Divine Names and the Mystical Theology*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2000), 93.

[263] Marion, *Being Given*, 7.

[264] Edmund Husserl, *Ideas; General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*. (London: Allen & Unwin. 1969), §32, 110.

presence. Although *phenomenology* as a philosophical movement is not the focus of this thesis, a brief examination of these concepts in Edmund Husserl's phenomenology will assist in our later discussion of how they arise in the phenomenological interpretation of the Byzantine icon.

Husserl's work is premised on a transcendental phenomenological approach to knowledge that describes the universal objects (essences) of consciousness:

> As over against this psychological "phenomenology" [empirical science], *pure or transcendental phenomenology will be established not as a science of facts, but as a science of essential Being* (as "*eidetic*" Science); a science which aims exclusively at establishing "knowledge of essences" (*Wesenserkenntnisse*) and *absolutely no "facts."* The corresponding Reduction which leads from the psychological phenomenon to the pure "essence", or, in respect of the judging thought, from factual ("empirical") to "essential" universality, is the *eidetic Reduction.*[265]

From Husserl's view, natural science is restricted to objects of observation that do not explain reality in its entirety. Specifically, empirical knowledge cannot account for the role of subjective consciousness in constituting/bestowing meaning (*meaning* as different from *facts*) to the world as it is exposed to human perception. Therefore, the *data of senses* should not be taken as the sole ground for objective knowledge, since consciousness preconditions the very possibility of ontic reality.[266] Science is able to provide a comprehensive meaning of the real world if the limitations of the rational/psychological viewpoints are compensated with a phenomenological examination of the pure *essential* elements of consciousness. This procedure of articulating ideal truths in the Husserlian *eidetic* science of consciousness is called *ideation.*[267] The *eidetic* universal meanings are formed from transcendental reflections that extract fundamental principles or essences from factual insights of individual acts of consciousness. These acts are "lived experiences [*erlebnis*] of consciousness" that determine (and unite) the subjective and objective sides of existence.[268] The *data of consciousness* is composed, then, of absolute/invariable phenomena that are transcendent to the psychological/tangible knowledge. As opposed to empirical realism that obtains "psychological facts" from the temporal/changing constitution of material objects and the events of everyday life, phenomenology provides

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[265] Ibid., 44.
[266] Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion,* 25.
[267] Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction*, 57.
[268] Rudolf Bernet, "Husserl," trans. Lilian Alweiss and Steven Kupfer, *A Companion to Continental Philosophy*, eds. Simon Critchley and William R. Schroeder, Blackwell Companions to Philosophy (Malden, MA; Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 199.

essential insights into the *what* of the world from "acts of consciousness" that are independent from the logic of reason.[269]

Husserl creates a void of meaning between consciousness and the physical world to position subjectivity in two different spheres: one in the transcendental space defined as *Being as Experience* and the second one in the realm of senses described as *Being as Thing*.[270] Transcendental subjectivity apprehends directly the *immanent objects* of consciousness in their totality without any *adumbrations* (*Abschattungen*)—that is, without the restrictions of human vision to apprehend material objects from different perspectival/spatial angles.[271] Psychological subjectivity apprehends the objects that are *transcendent* (or external) to consciousness— explicitly the objects of the natural world given to consciousness in *adumbrations*.[272]

In spite of this separation between consciousness and materiality, Husserl sees the spatial-temporal objects and consciousness coming together as a whole in the *lived experience*.[273] But this union in the experience of life is made possible only by the conscious *cogito* itself, thus Husserl's valorization of consciousness as transcendental. Life is lived when the *I* (*cogito*) intentionally addresses *cogitationes*.[274] The *cogito*'s intention continuously aims at the elements of life (*intentional objects* or appearances of phenomena that are made known to consciousness through *lived experiences*). In this way, Husserl defines the true knowledge of reality by considering both the objects that are *in* a consciousness (*immanent objects*) and the objects that stay *outside* that consciousness (*transcendent objects*). Through the force of *cogito*'s intentionality, the world appears as one Being (*Being as Experience* together with *Being as Thing*) in the *lived experience* of immanent and transcendent objects. Although Husserl believed that phenomenology overcomes metaphysical dualism in the unifying aspect of the *lived experience*, the professor of theology Robyn Horner points to the radicalization of the Cartesian

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[269] Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction*, 54, 113.

[270] Taylor Carman, "The Body in Husserl and Merleau-Ponty" *Philosophical Topics* 27. 2 (1999): 209.

[271] Ibid.

[272] The professor of philosophy, Taylor Carman clarifies that for Husserl "[a]n object is 'transcendent,'…if it is given to consciousness perspectively…so that only one side or aspect of the thing is immediately present to us at any one time. An object is immanent if it is given to consciousness all at once, transparently, so that no perspectival variation mediates our apprehension of it. Physical bodies and worldly states of affairs are transcendent objects, for Husserl, and so too are the abstract entities of mathematics and formal ontology" (209).

[273] Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion,* 25.

[274] Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction,* 119.

subjectivity, which underlines a Platonic dichotomy between the transcendental structure of subjectivity and spatial-temporal organization of objectivity.[275]

Returning to the concept of *eidetic Reduction,* Marion critiques the metaphysical aspect of Husserl's phenomenology due to the *cogito*'s role in constituting the self-appearance of phenomena. The Husserlian *phenomenological reduction* comprises a conceptual method of abstracting or *bracketing*[276] the facts produced "in terms of orderly theoretical thought on the basis of direct present (*aktueller*) experience."[277] While not denying the existence of Nature, consciousness disconnects itself from all empirical suppositions regarding the notion of Being in order to describe phenomena as they present themselves to intuition. According to Husserl, the tangible experience of the world does not play an equal role with the internal conscious experience of the *immanent objects* in constructing objective knowledge. In comparison to *immanent objects*, physical objects present themselves to intuition in an ambiguous/inferior way, that is, intuition perceives them fragmentarily from various (linear/spatial) perspectives. Husserl refers to the transitory presence of material objects as being translated or constituted by consciousness into *evidence.*[278] The concept of *evidence* defines the phenomena's level of coherence in its *givenness* to intuition—the amount of *evidence* determines the phenomena's adequacy in being constituted by consciousness. For example, the ideal type of intuition is when:

> [the] intentional object is given or made present "in person," which means that what is intentionally meant coincides either with the actual presence of the transcendent object, or the immanent presence of an object of insight (such as a mathematical truth).[279]

If phenomena arise with full *evidence* in intuition, then their presence is revealed in an absolute form, a mode of seeing beyond any sensible form of representation such as pictures, signs, names, letters, and recollections. The *evidence* for sensed objects is always deficient in defining the truth. Contrarily, the presence of the *immanent objects* within the transcendental consciousness is pure. Nevertheless, Husserl has been criticized for his concept of *evidence,* since the pure presence of *eidetic* images can also imply conceptual representations in a metaphysical sense. Marion is concerned that the Husserlian version of phenomenology treats the subject-object relationship in a Kantian fashion because the conceptual faculty is considered

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[275] Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion,* 25.
[276] Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction*, 110.
[277] Ibid., 52.
[278] Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion,* 29.
[279] Ibid., 28.

to prevail over phenomena. Particularly, he doubts that cognition can take a leading role over the intuition in describing notions of truth or pure essences. In Marionian phenomenology, the human mind is not adequate (*adaequatio*)[280] to the capacity of intuition to receive phenomena, instead it finds itself in a position of being flooded/saturated by the phenomena's *givenness*.

Marion rethinks the Husserlian theme of the phenomenological removal of material barriers to explain how *saturated phenomena* manifest themselves. When the phenomena present themselves outside of conceptual definitions, they appear as "saturating in…[their] givenness."[281] Rather than being constituted/comprehended, the *saturated phenomena* give themselves to consciousness not "from a deficiency in the giving intuition, but from…[their] *excess,* which neither concept nor signification nor intention can foresee, organize, or contain."[282] The *phenomenological reduction* takes a new apophatic sense in Marion's theology of the icon: the conceptual experience provides an acknowledgment of the phenomena's apparition and not a fixed formulation of their meaning according to *a priori* knowledge.[283] It is not a matter of producing definite significations—*constituting* does not mean defining in advance the possibilities for the phenomena to present themselves—but rather to use the reduction of false physiological attitudes for providing an unobstructed way for the appearance of the things into *lived experience.* The process of *reduction* is continuously at work and never finalized by means of imposing value judgments on the unknowable and invisible in the manner established by Kant, Husserl, and all other metaphysical projects.

When perceived as a process of "letting apparition show *it*self in its appearance according to its appearing," the *phenomenological reduction* shifts the emphasis from the constituting power of the knowing subject to the question of what presents itself to consciousness.[284] As I explain in Chapter 4, I take a similar type of Marionian *reduction* in relation to my psychological subjectivity in my own artistic practice by employing the Byzantine canons. This Marionian shift, from a matter of proving and controlling the existence of phenomena (as Nietzsche and Husserl do) to a matter of working toward removing the obstacles that prevent their

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[280] Marion, *Being Given*, 192.
[281] Brian Robinette, "A Gift To Theology? Jean-Luc Marion's 'Saturated Phenomenon' In Christological Perspective," *Heythrop Journal*. 48. 1, (2007): 91.
[282] Marion, *In Excess*, 159.
[283] Marion, *Being Given*, 9.
[284] Ibid., 8.

manifestation,[285] seems to shift (at this very moment in my discussion) phenomenology beyond metaphysics. The term *manifestation* means more than a Husserlian question of simply defining the visibility of phenomena—a situation in which their apparition is under the (idolic) control of the gazing cogito. For Marion, it implies an active exercise of the *phenomenological reduction* in the honor of phenomena's appearance: a "manifestation of the thing starting from itself and as itself, privilege of rendering *itself* manifest, of making *itself* visible, of showing *itself.*"[286]

Husserl's concept of presence is also redeveloped by Marion to emphasize the aesthetic power of *saturated phenomena* in exceeding the knower's intuition and capacity to make meaning (including metaphysical knowledge). The knowing subject always analyses a phenomenon through a restricted opening from one or more vantage points. This means that the presence of a phenomenon, in any possible form such as from an artistic representation to an *event* or tangible object, is perceived and described as a "ready-to-hand" or a "thingly" object for empiric analysis.[287] It is not that this materialistic understanding is unimportant in apprehending phenomena's appearance. Marion is simply affirming that the apprehension of phenomena's properties in their *thingness* cannot describe their aesthetic *lived experience.*[288] As an example, to see an object as a painting (idol), the viewer's intuition needs to be overflown by its aesthetic meaning. The aesthetic phenomenality of the painting can only be experienced (lived) as an unexpected inner event outside the limits of a subject's capacity to attain knowledge from the properties of tangible objects. This unexplainable/unforeseen aesthetic experience is exemplary to all forms of *saturated phenomena*. However, Marion refers here to Christ's *event* as the absolute/par excellence type of *saturated phenomenon* (the Icon):

> [W]hat characterizes the icon painted on wood does not come from the hand of a man but from the infinite depth that crosses it—or better, orients it following the intention of a gaze. The essential in the icon—the intention that envisages comes to it from elsewhere, or comes to it as that elsewhere whose invisible strangeness saturates the visibility of the face with meaning.[289]

The icon differs from the other types of *saturated phenomena* in the way it connects to the viewer's gaze to disrupt his/her expectations. It demands the viewer to decrease the icon's

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[285] Ibid.
[286] Ibid.
[287] Ibid., 46.
[288] Ibid.
[289] Marion, *God Without Being*, 21.

visibility to reveal the gaze of another (a holy viewer, say, the Virgin Mary) from an invisible source. The icon's visibility needs to withdraw before the believer's gaze to allow the invisible gaze of the iconistic face (the Byzantine image) to pass through the icon. The invisible, therefore, reveals itself in the intentionality of another gaze, which marks itself on the surface of the icon and envisages the viewer himself/herself. This act of eliminating the visible when seeing the icon stands for the effacement of Christ's visibility through His crucifixion.[290] Christ incarnated to become an image in order to undergo effacement in the presence of the divine will. The Cross does not merely represent the visible aspect of Christ's stigmata, as an idol does, but rather points to the invisibility that is revealed in the traces of violence left on Jesus' body. Moreover, the Cross is not an imitation of an original, a copy of a copy, or an artistic representation that reflects people's wishes. Instead of reproducing the bodily wounds of Christ and lay emphasis on His physical pain (as in a naturalistic/perspectival painting), the Cross refers to a visible trace, the type, or an opening in Christ's body to unveil the invisible, the prototype.[291] The invisible becomes present as absence through Jesus' wounds to meet the human gaze. Likewise, the empty space of the pupils designates an opening through which the invisible gazes (the divine gaze painted on the wood panel of the icon belonging to a saint or Christ and the viewer's gaze) can peer.[292] This interchange of invisible gazes through the visibility of the blank space in the pupils differentiates an icon from an idol:

> …the visible surface of the wood there gives to be seen, surrounded by a face, two eyes; these two painted eyes, however, permit themselves to be intentionally pierced (thus under a mode that is [unreal]/irreal) by the invisible weight of a gaze; in short, in these two dots of basically black paint, I discern not only the visible image of a gaze that is

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[290] Marion explains that the Cross became the model for Christian iconography in providing the theological foundation against idolatry and iconoclasm. In compliance with canon Actio 7 of the Second Council of Nicaea, the Cross is a type that reveals a prototype. The prototype is an incomprehensible invisible "nontype" (Marion 2004, 69). All artistic representations that follow the typical quality of the Cross in relation to Christ's stigmata are produced as material types. In opposition to only representing "something invisible," the Actio 7 established the theology of the icon as a type that gives "an approximation toward the prototype" (Marion 2004, 72). This means that the icon does not display a spectacle of abstract or realistic images to substitute the original body of Christ. An icon is not a copy of another icon either. The iconic image is a way of "carrying" through its visibility "the mark of violence on the innocence of the invisible" (Marion 2004, 70). The typical status of the Cross is fundamental to all icons. The type inspires the veneration "of that which has no type" without in fact showing/simulating it, hence avoiding the idolatrous gaze (Marion 2004, 69).

[291] Referring to the Actio 7 decreed by the Second Council of Nicaea, Marion explains that "the icon is given not to be seen but to be venerated, because it thus offers its prototype [the invisible] to be seen" (Marion 2004, 60).

[292] Referring to the dark space of the pupils, Marion states: "I can never see the eye of another human; or rather, even if I see his iris and so on, I cannot see his gaze, since it comes out of his pupils, which are empty spaces…the source of the invisible, at the center of the visible" (2004, 21).

(like all gazes) invisible but, provided that I acquiesce to it, this gaze in person, which, in fact, envisage me. Through the merely painted icon, I discover myself visible and seen by a gaze that, though present in the sensible, remains invisible, remains invisible to me.[293]

In phenomenological terms, the crucifixion of Christ made possible "the intentional transitivity of the visible and the invisible."[294] The intention of the holy gaze pierces through the painted eyes (of the saints or Christ) outside the material side of the icon to meet the aim of the viewer's gaze through the circular, dark opening which is located at the center of the visible eye. So, the painted black pupils are not a representation of the dark space from the inside of the biological human eye, but a mark of the unforeseeable phenomena. The aesthetic of the icon follows the formula: *the viewer sees God* and *God sees the viewer*. The transitive quality of the verb *sees* is guaranteed by the economical relation uttered by Christ himself: "He who has seen Me has seen the Father."[295]

In icons, the human figure is the most important visual element in seeing/feeling the presence of divine invisibility—hence, taking part in the Byzantine economy. The invisible in the icon differs from the invisible employed in a linear perspective, or the sheer visibility of an abstract painting, in its manifestation of the otherness as an opposing intentionality. Also, the visual features of the icon stand solely for the inimitability of the otherness. The experience of otherness is key in preventing the viewer from seeing his/her own desires reflected in the visible and, instead, exploring a sense of identity beyond his/her own intentionality. More specifically, in opposition to an idolic image (a mirror) that only reflects back one's own image, the icon directs "the gaze to surpass itself by never freezing on a visible, since the visible only presents itself here in view of the invisible."[296] For example, Marion compares the icon to the idolic aspect of Albrecht Dürer's painting entitled *Self-Portrait* (Fig. 9) by saying that:

Figure 9: *Self-Portrait* (1500) by Albrecht Dürer

> "the icon exchanges two invisible gazes, that of the one in prayer and that of the benevolent one; here [in Dürer's self-portrait], a gaze attempts to play both roles; the

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[293] Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, 83.
[294] Ibid., 84.
[295] John 14:9.
[296] Marion, *God Without Being*, 18.

gaze of the painter does not exchange itself with any other invisible but deposits itself in visibility to become its own spectacle."[297]

Dürer's self-portrait appears to be an idol due to the artists' intention to mirror his desires to see himself (as a Christ like figure) at the center of the viewer's attention. As the theologian Brian Robinette states: "[the v]icious circularity characterizes the gaze upon the Idol, be it a physical object or a concept. The seer can never ultimately escape the fascination of its own productions, since what is seen is its desire reified."[298] Here, however, Marion does not explain how the viewer's intention might be idolic in relation to the visible aspect of the painting. It might be true that Dürer's intention was to paint his eyes in such a way to not return the gaze in the crossing of the gazes, but his argument requires a clearer understanding of the visual techniques of painting an iconic gaze. For instance, the Byzantine mode of painting icons portrays the human face based on a mandatory set of canons that differ from Dürer's naturalistic style. In *The Crossing of the Visible*, Marion pays little or no attention to these technical canons, which are fundamental to the visual construction of the icon. One of the arguments in this thesis is that the critique of the idol and icon requires a practical understanding of the Byzantine techniques of painting an iconic gaze, which I provide reflectively in the final chapter and practically through the visual documentation of this thesis. Specifically, I pick up on Marion's reading of the iconic painted gaze, assimilating its important phenomenological elements into my own contemporary Byzantine-inspired practice of contemplating and making an iconic vision. My attempt is to complement Marion's analysis by pointing to the (practical) logic of the Byzantine economy: the invisibility as the face of the other is universalized on the account that the image of Christ is the image of every human. As explained in Chapter 1, the face of Christ is, in fact, the face of the viewer's own image. For this reason, the Byzantine depiction of Christ is painted in a symbolic-realistic manner. The wood panel painting included in *Performing the Icon* (Fig. 10), illustrates the Byzantine visual technique by portraying the face of Christ somewhere between an abstract and a naturalistic representation without (realistically as in Dürer's

Figure 10: Still image from the video documentation, *Performing the Icon*

[297] Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, 23.
[298] Robinette, "A Gift To Theology?" 88.

self-portrait) capturing the particular human features of Christ's appearance on earth. As I discuss in Chapter 4, this symbolic-realistic mode of painting follows an aesthetic formula that is applied to every human figure (saints, angels, etc.) within Byzantine iconography. The point is to visually depict His face in such a way to project His image into the believers' image. Christ's face is generalized through the concept of the other and the felling of otherness is not an image observed from a referential distance but, in fact, the very common image between humanity and the divine.

Marion explains that the *saturated phenomenon* of the face cannot be objectified/constituted in terms of concepts and senses as if perceived from an outside viewpoint.[299] Like the flesh*,* the face has the same immediate connection with the self beyond phenomenality: "in the same way that the…[flesh] only feels in feeling itself feeling, the…[face] only gives itself to be seen in seeing itself."[300] Due to the impossibility to see and feel the face in the same manner human intuition receives phenomena, the sense of otherness cannot be defined through any form of representation (including the notion of Being).[301] This very impossibility to constitute the face of the other is exemplified by Marion with the pupils or the dark void of all human eyes: the only part of the human body that offers nothing to be constituted by intentionality. However, in response to his designation of the human eyes as the central point of attention in the icon, this thesis argues that the Byzantines found a more complex (hierotopic) way to avoid the objectification of the other in the symbolic-realistic painting technique of constructing of an iconic vision, which I employ in my own artistic practice. Moreover, the main attention should not be on the human eyes only as the gate to eternity, but also on the entire physical environment in which the veneration of the icon takes place—I will return to this argument when discussing the practical component of this thesis.

Marion's description of the icon as the face of the other is connected with the Christian belief that humanity will face God in eternity. The Christ *event* is the *saturated phenomenon* in which the Father comes into phenomenality as the iconic face of Christ. What makes the image of Christ an icon is its power to call the viewer's gaze generating a sense of faith in his/her own eternity. And like the black pupils of every human being, eternity cannot be conceptualized or reduced to a finite meaning of a subjective constitution. The Christic gaze that comes from the

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[299] Marion, *In Excess,* 113.
[300] Ibid.
[301] Ibid., 114.

black pupils painted on icon-panels, summons or counters the viewer's gaze by exceeding the visibility subjected to the estimation of human intentionality. The viewer finds himself/herself envisaged and constituted by an opposing iconistic intentionality. But this divine counter-look appears only when the viewer submits himself/herself through contemplation to the ethical implications in his/her constitution by the face of otherness: *"that* I *must not kill,"*[302] that is not to objectify the other. Emmanuel Levinas refers to the objectification of the face of the other "under a generic category, such as humanity, ethnicity, gender or nationality" as a "violent act."[303] Also, the will to self-constitute (as Nietzsche desired) and to constitute the other is essentially a violent act for it dehumanizes the individual to the status of an object—a reduction of the other that manufactures idols.

Since the meaning of the face of the other exceeds human comprehension, one might question if the iconic gaze can be seen in terms of an individual. Marion explains that our individuation is actually preserved through love by the very incomprehensibility of the other:

> If you say you know someone and have nothing more to learn from him, no need to know him better, what does that mean? You deny to the other the quality of a face. Any love relationship implies eternity. Why? It is not a question of fidelity or moral standards. It is because, if you have no need of more time to know the other, you are not directly committed to him. To love somebody is always to need more time to know him. You don't have enough information about him. You will never have enough information. This is the infinite hermeneutics of the other.[304]

The contemplation of the icon involves a total acceptance and receptivity of the face's authoritative *call* to constitute the viewer's self as gift.[305] The viewer's self is not subjectively constituted but gifted through love by the iconistic gaze. Also, the meditative thinking involves a change in visual perspectives by replacing the *I*'s constituting gaze with the constituting gaze of the other. For instance, the inverse perspective depicted in the Byzantine icon aims at producing this very exchange of perspectives between the believer's gaze and the iconistic gaze. On the account that the appearance of the divine other does not involve an authority of a first-principle

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[302] Ibid., 116.
[303] Robinette, "A Gift To Theology?" 91.
[304] Jean-Luc Marion, "The Face: An Endless Hermeneutics." *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 28, no. 2 (1999): 10.
[305] Marion, *In Excess,* 118. In contrast to the *Übermensch*'s will to constitute the world, the viewer who contemplates the icon lets himself/herself be constituted from a divine perspective: "[f]or, as face, he faces me, imposes on me to face up to him as he for whom I must respond…I have therefore received (and suffered) a call *[un appel]*. The face makes an appeal *[un appel];* it therefore calls me forth as gifted" (Marion 2002b, 267).

constituted by the power of the *I* (the thinking subject), the contemplation of the icon is not a metaphysical experience. In this regard, Marion argues that the icon can offer a solution beyond metaphysics if the authoritative counter-intuitive gaze of the other manifests itself as prior to human will and, at the same time, contingent on the very impossibility of the viewer's gaze to comprehend it.

The idea of the other as gift in Marion's phenomenalization of the icon opens art (as idol and icon) to a theological mode of seeing invisibility, which is different than the one envisioned by Henry's aesthetic reflections on the auto-affection of life. And for this reason, Marion offers a mode of critiquing, as I discuss in Chapter 4, the idolic and the iconic aspects of my own Byzantine-inspired artistic practice. Although both Marion and Henry are fixed on the idea of not subjecting the painting to the viewer's (predefined) knowledge—a nonrestrictive approach to phenomena that allows them to appear as themselves—they diverge on the specific nature of invisibility and its mode of revelation in the visible. For Marion, the invisible is a challenge to the subjective consciousness in recognizing (or failing to recognize) the otherness and autonomy of the phenomena to show themselves as themselves.

So, the painting gives a stronger (iconic) or weaker (idolic) perspectival understanding of invisibility depending on its manifestation of the face's gaze in the visible—this phenomenological understanding of the icon and idol is particularly important to the Byzantine epistemological approach of my artwork. As Marion explains in *Crossing of the Visible,* the idol is a unidirectional vision that looks through a kind of keyhole towards the divine light that varies in size and form—from an abstract to a naturalistic perspective, depending on the measure of the human gaze. Moreover, the icon (the *saturated phenomenon* par excellence) is the face of the infinite that unveils itself through a divine light beyond the notion of Being and limits of the subject's perspective. And the artist becomes responsible in providing the face of the other*,* which demands the viewer's gaze to look beyond himself/herself (beyond personal aesthetic desires) to acknowledge the life of the other. For Henry, instead, the phenomena are revealed in their purity, as affect, only within the self. That is, they are not outside, in the visible, but inside, in the invisible self. For this reason, one can argue that Henry's phenomenology is restricted to the *transcendental I*'s aim in accessing the inner life through a symbolic vision that dematerializes the visible. Marion avoids this radical type of symbolic vision by recourse to the Byzantine theology of the image, affirmed by the Second Council of Nicaea—albeit with

difficulty when applied to the practical Byzantine (hierotopic) way of performing an icon, as I outline in the next section, 2.4.3 Transgressing metaphysical iconoclasm. For him, the Byzantine image convincingly brings to light that an iconic vision cannot be reduced to subjective affectivity or to an inner phenomenon that solely lives/operates within the viewer himself/herself. The idolatry of Henry's appreciation of non-figurative painting lies in its failure to deliver the very element of mediation between two gazes: the face of the other. In other words, abstract painting destroys the face of Christ by eliminating the historical aspect of a painting: the visible exterior object.

Marion's re-conceptualization of the Byzantine iconophile thought draws attention to the idolic nature of our own relationship to images, especially within our commercialized visual world. However, he has also been widely criticized for his dematerialization of the icon in an almost Henrian fashion.[306] In the next section, I argue that the use of the icon's visibility to acknowledge the existence of the other, beyond ones' subjectivity, requires a tangible consideration of the Byzantine painting technique in building an iconic vision.

2.4.3 Transgressing metaphysical iconoclasm

In the previous section, I have analyzed how Marion re-conceptualizes Henry and Husserl's phenomenology of a painting in order that we (the viewers and image-makers) receive a theoretical model which leads to a vision other than the idol. Concerned with the objectifying/Nietzschean power of the spectacle (*eidola*/copies of *eikōn*-appearances) on the act of seeing in contemporary visual culture, Marion proposes an iconic solution to the opening of the visible to the invisible for saving us from the idolic constitution of the image and its iconoclastic consequences. Departing from Plato and Nietzsche's hypotheses on the relationship between image and reality, I have also analyzed in the previous sections the grounds for presenting the invisible and visible in figurative and abstract artistic representations. Firstly, in confronting the Greek concept of mimesis with the *Übermensch*-artist's critique of metaphysics, I revealed the contradictory theoretical approaches regarding the representation of reality from which Western art did not escape. For Nietzsche, reality is tangible and visible, while for Plato it

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[306] Some of the critics who questioned Marion's dematerialization of the icon are: Peter Joseph Fritz (2009), Janice L. Deary (2007), Andrew C. Rawnsley (2007), and Steven Grimwood (2003).

is invisible and immaterial. This antagonism denies either the existence of the interior or exterior side of the human body. Kosuth's *One and Three Chairs* is evocative for Plato's theory of Forms whereas Barney's concern with the evaluation of the bodily world in *Cremaster* epitomizes the Nietzschean phase of the image. From Marion's view, contemporary art can offer the "access of the invisible to the visible," if the human body is reconsidered according to the demands of the *two dots of black paint* in delivering the gaze of the other.[307] If the mimetic competition between the original and its representation in metaphysical iconoclasm led to the Nietzschean state of self-idolatry, then the counter intuitive iconic gaze envisions the "knowing viewer" to allow his/her gaze to pass through "the objectness of the object" and see the non-mimetic relation between the type and prototype.[308] However, the question is if Marion's version of iconic vision, based solely on seeing the black holes, escapes the metaphysical tendency to constitute phenomenality. Theologian Peter Joseph Fritz suggests that Marion targets a new form of essence—that is, a new *first-principle*—in the painting through the phenomena's givenness[309] to intuition by "doing away" with "the idol, the icon, the liturgy, the eucharist, or whatever other phenomenon."[310] Does the visibility of the icon disappear in the process of *phenomenological reduction*? Beside the two black dots in the passage of invisible gazes, the icon's materiality, with its theological meaning in relation to the historical event of Incarnation, and all the iconographical elements of the icon that point to the Byzantine economy of the image seem to take a secondary role in Marion's construction of the iconic vision. Although he rightly invokes the Byzantine doctrine of the icon in his theological work, *The Crossing of the Visible*, as the divine gaze that summons the viewer's gaze into contemplating the unthinkable Gift/God, his vision of the icon appears to overlook the Byzantine economy. Specifically, Marion seems to offer a symbolic formulation of the *phenomenological reduction*, which is not practically applied in "concrete lived situations."[311] The bodies disappear in the aim of the subjective intentionality to move beyond the visible that blocks the gaze. This disembodied understanding of the icon seems to perpetuate the metaphysical thinking about of the image as being opposed to reality. The scholar of philosophy and theology, Andrew Rawnsley states that "this results in a failure to

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[307] Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, 68.
[308] Fritz, "Black Holes and Revelations," 418.
[309] Likewise, Henry's mystic approach to auto-*affection* can be seen as a quest for essence.
[310] Fritz, "Black Holes and Revelations," 432.
[311] Andrew C. Rawnsley, Practice and Givenness: The Problem of 'Reduction' in the work of Jean-Luc Marion," *New Blackfriars* 88, 1018 (2007): 691.

give any account of how his philosophical polemic to strip away *human-centered* questions from his philosophical vocabulary can even be *articulated* without consideration of the *human who practices philosophy*."[312] For this reason, Marion disregards where the theology of the icon begins, specifically "in the mediation of the Word through the material and concrete…within the sacramental practice of the Church."[313] When contrasted to the symbolic-realistic criterion of analyzing the way images are made, seen, and desired (as I argue through my way of crafting a Byzantine iconic vision), the symbolic mode of seeing does not provide a complete understanding of what makes an image the target of metaphysical iconoclasm within today's commoditized viewing conditions. Particularly, it does not reveal how an image is intertwined with the lived, performative experiences in an idolic or iconic way. Thus, Marion does not explain the life-world practices in which iconoclastic debates are situated.

As an alternative to both the symbolic and realistic ways of seeing, the Byzantine symbolic-realistic way of making, thinking, and seeing a representation allows for a hierotopic viewing experience that avoids many of the conflicting conceptual approaches to an image conceived as metaphysically different than reality. My point is that through the inclusion of my reflective artistic activity in this thesis, I concretely show what the Byzantine epistemological approach to the image offers for avoiding the metaphysical thought. Based on the Byzantine technique of icon painting, this thesis argues that the representational meaning of an image in metaphysical terms can be critically challenged when the difference between reality and a representation is understood at a practical level. Starting from the premise that the Byzantine system of signification does not function in a realistic way—that is, it is not based on a closed circuit of signifiers without a referent—I claim that through my actual practice of making and looking at images, (as established at the Second Council of Nicaea) we can actually reflect on (but not necessarily to comprehend through the power of the *thinking I*) the non-metaphysical aspects of vision. And it is only through this orthopraxis method, it seems, that we can actually appreciate how the reason for the critique and devotion of images is inseparable from the human practice of seeing and making images.

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[312] Ibid.
[313] Ibid.

On a final note, what Marion's critique of metaphysics calls for is an artistic way of practicing the Byzantine iconic vision without denying the earthly.[314] The theological problem with his notion of *phenomenological reduction* in deciding what makes a painting iconic or idolic comes to light when the practice of seeing the icon is re-considered in relation to the Byzantine pictorial technique. In the next chapter, I focus on how the visibility of the icon enhances the construction of an iconic vision at the aesthetic, commercial, and theological levels. I also claim that my artistic (hierotopic) practice provides a perceptual and performative point of reference in understanding how the icon's performance works in its traditional and contemporary contexts. Specifically, from its Christian Orthodox environment to the visual framework of the spectacle in which artistic and commercial versions of iconic/idolic visions inform a community of believers/consumers to creatively participate in their ideological, consumptive, or metaphysical meanings. What I particularly reveal is how the Byzantine canons of crafting an iconic vision can be employed (or how they are already employed) in the construction of today's artistic and commercial iconic visions, which have strong iconoclastic implications. For that reason, it is to the Byzantine hierotopic analysis of today's spectacle that I turn in the first section of the following chapter.

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[314] The tangible interaction between the icon and viewer cannot be separated, as it would negate Christ's incarnation in the sensible in order to transfigure it within the divine reality.

CHAPTER 3: THE CONTEMPORARY (METAPHYSICAL ICONOCLASTIC) CONTEXT TO AN ICONIC VISION

In the phenomenological analysis of the abstract and naturalistic painting, which was discussed in the previous chapter, I identified the need for a broader framework in understanding what visual elements contribute to the formation of an iconic vision and what techniques image-creators employ to trigger the presence of the image. That is not to claim, of course, that abstract or naturalistic forms of painting do not bestow on the viewer a sense of invisibility (through various levels of perspective). In following Marion's account of the idolic and iconic phenomena, I see how the intuitive aspect of the human gaze is always in search for the invisible by addressing an intentional phenomenon (objects and meanings). Yet, Marion (in his aim to overcome the metaphysical thought) relies on theological and metaphysical textual works to reformulate a theoretical understanding of the icon, even though the experience of an iconic vision is also immersed in its own materiality. By shifting the understanding of an iconic vision away from the exclusive authority of the written argument and by framing the phenomenological inquiry through a practical, artistic experience, I add a performative knowledge that places the viewer inside of what it means to see iconically. In doing so, I immerse Marion's analysis into the very Byzantine theology of the icon by merging the symbolic and realistic views at the level of artistic research. Without the symbolic meaning, the analysis is left with the mere spectacle of a tangible visibility and without materiality it is left with the (Kandinskyian) abstraction of visibility. As such, the research on the construction of an iconic vision requires a more comprehensive method that includes both the *research on the arts* and the *research in the art* (as I argued in Chapter 1, the section 1.3.3 Symbolic, realistic and symbolic-realistic methodologies).

In this chapter, I look at how contemporary forms of iconic visions function within a culture of spectacular media images, made "ever-present" through screens.[315] The consumptive

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[315] The media theorist, Nanna Verhoeff formulates one definition of the *screen* that I believe captures its relation to the metaphysical modes of seeing the image as false or real: "Screens are objects, technologies, apparatuses and machines of vision, all at once. The screen is a technological device, an interface, a flat 2D surface positioned in a 3D arrangement, potentially in a 4D relationship of time and motion, a metaphor for mediation and vision, a frame for representation, a site of innovation and change: what I call a meta-morphing constant in modern culture" (16). My discussion of today's ubiquity of screen technologies does not go beyond the critique of metaphysical iconoclasm and the concept of the spectacle, which targets the Nietzschean dominance or omnipresence of images in contemporary visual culture (as analyzed in Chapter 2). Also, this thesis does not argue against the idolic or iconic effects of technology per se, but keeps the conversation within the limits of how the

visual regime of the spectacle, made omnipresent by the rise of technological screens in the media industry, has been widely criticized for exposing viewers to a Nietzschean mode of seeing—the constitution of phenomena in a visual or conceptual perspective so well addressed by Marion, especially in his phenomenological mode of taking perspective.[316] However, in line with recent investigations on the changing screen technologies, media and social theorists advance a performative or interactive form of vision (with metaphysical implications) that repositions the viewer as having an active, creative role in relation to the spectacle.[317] Technological screens are also used as an aesthetic medium within contemporary art practices to construct an iconic vision, which will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 4. It remains, first of all, to investigate some of the possibilities of screen media to induce the presence of the image in order to overcome the objectification/alienation of human identity before providing a demonstration of the Byzantine nature of my artistic iconic vision. The next two sections, then specifically focus on the performative nature of vision in the digital age of mobile (touch) screens to delineate a Byzantine-inspired analytical method of understanding the contemporary (technological) possibilities and conditions of experiencing and constructing an artistic iconic/idolic vision.

3.1 Interactivity: the performance of *screenspace* and hierotopy

Interactivity is the performative aspect of an iconic vision. It is the practical mode in which viewers construct the various aesthetic components involved in their vision.[318] More

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spectacle (artistic and commercial) might induce/perform an iconic/idolic vision and how the Byzantine icon (as I employ it in my analysis and practice) helps to understand those visions.

[316] The critical theorist, Theodor W. Adorno argues that the televisual screen "'holds the possibility of smuggling into [its] duplicate world whatever is thought to be advantageous for the real one,' for it 'obscures the real alienation between people and between people and things. It becomes a substitute for a social immediacy that is being denied to people'" (qtd. in Jappe 107). Additionally, the Marxist philosopher, George Lukacs states that commodity fetishism objectifies the way people perceive each other by leaving humans in an inactive position of listening and seeing everything that the spectacle dictates (Jappe 114-115). In the *Crossing of the Visible*, Marion also picks up on this critique, and he points that the consumer is invited to rediscover a sense of community solely in the spectacle, which is detached from every part of life, and who "monopolizes all communication to its own advantage and makes it one way only" (Trier 89).

[317] Some recent media theorists, particularly influenced by the Marxist critique of the capitalist aesthetics of commodities, that make a performative claim about the way viewers' daily life is changed by technological screens are Nanna Verhoeff (2012), Eric Jenkins (2008), Brett T. Robinson (2013), Kimberly Jackson (2009), and John Lechte (2012).

[318] There are multiple meanings of the word *interactivity*, so in defining those specific aspects that relate to

precisely, performativity connects vision with mobility in a creative engagement with the virtual/invisible and physical/visible realms—a dynamic form of vision defined by the media theorist, Nanna Verhoeff as "performative cartography."[319] The mobile interactivity differs from the symbolic or realistic visions by shifting the analysis of spaces/frames for representation (screens) from either their content (symbolic or imaginary) or form (object or realism) to their creative use in private or public spatial arrangements.

According to Verhoeff, the development of mobile digital technology has brought a visual mode of *navigation* that creates *screenspaces* or frames for representation by merging vision and mobility,[320] the invisible and visible domains with a sense of narrative and agency. Referencing Michel de Certeau's theory of space, Verhoeff differentiates between the notion of place and space: "every place can be turned into space by the practice of narrative."[321] Comparing to fixed cinematic/televisual/photographic/painted screens, which produce images (on-screen space) into predefined geographical coordinates (off-screen space), the mobile (touch) screen becomes a software-based mediator that turns the act of seeing into a performative act of making/cartographing space—a mode of transporting both the viewer and screen through places to generate narrative events as spaces.[322] Recent portable pocket screen gadgets such as smartphones and computer tablets include various input and output devices for digital signifiers, wireless connectivity, camera, GPS receiver, and direct tactile access to multitasking interfaces that act as multiple (conceptual and visual) points of view, e.g. panoramic mode of vision. Media

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the performativity of the iconic vision I will refer to game designer Eric Zimmerman's notions of interactivity as a narrative practice. One could say that all types of narratives are interactive in the sense that all experiences (physical, utilitarian, cognitive, emotional, etc.) require a degree of immersion. Instead of generalizing the interactive phenomenon of narrative experiences, Zimmerman establishes four types of interactivity in relation to the content and form of a narrative: 1) the cognitive, interpretive experience of the content, 2) the utilitarian or the functional aspect of form in its materiality, 3) explicit interactivity, which stands for the dictionary definition of the word: "designed to respond to the actions, commands, etc., of a user" (merriam-webster.com), and 4) the cultural interaction in which the narrative is appropriated, enacted, deconstructed beyond the subjective experience. The iconic vision overlaps all these "flavors of participation" that manifests separately or concomitantly through various media screens (Zimmerman 158).

[319] Nanna Verhoeff, *Mobile Screens, The Visual Regime of Navigation* (Amsterdam Univ. Press, 2012): 133.

[320] The concept of mobility in relation to a frame for representation (screen) functions at two levels: 1) the virtual mobility of the visuals on/in the screen and 2) the physical mobility of the viewer (walking or being in a vehicle) with the screen-object. The performative experience of a *screenspace* takes place when the virtual and physical mobility interconnect by creating new spatial/temporal events.

[321] Verhoeff, *Mobile Screens,* 93.

[322] Verhoeff describes the mobile screen as a "theoretical object" that it not just a means to produce knowledge and reproduce/recirculate/ symbols as it is the case with any other non-portable forms of screen (from TV to desktop screens), but also a material object that is handheld, thus a perceptual "time-bound object-in-practice" (76).

critic, Brett T. Robinson explains that these "vital" functions of mobile devices elevated the status of the iPhone, for instance, to "sublime descriptors like 'Jesus phone'"[323] (I will return to the religious aspect of screen culture, and more specifically to the discussion of Apple products, in the next section). All these features, then added to the portable and tangible aspect of the mobile (touch) screen, immerse the viewer's senses into a dynamic/navigational spatial relationship with the screen as a physical site for making, communicating, and experiencing images within places—places yet to become meaningful spaces.[324] Verhoeff suggests that this active mode of making images or seeing in motion by appropriating places through narrative (visual) experiences turned out to be the fundamental feature of contemporary vision.

The navigational mode of creating *screenspaces* challenges the scientific/Cartesian dualism between subject and object, viewer and visible. Whereas the Cartesian pursuit of knowledge aims at mapping (representing) the world based on fixed principles—a (Platonic) mimetic mode of thinking that separates, classifies and charts space, time, beings, and materiality—mobile screen-based viewing allows for an innovative experience of co-creating/navigating a *screenspace* by combining the on-screen space (looking or traveling virtually through or beyond the screen) with the off-screen space (surrounding environment). The screen-based spatial arrangement encompasses a correlation between the transparency of the screen, which is the intentional act of looking in the screen as through a window, and the screen's physicality or lack of invisibility that allows its objective existence to be used and handheld as a tool. When the screen is touched in order to see, it is the opacity of materiality that marks the presence of the image. Thus, the constitution of the *screenspace* is strongly dependent on the tangible and interactive use of the screen-based interface, which establishes a "spatial continuity of eyes, hand, screen [object], and screened space [virtual]."[325] Verhoeff calls this flow between seeing and doing a screenic vision: a performative act of "live image-*making*" that combines the visual experiences of the cinematic screen, the television screen that broadcasts live events, the performative seeing in a performance art event, and the direct physical

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[323] Brett T. Robinson, *Appletopia: Media Technology and the Religious Imagination of Steve Jobs*, (US: Baylor, University Press, 2013), 61.

[324] Here, one can also add that the mobility of a window as seen through various modes of transportation (cars, trains, airplanes, etc.) is a movable screen, however the position of the viewer is still that of a stationary spectator whose bodily awareness and agency withdraw from view. Instead of a motionless screen for the viewer to *spectate* at a distance, the mobile (touch) screen fundamentally changes the fixed spatial arrangements imposed by a televisual spectacle.

[325] Verhoeff, *Mobile Screens,* 90.

experience of drawing.[326] The additional biological organ of the hand in the process of seeing shifts the conceptual/metaphysical understanding of vision from *seeing through* based on a detached engagement with the frame of the screen to *looking at* in order to make what is *seen through*. And for the reason that the screen is encountered first in its opaqueness in the off-screen space prior to what the intentional gaze constitutes (navigates) in the on-screen space, the notion of space (the meaningful place) becomes an important element in the contemporary understanding of a *Byzantine Iconic Vision*—to which I turn to later in the next chapter.

Figure 11: *The Hodegetria Icon* (double-sided), late 12th century, Archaeological Museum. Kastoria (Greece).

The tactile screenic vision that makes present or brings the image from the invisible/virtual world onto the material surface of the screen is similar to the Byzantine icon's performance of converting a place/*tópos* into a sacred/*hiero* space (hierotopy).[327] The art-historian and Byzantinist, Alexei Lidov suggests that images painted on wooden panels by Byzantine iconographers should not be seen as immobile surfaces/screens for stationary visual experiences. So, the icon is a sort of mobile frame for representation that is used symbolic-realistically to transform a place into a sacred space. As Lidov notes:

> In the context of hierotopy the very concept of "spatial icons" was shaped. We mean images purposefully presented in space, not of some flat depictions or material objects. In this case, we use the notion "icon" not as a formal or ornamental term but as a conceptual one. With this notion we mark images-mediators designed to connect our world with another one, heavenly and earthly realms, i.e. in the same functioning as flat iconic images (made on wood, wall, tissue or metal) — this very characteristic of "mediativity" which differs all iconic images from common pictures on religious topics.[328]

As investigated in Chapter 1, the Byzantine (spatial) icon*,* also called *living image*, differs from the artistic image that is seen from a symbolic or realistic vision in the way it

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[326] Ibid.*,* 84.
[327] Lidov, "Hierotopy. The Creation of Sacred Spaces," 32.
[328] Alexei Lidov, "*Introduction,* The Byzantine world and Performative Spaces," trans. *Olga Chumicheva, Spatial icons. Performativity in Byzantium and Medieval Russia,* (Moscow: Indrik, 2011): 17.

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performs/mediates a *synaesthesis/*symbolic-realistic experience.[329] Like the mobile (touch) screen, the icon performs interactively to construct a space in which movement brings together the audio, visual, and tactile perceptions.[330] That is, the spatial arrangement in hierotopy incorporates a (mimetic) correlation in movement between the faithful's body and the play of absence/appearance and presence/essence at the icon's material surface (screen). For this reason, I call the Byzantine icon a *living screen*. Lidov provides a particular example of a hierotopic vision in the case of the miraculous icon called Hodegetria (Pointing the Way) of Constantinople, which is also used as a prototype in the Byzantine depiction of the Virgin Mary (Fig. 11). Traditionally believed to have been painted by Saint Luke the Evangelist, the Hodegetria icon presents the Virgin holding the Child Jesus on one side, and on the other, the crucified Christ. According to various written accounts from the 12th to the 15th century, the icon was used in weekly rites to perform miracles in the Hodegon outdoor market place in the center of Constantinople. Since the late 13th century, the Hodegetria icon and the scenes of the miraculous events became a popular Byzantine iconographic theme. For example, in the icon, *The Glorification of the Virgin (Akathist Hymn to the Most Holy Theotokos)* (Fig. 12) the Hodegetria icon is depicted flying above a figure dressed in red with his arms spread out in a crucified position. The red garment symbolizes the sacred status of those who carried the icon during the rites around the market place.[331] On the left and right sides of the central figure in red, a crowd of worshipers is depicted as witnessing a miracle. Lidov quotes a Latin text from the 12th century that underlines the similarity of the icon with the mobile screen-based viewing insofar as both guide the viewer's movements to create a *sacred/screen space*:

> On the third day of every week the icon was moved in a circle with angelic power in full view of the crowd, as though snatched up by some kind of whirlwind. And it carried about its bearer with its own circular movement, so that because of its surprising speed it almost seemed to deceive the eyes of the spectators. Meanwhile everyone, according to their tradition, beat their breasts and cried out "Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison (Lord have

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[329] *Synaesthesis* is a term introduced by Bissera Pentcheva (2006, 2010) to differentiate the experience of seeing icons from the modern term *synesthesia* employed in art history. While the Byzantine *synaesthetic* experience involves the worshiper's body through the simultaneity of all five senses (sight, touch, smell, taste and sound), *synesthesia* entails a concomitant experience of aesthetic sensations in that one sensation turns into another and so forth.

[330] Pentcheva, "The performative icon," 632.

[331] Presumably, the people in charge with holding the icon were the direct descendents of St Luke himself.

mercy, Christ have mercy)"[332]

Like the navigational vision, the icon-bearers' activity in the rites is to geographically delineate a *screenspace/*sacred space within a commercial, urban place. Thus, the Hodegetria icon turns into a spatial icon through a combination of surrounding phenomena (from the crowd to material objects) that all contribute in forming a hierotopy. The icon is performed through liturgical rituals beyond its materiality as a flat pictorial image to the point of transforming the entire urban place within the sacred circle/space into an iconic vision. In this sacred space, everything (from the icon to the crowd and the visible world) coexists as a collection of spatial iconic images. While the visible border of the sacred space is marked by the icon's materiality in the physical space of the city, the invisible border is marked symbolically at the level of the

Figure 12: *The Glorification of the Virgin (Akathist Hymn to the Most Holy Theotokos)*, Detail, 14th century, Russia, Novgorod School

icon's screen. Lidov comments that the icon miraculously rotated in the air creating a visual effect in which the two images of the icon appeared as one.[333] The movement of the icon produced a whirlwind effect before the crowd's eyes inducing an iconic vision that imitates the divine vision. Specifically, God sees every side of the icon simultaneously by defying the logic of the linear/Cartesian perspective—the divine vision is not limited to time and space.[334] To that end, the space between the visible (realistic) and invisible (symbolic) borders of a sacred space defines the iconic vision (the symbolic-realistic mode of seeing).

According to Lidov, the circling of the market square by the icon-bearers is a re-enactment of the Hodegetria rite performed by the patriarch Sergius I during the Avars' siege of Constantinopol in 626. Moreover, the Byzantine victory over the Avar army is attributed to the

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[332] Alexei Lidov, "Spatial icons. The Miraculous Performance with the Hodegetria of Constantinople," *Hierotopy. Creation of Sacred Spaces in Byzantium and Medieval Russia* (Moscow, Progress-tradition, 2006), 352.

[333] Ibid., 354.

[334] In Byzantine iconography, this iconic mode of seeing is represented in the depiction of *simultaneous planes* through the technique of reverse perspective that I discuss in the next section. For more details on this topic see: Clemena Antonova, "Seeing the World with the Eyes of God: The Vision Implied by the Medieval Icon," *Hortulus: The Online Graduate Journal of Medieval Studies* 1, no. 1 (2005), 22.

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divine intervention through the Hodegetria icon. It is believed that during the events of the siege, the patriarch carried the icon around the city walls (demarcating a sacred space) with his arms stretched out in a crucified gesture without touching the icon's frame—a sign of the icon's purity of not being touched by human hands. The patriarch's crucified position mimics the Crucifixion painted on one of the sides of the icon. This mimetic behavior is particularly significant in understanding the difference between the mobile (touch) screen and icon—an aspect that I emphasize in the latter paragraphs. The mobile (touch) screen is designed for personal use, to be owned, and handheld to control everything with the touch of a finger. In moving through places, the screen user makes space or creates images that imitate himself/herself as in, for example, the GPS apps for the iPhone/iPad where an avatar follows along the navigator's moves. The icon, instead, is made to be touched for witnessing a miracle, beyond the human control. The purity of the icon underlines its performative quality of creating, before the beholder, the tension between absence and presence in order to mimic the Christic event of merging the image of humanity and divinity (as described in section 1.2.2.2 The epistemological position of the image: the symbolic-realistic vision).[335] The patriarch imitates the presence of the prototype before the beholders' eyes through the model of the Cross, thus simulating the divine presence of the prototype within the city walls of Constantinople (an urban place turned into a sacred space). Likewise, the icon-bearers, who performed the weekly miracles in the Hodegon Square from the 12th to the 15th century, did not aim to reconstruct a historical event. Instead, they mimetically renewed the patriarch Sergius I's participation in the icon's performance of the prototype. Referring to the rites performed in the Hodegon Square, Lidov notes that they:

> created a kind of spatial icon, or an iconic image in space, embracing the miraculous event, liturgical procession, special rituals of veneration, with the common people in attendance and the icon of the Hodegetria itself, representing the actual iconographic program on both sides of the panel.[336]

The Byzantine mimetic phenomena seen in the Hodegetria rites (from the patriarch Sergius I's rite to the icon-bearers' weekly rites) originate in the redemptive image of the crucified Christ. The icon of Christ is the most important mimetic model of engaging the participants in an iconic vision. The depiction of the Virgin Mary in the Hodegetria icon

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[335] Bissera, "The performative icon," 632.
[336] Lidov, "Spatial icons," 354-5.

emphasizes this mimetic significance of Christ by pointing with Her right hand toward the Child Jesus (the path for creating a sacred space). Any Byzantine mimetic event is fundamentally connected to the active participation of the viewers in the rite of carving with the material part of the icon (the screen) a sacred space in the urban environment. Such Byzantine form of creating spatial imagery (hierotopic creativity) is perpetuated in contemporary liturgical processions through the iconographic depiction of an icon-bearer as shown in *The Glorification of the Virgin (Akathist Hymn to the Most Holy Theotokos).* With his arms in a crucified position and miraculously carrying the levitating icon, the central figure in red functions as a mnemonic device (as well as a mimetic device) for today's believers to renew the appearance of the prototype in materiality.

Similar to the use of the portable Byzantine icon in delineating a hierotopy, the movement of vision in relation to the mobile screen is not only a matter of explaining the human's ability to travel from point A to point B (a physical action), but contributes to the intuitive experience of invisibility in visibility. This indicates, as Verhoeff states, "a collapse between making images and perceiving them."[337] Thus, the approach to the image as spatially distributed in a particular time and place, according to "the mobility of visual experience," offers an alternative to the metaphysical critique of contemporary forms of iconic/idolic vision based on binary oppositions, such as visible-invisible or realism-symbolism.[338] Particularly, it shows how the performative aspect of today's screen culture transforms the experience of seeing the spectacle from a contemplative/informative mind-set, which leads the viewer to his/her ultimate reduction as a mere instrument in the dynamics of capitalist production and distribution systems, into an active mode of creating unique spatial representations (events) that bring to presence the viewer's own image. As opposed to the metaphysical approach to screens, the performative analysis takes into account that the human desire to travel (imaginatively) into a virtual time and space is perceptually connected with the physical space in which the screen operates. And, this consideration helps to see how the invention of mobile (touch) screens changed the mode of experiencing and orienting in the world by merging the virtual and physical time and space. The screen then becomes the device through which the viewer overcomes the Cartesian/pre-established coordinates of the "fixed and distancing televisual or cinematic" screens to create

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[337] Verhoeff, *Mobile Screens,* 13.
[338] Ibid., 15.

new sensory-based spatial experiences that combine both the material and immaterial (digital) worlds.[339]

According to Robinson, the tangible quality of screen technology, with its infinite creative possibilities, has reached a religious dimension by replacing the natural sublime with the digital sublime. If the traditional screen (from painting to cinema and television) was meant to capture and share the unexplainable aesthetic (dynamic or mathematic) encounters with the natural or man-made industrialized landscapes, the (touch) screen (particularly in its sublime form of the iPhone) connects the viewer through the "holy trinity of the telephone, iPod, and internet" to a mysterious, "immense, global, and decentered network."[340] The electronic communications system transforms the on-screen space into a collective environment that overwhelms human imagination and comprehension. It is a (narrative) space created by "[a]n army of human creators fashioning a new Tower of babel, a new nature [and myth]…outshining the Creator."[341] The dual character of the sublime feeling is reflected in the technological screen due to its capacity to both attract the viewer in the transcendental world of digital communication and inspire the technological fear of potential blackout, viruses, digital surveillance, and data loss, which Robinson compares to the ancients' fear of an earthquake or thunderstorm.

With the concepts of performative cartography and hierotopy in mind, it is essential at this point to reflect on the impact of screen technologies in shaping human vision (and implicitly an iconic/idolic vision). Today's culture of mobility, "geographical and physical by means of travel as well as visual and virtual [imaginative] through media and communication technologies," is interrelated with screen technologies.[342] However, this performative mode of interacting with screens, dubbed "the spatio-visual or navigational turn," fosters a panoramic mode of making and viewing images (for navigating through and with screens in the tangible and

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[339] Ibid., 134.

[340] Robinson, *Appletopia,* 62. The iPhone is not just a handy object for electronic communication; it is the product of scientific rationalism that aims to control and tame the contingency of nature. Although the project of modern science is to disenchant the world from religious/magical explanations, the rational human uses the technological object (the iPhone) as a powerful "sacramental object" to both comprehend "all there is to know" and be omnipresent (Robinson 68). Robinson goes even further with the theological explanation of the screen culture by describing the iPhone as interacting with the viewer in a Byzantine way. That is, it acts like a living icon/object to mediate/communicate the invisibility of the digital world through its (touch) screen interface (text, video, and voice). In other words, the sense of touch makes present the absence of the digital sphere.

[341] Ibid.

[342] Ibid., 13, 133.

virtual worlds) that can be associated with the Nietzschean stage of the image.[343] In the visual era of (touch) screens, the viewer not only acquires a tangible freedom for creative abilities (artistic or scientific), but also obtains an intimate (idolic) relationship with his/her own (panoramic) desires. The human vision's idolic tendency towards the image might be explained by the "directed movement" of an intentional gaze towards an intentional object, which simultaneously makes present the (idolic) invisibility through a perspectival gaze.[344] And, this induces a universal state of iconoclastic suspicion over the nature of knowing and image-making via media screens. In writing on the history of recording media, Brian Winston explains that the challenge to capture the evidence of a referent in the world (its real existence) relies on the scientific status of the technological screen to provide an objective/realistic/analogous perception of nature.[345] The documentary value of the camera-instrument as a "nonliving agent" depends on the realistic mode of seeing, which perceives that the scientific recording device (from the early photographic/cinematic media to the latest digital devices) does not lie and that its naturalistic mode of representation is the most authentic way to measure captured data (to confirm the real-presence of a referent).[346] However, viewers doubt the recorded document of a historical event or concrete object when it is linked to the mistrust in human intervention or intentionality. The digital manipulation of the image, facilitated by mobile technology, challenges the faith in a recorded representation to the point of claiming the death of the referent—in other words, the spectacle transformed into its own signifier (as explained in 2.3.3 The (metaphysical) consequences of the spectacular image). This is the primary concern underpinning Marion's

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[343] Ibid., 133. The panoramic vision aims to perceive the world through technological screens beyond the spatial limitations of human senses. The panoramic experience can be categorized based on two types of relationships between the viewer and image: 1) seeing an object in motion through a screen (a landscape through a windshield or moving image through a televisual screen) while viewing from a static position and 2) seeing a static or a moving object through a screen while the viewer's body is in motion. This (metaphysical) ambition to perceive everything, however seems to be impossible to achieve as the viewer's relationship to a screen is always defined by distance and motion.

[344] Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion,* 28. To recall, the idolic invisibility manifests in the following way: "when the idol appears, the gaze has just stopped [from seeing the referent]: the idol concretizes that stop. Before the idol, the gaze transparently transpierced the visible [as in a linear perspective]….In each visible spectacle, the gaze found nothing that might stop it [specifically, a counter gaze as in the icon]; the gaze's fiery eyes consumed the visible….[And the idol forms when] the gaze no longer rushes through the spectacle stage without stopping, but forms a stage in the spectacle; it is fixed in it and, far from passing beyond, remains facing what becomes for it a spectacle to *re*-spect [that is, the gaze esteems itself in a Nietzschean way]" (Marion, 1991, 11-12).

[345] Brian Winston, *Claiming the Real: The Documentary Film Revisited*. (British Film Institute, 1995), 38, 40-42.

[346] James Moran, "A Bone of Contention: Documenting the Prehistoric Subject," in *Collecting Visible Evidence*. Eds. Jane M. Gaines and Michael Renov. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 258.

critique of the spectacle, an idolic mirror that stops the gaze to create its own spectacle with its own reflection.[347] Therefore, the crisis of the image in contemporary audiovisual civilization comes from the notion that the spectacle lost its direct connection to a physical reality by feeding the viewer's Nietzschean/panoramic desire and prompting a general sense of disbelief in the referential relationship between on and off-screen spaces.[348]

Referring to the spatial limitations of a panoramic vision constructed through a media screen, Verhoeff first differentiates the panoramic desire from the navigational desire by arguing that the former is an ambition to perceive a (narrative) space all at once in a frame for representation and the latter is a desire to reach a destination. Yet, the navigational desire is still an ambition to acquire a point of view or a viewing position that transcends the representational limits of space and time, with the distinction being that the viewer takes control over the panoramic spectacle. If the panoramic vision travels across the fixed/referential coordinates of a given map, the navigational desire creates the itinerary and produces the map of the environment, surrounding the navigator, through the direct engagement between the screen, space, and viewer/user. Particularly, the viewer preforms the cartography as a performative event that makes present the viewer's own spatial arrangement (image).

The idea that vision is mobile and the image is concurrently formed with the viewer's direct participation in a temporal and spatial field of representation parallels the Byzantine symbolic-realistic vision of crafting a hierotopic space. The difference, however, is that the screenic vision based on the handheld, mobile screen delineates a geographical space according to the commands and interrogations of the user and the hierotopic vision marks the space according to the demands of a (divine) intentionality that is beyond time and space. For instance, both types of screens (the mobile technological device and icon) produce a simultaneity of multiple points of view (a panoramic type of vision) in the process of creating a (sacred/screen) space: the (touch) screen offers multiple application interfaces and the Hodegetria icon presents a double sided painted screen (which according to the historical accounts provided by Lidov, induces a compounded vision by wondrously rotating in the air). The particularity of each type of screen is, then, in the mode of seeing the created space: the (touch) screen is a one-way mode of seeing and the icon-screen is a two-way mode of seeing. The iconic vision is driven by an

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[347] Marion, *God Without Being*, 11-12.
[348] Ibid., *The Idol and Distance*, 82-83.

additional (divine) intentionality that counters the constitutive violence of the human gaze to transform a place into a space through the practice of taking perspective or narrative—a counter-intuitive experience outlined by the idea of the other as gift in Marion's phenomenalization of the iconic gaze (see 2.4.2 Marion's icon and metaphysic iconoclasm). In their analysis of video games with travel narratives, Henry Jenkins and Mary Fuller further this argument regarding the objectifying aspect of the technological screens. They explain that the practice of converting a place into a space is imbued with the ambition of the viewer's gaze to colonize/constitute the *screenspace*—in other words, the *screenspace* is limited to the visible, spatial, temporal borders of human vision:

> Places exist only in the abstract, as potential sites for narrative action, as locations that have not yet been colonized. Place may be understood here in terms of the potential contained as bytes in the Nintendo® game cartridge or the potential resources coveted but not yet possessed in the American New World. Places constitute a "stability" which must be disrupted in order for stories to unfold. Places are there but do not yet matter, much as the New World existed, was geographically present, and culturally functioning well before it became the center of European ambitions or the site of New World narratives. Places become meaningful only as they come into contact with narrative agents…. Spaces, on the other hand, are places that have been acted upon, explored, colonized. Spaces become the location of narrative events. As I play a Nintendo® game and master it level by level, I realize the potentials encoded in the software design and turn it into the landscape of my own saga.[349]

The invisible borders, marked symbolically at the level of the on-(touch) screen space, is a Nietzschean projection of a navigational vision that imitates the navigator's moves. And for this reason, I call the technological screen a *dead screen*—that is, an object without intentionality that merely mirrors the viewer's own image (an image that can be positioned at the level of the artificial image in a Nicephorian sense). Although the advertisement campaigns of the mobile screens such as of the iPhones, iPods, and iPads stress the connectivity between users/navigators and the sharing of the *screenspace* experience—a quasi-hypostatic involvement through media screens that I will explore later in Eric Jenkins' analysis of the iPod ads—the pocket size devices are particularly designed/commercialized for individual use to personalize/control/create one's own world of images, e.g. Facebook. The commercial message of social networking stands, in fact, for an experience of a lonely gaze that constitutes phenomena solely based on the power of

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[349] Mary Fuller and Henry Jenkins, "Nintendo® and New World Travel Writing: A Dialogue." in Steven G.Jones (ed.) *Cybersociety: Computer-Mediated Communication and Community.* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1995), 57-72.

the individual's intentional gaze—similar to the spectatorship of the spectacle on a static cinematic/televisual/photographic/painted frames for representation. Verhoeff's statement regarding the discourse of connectivity in the age of technological screens supports my argument: "the term sharing is deceptive, and clearly belongs to the discourse of advertisement parasitical upon social needs and problems of our time."[350] However, what the (touch) screen navigation technology has changed in contemporary human vision is this on-screen space, synchronized with the pedestrian or vehicular off-screen space, that takes the bodily and spatial relationship with a static screen[351] to a new level of creativity, mobility, and interactivity in the surrounding environments/coordinates. But when comparing this creative mode of transforming the spectacle into a *screenspace* to a Byzantine iconic vision, I would like to firstly draw attention to the modern metaphysical tension between technology and Christianity, which is reflected in Pope Benedict XVI's statement:

> Is a Saviour needed by a humanity which has invented interactive communication, which navigates in the virtual ocean of the internet and, thanks to the most advanced modern communications technologies, has now made the Earth, our great common home, a global village? This humanity of the twenty-first century appears as a sure and self-sufficient master of its own destiny, the avid proponent of uncontested triumphs.[352]

Pope Benedict XVI's concern with today's technological state of the image suggests that the intermingling of technological screens with metaphysical desires misleads the viewer in finding redemption through the Nietzschean attitude to life of the *self-sufficient master*—the viewer as the central point of view within his/her field of vision. Nevertheless, the question is if the spectacle has the power to induce a creative (iconic) vision, and if so, how can this creativity be critiqued without limiting the conversation to metaphysical/iconoclastic debates? This question is essential in outlining a Byzantine artistic framework that understands an iconic vision

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[350] Verhoeff, *Mobile Screens,* 90.

[351] Although there is a movement of hands when touching the screen and when the viewer's body travels in different locations (walking or in a vehicle ride, for instance) with a handheld screen, the on-screen space still functions as an immobile frame through which we can look beyond as into a window. The mobility and creativity of today's technological mode of vision, and where it overcomes the objectifying power of the spectacle, lies in its relationship with the changing/ever-transforming off-screen spatial environment. The best examples of a viewer's agency, on-screen space, and off-screen space synchronization, as previously mentioned, are the Google map application or any GPS app that show the virtual location of the human body/vehicle while on the move in the physical time-place.

[352] "Urbi Et Orbi Message Of His Holiness Pope Benedict Xvi," *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*, Christmas 2006, accessed September 20, 2014.
http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/urbi/documents/hf_benxvi_mes_20061225_urbi_en.html

beyond the metaphysical tendency to see the image as visible—that is really present. A Marionian solution would be (as argued in Chapter 2) in the phenomenological interpretation of the Byzantine icon that breaks the dualism between the artistic (idolic) and theological (iconic) image. The practical level of this research complements Marion's initiative into outlining a non-metaphysical approach to image (that does not see the idolic image as completely opaque and visible to the constitutive gaze), but also does not stop at the phenomenological critique of the televisual screen culture. Through my artistic analysis of the Byzantine iconic vision, I aim to present a series of Byzantine rules that help the viewers (and the artist/image maker) to recognize common techniques of constructing a contemporary vision at a religious, artistic, consumptive, or technological level. Moreover, the key aspect of my practice is that I do not make any metaphysical claims in analyzing the structural elements of an iconic vision. My conceptual intention is non-metaphysical in the sense that I follow Nicephorus' epistemological interpretation of the icon (as explained in Chapter 1), which regards the image as completely transparent and outside notions of dualism and claims of real-presence.

Indeed, a red herring that arises in the contemporary artistic construction of an iconic vision is the presumption that the symbolic meaning of the work is subjective or embedded in a specific cultural/religious context and inextricably linked to a specific community of viewers, thus making it inconsistent with interaction. However, the symbolic value per se concerns the specific interpretations of a referent (religious or otherwise) and the evaluation of such negotiations is a metaphysical issue that does not explain the artistic techniques of performing an iconic vision. My argument (and where my concern lies) is that the organizational structure of all iconic visions (that include old or new media) are always premised on the non-essentialist relation between a signifier and signified. An icon is the mnemonic device that forms a communion between humanity (viewer), signifier (visible), and signified (invisible) by making (performing/interacting) present the absence of the image. Conversely, the idol is the mnemonic device that forms the communion by making present the image as if really present. As a point of comparison, I will look in the next section and the last Chapter at how commercial image-makers, contemporary artists, and I (as a Byzantine-inspired artist) use accessible materials to guide viewers in performing an iconic/idolic vision. From this evaluation, I identify 1) how both the iconic and idolic visions are formed when the organizational structure of the content supports the particular interpretations, desires, or beliefs of a viewer and 2) the goals, aesthetic rules, and

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specific techniques for interacting with screens that frame the symbolic content in an iconic or idolic way.

Returning to the Nietzschean visual regime of screen technologies that made the spectacle ubiquitous, I will investigate in the next section, on one hand, how this creative mobile vision addresses the idolic human need to fulfill the constitutive desire of the gaze. Verhoeff in a way validates this argument by stating that the navigational and panoramic effects that the mobile (touch) screen brings in the spatial positioning of the viewer generate a sense of alienation "from fully merging with the spatial configuration of a position in the world."[353] Even though it enables a sense of control by interacting with what is displayed (the spectacle), the media screens impose a spatial limitation on the field of vision within the bounds of "the technology of mobile visibility."[354] In turn, the media screens regulate how the gaze constructs the space in perspective. On the other hand, I consider how the viewer acquires the ability to virtually co-create the spatial construction of visibility, which relates to Marion's positive outlook on the phenomenology of the idol. I explore this creative possibility in my hierotopic practice in order to see how this union between the screen, representation, and viewing positions (makes present) the image in a material and spatial arrangement that simultaneously activates an imaginary world and a concrete touchable experience. Again, my aim is not to construct an iconic vision and expect the viewer to experience it as such—this claim is based on a metaphysical argument that is beyond the interest of this practical-based research. Instead, the focus is on the performance of viewing iconically to reveal that the image is not a Platonic/eternal/static picture of reality, frozen in time, but created and performed by the viewer through haptic visuality.[355] This Byzantine mode of viewing the image as invisible (not really present) facilitates the non-metaphysical understanding (beyond iconoclastic judgments) of the spectacle as a site for creative expression. In relation to the mobile use of today's technological screen, my practice highlights that the image is concurrently created with the touch of the screen (wood panel) and the intentional movement of vision. It concretely shows where the creative (performative) experience of the frame for representation lies and how this interactivity brings together the object, representation, and viewer. Seen from the Byzantine perspective, this union

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[353] Verhoeff, *Mobile Screens,* 19.

[354] Ibid*.,* 21.

[355] The meaning of haptic refers to the sense of touch that is intertwined with the sense of sight in visualizing the appearance of an object.

between a signifier, signified, and viewer can be judged by avoiding the logic of referentiality, which is the very source of metaphysical iconoclasm. I also claim that since with the interactive/navigational turn brought by the technological screen (mobile (touch) screen in particular), the Byzantine theology of the image is as relevant today in understanding the nature of the image as it was during the iconoclastic wars that occurred between 730 and 843 CE. Therefore, in the next section, I elaborate on Jenkins' symbolic-realistic analysis of the Apple ads to develop a method of reading the Byzantine aspects of the technological screen. Like the icon, the iPod/technological screen allows for a haptic (application-based) interaction with the invisible/virtual world without inducing a sense of separation between the object (the screen) and representation (image) as in the classic/modernist, purely optical, and passive experience of a cinematic/televisual/pictorial screen.[356]

In response to the Nietzschean spectacle and its objectifying effects in the age of technological screens (to answer Pope Benedict XVI's question above) my approach to the metaphysical critique of seeing (and implicitly of the iconic vision) does not turn into arguments surrounding the novelty of technological/scientific developments per say, as it would limit the conversation to factual (realistic) assumptions on the nature of reality. It is not in the (idolic) fascination for the latest technological innovations that I look for in analyzing the construction of an iconic/idolic vision, but on how the viewer engages with the screen as the target of metaphysical iconoclasm. Regardless of technological advances, humanity "has always been the same: *a freedom poised between good and evil, between life and death.*"[357] Moreover, although Verhoeff's performative approach to mobile *screen* technologies might seem to account for a spatial understanding of vision that is overlooked in Marion's phenomenology of the idol/icon, the viewer's ability to move virtually and physically in time and space within and with the screen is still dependent on the human nature of taking perspective. The construction of visuality through any given field of vision, in a 3D environment, screen-based (virtual) interface or a flat abstract surface, entails the gaze's investment of invisibility (space) in visibility. As a consequence of this, my focus is rather on how frames for representation connect with the metaphysical tendency of the human gaze to constitute and commodify phenomenality and how

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[356] The icon is designed to fulfill the particular purpose of informing the viewer of the presence of an absence that combine all human senses and faculties. Similarly, the mobile (touch) screen is designed for interactivity by incorporating pieces of software, camera, speakers, and various devices for output and input.

[357] "Urbi Et Orbi Message Of His Holiness Pope Benedict Xvi."

the Byzantine aesthetics provides an alternative to the confines of the Nietzschean vision in a contemporary context. Thus, in making a parallel between Verhoeff's analysis of a mobile vision and the Byzantine icon, I argue that the Byzantine hierotopic (navigational) vision offers a creative mode of critiquing the spectacle that challenges the viewer to consider the counter-intuitive gaze of the other (as Marion puts it). Precisely, I claim that the artistic and performative reconsideration of the theological and Incarnational arguments regarding the mystery of Christ's in-imagination (a mode of seeing what is human in the divine and what is divine in the human) provides a broader understanding of the limits and possibilities of the creativity enabled by the tactile nature of technological screens. And, if the creative act is an event of making new meaning, beyond what is already objectified by the viewer's gaze and already offered in the spectacle, than the artistic practice of the Byzantine (Christic) mimetic act can reveal a non-predefined/creative way to interact with contemporary screens. For this reason, I look, in the next section, at the particular Byzantine canons that form a contemporary iconic vision to practically investigate them in relation (in Chapter 4) to the technological screen and commoditized images.

3.2 A Byzantine view of the spectacle and the metaphysics of the technological screen

> Corporations seek to develop consumers with "brand loyalty" devoted to their commodities and beholden to their brand image. …This raises the question: How does a corporation, one obviously committed to the vulgarities of profit and materialism, inspire the devotion of a cult following?[358]

> "Image making'' in advertising, propaganda, communications, and the arts has replaced the production of commodities in the vanguard of advanced capitalist societies.[359]

Technological screens not only affect the viewer's mode of seeing, but also enhance the consumptive character of the spectacle within the Nietzschean regime of visuality. The commodity's cult value is no longer bound to a passive mode of spectating images, and now manifests through performative strategies that are similar to the canons employed by Byzantine iconographers in constructing icons. Media theorist, Eric Jenkins observes this parallel in the iPod silhouette commercials designed by art director, Susan Alinsangan in 2003.[360] These well-known commercials have been regarded, even by Steve Jobs himself, as the most unexpected success "in the history of Apple—and in the history of consumer electronics."[361] The simplicity of these ads incorporate compositional aesthetic rules that illustrate how Byzantine canons might be used to critique the construction of an image within today's consumerist state of the spectacle. In discussing Jenkins' analytical method of using a Byzantine critical framework, I will acquire a starting point in Chapter 4, where I delve into my solitary artistic practice of outlining a set of canons for balancing symbolism and realism—a coordinated movement of the image and materiality within the icon defined as *chōra*. The difference between Jenkins and my artistic methodology in considering the Byzantine icon as an effective and significant approach to visual criticism is that he takes the role of the observer (an outside/scientific perspective) and I take the role of the enactor (first person artistic experience). This distinction is crucial for appreciating the interdisciplinary approach of this thesis. While the scientific nature of Jenkins' analysis opens up the metaphysical/iconoclastic tensions regarding the reality of an iconic vision, the artistic nature of this interdisciplinary research complements the critique of an iconic/creative

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[358] Jenkins, "My iPod, My iCon," 467.

[359] W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 202.

[360] Eric Jenkins' Byzantine analysis of the iPod adds in his article entitled *My iPod, My iCon: How and Why do Images Become Icons?* (2008) has been recently followed by Brett T. Robinson's book on the religious aura of Apple products entitled, *Appletopia: Media Technology and the Religious Imagination of Steve Jobs* (2013).

[361] Ken Segall, "Bringing Icons to Life," *Insanely Simple, The Obsession That Drives Apple's Success,* (USA: Penguin Group, 2012), 75.

vision with a performative experience of the Byzantine canons. As noted in Chapter 1, this artistic addition to the analytical eye of the observer suggests a hierotopic way of moving the critique beyond the metaphysical/iconoclastic debates. The idea of hierotopy in my solitary role as an image-maker is to spatially situate my body within a canonic context, without necessarily involving or requiring the observer's direct engagement. My performative act is especially important for drawing an aesthetic experience through a combination of *lived experiences*, (*erlebnis* or the experiences of consciousness from lived stuff and immediate time and space), personal (idolic desires), and theological, historical theoretical accounts. Furthermore, my first person artistic experience is put forward as a canonized aesthetic judgment (a spectacle), which is different than the traditional monastic experience. This point will be explained in Chapter 4. In recording on video/photographic documentation, my artistic research can be further observed or visually re-experienced from the character of the observer's *erlebnis*. For *art practice as research,* these documentations are not about vivifying an actual iconic vision. More accurately, they fulfill (in Chapter 4) a symbolic or realistic function in describing, affecting, and interpreting the desire to frame a representation of an iconic vision. But this is not to say that the original event—as put into practice through *research in the arts* by canonically crafting an image—is not essential for the analytical method of *research on the arts*. Beyond its role as a source for documentation/facts and textual analysis, the performative knowledge of physically enacting the canons brings experiential awareness in pointing 1) the metaphysical struggles that exists between a signifier and signified and 2) the Incarnational dimension of the image.

According to Apple's creative director, Ken Segall the success of the iPod silhouette campaign comes from transcending the very metaphysical problems in depicting notions of reality: "It had a hook that really was captivating, and it didn't try to impress us with the coolness of any particular person…. It created an iconic image that came to immediately communicate 'Apple' and 'iPod.'"[362] One of the iconic features of this campaign is the depiction of the human body both abstractly and naturalistically to avoid the imposition of a specific human identity, such as race and age. This representational strategy, which is similar in form and concept to the Byzantine technique of painting, invites a larger group of viewers to identify with the products/iPod. Jenkins endeavors to theoretically outline a Byzantine critical eye for reading the spectacle in opposition to the more common academic scientific approaches to the image:

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[362] Segall, "Bringing Icons to Life," *Insanely Simple,* 75.

the symbolic and realistic visions.[363] He uses the iPod silhouette ads to offer a symbolic-realistic ground for contrasting and comparing the Byzantine aesthetics and *commodity aesthetics.[364]* Like Verhoeff's idea of performative cartography, Jenkins discusses the mobile aspect of the iPod as facilitating a Byzantine-like, quasi-hypostatic interaction (through music with the surrounding environment) in which the spectacle and viewers form a single identity. Jenkins' aim in defining a symbolic-realistic vision is to prove that by stepping outside the metaphysical/dualistic mode of thinking (symbolism versus realism), visual criticism acquires the necessary tools for analyzing the objectifying power of commercial images. As such, he proposes a Byzantine logistic in critiquing the iPod ads to unveil their ideological/commercial imperatives.[365] However, the critical eye should always have in mind the constantly changing behavior of the spectacle in mirroring desires.[366] Unlike the Byzantine icon, which persevered its original aesthetic form until preset day, the original style of the iPod silhouette campaign did not remain a constant feature of the iPod advertisement. While the "iconic look of these ads became instantly recognizable to anyone exposed to the marketing effort—which was pretty much

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[363] As pinpointed by Jenkins, the problem with the two different critical approaches based on realism and symbolism is that they fail to address the reasons for the devotion that commercial images inspire and, more importantly, why they trigger iconoclastic controversies. As opposed to symbolic-realism, the realistic and symbolic accounts do not show what makes an image perform and be performed within a commoditized context.

[364] Regarding the sale of goods and services in a modern economy, the Marxist thinker Wolfgang Haug coined the term *commodity aesthetics* to define the spectacle as the sensual appearance aimed to increase the sale of goods in a supersaturated market (119). Such images, prominent in fashion, architecture, and politics, appeal to human needs and desire by promising more than the product can deliver. Thus, agents of capital create ads promoting seductive illusions to control consumers' desire rather than serve it.

[365] As explained in Chapter 1, Byzantine theology of the image emerged from an iconoclastic war that tested the limits of hand-made representations in claiming, organizing, and harmonizing both the visible and the invisible worlds into one economy. In contrast, *commodity aesthetics* concerns only the economy of the visible world. Moreover, Jenkins explains that to escape skepticism and stimulate confidence in the purchase of their products, corporations adopt iconographic techniques into *commodity aesthetics* to declare non-materialistic values or spiritual meaning as opposed to messages of financial gain and power.

[366] From a Marxist critique of the capital, products with the same content are differentiated through labels due to the pressure of the market competition. Advertisements and labels are constantly changed in their shape, color, and description to meet the financial objectives set out by corporations. On one hand, the individual gaze is manipulated to see as a homogeneous group of people that follows a similar pattern of consumption. Guy Debord describes in his book, *The Society of the Spectacle* how people seek to copy ideals, enforced through advertisements, which can easily shift from household products to propaganda for Fuhrer. The ultimate purpose of culture industry is to present images that would make people give up the lifestyle they previously had and give people a sense of identity similar to the popular faces of the entertainment industry. On the other hand, consumers consistently covet purchasing products, such as clothing, electronic gadgets, and cosmetics to fulfill their incessant need in satisfying desires. Just as labels give a face to a product, the product displays a viewer's desire. The commodification of the viewer manifests in a social group created as "categories of persons" based on "categories of objects" (Baudrillard 1988, 16). A community of consumers is formed when a viewer's identity becomes a mere extension of a specific social group's chosen product/desire.

everyone on earth,"[367] the later campaigns, such as for the iPod nano, have taken various representational approaches that range from abstract to photographic approaches. For instance, the human figures in the 2nd generation of iPod nano commercials take on realistic features and the background colors show abstract forms. But these variations in design do not disproof the validity of a Byzantine frame for analyzing the spectacle—a point that will become clearer as I discuss my own artistic practice. In fact, it points to Marion's phenomenological argument between the idol and icon in overcoming metaphysical dualism. From a Marionian view of the idol/icon, the fluctuating relationship between symbolic and realistic elements within a frame for representation constructs various degrees of invisibilities toward seeing the image. Specifically, it is a consequence of the metaphysical eye in either feeling the presence or claiming the real-presence of reality. To put this into a phenomenological view, the iconic vision includes, in addition to the human gaze, the perspective of another (divine) gaze. The idolic vision, instead, engages the viewer into a performative event within the limits of the human act of taking perspective. The follow up question is: do the iPod silhouette commercials really induce an iconic vision? From a theological perspective, the ads are not iconic as they mainly emphasize human desires. Here, an important distinction is made in the notion of desire. While the icon prompts the viewer to acknowledge God's desire to unite the shared image of His Son and humanity (as explained in Chapter 1), the idol incites the viewer to see his/her own desires as the only reference point to reality. Consequently, the theological view of the idol is that it induces a sense of anxiety by preventing the knowledge of what God desires. From a metaphysical perspective (Jenkins' view), the ads induce a hypostatic experience due to their Byzantine quality of avoiding materialistic claims and of inviting the viewers in "a cult celebrating the immersive experience"[368] in music. Before exploring Jenkins' analysis of the iPod ads, it is important to note that although he reveals the similarities between the Byzantine icon and the ads in their formal/canonical structure, his critique does not make a concrete move out of the metaphysical mode of thinking. There is a lingering metaphysical contradiction in his analysis (to which I will return at length in the last section of this chapter, 3.2.2 Why the Contemporary Byzantine-Inspired Iconic Vision in the symbolic-realistic critique of the spectacle) in the fact that the ads

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[367] Segall, "Bringing Icons to Life," *Insanely Simple,* 74.
[368] Jenkins, "My iPod, My iCon," 466.

are described as iconic due to their cult following while, additionally, promoting Apple's consumerist ideology.

And so, my aim is to enrich my artistic research methodology with Jenkins' method of referencing the Byzantine icon in relation to the spectacle to move the critique, in the next Chapter, into a non-metaphysical terrain at the practical level through a Marionian phenomenological view of the icon/idol. From Jenkins's canonical inquiry, I will shift to a broader understanding of the image by 1) connecting the Byzantine icon with the aesthetic feeling and 2) proposing a practical engagement with the traditional canons to see the differences/similarities between an idolic/iconic creative experience. As it will become clearer in Chapter 4, the canons are not forms of representation in themselves, but techniques of vivifying the presence of an image. I do not use the canons to impose a predefined understanding of a creative experience, but as tools in learning how to present the invisible in an aesthetic *lived experience*. For example, in the video documentation, *Performing the Icon* I pay attention to the materials and techniques of constructing a Byzantine-like icon to continue (at the sensorial level) Jenkins' inquiry into how a viewer reacts to various symbolic-realistic elements by bestowing a commodity (and in my artistic practice, *intentional objects* as apprehended by my psychological subjectivity) with idolic value. And from this technical and practical consideration of the canons, I advance the possibility of the Byzantine icon to serve as a productive lens for visual criticism and art practices. It is a practice-oriented lens that investigates the need of the image to break away from its own referentiality in order to craft a creative/iconic vision—thus probing Marion's view of the idol within the contemporary regime of the spectacle.

While the obvious social scientific route to Jenkins' use of the Byzantine canons is to further analyze the objective/subjective properties of his symbolic-realistic claim, based on quantifiable data (interviews, etc.) it is also impossible to prove the reality of an iconic vision within a metaphysical framework. The analytical observer might describe what the artist's intention was in creating the iPod silhouette commercials or how many viewers have seen them in a Byzantine way, but this point of view of the observer will not be able to reveal how an iconic vision is actually performed. The scientific validity of the Byzantine canons (in triggering a performative event) adds more quantifiable data to a metaphysical perspective without proving the Incarnational dimension of an image. Such a rational attempt sends the analysis back to the basic questions of representation posed during the Byzantine iconoclastic war, as discussed in

Chapter 1. Hence, even if Jenkins (or any other media theorist) might attempt to present a defensible Byzantine claim to the iconicity of the iPod commercials (or any other spectacle), the visual critique will enter (and end) within the domains of symbolism or realism, which is doomed to iconoclastic suspicions. It is for this reason that I propose an artistic mode of enacting the canons that offers an alternative to the metaphysical endeavor in analyzing the image. My attention, therefore, is not on the accuracy of an objective/scientific view of the canons for discovering the manifestation of a Byzantine iconic vision in the commercial world, or in taking Jenkins' analysis into a metaphysical debate. These metaphysical frameworks will, in fact, defeat the very purpose of this practice-based thesis for the simple reason that there is no true point of reference (either seen from a symbolic or realistic lens) to guarantee the meaning of an iconic vision.

Now that I have noted my methodological interest in the visual techniques pinpointed by Jenkins' parallel between the canons and spectacle, the next section focuses on the Byzantine-like compositional structure of iPod silhouette commercials to examine 1) his analytical method of canonically decoding an authentic/hypostatic experience of the spectacle and to what degree this analysis adds an Incarnational dimension to visual criticism, and 2) how the canons provide a technical/design view of a contemporary cultural event in discovering visual strategies that deviate iconoclastic accusations or transcend the viewer's gaze from corporate financial gains toward the individual's needs and spiritual values. With these observational insights, I will develop (in Chapter 4) a contemporary Byzantine canonical framework for the artistic exploration of an iconic vision—hence, the interdisciplinary aspect of this thesis. In other words, Jenkins offers me a concrete and technical example of how to extract symbolic-realistic elements within a contemporary context of the spectacle in order to build a Contemporary Byzantine-Inspired Iconic Vision. And from my point of view as an enactor, this theoretical incorporation into the actual practice of the canons informs the in-imaginational mode of viewing metaphysical desires at the level of aesthetic judgments.

3.2.1 Performing the spectacle through Byzantine canons

> Churches, cars and computers share a secret affinity. They help us escape. The really special ones are works of art. Chartres, Ferrari and the iPod are all cathedrals - each one transporting us in different ways.[369]

In critiquing the aesthetic experience of mass media images, Jenkins refers first to symbolism (Platonic) and realism (Nietzschean) as the most prevalent (iconoclastic) modes of seeing imagery in current visual criticism.[370] He, then, affirms that there is little theorization of the ways in which to address the role of symbolic-realism in the spectacle, such as the Apple brand image.[371] Critiquing the cult value of products from a symbolic and realistic mode of seeing will not be sufficient enough to show how commoditized images attract a devoted group of followers and reveal the power of corporate aesthetics of commodities to mediate the relationship between visual representation, body, and desire.[372] The symbolic critique focuses on the meaning embedded in the image to explain their ideological, economical, political, or emotional power, thus diverting the critique from the visual form towards the cultural context of images without explaining how they come to impact the viewer in their market circulation. By contrast, the realistic interpretation of the image focuses on the visual form and their photo-realistic resemblance of the signified. This materialistic stance claims a direct physical relationship between a signifier and signified and ignores the creative mode of seeing required in the interpretation of the image, thus leading to a narrow definition of an iconic vision. While both the symbolic and realistic interpretations provide valuable information on iconic imagery, they fail to explain reasons for iconoclastic debates around commercialized images because they offer a fragmented interpretation of the particular visual techniques employed in their creation.

To that end, Jenkins claims that the Byzantine icon is a viable alternative to the symbolic and realistic ways of critiquing and that the symbolic-realistic type of vision can be experienced in various areas of contemporary visual culture, one of the most prominent being the

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[369] Robinson, *Appletopia,* 10.

[370] Jenkins, "My iPod, My iCon," 468.

[371] Ibid., 483.

[372] Here, the meaning of *image* is used in the Byzantine sense. It does not refer to a referential relationship between a (visual/conceptual) representation and an original model, but to how viewers create/perform an image in a physical environment through a quasi-hypostatic union between the human body, on-screen space, and off-screen space. A commoditized image, then, is a space/frame for representation designed for profit in a way that it forms a quasi-hypostatic union between the consumer's body, product, and a metaphysical desire that contributes to the cult value of a product.

advertisement industry. His discussion of the iPod silhouette commercials conceived by art director, Susan Alinsangan, in relation to Byzantine canons is especially indicative of the performative power of an iconic vision—a significant aspect to take into account when evaluating the creative intentions and (iconoclastic/consumptive) effects of image-makers (and images today). Considering the dancing silhouettes, Jenkins' explains how the Byzantine aesthetics turn the iPod into an event.[373] After providing a symbolic description of the iPod ads, Jenkins begins his analysis with an emphasis on four Byzantine iconographic techniques: the inverse perspective, light, color, and gesture.[374] I will analyze next these Byzantine canons to see how they help in designing commercials that "synecdochically embod[y] a hypostasis of immersion in music."[375] Particularly, how the ads display 1) an invitation for embodying a metaphysical experience through music by holding, dancing, walking (navigating) with the iPod in off-screen spaces and 2) the Byzantine canons of inverted perspective light, color, and gesture to construct a quasi-hypostatic union between the viewer/consumer's body, the iPod (object/screen), and the on-screen space (music and the visual representations of the dancing figures).

In opposition to the linear perspective that predominated in Western art since Renaissance, Byzantine iconographers developed, as the icon painter and art historian Leonid

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[373] Consistently shown on television, print ads, posters, and the Internet, these commercials contain five essential features, such as the bright colored background, the dancing dark human figures, the iPod in a distinctive white color, rhythmic songs from both mainstream and slightly unknown artists, and a minimal quantity of text.

[374] Defining the ideological/symbolic components of the ads, Jenkins separates these into three different groups. Firstly, he identifies the message of hip; an idea of what is trendy and young-looking which is communicated by upbeat music and different neon colors animating the background of the ad (generally referencing nightclubs and urban environments). The idea of hip suggests, among other things, a certain freedom of thought and action (perhaps even evoking the impression of a release from traditional forms of authority). Secondly, Jenkins identifies the notion of individual liberty and the idea of the uniqueness of the self. These ideas are expressed by the solid black figures of the ads, which are imaged in various poses—generally each is captured performing a unique dance step. The figures display a distinctive fashion and hairstyle, which change each time the camera angle changes. These postures and appearances speak to a particular and popular image of individualism, an image associated with personal independence, free expression and even a sense of abandon. Analyzing the images, Jenkins remarks that "the self is condensed to body through the darkness of the silhouette and the association with the sensual pleasure of dance; yet the amazing [dance] moves allow individualism to shine through" (Jenkins 2008, 476). Thirdly, Jenkins calls attention to the enthusiastic ambience created by the ad. This feeling is generated especially in the images of energetic dance moves (performed by the black human-shaped silhouettes) following a progressive musical tempo and reaching a climax before the display of the textual message and the Apple logo.
    While the symbolic interpretation gives a significant understanding of iPod's popularity, Jenkins argues that at this stage, the critique cannot reveal the commercial's attempt to communicate a quasi-hypostatic absorption in music. Thus, I will focus next on his symbolic-realistic approach to analyze the particular visual techniques and iconic forms that are used in iPod ads.

[375] Jenkins, "My iPod, My iCon," 480.

Ouspensky calls, an inverted perspective.[376] To imitate the physical universe with its depth perception as seen with the naked eye (or intentionally, in a Marionian sense), Renaissance artists developed the linear perspective that constructs pictures based on parallel lines converging in invisible spots known as vanishing points. The illusion of depth (or the insertion of invisibility in visibility through the power of the intentional gaze) directs the viewer somewhere faraway in the background of a painting. This method is inverted in the Byzantine perspective by diverging the lines from the horizon, whereby the nearest objects to the observer appear smaller than the more distant ones. The effect of depth is removed and the vanishing points are placed in the foreground to give the impression that the background is enlarging and opening up in the real space of the onlooker. In opposition to some distant point or invisible space in the horizon, the reverse perspective draws attention to the iconic figure, giving the feeling that the painted gaze (and the invisible space of the background) counters the beholders gaze by protruding through the flat surface of the icon, thus taking an active role in the construction of a hierotopy. The Byzantine perspective that Jenkins discerns in the iPod ads is partly provoked by the uniform bright background colors and the missing shadows of the silhouettes, which take away any effect of depth. The dance movements of the black figures are also meant to address the viewer as models for mimetic behavior. Instead of watching the ads passively (as one would when looking into a linear perspective or a cinematic screen), the shifting camera angle of each scene—from close-ups to full point of views—urges the viewer to picture himself/herself in the event.

The second point of resemblance between the Byzantine aesthetics and iPod commercials is the use of light (in the frame for representation) to symbolically differentiate the terrestrial aspect of a human figure from the heavenly aspect of the colors in the backdrop. Traditionally, iconographers cover the background of icons with gold leaf to symbolize the divine light and use darker colors for saints and vegetation to reference the earthly world of humans. The golden background is applied to separate the saints from the natural world by raising them above the visible reality.[377] However, the golden light is not seen as a representation of the divine light; it is part of a series of visual element that are performed in the icon's interaction with the believer. In the hierotopic event, the light radiating from the gold is considered to come "from the motif

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[376] Ouspensky, *Theology of the icon,* 1992a, 492-495.

[377] Bychkov, Victor. *Byzantine Aesthetics, Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*. Vol.1 (New York: Oxford Press, 1998), 38.

itself, and not, as in the case of realistic painting, from a conjectured exterior source of light."[378] An additional element to the concept of eternal light in the icon is the nimbus that is placed around the heads of the saints. Likewise, the telluric silhouettes of the ads are surrounded by a shiny neon light performing a saintly quality. Jenkins notices a parallel between the soft gleam surrounding the dancing silhouettes and the whiteness of their ear buds with the image of the halo depicted in Orthodox icons as well.[379]

In the third example, Jenkins observes a similarity in the way colors are used to render the figures of both the Byzantine saints and the dark silhouettes of the iPod ads (which stand out from the glowing neon colors of their background). In both cases, such a technique gives these focal figures something between a realistic and a symbolic representation. In icon painting, the portrayal of saints has neutral bodily features along with an unusual olive skin tone[380] and an ascetic facial expression. Saints are depicted with limited hand gestures in colors ranging from reds (earthly colors) to bright blues (heavenly colors).[381] Ouspensky argues that "the human body, although represented in a manner, which is not naturalistic, is, however, with very rare exceptions completely logical: Everything is in its place. The same is true of clothing…."[382] Without resembling a particular person, the facial features of the saints reduce any potential distractions allowing the viewer to focus on the transcendental rather than the human form. The same is true with the dark silhouettes against the glowing neon colors from iPod ads. The bright background colors (bright blues, reds and yellow) recall a spiritual experience much like the heavenly colors of the Byzantine icons. The earth-colored silhouettes of the ads also give a realistic representation of ordinary young people while their specific identities are erased (for example, racial or facial details are omitted). The anonymity of the human figures in the ads thereby facilitates an easy identification with them on the part of the viewer.

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[378] Nes, S. *The mystical language of icons (2nd ed). Grand Rapids*. (MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 20.

[379] Jenkins, "My iPod, My iCon," 479.

[380] The first rule in icon painting is to start with a dark layer of color. The iconographer successively applies lighter tones of that particular background color by adding a certain amount of white. This process, called scumbling, is seen as a spiritual journey from a state of being in darkness towards a transcendental light.

[381] The color red symbolizes humanity; the blue signifies the kingdom of God in heaven; the white stands for spiritual purity, the green and brown refer to the transitory living condition on earth; and the black portrays evil and demon like beings. For example, in the Byzantine icons, Mary, the mother of Jesus (Greek: Theotókos), is depicted with a blue garment underneath an outer red one. The blue stands for her divine nature and the red for her human character. Contrarily, Christ is represented wearing clothing with a reversed color structure—the blue is outside and the red is inside. This indicates that the heavenly nature prevails over his human existence.

[382] Léonide Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon*. Trans. Anthony Gythiel. (1. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1992b), 187.

In the fourth common aspect, Jenkins argues that the apparently opposite gestures of the continuously moving silhouettes from iPod ads and the stillness in depictions of Byzantine saints from Orthodox iconography communicate/perform the same meaning, the presence of a divine experience. The dancing figures, holding the bright white iPods, are immersed in music, performing "astounding flips, splits, twists, and turns [that] are simultaneously realistic and extraordinary."[383] Likewise, the Byzantine saints are enveloped "by the divine, captured in prayerful communion or penitent reflection."[384] Both characters reveal/perform a transcendental experience (symbolism) in concrete grabs (realism) encouraging the viewer's participation. By portraying a quasi-hypostatic experience, the commodity, in addition to its symbolic, exchange and use value, is now invested with a cult value.[385] As is the case with Byzantine iconography, these iPod ads create an incomplete scenario where the missing component of the scenario is the viewer/consumer him or herself. The scenario becomes complete only when the viewer participates in the performance of seeing the commodity through a symbolic-realistic lens. This happens (that is, the quasi-hypostatic event ultimately crystallizes) at the moment when the iPod turns into "*my* icon."[386]

Ouspensky asserts that the genuineness of the Orthodox icon stems from all its parts forming a synchronized union between the on-screen and off-screen: "as the space represented in the icon is united to the real space in front of it, so the depicted event which took place in a time past is united to the present moment."[387] As argued in Chapter 1 (See 1.2.2.2 The epistemological position of the image: the symbolic-realistic vision), this unity that creates a hierotopy/iconic vision/*screenspace* is based on the Trinitarian economy, which refers to an in-imagination of the Incarnational logic of the image. And the in-imagination is made possible only by constructing (at the technical/visual level) a balance between the constitutive element of the icon—the narrative-structure, the raw materials, and the visual techniques/composition. The materials and the technique used in painting the icon, which I reveal in *Portrait of an Icon Maker,* are of equal importance in determining the construction of an iconic vision as its

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[383] Jenkins, "My iPod, My iCon," 479.
[384] Ibid, 480.
[385] In *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy,* Marx explains that every labor-product has a use value that facilitates the satisfaction of a human need. When labor-products are traded as a commodity in markets, in addition to use value, they acquire an exchange-value that is translated as money (Marx 1904, 38).
[386] Jenkins, "My iPod, My iCon," 481.
[387] Ouspensky, *Theology of the icon,* 1992a, 499.

narrative that is symbolically linked to the Byzantine economy.[388] Likewise, iPod ads combine the necessary visual ingredients (after the manner of Byzantine iconography by using the elements of perspective, light, color, and gesture) to in-imagine the ecstatic experience of music through earphones. Apple's success in depicting the quasi-hypostatic immersion in music is to naturally fuse elements in a way that the dancing figures, the neon background settings, the upbeat music, and the music player/mobile (touch) screen become one economy. Every component included in the commercial is needed to see the world through music. In the span of 30 seconds, iPod ads seek to reproduce a nearly universal, phenomenological experience (dancing or being captivated by music). Reflecting on this shared experience, Jenkins comments; "anyone who has traversed public space while entranced in their favorite song recognizes the experience, similar to the feeling one gets when consumed in dance. The world seems to become mute [free of any prescribed/intentional meaning], while people appear to move in harmony with your song."[389] IPod commercials incorporate short sound breaks in their structure to specifically recall that mute moment (the iconic vision) when one is fully submersed in music. By claiming to sell this quasi-hypostatic experience "of a spiritual quality,"[390] the iPod becomes more than an ordinary commodity in the capitalist market competition. Therefore, Apple Inc. declares itself as different from other corporations whose ultimate motive is only profit and consumerism. An identical compositional configuration is illustrated in the Byzantine icons to invite the viewer in completing the spiritual experience illustrated in the on-screen space of the icon.

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[388] The Orthodox theologian, Pavel Florensky emphasizes the importance of selecting the materials and technique for painting the icon: "Neither the technique of the icon painting nor the materials used can be accidental in the relation to worship…It is difficult to imagine, even in formal aesthetics analysis, that an icon could be painted with anything, on just any surface, and by just any method" (qtd. in Ouspensky, 1992a, 499). All the materials and ingredients used in making the icon are derived from mineral, vegetable and organic materials. I elaborate on this topic in the next chapter.

[389] Jenkins, "My iPod, My iCon," 477.

[390] Ibid., 468.

3.2.2 Why the Contemporary Byzantine-Inspired Iconic Vision as a symbolic-realistic critique of the spectacle

Jenkins makes known that the Byzantine techniques of constructing an image reveals the (idolatrous) process in which commercial imagery objectify human identity. To summarize, Byzantine symbolic-realism is the mode of seeing that bestows the icon with a cult value through a rich sensorial experience. The Byzantine analysis of iPod commercials asserts that it is through this very participatory mode of seeing that the spectacle of today's mass-media images dominate over human desire and perception of reality. What is intriguing in this claim, however, is the fact that both the Byzantine icon and iPod are seen in the same symbolic-realistic manner. On the one hand, Jenkins follows the Marxist and Marionian critique of capitalist idolatry and looks at the Byzantine theory of image to expose how corporate image-makers deceive viewers in buying products.[391] In essence, he wants to strengthen the critique against the spectacle by showing how the Byzantine technique of making the icon helps to see the performative way in which "commodities and corporations accrue cult value."[392] On the other hand, Jenkins does not question how the iPod (or any other product that acquires cult value) can be seen iconically while acting as an idol simultaneously.[393] This analogy between the Byzantine icon and iPod seems to contradict the Incarnational logic of the image if the difference between the icon and idol is not clearly stated: the symbolic-realistic structure of the iconic vision constructs the presence of the image as absence and, the structure of the idolic vision constructs the image as the real-presence of reality by oscillating between symbolism and realism. Moreover, I find that Jenkins' parallel between the icon and commodity validates Marion's (non-iconoclastic) outlook on the idol in revealing a lower level of invisibility. This means that the symbolic-realistic experience does not necessarily imply a strict association with the Byzantine icon itself. In conforming the compositional structure of an aesthetic appearance to various Byzantine canons, an image can manifest through various intensities of transparency.[394] However, to what extent a Byzantine balance between symbolic-realistic elements can be crafted in an aesthetic experience requires a

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[391] Idolatry consists in worshiping a spectacle disconnected from the real due to the death of signification via simulation (as discussed in 2.3.3 The (metaphysical) consequences of the spectacular image).

[392] Jenkins, "My iPod, My iCon," 483.

[393] Although Jenkins' analysis into the icon's performativity is closer to the Incarnational logic of the image, he seems to overlook Marion's point regarding the iconic and idolic intentionality in critiquing the spectacle.

[394] One of the main research questions that I explore in my artistic practice is if the canons of reversed perspective, light, color, and gesture are universally applicable to any type of images (religious, commercial, etc.).

practical/performative inquiry at the level of artistic research, which I offer in the next Chapter. Without elevating the idol to the status of the icon and vice versa, my artistic proposition is to develop the symbolic-realistic lens for enabling various modes of critiquing a frame for representation (saturated with either commercial or religious symbolism): from a symbolic (idolic) to realistic (idolic) and symbolic-realistic (iconic) experience of the image. As such, I argue that it is important for visual criticism to address how the symbolic-realistic structure of an image is constructed at a practical level (using artistic means based on Byzantine canons) when focusing on the mediational nature of the screen in relation to iconoclastic/consumptive debates.

In addition to performatively revealing the modes of purchasing/worshiping commercial imagery, the Byzantine icon discloses metaphysical reasons for consumptive debates. For instance, while commercial images (pop icons, brand images, etc.) may not completely fit the Byzantine canons of forming a hierotopy, the consumer invests them with a cult value when what is viewed in the product retains a mimetic relation between the symbolic value (the message of a product such as being young and cool) and the use value (the material and utilitarian use of the product).[395] A product is bought/worshiped only when its symbolic value is considered as one and the same with its tangible/utilitarian form—that is, the symbolic content is seen as present. The consumers believe in this union between the symbolic value and use value when they participate in the consumption of the product through a mode of seeing that parallels the Byzantine symbolic-realistic mode of seeing. It is important to emphasize here that the theological perspective of the Byzantine symbolic-realistic mode of seeing is strictly connected to evoking the image of Christ. From an artistic/phenomenological perspective, the symbolic-realistic vision triggers an evocation that actualizes a referent beyond the mere function of a representation. Within the context of *commodity aesthetics*, symbolic-realism specifically refers to the way viewers respond with faith to products or the way in which the product is perceived as an icon—thus, the possibility of every frame for a representation to contain iconic elements and act as an icon to a certain extent.

Consumptive controversies arise from debating the juxtaposition of the concrete form with the symbolic meaning of the product (Byzantine iconoclasm arose from a similar affirmation that the icon/signifier is one and the same with God/signified). Claiming that the

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[395] A commercial *icon* sells a particular invisible message/desire (symbolic value*)* in concrete grabs (use value). In the advertisement world, therefore, the image of a product turns into an experience (a transformative desire) that attracts the consumers' gaze so that they purchase the product.

image of the product offers exactly what it sells (the real-presence of the content), invites for questioning the metaphysical relationship between the inner and outer experience of the world and the commoditization of the body according to consumers' desires. In line with the Marxist critique of the spectacle,[396] a metaphysical desire (with commercial implications) relies on a collective belief in the power of realistic/naturalistic representations to accurately depict notions of reality—a conviction defined as the "documentary mode."[397] And, the trust that consumers place in naturalistic illustrations (as presentations of an objective, genuine world) hinges on using advertisements that avoid any iconophobic attitude regarding the product. Today's iconoclastic controversy surrounding the spectacle becomes evident in the paradoxical use of the technological screen (from cinematic/televisual to digital mobile screens): while it has the power to convince onlookers about its neutral stance in presenting authentic events, it can as well be used to disseminate information that reflects the interest of those advocating an ideology or belief. Jenkins exemplifies that "critics quickly viewed images as a way to advance claims that would be either illegal or unethical if expressed directly in words (such as cigarette smoking makes one youthful)."[398] As such, consumers' general suspicion towards advertisements determined the brand image-makers to employ iconic techniques for hiding the dual quality of a frame for representation—its naturalizing capability through concrete depictions of a narrative and its "persuasive power and propagandistic implications."[399] Jenkins' analysis of iPod television ads demonstrates how the visual language of icons reemerges as a marketable tactic. By introducing the Byzantine concept of iconic hypostasis in the creation of commercials prevents the iconophobic tendencies of consumers and criticism. The icon techniques can accommodate the products endowed with transcendental meaning to the consumers' understanding without forcefully linking their physical body to abstract ideas/advertisement slogans. Thus, by portraying a quasi-hypostasis in advertisements, corporations manage to keep

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[396] In brief, the Marxist critique of the capital is based on the idea that a commodity is not an object that simply satisfies the human basic needs. A commodity has a theological meaning that reflects the presence of invisible images.

[397] Finnegan, C. A. "Documentary as art in U. S. Camera," *RSQ: Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, Vol. 31(2), 2001, 37. Following the same line of thought, Roland Barthes refers to photographs as having the power to naturalize a story/fiction by making the claim of "having-been-there" (44).

[398] Jenkins, "My iPod, My iCon," 474.

[399] Ibid. For example, the false statement, *poison is good for the health* is obviously unbelievable to consumers when communicated through words alone. However, the same message can be communicated visually through iconic techniques and appear, in fact, as a positive message.

themselves away from accusations of designing commercials that mislead and persuade the public.

In applying the Byzantine tradition of icon painting, I am not only continuing Jenkins' parallel between the Byzantine canons and *commodity aesthetics*, but also complicating his symbolic-realistic interrogation at the phenomenological level by considering Marion's approach to the icon/idol. As previously stated, Marion finds a similarity between the icon and idol in the way they reveal the invisible with different intensities (see <u>2.1 The phenomenology of the idolic vision</u>). So, when comparing and contrasting the Byzantine icon with a brand image, it is important to consider this phenomenological resemblance by further investigating (practically/artistically) the two modes of creating images iconically in a liturgical space and idolically in a commoditized space. Regarding the relevance of the doctoral level practice-oriented research into the construction of an iconic vision*,* the following performative inquiries occur**:** Is the Byzantine based artistic framework capable of addressing what academic research, based on the symbolic and realistic arguments, fails to do: 1) a non-dualistic understanding of an iconic vision—that is, beyond iconoclastic susceptibilities that only limits the analysis to a metaphysical mode of thinking and 2) what are the practical, technical, and artistic reasons for the devotion that contemporary media imagery inspire within a commoditized context. It is the answer to these questions that occupy my practice of a Contemporary Byzantine-Inspired Iconic Vision*.* Based on Byzantine visual techniques, I will concretely show what makes a frame for representation perform and be performed iconically or idolically. These differences and similarities will become clearer once I turn (in the following sections) to the aesthetic construction of my Byzantine iconic vision in relation to other contemporary artistic modes of seeing reality as present.

From a phenomenological view, Jenkins overlooks the fact that the Byzantine icon acquires a cult value beyond one's intentionality whereas the iPod attains a cult following through a voyeuristic participation within the limits of consumers' intentionality—as Marion puts it, the televisual screen mirrors one's desires and stops/violates the gaze with its dazzling appearance. According to Jenkins' analysis, a viewer of the iPod ads is immersed in music, when the meaning/image of the ads are not perceived as something imposed on the ads themselves. Rather, this meaning is constructed in the act of viewing itself; specifically as in the Byzantine symbolic-realistic perception of the image. The Byzantine-ish elements of the ads prompt the

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spectator into a creative immersion where essential values are revealed—a "secret meaning 'given' in the phenomenal being of the object."[400] Jenkins argues that due to their self-referentiality, the meaning of the ads emerge (or rather its effect arises) by breaking the separation between a viewer's mental process of ascribing meaning and his or her sensual-physiological experience of the object/iPod. Therefore, the ecstatic experience of music (heard through earphones) is accomplished when the user harmonizes, performs, or mimics the visual experience of the on-screen space (based on perspective, light, color, and gesture) within the off-screen space. Consequently, the particular iconic elements (the dancing figures, the neon background settings, the upbeat music, the music player, and the consumer) form a *screenspace*/hierotopy when they appear as devoid of any particular meaning—that is, they present themselves as "purely 'sensual' phenomena."[401] In this manner, the user is invited to construct an individualized/Nietzschean path through the off-screen. Here, the formula is: self-referentiality + intentionality = idol. While this might seem a mode of overcoming the objectifying power of the spectacle, the investment of the phenomena in the quasi-hypostatic experience of the iPod with the user's intentionality and desires is itself an idolic imposition of meaning (an authorial control over the phenomena). In addition, Jenkins' claim that the profit-driven intention of the corporate image-makers is hidden behind the Byzantine visual rules in the ads is rarely explicitly religious to viewers. This means that his symbolic-realistic critique of the spectacle becomes more comprehensive and instructive for scholars of theology, art history, and visual culture when considering Marion's point regarding the intentionality of the iconic/idolic gaze and my artistic practice into the Incarnational dimension of an iconic vision.

From an artistic research perspective, the above phenomenological issues can be seen in a non-iconoclastic light by reflecting on how the Byzantine icon allows the viewer to create new meaning and values beyond human intentionality. This Byzantine type of reflective artistic activity, which I propose in the next Chapter, brings a restorative and creative critique of the performative practice of seeing that has been lost in the age of mobile interactivity.[402] For example, Robinson explains how the (touch) screen of the iPhone is designed for an instant

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[400] Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance*, 142.
[401] Ibid.,140.
[402] During a speech at the Vatican in Saint Peter's Square on August 5th, 2014, Pope Francis has addressed the need (to a crowd filming him on smartphones) for "calm, reflection, and tenderness…if…the high-speed world of online social media…was to be 'a network not of wires but of people'" ("Stop wasting your life on smartphones, web - Pope Francis," www.rt.com, Published time: August 06, 2014 03:34).

gratification of the self to the point where "there is a social obsession with efficiency via process and technology.… Whether we own an iPhone or not, the ethic of speed [or mobility] is built into nearly all our cultural practices."[403] The performative freedom of controlling, transiting, and visualizing every social aspect of one's life according to human intentionality through screen-mediated consumption does not facilitate the monastic/solitary kind (orthopraxis) of meditation that specifically contemplates on how the tangible experience of the elements from an on-screen space are seen as if they were physical realities in an off-screen space.

To sum up, this research takes the stance that a claim for symbolic-realism can be made within the corporate aesthetics of commodities—a position that parallels Marion's phenomenological turn in redefining the theology of the icon/idol. Peter Joseph Fritz clearly describes Marion's viewpoint: "In the face to face, the cross of gazes, Marion locates the essence (even the salvation) of all images, which includes all paintings (even idols)."[404] Nevertheless, I also keep in mind that the Byzantine icon induces a type of vision within a hierotopy that moves the viewer beyond metaphysical desires (as argued in Chapter 1 when analyzing Nicephorus' epistemological view of mimesis). Although Nicephorus' non-essentialist approach to the icon can still be categorized as an iconoclastic claim by a contemporary viewer committed to metaphysical values, I argue that, through an epistemological turn to the mystery of Incarnation (the image of Christ as God and man), the artistic research can provide a valid alternative to metaphysical iconoclasm in analyzing the image and the construction of a contemporary iconic/idolic vision. The difference between an icon and a commercial icon/idol, I reinstate, can only be analyzed and understood when the practical (artistic) level is also included. This thesis considers the actual form and content of the Byzantine icon—an approach that neither Jenkins nor Marion has been prepared to do—to shape an iconic vision (within the limits of the academic artistic research) for viewers to concretely see and experience the particular visual techniques of using symbolic-realistic elements.

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[403] Robinson, *Appletopia,* 70.
[404] Fritz, "Black Holes and Revelations," 428.

CHAPTER 4: MY CONTEMPORARY BYZANTINE-INSPIRED ICONIC VISION

> We must be careful not to distort the human figure…to avoid the risk of becoming caricaturists…For these reasons, the Orthodox Church requires that all iconographers conform to an ensemble of Canons, which are at once guides and safeguards intended to guarantee…the doctrinal unity that are valid beyond all national boundaries.[405]

> …[the iconic vision of an] artist and painter does not reside in…[creating] abstract [or naturalistic] forms, but rather in a rediscovery of the human face, since the Incarnation of Christ…postulates this very fact.[406]

In Chapter 3, I focused on the performative nature of vision in the digital age of mobile screens to highlight the contemporary (technical and metaphysical) context for constructing an iconic/idolic vision. Jenkins' Byzantine approach to the spectacle tells that one must be critically aware of how (instead of what) a screen for representation induces a quasi-hypostatic vision. By using the Byzantine canons—more precisely, the aesthetic elements of inverse perspective, light, color, and gesture to balance the symbolic and realistic modes of representation— idolic/materialistic claims can be framed iconically and grounded in the commercial world in such a way that the viewer's intentionality is invited to worship, navigate, contextualize, and create new meaning. One critical observation that can be taken from iPod advertisements is the disjuncture between the Byzantine technique of portraying the hypostasis of Christ and the objectifying effects of the quasi-hypostatic event between the iPod and consumer. The Byzantine canons (theologically defined in Chapter 1, <u>1.2.2.2 The epistemological position of the image: the symbolic-realistic vision</u> and aesthetically described through Jenkins' analysis of iPod advertisements) were developed to avoid iconoclastic concerns in depicting notions of truth/reality, so when the critique considers them only in light of ideological/metaphysical connotations, the attention shifts from how to what forms an iconic vision. Consequently, in place of critiquing a vision's symbolic or realistic link to an origin beyond the screen, this chapter particularly focuses on the (orthopractic) construction of an artistic iconic vision in terms of the canons to provide a route for revealing ways to dress up an idolic/aesthetic vision as iconic. In so doing, I offer an alternative artistic mode of analyzing the ideological implications of the spectacle as a container of objectivity/reality.

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[405] Michel Quenot, *The Icon*, *Window on the Kingdom,* Trans. by a Carthusian Monk (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1991), 67.
[406] Ibid.,148.

4.1 The traditional role of the canons in my artistic research

In my artistic practice, the Byzantine canons do not act as a way to contain the essence of an image (a referent), but rather, I see them in a similar fashion as time (a referent) is displayed by the rules (canons) of a clock according to the number of hours, minutes and seconds. More precisely, my aim is to see how the canons allow the depiction of an invisible reality without claiming real-presence. This means that the canons are always contextualized within a constructed space (a place turned into a narrative space, e.g. a *screenspace* or hierotopy), and not some pure Platonic abstractions, separated from the material world.[407] In this view, I want to stress that my artistic research intention is to iteratively use these canons within the designed environment of an art installation. My purpose is to prompt a performative inquiry into the universality of Byzantine canons' formal structure to mediate images that make the world present to viewers. Said differently, to see how the canons articulate a symbolic-realistic solution to a wide range of ideological meanings. With regards to the artistic validity of the canons in constructing an image (in space), theologian and cardinal Christoph Schönborn explains that any human created image (that is, to actualize the presence of an absence) affirms an intimate connection to "the concept of the mystery of Christ as God and man."[408] I quote at large the following text to encompass where art and Byzantine iconography meet:

> The Incarnation not only transformed our knowledge of God, it also changed man's view of the world, of himself, and of his activity in the world. The work of the artist, too, was drawn into the spell of this mystery. If Christ appeared on earth in order to renew man in his total being, to form man after his own image, then we must also say that the artist's eyes,…and his creative powers, are included in this re-creation as well….For both art and ritual, have in common their flowing from an *encounter* [emphasis mine] between heaven and earth, between divine and human reality, and living out this *encounter* ever anew. [An *encounter* that] all religions…express obliquely or clearly, finds its unexpected fulfillment in a human face. The face, the eyes, the voice, the countenance of a man, the One who is God and man, has become God's own word, his personal gesture, his self-expression—this we believe without a full understanding.[409]

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[407] For instance, the Byzantine iconographic canons of painting Jesus' portrait are not made-up abstractions as they were formulated based on the material evidence of acheiropoietic icons. In Christian tradition, acheiropoietic icons of Christ, the Virgin Mary, Veronica's veil and those marks imprinted on the Turin Shroud, have been worshiped for centuries as pure in origin; that is, as true appearances untouched by the human hand. The significance of these icons (made without hands or painted from the life subject during Jesus and Mary's lifetime such as the Hodegetria icon by Saint Luke) has played a fundamental role in authenticating the role of the canons to bring to presence (as absence) the real historical referent (the Incarnational event).

[408] Schönborn, *God's Human Face*, 238.

[409] Ibid.

The Incarnation of Christ demands His visual understanding by depicting Him in a human form. Accordingly, the challenge to represent Christ is similar to the task of representing the human being in general, whose image is one with God. The canons that guide the icon technique of painting/imprinting the shared image of God and mankind follow the result of the Incarnation: the icon of Christ—which "is the basic model for every other representation of the human face. This face of God-become-man sanctifies the faces of all humanity: black, white, red, yellow, and mixed races of every color."[410] And from the iconophiles' perspective, those (the iconoclasts) who reject the idea that the face of another human could mirror the face of God commit the true heresy.[411]

According to the Second Council of Nicaea, "[o]nly the technical aspect of the work depends on the painter; its design, its disposition, its composition depend quite clearly on the Holy Fathers."[412] Before taking up a performative position on the role of the technical in the construction of my Contemporary Byzantine-Inspired Iconic Vision (in the section 4.4.5.1 Technical/realistic and symbolic description), I will add now to Jenkins' classification of the canons by further drawing upon the nature of icon painting, that is, the traditional role of canons in describing the icon's design/color/light, disposition/gesture, and composition/perspective. This return to a broader canonical understanding of Byzantine iconography will help, in the next sections, to position the Byzantine aspect of my art in (Kantian) aesthetic terms.

By delving into the need and use of the canons, I must first re-emphasize the following fundamental Byzantine principle. Comparing to the rules of depicting notions of divine presence in other major forms of religious art, including Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam,[413] the beauty[414] of the Byzantine icon emanates from its elaborate (almost mathematical) organization of symbolic and realistic, on and off-screen spatial elements for addressing the unity of Christ's human form and His invisible image. Furthermore, the iconic image is not related to the iconographer's artistic talent of painting/drawing, his/her power of reason, or personal aesthetic

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[410] Quenot, *The Icon*, 147-148.

[411] Ibid.

[412] Nicea, 6 a, sess. 252 C, qtd. in Quenot, *The Icon*, 67.

[413] Similarly, Islamic calligraphy, Hindu and Buddhist mandalas follow strict/geometrical representational rules to communicate revelation.

[414] The difference and similarity between Kant's aesthetic feeling of beauty (as opposed to imagination and emotion) and the Byzantine image will be discussed later in the section 4.3 Aesthetic constrains in the Byzantine appreciation of the spectacle.

emotions and imagination—secular values that came to be appreciated in the Western Christian art, after the Romanesque era.[415] The symbolic role of the canons is to specifically restrain/counteract (but *not* to oppress human creativity, as I argue in the next sections) the sensual satisfactions (or consumerist desires) gained from imagination and materiality.[416] This symbolism is established based on thematic parameters (constant reminders of His Incarnation) in which the depictions of Christ, the Virgin, and saints take on certain details: from the gesture of hands to the color of clothing and the position of figures in relation to vegetation and architecture.[417] Regarding the regulatory role of canons in liberating the iconographer's creative power, the contemporary iconographer Mrs. Fortunato-Theokretov explains that the canons guide the painting of the human body (using the right colors, facial expression, and clothing) to become the vehicle of the Holy Spirit: "Byzantium succeeded in discovering the perfect formula that we [the icon makers] still recognize today, and to this very moment every other attempt to express and represent the idea of a transfigured body has failed…."[418] On a similar note, I have explained in Chapter 1, section 1.2.5 A form of performativity in the Byzantine performance that the *performative turn* in contemporary arts (as it stems from Austin's theory of speech acts) identifies a creative, performative act when the human body is seen as self-referential (for "avoiding" metaphysical dualism)*.* From this Austinian perspective, any form of symbolism performed in an artistic event is critiqued for imposing an authoritative *I*/essence, which prevents the performance of a new creative act. In the case of icon painting, however, human vision does not implement the canons as an end in itself. Through their use, the canons contextualize the role of the iconographer's gaze in complementing the Incarnational symbolism. And I argue (through my practice) that the canon's function to contextualize an iconic image is non-aesthetic (in a non-Kantian sense). My artistic view does not take the canons as predefined value judgments of what an iconic experience should be or some kind of acting rules in playing an original script/event on a stage. They act as a method of learning and seeing in an iconic way by framing realistically the possibility of human vision to actualize an image as a real life event in a non-

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[415] Quenot, *The Icon*, 72.
[416] Quoting from the decrees of the Council of Moscow (Stoglavy Synod) held in 1551, Quenot says that the icon-maker "must be humble, gentle and pious, avoiding immoral conversations and mundane scurrility; he must be neither quarrelsome nor envious of others, neither a drunkard nor a thief; he must practice both spiritual and corporal purity" (68).
[417] For a comprehensive list of themes and icon technique instructions see: Dionysius of Fourna, *The Painter's Manual*, trans. P. Hetherington, California: Oakwood Publications, 1989.
[418] Quenot, *The Icon*, 70.

referential way. I return to this argument later in the section <u>4.3 Aesthetic constrains in the</u> <u>Byzantine appreciation of the spectacle</u>, where I equate the Kantian image of beauty with the Byzantine theology of the image (even if Immanuel Kant's stance on aesthetic experience contradicts the Incarnational dimension of the image)**.** Specifically, I claim that the canons, somehow, help to reset all predefined symbolism (produced by human intentionality alone), allowing the elements involved in the icon's performance to reach a point of self-referentiality, however without stopping at the sensual perception or the form of the object. In contrast to a performative act that denies symbolism in favor of creativity—that is, to stop at realism to create new meaning out of human intentionality, as described in Chapter 1 from Fischer-Lichte's view of contemporary performance art[419]—the Byzantine canons move the human gaze towards an essence, which is a form of symbolism that challenges the limits of human vision with *its own* invisible image. The Byzantine view of a performative act demands symbolism as much as it needs realism—it is not one more important than the other. So, the iconographer's creativity does not lie in creating performative events from self-referential acts as new forms of symbolism (which is nothing else than a Nietzschean mimetic behavior of producing one's *own image*), but to take an active, creative role in completing the lack of an invisible reality (an absence of the image that is acknowledged symbolically at the performative∕realistic level).

At this point, it is important to specify some additional key Byzantine canons that expand or provide further support to the Byzantine model of vision in critiquing the spectacle. For the purpose of showing how the canons can be used in a Contemporary Byzantine-Inspired Iconic Vision, it is not necessary to provide a comprehensive presentation of all the iconographic canons. Nonetheless, for a detailed list of thematic and technical instructions/canons, the most popular iconographic manual is called *Hermeneia*, written between 1730 and 1734 by the Athonite monk, Dionysius of Fourna. Therefore, I will be quite selective in my analysis in order to address only those canons that I consider and rethink in my icon practice to propose an alternative to metaphysical iconoclasm. Based on the archpriest, Michel Quenot's Orthodox perspective on the icon, the traditional/monastic approach to icon painting poses the following general principles:

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[419] And even if Fischer-Lichte would argue that the performative act needs to remove old, predefined meanings to create new meanings from self-referential acts, this idea of creativity directly parallels the Nietzschean imposition of human intentionality over notions of reality/truth, thus sending the critique back to metaphysical issues. This radical elimination of symbolism for a new form of symbolism only perpetuates iconoclastic debates.

1) <u>The Signature.</u> The iconographer's intentionality should be eclipsed by the person depicted on the icon in the manner portrayed by John the Baptist: "He must become greater and I must become less."[420] As a consequence, the wood panel painting should not be signed or, in the opposite case, the signature should be preceded by the remark *By the hand of…,*. The reason for this is that on the icon, the written name is existentially linked to the person of Christ, which has the power to actualize/make present His absence.[421] In the Byzantine theology of presence, the name and person creates an intimate bond between vision and hearing—a topic that I exemplify later, in the section 4.4.1 Orthopraxis*: the technical + the image + body = canons*.

2) <u>The Unity of the Elements</u>. The materials of the icon reflect the organic and mineral (pigments, chalk, egg, wood, etc.) states of the visible worlds (as opposed to the artificial/man-made materials). The totality of the natural world brought together in the icon by the work of the iconographer mimics God's creation of matter. The use of plastic or acrylic paint, for example, is a Nietzschean perversion—that is, a "manifestation of the human being's emancipation from nature, from God's creation, from all His works destined to glorify Him"[422]

3) <u>The Symbolic-Realistic technique.</u> As stated throughout this thesis (particularly, in Chapter 1, section 1.2.2.2 The epistemological position of the image: the symbolic-realistic vision) the symbolic-realistic painting technique is neither representational/naturalistic nor non-representational/abstract. It is a mode of creating an image that breaks the customary relation between the maker, artwork, and viewer with another invisible presence. Similarly to the effacement of the iconographer's personality in the process of icon making, the onlooker's intentionality withdraws before the icon's authoritative (divine) gaze. However, since this divine, invisible gaze cannot be represented in a tangible/realistic way, Byzantine iconographers searched for a way to faithfully depict Christ's bodily characteristics, without producing a dematerialized, abstract perception of His identity. The result of such a mode of painting the human body requires that:

   a) <u>The Background.</u> The surrounding landscape (including architectural elements, animals, and vegetation) follows the geometric logic of the reversed perspective

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[420] Jn 3:30, New International Version (NIV), www.biblegateway.com, accessed 10 October, 2014.

[421] The Greek acronym for Jesus Christ is IC XC and for the Theotokos (the Mother of God) is MP-ΘΥ. Also added to Christ's halo is the inscription οΩυ ("He who is").

[422] Ouspensky, *Theology of the icon,*1992a, 500.

(as explained in the previous chapter). Instead of a fixed independent stage for events to take place, all the background elements defy the gravitational and proportional laws of this world in order to take part in the foreground together with the viewer's act of seeing. In a way, the canon of the Byzantine perspective removes the depicted event from particular historical periods and locations so that all times and spaces meet in the present, in front of the viewer.

b) <u>The Face and Body.</u> There is no icon without a full frontal view of the human face. A profile face prevents the crossing of the gazes between the icon and viewer, which allows full authority to the viewer's objectifying gaze. In icons, profile views of human bodies are used to comment on people who did not achieve holiness. Quenot notes that "the ancient Greeks called a slave *aprosopos*, i.e., he who has no face."[423] Understood in contemporary terms, the process of objectification/depersonalization under the capitalist conditions of image-production involves the defacement of the human being by the desiring gaze. Quenot likewise agrees, with this comment in relation to the spectacle of screen culture, when he declares that "[d]espite a profusion without precedent of media at his disposal, modern man experiences a growing difficulty to meet or encounter his neighbor, whose face he so often does not even notice."[424] Hence, from this commoditized condition of "slaves without faces—*aprosopos*-because of sin [desires]," the icon reconstructs the human face in God's own image based on the logic of Incarnation.[425] To attain a face is to acknowledge the face of the other and upraise his/her presence to the divine level of Christ's image.

Every element of the face is painted with earthly colors and takes a specific (symbolic) role in directing all senses towards the image—that is, to perceive more than the visible.[426] Symbolizing an infinite invisibility, the eyes are disproportionally large, staring at the viewer from pronounced orbitals under a curved forehead marked with deep wrinkles. The nose is overextended vertically and the mouth is painted with closed, thin lips to indicate that smell and taste are not simple detectors of the physical world but also made for contemplation. Similarly, the ears have unnatural shapes to signify that they are also listening to a mysterious invisible world.

And an additional note on the face is that it establishes the size, posture, and placement of the human body in the icon's composition. Usually, the head fits ten times in the length of the body. The elongated way of painting the hands, fingers, and beard emphasize this unearthly aspect of the body.

c) <u>Stillness and Movement</u>. The garments are not mere pictorial elements for highlighting the naturalistic shape of the human body. They do not render material accessories that might compete with the center of the human body—

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[423] Quenot, *The Icon*, 93.

[424] Ibid.

[425] Ibid.

[426] A brief symbolic description of the colors in Byzantine iconography was provided in Chapter 3, footnote 377. For a thorough understanding of the Byzantine use of colors and their psychological effects see Michel Quenot's book *The Icon: Window on the Kingdom*, the section from page 111 to 119.

which is, as Marion puts it, the gaze that pierces back at the viewers through the black dots of the eyes. In opposition to the apparent stillness of the bodies, the cloaks directly expose, through their folding, color and light, the movement of an invisible presence.

d) <u>The Gold, Color, and Light.</u> The purpose of the colors is not to illustrate shadows and depth in a linear perspective, but to emanate different intensities of light. Symbolizing the divine pure light, the gold leaf (used around the heads or to cover the entire surface of the icon's pictorial background) helps to see the face as witnessed by the biographer of Saint Seraphim of Sarov, Nikolay Motovilov: "Picture to yourself the face of a man who is speaking to you from the middle of the sun at its midday brightest. You can see the movements of his lips and the changing expresions of his eyes; you hear his voice and you feel his hands on your shoulders, but can neither see his hands, his body, nor your own, but only a blinding light for many yards all around you…" (Quenot 100-101). Gold has a special value in the Byzantine color palette as it symbolozies the brightest available natural light that is the closest to divine light, which is beyond human vision. All the other colors of the rainbow are of lower light intensity (subdued), thus used to paint the visible enviroment.

4.2 The iconic and idolic roles of the canons in my artistic research

In defining the above traditional (or ideal) visual elements of the Byzantine icon to craft an artistic mode of presenting the absence of a subjective/artistic image, I do not aim to formalize the viewers' interpretation of the Byzantine canons—that is, if a person, according to his/her social/cultural background decides whether to see in a realistic, symbolic, or symbolic-realistic mode. Jenkins clarifies that "an icon achieves the status of a divine image only when it becomes culturally accepted as a natural fusion of meaning and form through continued use."[427] An image-maker can perform and present the artistic visual conditions for an iconic vision, but cannot control how those conditions will be estimated and instantiated by a viewer. Everything that implicates human intentionality or interpretation is, arguably, changeable and contextual. As an artist, I can only guess how my work will be interpreted or performed. From the perspective of viewers, I could say that my artistic iconic vision can be defined as idolic when it stops the viewer's gaze to what I (subjectively) imagine, in the sense that the gaze sees a Nietzschean celebration of my own identity (see in particular my discussion on Marion's phenomenological view on idolic art in Chapter 2, <u>2.2.2 The realistic artistic vision</u>). Moreover, in the idolic vision

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[427] Jenkins, *My iPod, My iCon,* 480.

of my artwork, the viewer could identify his/her own (materialistic or metaphysical) desires, as in a mirror, with my own imagined narratives. In this case, the (mimetic) communication between my work and the viewer manifests strictly at the level of human intentionality—the same mirroring effect happens in the worshiping of pop-culture icons and products. Conversely, my artwork could become iconic in intent, if it confronts the viewer's intentionality as defined by Nicephoros' epistemological understanding of the icon. If my iconic vision poses a visual challenge to the viewer's own desire and interpretation of the visual elements included in my narratives, then my work can produce a type of (symbolic-realistic) reassessment of predefined values and objectifying judgments. Also, if in my iconic vision, the viewer rediscovers a sense of otherness (in the form of a human gaze that counteracts the viewer's own gaze), then my work can trigger an iconic experience.

From the perspective of an iconographer, it is essential to note, firstly, that the Byzantine approach to an artist's imagination is that it always acts as an idolic pool of images and the role of the canons is to *not* limit, but to *free* the artist's creativity from the limits of human intentionality. The only way to acquire an iconic intent in presenting an image is to obey the Byzantine canons both symbolically and realistically in unity with the Incarnation of Christ, "who was God's image incarnate."[428] In following the canons either symbolically (as in an abstract mode of representation) or realistically (as in a naturalistic mode of representation) subsequently exposes the artistic intent to a metaphysical tendency, on the part of the artist, that claims the real-presence of an image. The same goes with the symbolic and realistic modes of seeing, on the part of the viewer, which stir the perpetual iconoclastic debates between image and reality, visible and invisible. The idolic/iconic intent and form of my artwork, however, will be discussed further in the next sections, where I propose a new list of Byzantine criteria to analyze the construction of a contemporary hierotopy. And with this list, I critique how the artistic intentionality can be masked as iconic in "form" by using visual techniques that parallel (or are similar to) the Byzantine canons. This artistic approach in seeing the human gaze's tendency to objectify/dominate the world and project a predefined identity onto it, I believe, contributes significantly to the critique of the spectacle. For instance, in using my icon practice as an artistic testing ground, I can see, on one hand, how my performance of marking/tracing in the visible a subjective/invisible image (as in *Portrait of an Icon Maker*) parallels the

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[428] Ibid., 473.

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performative way of experiencing the Byzantine iconic vision, and, on the other hand, how my personal interpretation implicit in this event makes for a weak symbolic link to iconicity or to a sense of otherness. If I delve into the twin pitfalls of (artistic) subjectivism, as originated from the metaphysical dualism between subject and object, I can state that my Byzantine technique of combining the visual elements in my iconic vision comes from my own imagination. Particularly, I illustrate an imaginary spectacle in a manner that combines figures taken from Byzantine iconography with animated cartoons and products from American entertainment industry. This is evident in the following wood panel paintings:[429]

1) *The Holy Earbuds* (Fig. 14) **Description:** Bugs Bunny takes the role of archangel Michael holding a rosary made of iPod earbuds.

Figure 14: *Holy Earbuds*, 8" x 11", genuine gold leaf, egg tempera, pigments on Wooden Panel, 2011. Available on the companion DVD and at: http://youtu.be/W-tMslN6oUc

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[429] For my older versions of wood panel paintings (made prior to entering the doctoral program at Concordia University, 2010), see **Figure 13** from the List of Figures, a video documentation of my work exhibited in 2010 at the Art Gallery of Windsor, Ontario, Canada entitled *The Holy Corner*. The video is also available at: http://youtu.be/8IF8KWlNNns

2) *Play with me, you mother* (Fig. 15)
   Description: Kermit the Frog and Miss Piggy engage in an imaginary Byzantine world

Figure 15: *Play with me, you mother*, 5" x 8", genuine gold leaf, egg tempera, pigments on Wooden Panel, 2011

3) **Figure 16:** Video documentation of *Tom and Christ's grace* (2012), 5" x 6", genuine gold leaf, egg tempera, pigments on photograph and wooden panel. Available on the companion DVD and at: http://youtu.be/uYb_paRaaig
   Description: The American animated character Tom takes the face of Christ as a Byzantine icon. The sound element is a personal interpretation of the Byzantine chants in combination with sounds from the song *Sola Gratia* by the Dutch minimalist composer, Jozef van Wissem.

4) **Figure 17:** Video documentation of *Icon* (2012-work in progress), Video documentation of *Icon,* 14" x 17", egg tempera, pigments on wooden panel. Available on the companion DVD and at: http://youtu.be/PVAXipH3bSg
   Description: It explores the classic theme of the Crucifixion by incorporating imaginary characters and forms painted in the Byzantine style of symbolic-realism. The sound element in the video documentation is a personal interpretation of the Byzantine chants. This particular wood panel paint is also part of my installation work entitled, *Performing the Icon*, which I discuss later in section 4.4.5 Probing the Byzantine framework 2: *Preforming the Icon*.

The idolatry of my artistic vision occurs from taking the following steps: 1) While guided

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by my power to *take perspective*, I look at the spectacle of today's advertisement industry. 2) My gaze gets caught up into what mirrors my own desires such as Apple products, Looney Tunes characters, and parts of the human body, particularly hands and feet. 3) I collect and mix them using the icon painting technique to generate an imaginative scenario that pleases my own personal interests/desires.[430] Simply said, I create narratives that *agree* with my own subjective judgment.[431] Nevertheless, I can also state that the solitary, monk-like method of painting according to the Byzantine canons stems from the monastic practice of the mystical prayer of the solitaries (hesychasts) called *The Prayer of Jesus*.[432] In the hesychastic tradition, the practice of prayer refers to a relentless repetition of the words "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me a sinner" in order to attach the mind to the memory of Christ's image. In my private icon performance, I continuously repeat the same prayer/sounds and actions through the Byzantine technique of painting. Based on the hesyhast practice of this prayer, I composed a list of 12 Hierotopic sounds (**Figure 18**, see List of Figures) that are incorporated in *Portrait of an Icon Maker*. The sounds are a mix of Byzantine prayers (recorded in an Orthodox monastery years ago) with sounds extracted from chants, bells, carpentry tools, and wind blowing through the monastery's chambers.

To some extent, my artistic/subjective/idolic approach to the Byzantine icon corresponds to the way Apple's image is framed/performed iconically to imitate a quasi-hypostatic union with its distinct corporate identity, which is idolic/objectifying in intent to trigger consumerist desires. A product like the iPod illustrates a technique of using the Byzantine canons, to design iconically a materialistic desire. As discussed in Chapter 3, <u>3.2.1 Performing the spectacle through Byzantine canons</u>, corporate image-makers are faced with the challenge to frame an image in such a way to mask any profit driven intentions. It is key to sell a product with a real intention to accommodate the consumer's needs/desires; the profit goal is to sell as many

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[430] There is a parallel between my approach to creating a composition and the Byzantine technique: "[a]n experienced iconographer either draws it [the icon's composition] from his head [inspired by the thematic canons], if the subject is well known to him, and guided by the meaning of the image, lays out the composition and the figures as he wills, or, if the theme is little known to him, he uses the help of other icons, iconographic manuals, preliminary sketches and so forth (Ouspensky 1999, 53)."

[431] On the meaning of the agreeable, I refer later when discussing Kant's idea of aesthetic judgments.

[432] Hesychasm (from the Greek word *hesychia*,) stands for "calm, solitude, interior peace" (Quenot 94). It is a solitary practice of prayer that began in the first centuries of Christianity and revived in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in the monasteries of the Eastern Orthodox Church (Quenot 94). My personal experience of this practice started at Sihăstria Monastery (North Moldova, Romania) after listening to abbot Ilie Cleopa's talks in the summer of 1995. For more on hesychastic tradition see Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox way*, London: Mowbrays, 1979.

products as possible and the best way is to attract and shift consumers' attention beyond the usefulness of the product. In the market competition, the battle of products takes place at the level of the image and who finds the most honest/successful way—thus, the importance of the Byzantine canons—to frame an image of an ultimate desire wins the competition. And in this world of commoditized images, the consumer is expected to perform creatively in view of their fidelity to a product. And so, like my performative inquiry, the iPod commercials seem to fail in making a strong symbolic link to an iconic experience, but succeed in using a canonized visual structure to engage performatively the consumer with the iPod (object). The same blurring effect may happen between the artist's imaginative intent and the iconic framing of an artwork (not noticeable by neither a symbolic nor realistic critical eye), which I explore later in this chapter in Isar's analysis of contemporary hierotopic visions (see 4.4.4 Probing the Byzantine framework 1: Isar's chorographic reading of Bill Viola's technological screens) and through my artistic research into the Contemporary Byzantine-Inspired Iconic Vision.

Thus, in this fourth chapter and through my practically situated symbolic-realistic approach, I offer an artistic means to critique how the screen-based creativity actualizes or frames iconically an idolic/subjective image. If the Byzantine analysis of the iPod ads provides an understanding of the canons' use and complexity outside of their traditional context, similarly, my attention on framing an alternative artistic hierotopic scenario plays an important role in inferring how the performative nature of viewing offers insight into a commodity's cult value and spectacular quality. Particularly, my contribution is in the symbolic-realistic manner of crafting a solitary experience of presenting/performing a subjective image (as in *Performing the Icon*, where I incorporate Byzantine and pop-culture figures with Apple products). As mentioned earlier, while iconoclastic assumptions[433] about my version of an iconic vision may make sense within communities of viewers governed by symbolic or realistic principles surrounding the metaphysical meaning of the image,[434] the advantage of exploring iconic experiences in the context of *art practice as research* is that the academic critical eye can draw practical and aesthetic conclusions on the performative power of these canons to help outline a symbolic-realistic approach to visual criticism. While there might be an iconoclastic fear that the

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[433] If my artistic intention would be that to claim the real-presence of my aesthetic judgments, then I would position my art installations/performances under the scrutiny of the metaphysical eye.

[434] Especially since my approach triggers a challenging symbolic tie to the Incarnational logic of the icon, given the idolic/commoditized value of the symbolic elements included in my *icons*.

techniques and rigidity of the Byzantine canons reinforce a formalist mode of making an image, the limitation of the iconic technique opens up a rich performative realm for artistic research into a challenge of depicting the invisible or a truthful representation of reality. A closer look (through my icon practice) at how the canons foreground the formal structure of the icon, can be used to artistically frame an image as present, which in the end, can serve as a means to critique the metaphysical assertion of such a subjective/aesthetic view. Moreover, I can now expose the core interdisciplinary claim of this thesis, which bridges visual criticism, artistic research, and Byzantine theological convictions: a symbolic-realistic mode of critiquing the spectacle that is sensitive to the Incarnational dimension of the image. Beside the usual triangle in the artistic/visual/spatial/screen-based experience between the image-maker, the artwork, and the viewer, the icon broadens visual criticism with another layer of consideration that eclipses the subject-object relationship in iconoclastic/metaphysical judgment: a visible trace/absence of an invisible (sacramental) presence. In the following sections, I continue my investigation into the Byzantine theology of the image towards developing an aesthetic vision that helps to see how instances of hierotopy (of image-making) are performed as if miraculous events. More explicitly, my focus is not on proving that an iconic vision is a miracle per say (although seeing with the symbolic-realistic eye implies taking part in the mystery of the Incarnation through the performative relationship between the type and prototype), but rather on how contemporary Byzantine-like aesthetics helps to perform a subjective vision as present.

4.3 Aesthetic constrains in the Byzantine appreciation of the spectacle

The investigation from Chapter 1 into the Byzantine theological foundation of the image revealed the logic of Incarnation in the icon, which configures the symbolic-realistic structure of an iconic vision. St. Theodore the Studite says that "those who in principle reject the icon, ultimately also reject the mystery of the Incarnation."[435] It is significant to note that the phobia of icons, which defined iconoclasts in the medieval controversy, did not emerge strictly from a fear of aesthetic ideas, but rather from a controversy over Christological/ontological and epistemological principles. Particularly, it was not the fear of artistic images per se, but the threat

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[435] Schönborn, *God's Human Face*, 237.

inspired by the use of impure metaphysical pictures of reality (being fashioned by human hands).[436] This fact is explained, "at least in part,...[by] the entire literature of that time (for and against images), [which] does not contain any discussion about questions of aesthetic or artistic theories."[437] So, given that the theological concerns were focused more on the metaphysical limits of the use of human-produced images of God, how can an artistic vision be crafted iconically (based on the act of taking perspective) to provide a contemporary symbolic-realistic mode of critiquing the spectacle? And this is the main question that I consider in this section.

Having in mind that the aim of this thesis is to understand how the spectacle induces an iconic/idolic vision—beyond the metaphysical analysis of the spectacle as a mirror of objectified images that act as their own origin—the issue is if a creative intentionality, susceptible to a Nietzschean decline in an awareness of the Incarnational mystery, can arrive at a symbolic-realistic mode of seeing and critiquing. The first thing one should investigate is the relation between an intentional attitude towards a screen for representation and the Byzantine iconic experience, and additionally, the possibility to attain an Incarnational synthesis through artistic research in order to form an alternative Byzantine approach to the realistic and symbolic modes of seeing and visual criticism. John Lechte explores the Byzantine image in relation to art in a way that challenges the metaphysical approach to an aesthetic experience: "it is the absolute transparency of the image which makes it beauty's intimate ally….if there is beauty in the image this is because of what it takes us to—as in an evocation."[438] The concern, I can now reinstate, is to offer the aesthetic groundwork for a Byzantine mode of understanding the image as invisible, which explains the construction of human vision in making present the absence of invisibility.

In rethinking Immanuel Kant's idea of beauty as presence of absence, Lechte endeavors to connect the aesthetic experience of new-media screen installations (particularly of *The Golden Calf*, by Jeffery Shaw, Fig 17, that I discuss in the next section) to the Byzantine theology of the

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[436] In his doctoral dissertation, *"A Picture Held Us Captive": Investigations Towards An Iconoclastic Praxeology*, Janice L. Deary explains that while iconoclastic gestures of the metaphysical aesthetic type focus more on the ontological critique of idolatrous concepts as mental pictures that hide illusory or ideological messages, the iconoclastic critique of the religious type places more emphasis on the epistemological status of images, that is, the way images are used in idolatrous practices. Byzantine iconoclasm provides a practical perspective on the aesthetic issues of the image as a copy of reality, and it is from this practice-based perspective that I aim to understand contemporary iconoclastic/consumptive discourses.
[437] Schönborn, *God's Human Face*, 237.
[438] Lechte, *Genealogy and Ontology of the Western Image and its Digital Future*, 136.

image.[439] Although the Kantian notion of beauty is a subjective mental (intentional) process that is exclusively concerned with the realistic (form, shape, organization, etc.) appearance of an object,[440] it also depends on a *sensus communis*—a universal, disinterested recognition of beauty, by which Kant means an *a priory/*transcendental principle of our cognitive faculties.[441] It is in the "idea of universal communicability"[442] between a subjective and collective feeling of the beautiful that a parallel between the aesthetic experience of an artwork and the Byzantine iconic vision can be discovered. Lechte suggests that the feeling of beauty forms a type of *third space* or a mediating link between symbolism and realism that helps to see how viewers interact with the spectacle both in the off-screen space (at the bodily level) and in the on-screen space (at the virtual level) in order to perform iconically or idolically.

For Kant, all judgments (determinate/scientific judgments of natural objects and reflective/aesthetic judgments of taste) are mental processes (contingent on human intentionality) that are formed based on a relation between understanding/concepts and the intuition of sensible experiences (including imagination).[443] Determined judgments are dependent on a particular context and formed from a union between understanding and imagination.[444] An aesthetic/reflective judgment of beauty is formed when one's imagination does not match a concept.[445] In other words, the sensible experience of an object's form (and not the mere subjective judgment, e.g. like/dislike, of an object's content) overwhelms imagination to the point of creating new meaning/concepts. The difference between a subjective judgment and an aesthetic judgment is that the former finds an object beautiful for the sake of one's own (idolic) pleasure and the latter feels pleasure as a result of disinterestedly finding an object beautiful.

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[439] In its Greek original form, *aesthesis* was opposed to *technē* in understanding the world. Plato appreciated *technē* as a practical, applied way of knowing the forms. *Aesthesis* was seen negatively since it was linked to the senses and knowing the form through semblance. In Kant's aesthetics, *aesthesis* was associated to art and feeling and elevated to the highest mode of knowing the world, as I will explain later in this section.

[440] Douglas Burnham, *An Introduction to Kant's Critique of Judgment.* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press [in the US, Columbia University Press], 2000), 55.

[441] Lechte, *Genealogy and Ontology of the Western Image and its Digital Future*, 146-149. Kant's claim of a disinterested, decontextualized, autonomous universally communicable feeling (which is contrasted to emotion that is linked to a particular context) was rejected by Nietzsche's idea of the *Übermensch*-artist, who dismisses any form of transcendentalism as (Platonic) idealism.

[442] Burnham, *An Introduction to Kant's Critique of Judgment.* 56.

[443] Douglas Burnham, "Immanuel Kant: Aesthetics," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. (Available from http://www.iep.utm.edu/kantaest; accessed September, 2014), b. The Deduction of Taste.

[444] Ibid., a. The Judgment of the Beautiful.

[445] The notion of sublime can also be included as an aesthetic judgment.

Moreover, a subjective judgment is solely concerned with the symbolic content of an object (natural or artistic), which relies on the *agreeable* and relates to personal interests/desires.[446]

With respect to an aesthetic judgment, it is a feeling of beauty that moves beyond a particular/subjective narrative and context towards universally valid, logical concepts, which are recognized by "*all* Subjects as unreservedly as if it were an objective judgment, resting on grounds of cognition and capable of being proved to demonstration."[447] Specifically, while beauty "explodes" both the materiality of a particular object and "the very subjectivity of the subject,"[448] it is an immediate subjective feeling of an unforeseeable phenomenon, free of any historical/geographical context, and universally appreciated visible incarnation—the form of an object is, for Kant, the only access to beauty.[449] Therefore, in its universality, an aesthetic judgment of taste remains, ironically, a subjective experience of "the individual's own feeling of pleasure in an object."[450] This disruption of the dualism between the subject and object in the aesthetic experience is where Kant's aesthetic meets the Byzantine symbolic-realistic mode of seeing the notion of reality.

In order to argue for the possibility of the Byzantine theology of the image to act as an artistic mode of critiquing the spectacle, it is essential to understand that beauty, for Kant, is not an ideal Platonic form, independent of human intentionality, but always the outcome of human's faculty of reason—which is also the fundamental base of Husserlian phenomenology (see Chapter 2, 2.4.2 Marion's icon and metaphysic iconoclasm). The autonomy of beauty from a particular context does not refer to an invisible counter-intuitive divine gaze—as seen in the Byzantine icon. It only defines its independence from the *agreeable* and *emotion*, which are feelings reducible to merely subjective states and determinate judgments. For instance, a tattoo design losses its beauty once it is imprinted/contextualized on an individual body, thus subjected to a particular circumstance. As opposed to an iconic vision, Kant's idea of an aesthetic vision of beauty remains solely a function of the human reason and intentionality and contradicts the

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[446] Burnham, Immanuel Kant: Aesthetics, 5.

[447] Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgment*, (trans. James Creed Meredith, Oxford: University of Oxford Clarendon Press, 1973) §33, 141. Some universal concepts are space and time that are produced by every human mind.

[448] Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche: The will to power as art,* (Trans. David Farrell Krell, HarperCollins Publishers: University of Michigan Press, 1980), 123.

[449] Burnham, Immanuel Kant: Aesthetics, 5.

[450] Kant, *The Critique of Judgment,* §36, 145.

Incarnational dimension of the image in which the divine gaze takes an equal role with the human gaze in forming an iconic vision.

Inspired by Kant's notion of beauty, Lechte argues that what makes an object beautiful is, actually, its power to perform an evocation (an invisible image) through a universally communicable feeling that induces a sense of otherness. On one hand, this argument is essential to understand why the Byzantine theology of the image is relevant for artistic research and, on the other hand it clarifies where an artwork and the Byzantine icon meet and diverge (as clarified in the above paragraphs). In Chapter 1, section <u>1.2.4 The Byzantine view about the sacred space and Contemporary hierotopy</u>, I stated that the perception of the Byzantine icon in terms of a Christian aesthetic object does not provide a full understanding of the two mimetic levels of correlations in the icon's Incarnational logic, which helps to see how an image is formed/performed in a context. From a theological standpoint, treating the icon as if an art object is an iconoclastic/metaphysical attitude. This leads to the obvious conclusion that a Byzantine icon, in its context, is not beautiful. But what Lechte is pointing at is the importance to take a theological turn when critiquing how an image is constructed/signified in aesthetic terms. The Incarnational understanding of the image not only enriches contemporary visual criticism with a new, symbolic-realistic mode of seeing, but also helps to understand the phenomenology of the idol. As a matter of fact, it adds a critical eye that questions the power of the spectacle to signify itself as a decontextualised appearance (image as simulacrum).[451] And if the idolic phenomenon (in an abstract or material form) partially reveals low levels of invisibility, then this limitation is best analyzed through an aesthetic experience of today's spectacle that considers the transparency of the image (hence the importance of my icon practice in constructing a Contemporary Byzantine-Inspired Iconic Vision).

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[451] Lechte adds that "[d]espite appearances certainly being to the contrary, it is not certain that the image as simulacrum is in fact the way the image operates today, and that the discontinuity…between an experience of God through the image in Byzantine culture (the 'Holy Image')…and that of the modern era of art [in the sense of the spectacle] might be too radical" (151).

4.3.1 Beauty and the Image: The performance of a Contemporary Byzantine-Inspired Iconic Vision by merging performativity (body as realism) with symbolism (tracing the invisible in the present)

The aforementioned art installation, *The Golden Calf* (Fig. 19)*,* offers an evocation of a Biblical iconoclastic incident in which a Golden Calf, idolized by the Israelites,[452] was burned down by Moses who announced the Words of God: "You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below."[453] The installation is constructed from a mobile digital screen, placed on a pedestal, that displays a virtual version of the calf. When the viewer touches and moves the screen around the pedestal, the virtual calf appears as if present in the physical space.

Figure 19: *The Golden Calf* (1994) by Jeffrey Shaw

In short, the viewer is invited in a performative event that combines elements from on-screen space (the Biblical narrative and virtual reality) and off-screen space (the mobile digital screen, pedestal, and the viewer's body in the physical environment of a gallery). How is the contemporary viewer expected to see the reconstruction of the original/historic (idolic) event in an art installation form? If the calf is seen as an object at the virtual or material level, then the viewer interacts with a spectacle. However, Lechte suggests that, in fact, *The Golden Calf* forms a contemporary Byzantine type of iconic vision as a trace of the past onto the present. Such a Byzantine reading of an interactive art installation not only deepens the understanding of an aesthetic experience in the era of televisual screens*,* but also reveals that the image does not operate on its own. The spectacular image of the Golden Calf takes on a qualitative (as opposed to quantitative) slant connected to a transcendental/religious feeling of

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[452] Exodus 32:4

[453] Ibid., 20. The prohibition of human-produced images was rooted in laws of separation. One example of this paradigm is found in the book of Leviticus, where observance of food laws mandates a separation between blood (considered pure and offered to God through offerings/sacrifices) and flesh (regarded as impure and appropriate for human consumption). For the Byzantine iconophiles, however, the Incarnation had challenged any simple division between humanity and divinity, or between matter and spirit. Christ had made Himself visible in human flesh. The Incarnation, according to the iconophiles, abolished a simplistic division between pure incorporeality and impure corporeality. The Last Supper was further evidence of the insignificance of such divisions; it brought humans together to consume a mixture of blood (wine) and body (bread) at the same time.

something that is totally present in its absence. This might seem ironic since the symbolic/Biblical meaning of the Golden Calf is defined by its idolic opacity or lack of transparency in forming an image. Nevertheless, according to Shaw's artistic statement, the installation is not about worshiping a simulacrum: "the real space actions of the observer, therefore affect the virtual representation of the room and become a "dance" around the virtual idol."[454] This means that the viewer is invited to actualize or literally feel the presence of a historical (idolic) image, which is different than idolizing an object/concept. Although the viewer looks at an idol, he/she experiences an evocation of the Biblical narrative that Incarnates an image by holding the mobile digital screen—a hierotopy/*screenspace* is, thus, created. The artist further elaborates on the performative nature of his installation when saying that by "moving the monitor screen up, down and [a]round the pedestal, the viewer performs what looks like a ceremonial dance around a technological pilaster constructing an almost tangible phantasm."[455] Therefore, Lechte emphasizes that the iconic vision occurs not when the viewer recognizes the calf as a "'real' idol, but…[when] the 'virtual idol'…becomes an evocation…of the idol in the Biblical story."[456] This aesthetic mode of transforming an idol (an opaque appearance) into an image (invisibility) directly parallels my own Byzantine approach in performing a subjective artistic image—as documented in the *Portrait of an Icon Maker*. This is also the major concern of my artistic practice in general. In all my Byzantine experiments with the symbolic outcome of my determinate judgments (subject to my intentionality) regarding commercial/religious products/figures, I search (through new media, performativity, and Byzantine canons) for the possibility to evoke/feel the presence of an image that is quite removed from the actual space of the performance/installation. This quest for an aesthetic type of iconic vision is, in fact, a means to question the nature of the spectacle.

To what extent the new media idols that I incorporate in my Contemporary Byzantine-Inspired Iconic Vision can be experienced as transparent (that is, as an image) and not just simply as references to commercial products? Could it be that the potential beauty of my Contemporary Byzantine-Inspired Iconic Vision lies in what it points towards rather than what it represents in itself? Lechte's aesthetic interpretation of the image in the context of visual digital

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[454] Jeffery Shaw, "Abstract," *The Golden Calf*, 1994b.

[455] Jeffery Shaw, *The Golden Calf*. A computergraphic instalation,1994c.

[456] Lechte, *Genealogy and Ontology of the Western Image and its Digital Future*, 152. This type of evocation can occur even if the artists' "real interest is in facilitating actions in real time around the three dimensional virtual object/image displayed on an LCD screen" (Lechte 152).

art reveals how the Byzantine icon moves the metaphysical critique of the spectacle (in the age of the technological screens) beyond its decontextualized/virtualized status as pure appearance (a simulacrum that plays the role of a signified).[457] Precisely, Lechte argues that "an image is not, equally, a commodity," which became "difficult to appreciate…[since] images [as simulacrum, seem] to circulate endlessly in a globalized ether."[458] A key metaphysical point (as in Marion's critique of the spectacle) is that the spectacle is discontinuous with the referential logic between a copy and model. The aesthetic issue with this interpretation comes from equating the spectacle's ontological feature of effacing the referent (an original context) with an aesthetic experience. In principle, this is a misinterpretation of Kant's idea of beauty that leads to a parallel between the aesthetic judgment of displacing/circulating an art object (from its original environment into the decontextualized place of a museum/gallery) and the process of decontextualisation of all signifiers (on-screen space) induced by digital technologies—a process that is believed to have begun with the mechanical reproduction during the Industrial Revolution.[459] However, there is a difference in meaning between the decontextualization of the beautiful and of the digital reproduction. Kant's idea of decontextualization enables the universalization and inimitability of beauty. Without depending on a subjective or determined judgment of utility and perfection, Kantian beauty acts as an embodiment of its own model in a unique/non-reproducible object that is felt *a priory* within a "community of feeling," aka, *sensus communis*.[460] The post-Nietzschean spectacle is critiqued for having an opposite effect; it reproduces a copy of a model to the point of completely decontextualizing it in favor of an individual (idolic) desire. Thus, the spectacle induces (from a Kantian perspective) an emotional delight "centered in sensation rather than feeling," which is linked to objectifying/conceptualizing an object by its end (judging an objects' utility/perfection) in a particular context, as it is pinned down by an intuition.[461] In other words, the spectacle depends on a subjective judgment of the *agreeable*. By inference, the spectacle is not beautiful—and

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[457] In light of the advancement of screen technologies, for example, Bernard Stiegler provides a radical critique of the decontextualisation of the signifier from its signified. He argues that now, with the dissemination of information via screens at the speed of light we witness a radical form of decontextualisation that occurs as a two way process: "no longer would decontextualisation be solely that of the initial story, however distant globally, but that of its 'reception,' which would thus tend toward, purely and simply, the complete loss of all context" (Stiegler, 2009, 116-117).

[458] Lechte, *Genealogy and Ontology of the Western Image and its Digital Future*, 138.

[459] Ibid.

[460] Ibid., 148.

[461] Ibid.,147.

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therefore, not a source of artistic inspiration—since it is "marked by regularity and can be easily [digitally] reproduced."[462]

Someone could also argue (in a Marionian or Baudrillardian sense) that in its simulation of reality, the spectacle acquires its own universality/perspectival space as an independent mirror that reflects the intentionality of all consuming eyes. If the spectacle operates in a decontextualized *sensus communis*, then the Kantian idea of aesthetic judgments can take a new contemporary artistic function if an artist considers Marion's interpretation of the idol as a low level of invisibility that is revealed according to the measure/perspective of the human. However, reference to Lechte allows questioning if this dematerialized view of the spectacle regards, in fact, the object (the frame for representation or the form of an object) superfluous, which is a significant element in both Kant's aesthetic experience and Byzantine theology of the image.

What forms an image is not the technological capacity to reproduce a virtual reality (VR) in itself, but the symbolic reflection of "a material incarnation of beauty" (such as through a mobile screen or wood panel icon), which, in Kant's view, is the only way to experience an aesthetic judgment.[463] Therefore, where does the aesthetic appreciation of the spectacle truly lie? The existence of the spectacle cannot be simply regarded as a mere simulation that simultaneously plays the role of a copy/signifier and model/signified. If we follow the Byzantine theology of the image, the nature of the spectacle needs to be understood as both experienced (realistically) and observed (symbolically). To that end, Lechte reconnects beauty to context through the performative act of screenic vision. The idea of beauty, *as its own* (invisible) image, is not just a symbolic convention for aesthetic elitism to objectify and decontextualize the art object from its own functionality, history and maker.[464] Instead of a mere contemplative judgment, beauty is now a performative act with transcendental implications—a redefinition of creativity that contradicts Fisher-Lichte's view of an artistic event from Chapter 1. Like the Byzantine image, beauty is not really present in an object/place or an autonomous ideal reality, but created by the viewer through a feeling of presence as absence.

Similarly to Jenkins' symbolic-realism and Verhoeff's interest in seeing how the dynamic vision of *performative cartography* overcomes the omnipresence of the spectacle and its power

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[462] Ibid., 147.

[463] Ibid.,146.

[464] According to Kant, beauty assumes its purity when completely removed from its existence or the context in which it is used and taken for granted (1973, §15, 69).

to decontextualise (by recontextualising a place into a narrative space), Lechte investigates how the integration of the mobile digital screen into an interactive art installation (e.g. Jeffery's *The Golden Calf*) immerses the viewer in the image of beauty. This very Kantian aspect of beauty *as its own* image correlates to the Byzantine creation of an iconic experience, which I apply through my Contemporary Byzantine-Inspired Iconic Vision to the critique of the spectacle. What Lechte questions in today's visual criticism and art making, however, is the lack of a symbolic understanding of the image and body in the viewer's realistic (performative) experience of digital technology:

> …the problem arises when the results themselves [of neuroscience that explain bodily experiences in space in relationship to cognition and perception such as frequencies] of brain impulses and speed of recognition, or visceral sensations…become equivalent to an aesthetic mode.[465]

This is because the body's affective function to embody the virtual digital worlds through interactive technology is taken for granted by "describing the intricacies of the digital idiom…[as the basis for] formulating a new framework for aesthetics."[466] Put differently here, realism is confused with symbolism. The aesthetic issue in questioning an iconic vision, as I see it, is when visual criticism ascribes a performative value (that decontextualizes or reduces the human body to "information ('0-1')"[467]) to the viewer's body, which removes symbolism (a significant role of the imagination in an aesthetic judgment). I made the same point in Chapter 1, section <u>1.2.5 A form of performativity in the Byzantine performance</u>, with regards to Fisher-Lichte's performative analysis of contemporary performance art. Her critique of Abramovic's work, for example, in prompting a transformative event (a performative experience, beyond metaphysical dualism, in which the audience takes an active role of shaping the artwork) is based on denying referentiality or the link to an invisible essence (symbolism). Fisher-Lichte's reason for this is that myths, any form of signification, or semiotic values enforce a Cartesian mind-body dualism and predefined/referential meanings that prevent viewers' connection to new phenomena. Whereas the dissolution between the subject and object is a prerequisite to the union between symbolism and realism in an iconic vision—equally affirmed by media theorists like Jenkins, Robinson, and Verhoeff in relation to interactive media screens—it is possible to address

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[465] Lechte, *Genealogy and Ontology of the Western Image and its Digital Future*, 140.
[466] Ibid., 139-140.
[467] Ibid, 139.

Lechte's concern regarding the necessity of symbolism in visual criticism if Nicephoros' idea of in-imagination (discussed in Chapter 1) is considered at a practical/artistic level. I will take this challenge myself in practicing the Byzantine painting technique with a goal of performing my aesthetic judgment *as its own* image. In the next section, I particularly focus on understanding the symbolic role of my own body in contextualizing an event of in-imagination.

The ever-greater role of the viewer in the determination of an image entails the Incarnational approach to the aesthetic/visual dimension of a *screenspace/*quasi-hypostatic/artistic event. The point is to connect back the body to symbolism (the experience of the body from a reflective point of view) or to aesthetic ideas (religious or commercial) that invite the viewer to construct an image—as seen in the Byzantine hierotopic encounter with the icon. Consequently, I argue that the practical solitary experience of painting in a Byzantine manner—an iconographic technique that is fundamentally linked (through canons) to the symbolism of the in-imagination—helps to spell out the aesthetic implications of the image as beautiful/invisible in the viewer's interactive relation with the spectacle. Lechte makes clear that visual criticism requires not only a focus on the impact of screen technology over experience (in the sense that it considers the technical part of experimentation as if the spectacle forms its own aesthetics apart from the human), but also a concern with the object's form (the finality of beauty) that "disappears in a maze of digital gadgetry."[468] Since the finality of the icon's form is determined by the Byzantine canons (the symbolic meaning of the technic and material used to construct an iconic vision), I elaborate next on how they move the critique from "the technical for its own sake" towards formulating an art-aesthetic framework that reveals the power of "things to signify and…the place of the body (drives and affect) [and object/product] within signification and aesthetics."[469] This will be discussed by reflecting on the Byzantine nature of my icon practice.

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[468] Ibid., 149.
[469] Ibid., 141.

4.4 Symbolic-realistic research*: canons as artistic reflective practice in the Contemporary Byzantine-Inspired Iconic Vision

4.4.1 Orthopraxis*: the technical + the image + body = canons

> Thus I had to deny *knowledge*…and the dogmatism of metaphysics…in order to make room for *faith*.[470]

> …the impact the beauty has on our senses…reaches the depths of our soul which quite naturally turns to God, who is beauty itself, source of all goodness and Giver of life.[471]

> Humans live in a medium (technics) as fish live in the medium of water (McLuhan), even though, in seeing the fish, one does not see the water.[472]

After analyzing where the Byzantine icon meets and diverges from the aesthetic appreciation of the image, I now make a theological and Marionian (phenomenological) turn within the framework of an orthopraxis (a canonical understanding of the tools and materials in the construction of an iconic vision).[473] This canonized technique-based model of vision allows me to practically address the Incarnational dimension of the image in view of its aesthetic/idolic reconsideration for an alternative mode of seeing notions of reality within metaphysical iconoclasm.

As it was discussed in the previous sections, the Byzantine canons are always contextualized, thus form the medium (= icon technique) of an iconic vision. The nature of the icon's medium is not autonomous from the image-maker's bodily senses, and if visual criticism does not see it as an inherent element in the act of critiquing an iconic vision, the image risks to be reduced to the old metaphysical issues of the mind–body dualism. What I suggest here is that the Byzantine canons can be a viable alternative to metaphysical iconoclasm as long as they are not reduced to the artefactual. That is, the icon technique should not be reduced to what is commonly understood by the tools and materials used to create a work of art in a particular aesthetic style. From the perspective of the icon-maker, the icon technique forms a medium or a

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[470] Kant *Critique of Pure Reason,* B xxx.
[471] Quenot, *The Icon*, 65.
[472] Lechte, *Genealogy and Ontology of the Western Image and its Digital Future*, 154.
[473] In my icon practice, I make a direct connection between my idolic creativity and Marion's idol as half-presence of absence. This parallel is particularly interesting in light of the traditional exposition of the canons in the first section of this chapter, 4.1 The traditional role of the canons in my artistic research. Under point d) The Gold, Color, and Light, I explained the relation between colors/the symbolic use of pigments and gold in relation to divine light. The Byzantine color palette is symbolically organized based on their power to reveal different intensities of divine light. Similarly, Marion regards the idol as a form of semi-invisibility defined by a deficiency of light.

performative environment (hierotopy) that visualizes the *mneme* (memory) of God through the interaction of the on-screen with the off-screen spaces (in the sense that one space leads to the other and vice versa).[474]

This two-way process (that is discussed by Marion in the crossing of invisible gazes) in the construction of an iconic vision is best exemplified by the art historian Nicolletta Isar's example of the Byzantine icon, *Christ, Chōra tôn zôntôn* (Fig. 20).[475] The specific way in which the icon's performance induces a sense of participation in the image—a relation between the receiver of the image (viewer) and sender of the image (through the frame for representation) that characterizes how all forms of iconic visions take place in any context. *Christ, Chōra tôn zôntôn* presents Christ in a standing position looking directly in the viewer's eyes. He holds in one hand an open book while indicating with the other hand to His own "hypostatic identity" or Christ's personal existence.[476] As I explained in Chapter 1, the notion of *hypostasis* is fundamental in understanding the icon and refers to the particularity of the three persons that form the Trinity. While the image of Christ is one with His person (hypostatic identity), the image is different

Figure 20: *Christ, Chora tôn zôntôn* (mid 14ᵗʰ century), Chora Monastery

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[474] The icon's performative power leads to the discussion of Byzantine mimesis, analyzed in Chapter 1 and throughout this thesis in general. To recap, Byzantine mimesis imitates (as a mark or trace in the visible) the presence of the invisible prototype through a performative interaction of the type with the faithful. While in modern Western culture the mimetic perception of the image emerged from metaphysical mimesis, which rests on the Platonic idea of form, in the Byzantine icon it functions as the imprint (*typos*) of form. This means that the icon does not copy, but enacts/performs, in its making and viewing experiences, the presence (tangible/type) of absence (intangible/prototype). Some viewing experiences are the *aspasmos* (the kissing of icons) and the *proskynesis* (prostration and performing the cross in front of the icon). According to Pentcheva, this phenomenological and participatory aspect of the icon is overlooked in the study of art history (631, 2006). Therefore, Byzantine mimesis/performance refers to the icons' role in imitating the appearance of the prototype in visibility—an appearance performed through its materiality that saturates the believers' senses in order to prompt a symbolic-realistic mode of seeing.

[475] This concrete example of how the iconic vision is performed through the icon of *Christ, Chōra tôn zôntôn* at the Church of the *Chōra* in Constantinople demonstrates how Nicephorus' version of mimetic behavior differs from the Platonic and Nietzschean mimesis in the way it hypostatically unites the symbolic and realistic vision into one vision.

[476] Isar explains that the name "Christ" is what "defines Him hypostatically and distinguishes Him from other people, therefore circumscribes Him" (2000, 64). Words such as *hypostasis*, *presence*, *person*, *image*, and *name* have specific significances in the Byzantine theology of the image.

from His nature.[477] *Christ, Chōra tôn zôntôn* engages the viewer in a direct dialogue with the image through Christ's hand gesture, gaze and the text from the book, a quote from Matthew 11:28: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."[478] The meaning of the text synchronizes with the role of the right hand in pointing to the person of Christ (*me*) who addresses the viewer (*all ye*/you). According to Isar, this simultaneous coordination between the textual message, the hand gesture, and the aim of Christ's gaze establishes an immediate, deictic connection between the image and viewer "in the field of representation."[479] The icon, therefore, is not a simple imitation of a Platonic reality, but an act of naming the person of Christ that takes place in the present tense, right before the viewers' gaze. The representational aspect of the icon does not refer to a metaphysical reality that is somehow opposed to our lived life, but it points to the directly lived experience of seeing the image. This coexistence between the iconic image and viewers is defined by a paradoxical space, called by the Byzantines *chōra*.[480] In naming (the function of the type) His name (the prototype), the icon establishes the *chōraic* space for the viewer to recognize the relationship between the type (that which it names) and the prototype (that which is the name itself). The type makes present the prototype (the absent) in the moment when the viewer recognizes (enacts) the relational (mimetic) function of the type in naming the prototype. The type imitates the prototype as presence as a trace in the visible, similarly to the way Veronica's veil has an imprint of the face of Christ. For Theodore, the type is the way of *naming* the *name*, which is Christ's hypostatic identity. Thus, Christ is made present by the icon in the sense that what is named by the image is identical to the name—the name of Christ is indistinguishable from His hypostatic identity. Isar clarifies that "the naming, just like the Incarnation, allows 'the visible image to communicate with the archetype' in the icon."[481] In other words, the pictorial trace of the icon makes present the name of Christ in the visible by hypostatically defining Him as a person. Consequently, the

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[477] Nicoletta Isar, "The Vision and Its 'Exceedingly Blessed Beholder': Of Desire and Participation in the Icon." *Anthropology and Aesthetics* 38 (Autumn, 2000): 59. Isar also adds that "to disregard this identity of person in the image would be 'severing from the image the might and glory of the model'" (2000, 59).

[478] Ibid., 62.

[479] Ibid., 61.

[480] The concept of *chōra* originates from Plato's thought, where it means a specific type of space that gives place for *things* to come into existence. Although uncontainable itself, the *chōraic* space contains (from a Byzantine perspective) the type or the presence of absence in the pictorial trace of the icon—a type that is recognized as such by the entire community of believers. The concept of *chōra* is similar to the a priory feeling of beauty that is commonly perceived by everyone, i.e. the "community of feeling" or *sensus communis* (Lechte 148).

[481] Isar, "The Vision and Its 'Exceedingly Blessed Beholder,'" 64.

construction of such an interactive medium according to the Byzantine theology of presence necessarily involves a two-way operation in which the image-maker's mediational role is basically technical. This is precisely what I consider in the next section and in *Portrait of an Icon Maker*. In this canonized context, however the meaning of the word technical is not taken in a utilitarian way of reaching mechanical perfection in (re)producing a product/icon. Due to its Incarnational symbolism, the technical becomes the medium of life experience for the image-maker—the orthopraxis of the iconographer's activity of *mneme.* Yet, in following Lechte's insight on the relation between the visual digital art and the aesthetic image, I get a sense that the iconographer's performative level of experiencing the (invisible) image as if present is, in fact, the fundamental nature of human's relationship to images in any context (even in the idolic context of the spectacle).

If in the previous section, I have conceptualized the Byzantine iconic vision in terms of the aesthetic judgment of beauty—which, for Kant, is an innate feature of human nature—at the orthopraxis level of this research, I focus on what cannot be described through words: the Nicephorian non-essentialist connection between an invisible, inaccessible origin/past event and a present/contemporary performative experience in the spatial construction of an image. As I have tried to reveal throughout this thesis, it seems that through their Incarnational meaning, the canons transform the icon-technique into a "part of what it means to be human," which simply means that the image cannot be defined separately from the human action.[482] The image cannot be critiqued "in general because each image is beholden to its mode of incarnation in technics (= medium)."[483] And it is this symbolic-realistic mode of seeing an image that exposes the *fallacy* of understanding the spectacle as disembodied or decontextualized.[484] Again, my understanding is that by elaborating on the Incarnational dimension of an aesthetic experience (as seen in the video documentation of my way of experiencing the techniques of making an icon), visual criticism acquires the necessary technical knowledge to analyze the possibility of constructing an image in the age of technological screens. What I exactly explore in my icon practice is the

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[482] Lechte, *Genealogy and Ontology of the Western Image and its Digital Future*, 154.

[483] Ibid., 154. The quote is Lechte's take on Bernard Stiegler's work regarding the relationship between technology and human body. See Stiegler, Bernard. *Technics and Time. 1. The Fault of Epinetheus*, trans. Richard Beardsworth and George Collins, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998.

[484] It is a "fallacy of technical modernity" to insist that the spectacle acts as an autonomous visual battlefield (a simulacrum opposed to reality) in which the viewer objectifies the visible and the image-makers strive to dominate the consumers (Mitchell 2002, 172). The idea that the spectacle is a product of new media technologies "displaces moral and political panic onto images [as]…'convenient scapegoat'" (Deary 201).

performative exchange of invisible gazes in an iconic vision that moves the image beyond the Marionian dematerialization of the visible (see 2.4.2 Marion's icon and metaphysic iconoclasm). I do so by considering the Byzantine epistemological view of the iconistic intentionality at the pictorial trace of the prototype, which in turn allows me to pose the following questions: Is there an iconistic intentionality that manifests at the level of the spectacle? And if so, how does the spectacle contextualize an image in a phenomenal form? My view is that the critical eye needs a more complex/performative understanding of the crossing of the gazes between the receiver and the sender in order to see how (and if) the image is embodied at both levels: that of the viewer and that of the spectacle.

Furthermore, my approach to the Byzantine model of vision is not quantitative, but more focused on the Incarnational meaning of the canons that directly expresses itself in the icon. It is a form of symbolism that is quite different than the metaphysical symbolism expressed by means of intellectual speculation, which makes the aesthetic consideration of the icon technique *not* a matter of making an object for either cognitive or empirical observation.[485] So, instead of describing the role of canons in their traditional/monastic context (as in 4.1 The traditional role of the canons in my artistic research), my aim is to discover, through my own icon practice, how the contemporary artist can further take their function of making present an (invisible) image to critique the viewer's interaction with the spectacle. It is not by quantifying the canons/medium in a realistic way, based on the amount or type of materials involved in the act of making, but in reflecting on those fundamental elements that construct the viewer's experience beyond the individual level, in a *chōraic* space where the image is brought to presence as absence.

On this score, *Portrait Of An Icon Maker* (video work in progress), that I discuss in the next subsection records various stages involved in the process of icon making. In presenting the canons at the solitary level of artistic reflection, I explore a practical shift of the canons into an aesthetic realm. Such a Byzantine framework for performing an iconic vision enables a useful way to think about beauty without falling back into metaphysical debates surrounding the real-presence of an artistic image, e.g., of my subjective/idolic/artistic vision. My icon performance (and installation) reflects a situated response to various canonized visual structures that eventually determine a viewer's understanding/involvement in the construction of an image.

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[485] Having said that, I also see this artistic/academic process of extracting conceptual and practical insights from the Byzantine painting technique a continuous work in progress.

Ultimately, I create an alternate Byzantine space (hierotopy) of union between my body, desire, artistic intention, and canons to acquire a sort of monastic mode of analyzing the dominance of today's technologically fashioned images over my (human) perception of reality. While the theological role of the canons is to construct performative reenactments of Christ's Incarnational event, I use the icon-technique to bring my aesthetic judgment of the spectacle to presence in a *sensus communis*. In this way, my approach corresponds to Lechte's Byzantine reading of the installation, *The Golden Calf* in which the viewer constructs through a screen an image in space, i.e. *screenspace*, by interacting with a Biblical idol. And, in taking the idols of mass media—idols that mirror my own desires/metaphysical beliefs as an image-maker—and frame their presence through the solitary Byzantine practice of icon painting, I attempt to reveal how an image operates through a performative act.

4.4.2. *Portrait of an Icon Maker*: my Byzantine reflective artistic practice

Figure 21: Still image from *Portrait of an Icon Maker* and the wood panel painting *Holy Earbuds*. Video documentation *Portrait of an Icon Maker* (33 min.) available on the companion DVD and at: http://youtu.be/wvF-kDpBtk8

Here, I explore the possibility to manifest an iconic vision beyond the interaction of the black dots in the crossing of gazes (as in Marion's idea of the icon). Subsequently, I search for a tangible, canonized spatial view of the icon/idol by delving into Nicephoros's theory of presence in the pictorial technique of inscribing a trace (type) that is "contained in the uncontainable

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chōraic space."[486] This very Byzantine iconic technique of non-mimetically performing a type as a trace of a prototype, I believe, enriches visual criticism with the Incarnational/in-imaginational property of the image.[487]

In the following paragraphs, I may seem to deviate from the main theme, the iconic framing of the spectacle to address the role of the Incarnation in the critique of the spectacle, "but in order for immediacy [of the image, through canons,] to have any real purchase it is necessary to have a clear grasp of medium and mediation."[488] Therefore, *Portrait of an Icon Maker*—a video project that focuses mostly on the first stages of preparing an icon board—documents my experience of exploring the meaning of the iconic gaze from the Byzantine epistemological position of tracing the presence of an absence.[489] Specifically, I document my symbolic seeing of today's spectacle according to the canons. The video starts with carving the wood, then making the glue to join the wood panels, covering the icon board with cotton fabric, applying/polishing the gesso ground, making the emulsion, and finally painting with pigments (natural organic and earth/mineral). The method of the icon-technique is a living tradition preserved by iconographers through a series of precise consecutive operations, which I carefully employ and document:

1) The Wood. In building the board, I used basswood that is commonly known for its advantageous properties in relation to a gesso ground. Other suitable types of wood are birch, alder, and cypress. The basswood was naturally dried for more than a year in a warehouse (from the winter of 2011 to the Spring of 2013)—if left in the sun, the wood cracks and warps. I purchased wood panels that are 2 ½" thick, 4" in width, and 8' in length. It is important that the wood has few or no knots as they induce cracks in the gesso.

2) The Casein. After planning and trimming the panels to a size of 18" x 12 ½", I glued them with casein. Casein is a protein extracted from mixing milk and vinegar.

3) The Braces. The back of the icon-board is reinforced with two horizontal braces (¼" thick) made from red oak, which is a harder wood that prevents warping.

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[486] Nicoletta Isar, *"Chôra*: Tracing the Presence,*" Review of European Studies 1* (June, 2009): 42.

[487] In Chapter 1, section 1.2.2 The Byzantine view about the image, I have explained the reason for using the egg-tempera painting method on wood panels. Additionally, Leonid Ouspensky argues that the technique of painting on wood panels exemplifies best to the Incarnational view of the image (53).

[488] Lechte, *Genealogy and Ontology of the Western Image and its Digital Future*, 154.

[489] While in documenting my performed reenactments of the canons, the main focus was on the technique of marking the presence of an absence, I consider the painting of the gaze per se in *Performing the Icon*.

4) <u>The Recessed Area</u>. On the front side, in the center area of the panel, I carved an area at about ¼" deep. This space is meant to receive the drawing and painting and has a strong significance in sheltering the (invisible) image. It helps the painter in painting the icon without touching the surface.

5) <u>The Size Solution.</u> The icon-board is covered with a few coats of liquid rabbit skin glue and left to dry over night. The glue is made from pieces of dry skin soaked in water that turns into a gel like consistency. The recipe for the size is: 100 grams of skin + 1 litter of distilled water. In order to apply the glue, the gel needs to be liquefied or warmed up to a maximum of +70 degree Celsius. It should not be brought to a boil as it loses its properties.

6) <u>The Cheesecloth.</u> The icon-board is covered with a piece of cheesecloth (100% cotton) that was soaked in liquefied rabbit skin glue. The cloth helps to create a strong bound between the wood and the gesso ground. It also prevents the cracking of the surface and paint, in the event that the wood warps.

7) <u>The Gesso Ground.</u> After the icon-board (on which the cheesecloth has been glued and left to dry for a few days) a gesso ground is prepared and applied in seven thin coats. The recipe for the ground is: 1 part of size solution + 1 part of powdered chalk + 1 part of white zinc. In the mixture, a ¼ cup of linseed oil is added (this adds to the elasticity of the gesso and prevents cracking). The mixture is blended with a wooden spoon for ½ hour by avoiding rapid movements. The consistency of the gesso needs to be similar to that of a thick sour cream, and when heated, it should dissolve into a uniform solution. The method of warming the gesso should be carefully observed in order to avoid the appearance of bubbles. For this, the glue should be warmed up in a double boiler. When the water has almost reached a boil state, the containers should be removed from the flame. At this point, the first few layers are applied with a brush every 30 minutes by alternating the directions of each application (layer) between horizontally and vertically. If the gesso thickens in the process of application, I usually add a little more water to the mixture. For the last layer, I use a plastic card that has the elasticity of a credit card to create a smooth surface.

8) <u>The Polishing</u>. To make a perfectly glossed surface for painting onto, the gesso is polished with a piece of stone (preferably agate) or the base of a small glass bottle.

9) <u>The Marks</u>. The proposed drawing is, then, lightly impressed with a sharp tool onto the surface by following the details and outlines of the compositional elements.[490] These permanent marks engraved in the gesso become a guide during the act of painting.

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[490] As mentioned earlier in section <u>4.2 The iconic and idolic roles of the canons in my artistic research</u>, the design of my compositions is inspired from several traditional icons and televisual screens. I return to the symbolic use of these elements later when discussing *Performing the Icon*. For now, I resume my analysis to how I perform an iconic vision according to the canons.

10) The egg-yolk emulsion. In its current production stage, *Portrait of an Icon Maker* ends with preparing the egg-yolk emulsion for the actual painting. I separate the yolk from the white between my hands. The white of the egg should not get in contact with the emulsion as it provokes the flaking of the paint. Therefore, I gently poke the yolk and squeeze it in a container where I add some distilled water and vinegar. Distilled water is recommended as it does not contain minerals that affect the chemical composition of the organic and mineral pigments. After stirring the emulsion well, I use it as a binder for the pigments to apply, with a brush, the first layers of color.

11) Colors. The powdered pigments require different amounts of water and yolk. So, controlling the right proportion between the pigments and emulsion is key to create properly prepared paint. Specifically, when dried, the paint should be matte and resistant when lightly scratched with the fingernail. If there is too much emulsion in the pigments, the paint becomes shiny and eventually cracks. Although there is a symbolic restriction in the use of colors (vis-à-vis the particular features of saints, such as the color of their clothing, the short or long beard and hair), an iconographer can exercise his/her imagination as concerns the variations of color hues, architectural details, and landscape.

12) The Painting Method. Regarding the actual Byzantine technique of painting (which "goes back…to Greek portraiture"), I employ the method of painting from darker tones towards the lighter ones.[491] Initially, I apply "the basic tone for darks" on which I retrace the outlines with black paint.[492] With each consecutive layer, I add a small amount of white to each tone. I continue this process of lighting the color tones until I reach the highlights. Paying attention to how the brush strokes determine the relation between layers, I connect them by directing the tip of my brush towards the darker layers from underneath. The last stages of this painting method are to redraw the outline (covered in the process of painting) with black paint and write the name of the figures, usually in the background around the head or directly onto the halo.

There are two more essential steps that need to be employed in completing *Portrait of an Icon Maker*:

13) The Gilding. Gold or genuine gold leaf is applied to the background. Normally, the gilding is done before the painting starts so that the gold leaf does not stick to the paint. Since I do not know the exact, final design of my composition I am forced to leave this process for later.

14) The Olifa. The application of olifa, which are final protective layers (usually three

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[491] Léonide Ouspensky, and Lossky, Vladimir. *The Meaning of Icons*. (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1982), 54.
[492] Ibid.

layers) of heated linseed oil (some amber is also added to create a yellow/golden shine that is specific to the icons). The olifa is a process that involves the distribution of the oil from the center/face towards the edges in order to penetrate and unify all the layers of color. Before the drying process, the excess of oil is removed—a process that can last up to eight hours.

To argue that *Portrait of an Icon Maker* documents my performance of experiencing the real-presence of an essence (invisible image) is a metaphysical statement with iconoclastic implications. Equally, it is against the *art practice as research* to convince my viewers that they see the real-presence of an image through the video documentation. Hence, *Portrait of an Icon Maker* stands for a performative insight into what is involved in performing an iconic vision from the perspective of an artist (as an image-maker). What I do is to perform the traditional role of the Byzantine canons into an aesthetic space constituted by my active, creative view of the spectacle of media entertainment. It is a space of canonical inquiry into making present my aesthetic judgment *as its own* image. In a way, my interaction with the wooden panel parallels the navigational vision of a viewer engaged with a mobile (touch) screen for representation in the off-screen space. In Verhoeff's terms, I generate a *screenspace* through a mobile screen-based viewing in which the wood panel turns into an *object to think with*. This performative knowledge (knowing the intricacies and secrets of how to use the canons in building an image) will assist me later in reflecting on a list of Byzantine rules to critique contemporary hierotopic endeavors, including *Performing the Icon*.

In the light of *research in the arts,* it is fair to say that *Portrait of an Icon Maker* portrays how I employ the Byzantine iconographic method of participating in a hypostatic event (of making and seeing an image) to vivify an aesthetic judgment of the spectacle. And, seeing how the canonical making of such a vision shapes my imaginative intent into a symbolic-realistic mode of seeing—an aspect that is more important in relation to *Portrait of an Icon Maker* than the finished piece (my symbolic depictions on the wood panel)—the viewers acquire a non-iconoclastic/non-metaphysical understanding of the techniques required to critique the mediation of images in general.

Some of my own reflective thoughts about *Portrait of an Icon Maker* as a performative investigation relates to the difficulty of balancing the realistic and symbolic modes of seeing when constructing an iconic vision in an installation/aesthetic form (as I strive to do in *Performing the Icon*). The biggest challenge is to avoid accusations of real-presence of an image,

in the sense that the viewer, when looking at my Contemporary Byzantine-Inspired Iconic Vision (an environment specifically designed based on canons to induce an iconic vision), says: *I see it* or *I don't see it*. Maybe my artistic capacity to represent/imitate a narrative from an imaginative source brings a narrow path of signifiers confined to my own spectacle—thus, limiting the visual experience in a way that stops the performance of another creative gaze/intent (a gaze other than my own).[493] The Nietzschean mimetic relationship of the *Übermensch*-artist with the physical world was discussed in Chapter 2, but the performative inquiry into what disrupts the formation of an iconic vision—even if my subjective image is discounted as *monological*/idolic—conveys additional information into the role of canons in the viewer's evocative understanding of an image. This very creative capacity of the viewer to bypass an artist's own creative intent due to the canonical framing of an aesthetic judgment is of particular importance (and a major argument of this thesis) in critiquing the participation into an iconic/idolic vision.

Reflecting on the canons The Unity of the Elements, The Background, and The Gold, Color, and Light (explained above) in relation to the idea of a *screenspace*, I searched, in *Portrait of an Icon Maker*, for a way to bridge what I imagine/depict on the wood panel painting (on-screen space) with the physical anchoring that a performative experience requires (off-screen space). For me, the canons took the role of providing a way to handle and move the tools and materials for an evocative experience of my imagination. Yet, during my artistic act, I was confronted with a shift in viewing perspectives. According to the Byzantine theology of image, the fundamental aspect of the icon is to confront the viewers' intentionality in acknowledging Christ's image as the face of every human. And the "sacrosanct presence of the Incarnation" is revealed when the viewer becomes/takes part in the union with Christ's image—thus avoiding any form of objectification/commodification that transforms the visible into an extension of the human gaze.[494] It is essential for the (divine invisible) image to keep its distinctiveness/otherness without being contingent on human intentionality and perspective. How does this play against the evocation of a subjective image—the effect of an image-maker's faculty of reason and imagination? By following the demands or reductionist nature of the canons, my bodily movements were (paradoxically) framing iconically the symbolic outcome of my own gaze as if

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[493] Or, in spite of my artistic intention, the viewer's power to *take perspective* picks on the realistic/symbolic details that are incidental to my iconic vision. This is also defined by Marion as an idolic/Nietzschean relationship with the visible—especially in relation to the spectacle.

[494] Isar, "*Chōra*: Tracing the Presence," 39.

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acknowledging another intentionality. Was I here unavoidably experiencing a *phenomenological reduction* (as was discussed in Chapter 2) of my own intentionality? These questions refer to a phenomenological challenge or awareness in perspectives that need to be considered when constructing a Contemporary Byzantine-Inspired Iconic Vision for inviting viewers to form new meaning (beyond his/her intentionality). From this very performative inquiry, I hope to show how, in fact, the image and spectacle cannot be critiqued as operating on their own—that is, to signify themselves or to form their own aesthetics without the participation of a viewer.

Additional thoughts on working with the chorographic aspect of the canons in *Portrait of an Icon Maker* can prove instrumental in the aesthetic approach to designing an iconic vision. *Byzantine Chorography*, a concept termed by Nicoletta Isar, refers to the appearance of presence by both filling up and incorporating a space, which is the iconic technique of performing the Incarnational economy.[495] Referencing Marie-Jose Mondzain's extensive research on Nicephorus, Isar explains that the "chorographic performative inscription in the visible" is the "iconic line [trace/inscription] (*graphē*) in the visible of the *chōra* space of the Logos, which reveals itself completely only as an imaginary (*hennoēsai*) place, yet to be fully enacted in the liturgical performance."[496] I should perhaps elaborate here on Isar's application of the Nicephorian epistemological definition of the icon/living *image* to the human body's imitation of the *chōra* in transforming a place into a hierotopy—as this will clarify my performative approach to the canons, space, and movement. The original Platonic notion of *chōra* (described in the dialogue *Timaeus*) presents the creation of the cosmos and humans as a paradox. It is a "space-in-the making" or an inexplicable, neutral space "in-between" the visible and invisible without having either the features of an "intelligible" object or the movements/alterations of a "sensible" object.[497] While an essential third space in the appearance of visibility, Plato's *chōra* is always imperceptible and:

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[495] Ibid., 43. The term *chōra* was incorporated in the Byzantine theory of the image at the end of the iconoclastic war by Nicephorus to define the structure of the image-matter (Incarnation), venerated in the icon and through the liturgical performance of hierotopy (Isar, 2009, 42). As defined in Chapter 1, <u>1.2.2 The Byzantine view about the image</u>, Christ's artificial image (human form) is imprinted (circumscribed) in matter/*tópos* and His natural image is uncircumscribed in such a way that the "iconic inscription (*graphē*) is a trace that defines a space that is and is not there (*achôrêton*) (Isar, 2009, 42)." Said differently, His form is contained in *tópos* and His image is uncontained in *chōra*. The word *tópos* stands here for its Aristotelian meaning as circumscribed matter.

[496] Ibid., 42.

[497] Ibid., 40, 43.

[a] characterless sort of thing, one that receives all things and shares in a most perplexing way in what is intelligible, a thing extremely difficult to comprehend…And in so far as it is possible to arrive at its nature on the basis of what we've said so far, the most correct way to speak of it may well be this: the part of it that gets ignited appears on each occasion as fire, the dampened part as water, and parts as earth or air in so far as it receives the imitations of these.[498]

For Plato, the appearance-being copies the essence through "the movement of the primordial elements" (fire, water, earth, and air) in the womb of creation (*chōra*).[499] In short, although *chōra* provides access for the elemental properties of phenomena to make the world of appearance-beings*,* it is invisible and its reality cannot be made present in the sensible world of appearances (transported into being).[500] The Platonic *chōra* can only be perceived in a dream through a "kind of bastard thinking."[501] From this ontological ambiguity or contradictory position of the *chōra*—as a space that incorporates the process of creation without belonging to what is contained in the creation—the Byzantine iconophiles claimed the possibility of its manifestation in the "performative spatial inscription" of the icon's *graphē*. That is, *chōra* is made present as absence in the movement of the trace/type performed by the viewer's interaction with the icon—"the presence of the *chōra* could be only glimpsed in this movement, therefore we could call it a 'motional presence.'"[502]

The Byzantine *chōra* is more than a figure of speech in explaining the mysterious phenomena of the Incarnation. Isar clarifies that the ancient Greek meaning of *chōra* was particularly connected to the physical/geographical space and the farming method of threshing and winnowing. Similarly to the removal and distribution of the grains from chaffs by the sieves, the primordial elements are moved/organized through *chōra* to form phenomena. Accordingly, Plato makes a parallel in *Timaeus* (52e-53a) between the land marked by the outdoor threshing floor and the *chōraic* space:

> [earth, air, water, and fire] are winnowed out…like grain that is sifted by winnowing sieves…. separating the kinds most unlike each other further apart and pushing those most like each other closest together into the same region….before this took place the four kinds all lacked proportion and measure, and at the time the ordering of the universe

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[498] Plato, "Timaeus. 51b," *Complete Works*, Ed. John M. Cooper. (USA: Hacket Publishing Company, 1997), 1254.

[499] Isar, "*Chōra*: Tracing the Presence," 40.

[500] Isar notes that Jacques Derrida advocated the idea that *chōra* is total absence in his concept of *différence*, thus denying the Incarnational role of the icon to manifest the presence of absence.

[501] Plato, "Timaeus. 52b" *Complete Works*, 1255.

[502] Isar, "*Chōra*: Tracing the Presence," 41.

was undertaking, fire, water, earth and air initially possessed certain traces of what they are now. They were indeed in the condition one would expect thoroughly god-forsaken things to be in. So, finding them in this natural condition, the first thing the god then did was to give them their distinctive shapes, using forms and numbers.[503]

Isar uses Plato's parallel between the configuration of the cosmic *chōraic* and agriculture activities (in tracing the iconic *graphē* or manifesting the "coinciding trace between content and container"[504]) to exemplify how the Byzantine *chōral* movement is performed (with the icon) during the "Earthly Liturgy" as the type of the "Heavenly Liturgy"/prototype.[505] Here, the idea of movement is always seen in relation to generating or delimiting an iconic space for imprinting the presence of the image. Lidov's example of the Hodegetria rite performed by the patriarch Sergius I (described in Chapter 3, section 3.1 Interactivity: the performance of *screenspace* and hierotopy), showed how a communal/liturgical response to the icon through chorographic movement reflecting praise established an interaction with an invisible agency, thus forming a hierotopy. The meaning of movement in relation to *chōra* is particularly important for the construction of an iconic vision. For example, Isar refers to three types of coordinated movement for tracing the visible (with the invisible) that can be categorized as follows: 1) withdrawing from a space to create room (a trace) as argued by Marion when defining the icon according to the effacement of Christ's visibility through His crucifixion (see Chapter 2, section 2.4.2 Marion's icon and metaphysic iconoclasm), 2) moving forward "to be in motion or in flux" as in Verhoeff's navigational vision based on the mobile (touch) screen[506] (see Chapter 3, section 3.1 Interactivity: the performance of *screenspace* and hierotopy), and 3) collective dancing (*chōros*) in a circle "around (*perichoreúousa*) an eternal knowledge of" the divine as in Lidov's example of the Hodegetria icon of circling a profane space in the Hodegon Square.[507] Moreover, referring to the *chōral* dancing in the liturgical performance, Isar says: "Byzantine church performances frequently refer to actions...[whereby] humans could and should join the angelic performance…[in order to] partake into the great cosmic praise…[like dancing] in a choir, or in a circular manner…in which the whole of creation takes part."[508] In *Portrait of an Icon Maker*, I

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[503] Plato, "Timaeus. 52e-53b," *Complete Works*, 1255-1256.
[504] Isar, "*Chōra*: Tracing the Presence," 42.
[505] Ibid., 43.
[506] Ibid., 41.
[507] Ibid., 43.
[508] Ibid. Another Byzantine example of inscribing a hierotopy according to the "circular movement" is the liturgical performance "around the church at the Resurrection" (Isar, 2009, 50). The presence of the divine image is liturgically performed in a series of mimetic movements. Isar refers here to Pseudo-Dionysus's Ecclesiastical

add, instead, a new understanding of the *chōral* movement: the solitary aesthetic exploration of the canon-directed movement, which can also be called a *canonized motional* presence, that is *choreographed* to address the Incarnational dimension of the image at the pictorial level of the icon. Like the role of the sieve in giving shape to phenomena in Plato's *Timaeus*, the canons that I employ in my practice can take the meaning of organizing/balancing symbolic and realistic elements to manifest the *chōraic* trace.

Furthermore, at the center of Isar's idea of chorographic inscription is the mimetic role of the human body in performing the *chōraic* movement: "[g]esture, motion, choreography—this is the" creative mode of expressing an iconic vision.[509] Returning to Plato's *Timaeus*, Isar evaluates the appearance of presence in a performative event by associating the bodily sickens and desires to an unbalance in the *chōraic* movement—from a Marionian critique of the spectacle, I can also make a parallel here between disease and the viewer's idolic desires and the objectification of human identity based on brand images. At the level of the cosmic *chōra*, disease is translated into a sense of chaos/disturbance that prevents the phenomenal process of creation whereby the invisible is *mirrored* (marked or made present) in the visible. To maintain a sense of well being in the human body in order to allow the "emergency of presence in the bodily *chōra*," then one needs to copy the cosmic *chōra*'s orderly fashion of creating the world.[510] In Plato's terms: as much of essence's presence in the visible as of likeness in an appearance-being.[511] Like in the canonized relationship between the icon and faithful, in which the image of humanity is shaped according to the divine image of Christ, "man should constantly adjust his image to the archetype by imitating the *chōra*…[to] stay tune to his creator."[512] This christic

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Hierarchy to amplify the mimetic movement between the faithful and angels in the *Byzantine Chorography*. In the book *The Celestial Hierarchy,* Pseudo-Dionysius describes the organization of the celestial and terrestrial world (including social structures) on a hierarchical order through which the divine knowledge is disseminated to humans in the form of illumination. He gives an essential role to aesthetic elements in the process of spiritual uplifting of human beings to God. The divine elevation is realized "by means of antinomical 'likening' to and 'imitation' of (mimesis), God." (Bychkov, 321-323)

[509] Isar, "*Chōra*: Tracing the Presence," 44.

[510] Ibid. Isar explains that Plato locates the bodily *chōra* in the liver, which replicates in the human body the exact regulatory function of cosmic/nurse *chōra*. In fact, the surface of the liver is compared to a *mirror* that reflects the image of the soul (thoughts) in the human body in the same way as the cosmic *chōraic* womb mirrors phenomena through movement.

[511] In discussing the moment when the presence of the image is revealed to the human gaze, I would return to Plato's allegory of the Cave (mentioned in the Introduction) in which one of the prisoners managed to escape from the cave and see the true "sun itself, in its own place [*chōra*]" (Plato 1997, 1134). The presence of the sun is given as gift to humans by blinding his/her vision, which means that the access to full presence confronts the power to *take perspective.*

[512] Isar, "*Chōra*: Tracing the Presence," 44.

mimetic behavior of replicating the *chōra* is particularly relevant to assessing the canonical method of tracing the *motional* presence of a subjective interpretation (desire) of the spectacle.

Portrait of an Icon Maker is my attempt to express symbolic and realistic elements in space to ask how the image-maker differs from his/her own image. While in the on-(wood)screen's content, I take perspective in the spectacle by combining religious and pop culture symbolism, in performing the canons I had to constantly deal with tools and materials. This was a learning experience in seeing how matter (that was simply filling out a place before my eyes) transformed in the very access to my (spatial) stories. My bodily movement was not just physically positioned in a landscape (*tópos*) but also performing, in an experiential space, the manifestation of something invisible—similarly to Verhoeff's notion of performative cartography. Based on the Byzantine idea that an image is invisible, *Portrait of an Icon Maker* presents my attempt to initiate a dialog with invisibility through imaginative characters. It is ostensibly a performance about following the Byzantine technique with a purpose of constructing an iconic vision, but digresses symbolically into negotiating with a mirror of my own ideas and desires. However, since the performance is canon-based, my aesthetic judgment necessarily advances a quest for an iconic experience that "exceeds and precedes the thinking I."[513] Particularly, the symbolic-realistic technique (as described above under <u>The Signature</u>, <u>The Background</u>, <u>The Face and Body</u>, <u>Stillness and Movement</u>, <u>The Gold, Color, and Light</u>, <u>The Painting Method</u>, and <u>Color</u>) projects the compositional elements of my wood panel painting into an inverse perspective that counters the cultivation of artistic originality (in a Nietzschean sense). While taking advantage of the pictorial liberty that is given by the canons (from the way I play with the layers of paint and the combinations of colors and forms), the Byzantine figurative format of painting—which combines the naturalistic and abstract visions, as analyzed in Chapter 2—restricts a full Platonic or Nietzschean projection of my artistic vision. By connecting the compositional elements with reflections of my own desires, *Portrait of an Icon Maker* turns into an event of *witnessing* desires as given in my understanding as a *thinking I*. This moment of reflection creates a sense of disjuncture between my power to represent these elements and narratives and their actual, real-presence, which pulls my attention away from their referentiality between two opposites (my intentionality and their symbolic meaning) and towards the performative action itself. In other words, my gaze shifts to my present/performative experience

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[513] Marion, *The Reason of the Gift*, 3.

as an image-maker. So, it is possible to say that I am crafting a particular type of space through a *canonized coordinated movement* of tracing my aesthetic judgment (the invisible) in the visible, which is similar to "the presentification of the *chōra* in performance."[514] I could feel and speak of my imaginary image only in movement, which, again, unveils the fact that an image cannot operate without a human body. This performative glimpse into an orderly manner of making present the spectacle of my aim (idol) in the physical space is instrumental for my thesis argument that the critique of the spectacle in relation to the image should not be resumed to a symbolic recognition or a realistic assessment.

Moreover, to what degree can I critically appraise the amount of presence in my affective experience of performing my own spectacle? *Portrait of an Icon Maker* is less about quantifying and formalizing the embodied affect/pathos from an aesthetic experience, and more about paying attention to how the canons mediate an aesthetic judgment *as its own* image—in a similar manner as the face of Christ is given/gifted to the believer by an invisible gaze. This also applies to the viewers' affective engagement with the *Portrait of an Icon Maker.* The point with my performative inquiry is not to imitate an essence—to claim a strong symbolic bond to an idea of reality—and measure the viewer's degree of engagement in its presence accordingly. Thus, it is not about calculating if my own artistic actions induce ethical/metaphysical concerns or emotional responses (desires, boredom, etc.). A Henrian focus on subjective affectivity would only send the analysis back to a basic form of symbolic vision, which abstracts the visible phenomena in favor of a *transcendental I* (as I discussed in Chapter 2, section 2.4.2 Marion's icon and metaphysic iconoclasm). And this limitation to a dematerialized inner phenomenon restricts visual criticism from acknowledging the Incarnational operation of the image within an iconic vision. Instead, the point is to imitate the canons through a performative inquiry and uncover rules that reveal techniques for evoking an image and which might be applied repeatedly (however in a different manner) in various visual/symbolic contexts. Particularly, in navigating through canons, my *screenspace* emerges in an aesthetic space for reflecting on the viewer's capacity to perform an invisible image (an evocation) by enacting my symbolic mirrors. In turn, this inquiry helps to better understand claims to real-presence and symbolic/realistic assumptions about an iconic vision.

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[514] Isar, "*Chōra*: Tracing the Presence," 43.

4.4.3. Byzantine Framework: basic aesthetic rules for artistic reflection

> Presence is participative [hence] there is no presence per se, but an experienced presence.[515]

The Incarnational importance of the canons has brought my performative inquiry a long way from a simple symbolic or realistic description of the Byzantine icon. In the previous section, I have reflected through artistic research on a series of canons (from the preparation of materials to the symbolic use of colors and shape of the human body) to see 1) how they connect/contextualize my physical body and imagination to a space and 2) how this experience threatens to override the design goal of an iconic vision. I have also mentioned above how, through the canonical technique of painting, the invisible was meant to violate my own desires. However, this theological turn in critiquing the image from a Byzantine canonic mimetic behavior should not be limited to an academic (historical or scientific) quest for the mystery of an iconic vision, but understood from an aesthetic experience of receiving the (Incarnational) mystery. Both, the viewer and image-maker are already physically immersed in the mystery of an image through movement in space. The performative medium (hierotopy) of an image is gifted not esteemed.[516]

After reflecting on the chorographic movement of the Byzantine painting technique—thus, moving beyond a dematerialized phenomenology of the image—what are the contemporary artistic possibilities to craft the presence of an image using new media installations? How does a Contemporary Byzantine-Inspired Iconic Vision work as hierotopic installation? Particularly, in a visual culture that is dominated by technological screens (the favorite medium of today's spectacle). Given Lechte's Byzantine reading of Jeffery's *The Golden Calf* (analyzed above in section 4.3.1 Beauty and the Image) and Isar's idea of hierotopic creativity (whose view of Bill Viola's video work I explore in the next section), there is a promising avenue for providing an aesthetic access to an iconic vision through a performative event. Nonetheless, in critiquing an aesthetic visualization of an image, it is essential to remember, firstly, that the image is not the same with its object of representation and the on-screen space acquires referentiality only by

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[515] Ibid., 44.

[516] The goal of this thesis is not to classify my artistic practice into an idolic or iconic vision to yield a metaphysical proof regarding the construction of an image. An image cannot be analyzed by only following this metaphysical logic that limits the critique to the referentiality between two opposites (icon versus idol). I point, however, to a broader understanding—that is, beyond the dualistic views that fluctuate according to the perspective of a viewer—of the image as a canonized performative act (realism) of feeling the presence of symbolism.

enacting a signifier in the off-screen space. And, secondly, that a Contemporary Byzantine-Inspired Iconic Vision is formed when symbolic and realistic elements are combined and balanced according to a compositional structure similar to that of a Byzantine icon—equally showed by Jenkins' critique of the iPod adds.

The Byzantine aesthetic view (hierotopy) opens up a new, interdisciplinary field of research that is yet non-practically or insufficiently explored and which may offer an alternative to the metaphysical iconoclasm surrounding the idea of the spectacle (and to the general view in the humanities) regarding the end of the "metaphysics of presence."[517] In reflecting on Viola's use of icon technique, Isar proposes a hierotopic reading of how viewers interact with artworks/artists to *claim* or *receive* new meaning and creative experiences.[518] She recognizes that Viola is doing similar things to what a Byzantine iconographer is attempting to do in presenting symbolic content when using an interactive screen (wood panel painting) for framing canonically an image. Isar's point is that a hierotopic vision gives the contemporary artist an opportunity to go one step further in using a perfomative event, not simply in a realistic manner (as exemplified in Chapter 1 by Fisher-Lichte's view of Abramović's performances), but to reconnect the viewer's body to Incarnational symbolism that constructs an image. In other words, to acquire a symbolic-realistic understanding of what it means to participate in a process of in-imagination by joining a creative space of accessing the presence of an absence, dubbed by Isar an act of "presencing."[519]

Before delving into Isar's hierotopic analysis, which reveals iconic elements addressing metaphysical symbolism that may be commonly incorporated in artworks, my concern is to underscore first the contemporary role of the Byzantine canons in the symbolic-realistic critique of the image. If the scope is to understand what it means to preform an iconic vision, then the canons provide a mode of incarnating the invisible that is not based on referentiality or myth/signified/invisible versus ritual/signifier/visible, but grounded on their mnemonic/mimetic use for performing an "experienced presence."[520] There is no aesthetic recipe on how to construct an iconic vision, but there are particular technical methods for seeing/feeling the presence of an image. Some initial questions from *Portrait of an Icon Maker* in proposing a

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[517] Isar, "Vision and Performance," 336.
[518] I mean here the idea of claiming a full picture of reality versus receiving reality as *gift*.
[519] Isar, "*Chōra*: Tracing the Presence," 44.
[520] Ibid.

series of Byzantine aesthetic guidelines for visual criticism are:

> 1) The canons were employed to evoke a subjective, solitary, and tangible point of view on image making. How do their aesthetic and performative considerations reconnect body and symbolism in critiquing the spectacle?

> 2) How does the aesthetic context in which the canons are implemented, change the structural elements of an iconic vision (from the surrounding to the compositional forms)?

The above two questions address primarily the phenomenological power of the canons to induce an evocation through the chorographic technique of blurring the symbolic and realistic visions. The integration of the canons into an art installation context, however, requires further explanations concerning the realistic, symbolic, and symbolic-realistic representational approaches between a signifier and signified. In order to clarify the relevance of the canons for a contemporary artist in constructing an image, I will focus next on how these three types of vision maintain at the artistic/technical level distinctive referential links to notions of reality.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the realistic vision (that parallels naturalism, particularly the photographic type of representation) is built on a strong Nietzschean link between the signifier and signified to measure reality according to the viewer. Only when esteemed by the viewer, the signified becomes present and stops acting as a pointless Platonic abstraction—paradoxically, it seems that the signifier becomes useless in the realistic vision. Therefore, by merging canonical elements with naturalistic/photographic representations can disrupt the iconic visual composition, and to some degree dominate (realistically) the aesthetics. The realistic power of a depiction has been famously described by Roland Barthes: "the Photograph is violent: not because it shows violent things, but because on each occasion *it fills the sight by force*, and because in it nothing can be refused or transformed."[521] Contrasted to the symbolic-realistic technique of painting (that I discuss later in relation to the rotoscoping technique of tracing the *real*, as developed by the animator Max Fleischer in 1917), the photographic picture stimulates spectatorship (for inducing a sense of real-presence) without making enough room for the viewer to perform the image as present.[522]

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[521] In this context, the word *violence* takes the meaning of imposing the real-presence of an image. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, Trans. R. Howard, (London: Vintage, 2000), 91.

[522] Paul Ward, "Animated Realities: The Animated Film, Documentary, Realism." *Reconstruction* 8.2 (2008): Paragraph 14, http://reconstruction.eserver.org/Issues/082/ward.shtml, accessed 25 Dec 2014.

Oppositely, the symbolic vision (in the sense of an abstract or conceptual type of representation) constructs a weak link between the signifier and signified to the point were the signifier is taken as an unreal medium toward the actual reality of the signified. The signified is an appearance-being that is never really present—this Platonic attitude to representation was analyzed in Chapter 2. Thus, the symbolic power of an abstract representation would have the same disruptive effect on the aesthetics of an artistic iconic vision by leaving too much space for interpretation (as in Kandinsky's abstract painting or Kosuth's conceptual art discussed in Chapter 2, sections 2.2 The symbolic and realistic artistic visions and 2.4 The phenomenology of the iconic vision) or by confusing consciousness to the point of blocking the viewer's intentionality in the act of taking perspective (as explained in section 2.4.1 Abstract painting as an aesthetic of the invisible).

The above explanation of the two opposing representational tendencies of naturalism and abstraction leads to the symbolic-realistic vision. This third Byzantine type of visualization is built, to use media theorist Paul Ward's words, "around the *relative* realism attached to" Christ's bodily features as part of "the real world of lived, material actuality (and, crucially, history)."[523] It is essential to reiterate here that the realistic and symbolic visions differ from the symbolic-realistic vision in the representational relation between the signifier and signified. In the icon, the signifier takes the active, performative function of tracing (type) the prototype (model) to create a phenomenological move in the perception of the real: the signified is felt present and absent at the same time. From a phenomenological view, the best way to explain how this shift happens is to analyze the experience of seeing a naturalistic representation, such as a photograph, video, or hyperrealistic illustration of someone being killed. The ethical feeling that a viewer might experience when looking at such a depiction does not come from its objective/realist representation of the event, but from the fact that it originates from a real event. This difference between the naturalistic and the real in implicating a viewer unveils the crucial role of the icon's symbolic-realistic link between a signifier and signified for depicting the real/historical body of Christ. Specifically, in order to create an evocation, the image has to be felt and not imprisoned as if really present in a frame for representation. Due to its claim to reality, the naturalistic depiction competes with the original model and, therefore, inserts a sense of disbelief in the viewing experience of the real/Christ event. More importantly, as Marion also argues in *The*

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[523] Ibid., Paragraph 1.

Crossing of the Visible, naturalism limits the viewer's intentionality to simply acknowledging the real, without implicating him/her in an act of evocation (the feeling of presence). Conversely, the abstract depiction removes all clues regarding the existence of an original event by dissolving the bond between a signifier and signified.

From a purely technical stance, an instance of a symbolic-realistic technique—which artists can use to create an evocation—is exemplified by the practice of rotoscoping imagery that is employed in the cartoon animation industry. In my attempt to provide a Byzantine canonic lens to the contemporary artistic/critical eye, I will connect next, Fleischer's technique of rotoscoped animation with the Byzantine painting technique. However, I must mention first that this parallelism addresses an idea of movement between the viewer, frame for representation, and image (in order to actualize the real) that mostly relates to the Marionian dematerialized view of the crossing of two gazes.[524] Still, when this shift happens, lets say, in the exchange of two immobile gazes, it can play a significant role in the artistic construction of an image by prompting a sense of otherness.

Figure 22: Adrian Gorea, *The Offering of Elmo's Head* (2014), Video available on the companion DVD and at: http://youtu.be/7F0USDY73fE

Like the Byzantine technique, the rotoscoped animation was developed as "an instructive example of a representational strategy that appears to be *both* animation [imaginary/symbolic] *and* live action [realistic], rather than simply one or the other."[525] For example, Fleischer depicted the character Betty Boop dancing the hula in the animation *Betty Boop's Bamboo Isle* (1932) by tracing the movements of a (real) Polynesian dancer recorded on film.[526] This very method of creating animated frames provides an interesting similarity to how iconographers transfer onto the new surface of a wood panel the outlines of the holy figure, which are preserved in acheiropoieta traces or old icons.[527] Although this connection may appear

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[524] To recall Marion's idea of the icon, the feeling of a gaze that pierces out of the screen to confront the viewer's perspective is framed as if the body stands still, in a contemplating attitude that almost eliminates all bodily sensible functions and movements.

[525] Ward, "Animated Realities," Paragraph 16.

[526] *Betty Boop's Bamboo Isle*, Fleischer Studios, Runtime 8 minutes, 1932.

[527] Jesus Himself imprinted the very first acheiropoitos trace, also known as the Mandylion. According to a 4th century legend, He miraculously left the marks of his face on a piece of linen for the leprous King Abgar of

odd from a theological or consumerist perspective, this resemblance in tracing the real has captivated my artistic vision to merge American animated cartoons with Byzantine figures. Therefore, in the wood panel painting, *The Offering of Elmo's Head* (Fig. 22), I have combined both techniques of tracing of an icon and photographic documentation of popular culture characters. The table below (Fig. 23), sketches my (technical) point and how I see it unfolding in four specific stages.
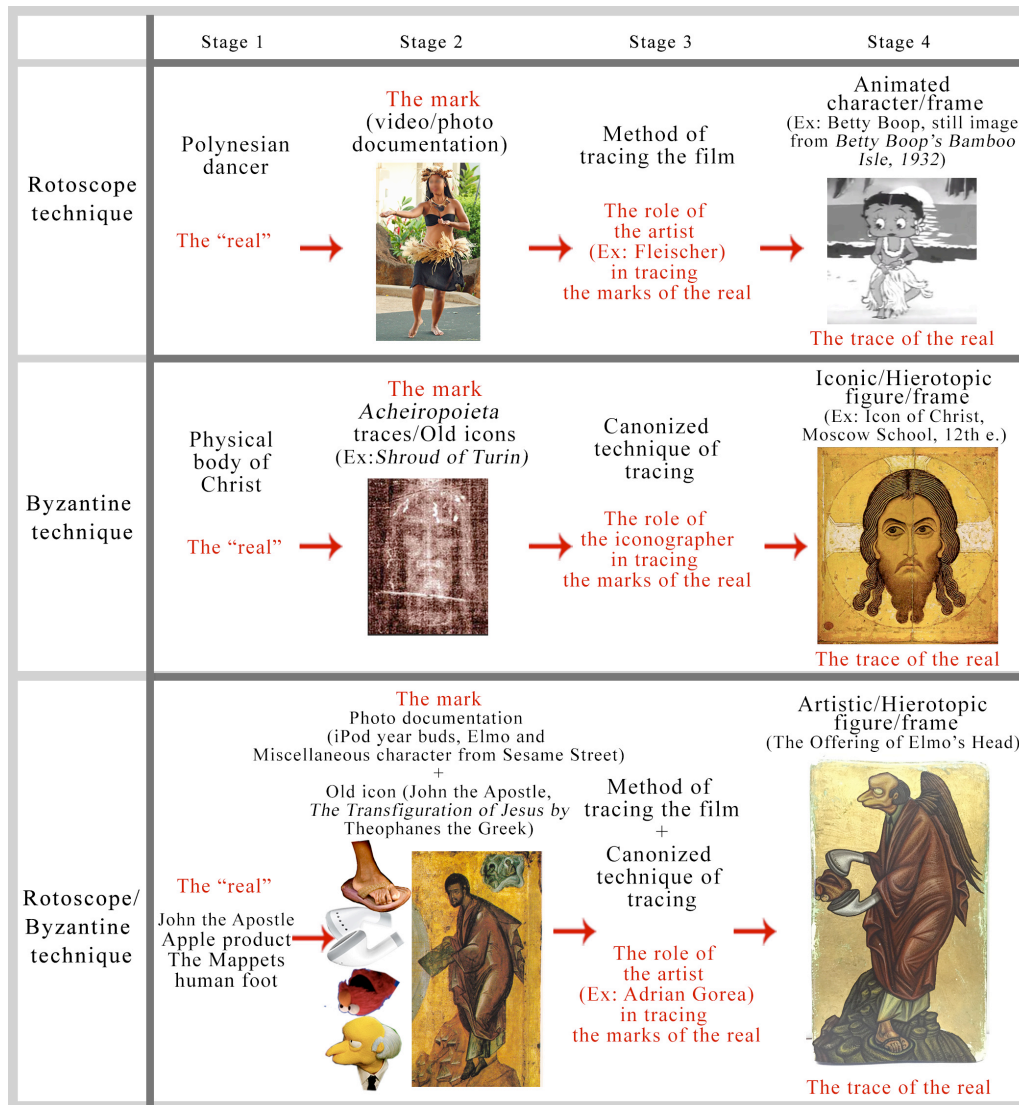

Figure 23: The Trace of the Real in Byzantine and Rotoscope Techniques

Edessa. *The Doctrine of Addai*, 13-14. English Translation**,** accessed 21 April 2015. http://www.apostle1.com/doctrine-addai-syriac-orthodox1.htm.

The Offering of Elmo's Head juxtaposes iPod ear buds, a human body part (foot), the red monster Elmo, and a miscellaneous character from the television show Sesame Street with John the Apostle, painted by Theophanes the Greek in the icon entitled *The Transfiguration of Jesus* (15th century). By following the Byzantine style of painting, I was able to create a new on-screen narrative that shifted my solitary, artistic experience towards a symbolic-realistic vision. More closely, I have managed to evoke a subjective/aesthetic reality by responding to it with the faith afforded to a Byzantine icon (equally to the way I show in *Portrait of an Icon Maker*). This means that the use of canons allowed me to ground my aesthetic judgment in the material world (performatively) in a way that guided my intentionality toward acknowledging a symbolic source (Stage 1) beyond my own imagination. From an image-makers perspective, the canons prove to be a powerful aesthetic tool in understanding the inherent structure of a viewing experience that transforms into an iconic vision. What is revealed is the chain of thought and actions within the complex process of making an image present from transparency to visibility. Then, what exactly does emerge from the artistic engagement with the canons? Well, the significant emerging insight is that the Byzantine icon provides compelling tools for an artist to see/critique the human desire for real experience without the clear cut representational distinction of an image as real-presence or complete absence.[528] In other words, the canons turn the (iconoclastic) critique from what is the real in a frame for representation to how and when a referent becomes transparent enough before the human gaze to witness the represented as if really existing in the same space with the viewer.

In *The Offering of Elmo's Head*, for instance, my fictional association of the compositional elements was concomitantly filtered through an ongoing awareness of the canons by moving from Stage 1 to Stage 4. Particularly, the act of tracing my aesthetic judgment based on the canonical link between an original source (Stage 1) and a frame for representation (Stages 2 and 4) restricted my intentionality in esteeming the presence of my own imaginary narrative in a self-referential way. What I am suggesting here, is that the act of creating is not an immersion through the frame for representation to the point of claiming the total disappearance of the signifier in favor of the signified, akin to Marion's dematerialized version of the icon. This is a misconception of the complexity of image making that disregards the practical/technical mode of

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[528] As explained in Chapter 1, in the context of a Byzantine icon, a real experience is defined when a viewers performs or completes the image of Christ. Similarly, in the case of an artwork, a real viewing experience actualizes a symbolic meaning.

a viewing experience from the very position of where the viewer stands in a tangible space. My epistemological contribution to artistic research lies, then, in revealing a Byzantine thinking framework for the artists based on the four stages of vivifying an aesthetic experience in relationship to a referent. This practical insight in bringing to life an artistic image reveals that an iconic vision cannot be resumed to a feature of the artist's imagination alone. The image does not simply belong to an inner, artistic self. Instead, it should be discovered in the fine balance between symbolism and realism that contextualizes an iconic vision's relationship with a referent beyond the sphere of metaphysical dualism.

Returning to the effect of rotoscoping, this visual technique creates a very life-like animation. The viewer is confronted with the ambiguity of how to see an animated cartoon, such as Betty Boop: from a pure subjective/imaginary type of visualization (as it comes from an artist's imagination) to a "serious History lesson [as recorded on film], one which requires the stylistic shift from 'cartoon' to the ontologically (therefore epistemologically?) distinct "rotoscoped animation."[529] While the fictional/cartoonish features of Betty Boop (silhouette, proportions of the facial elements, colors, etc.) stem from Fleischer's imagination, it also offers a connection to an origin (based on the video documentation of the Polynesian dancer) that can be acknowledged by the viewer in the very act of seeing. This connection is not offered in a specific naturalistic, linear perspective, or 3D manner.[530] Instead, the rotoscoped animation invites the viewer himself/herself to make the link to the real.[531] The same mode of seeing takes place through the hierotopic interaction with the Byzantine *spatial* living *icon*. The evocative effect in the rotoscopic trace of the real corresponds to the Byzantine canonized balance between symbolism and realism in painting the image of Christ (and holy figures in general). Moreover, this parallel between rotoscoping and icon painting helps to practically consider the canons in an artistic context/visual criticism (as in my wood panel paintings). It shows the non-referential role of the canons in critiquing *when* and how an aesthetic experience changes into a phenomenological turn that evokes the presence of an image. And, when the canons are implemented at the artistic level of research, it allows reflecting on metaphysical questions of

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[529] Ward, "Animated Realities," Paragraph 15.

[530] The reverse is also true as Fleischer does not provide an abstract representation of the Polynesian dancer's movements.

[531] Ward explains that due to the simplistic or formulaic aspect of the rotoscope in communicating the complexities of a subject matter, the technique is "closely associated with discourses of instruction and training in 'the government...industry...and educational institutions'" (Donald Crafton quoted in Ward, "Animated Realities," Paragraph 14).

real-presence: whether the image is seen from a realistic vision by claiming a strong link to reality, or from a symbolic vision by seeking a weak link to reality. Of course, any artistic vision that incorporates canons can be critiqued from a symbolic or realistic view of reality, but what is important to remember is that an image is always crafted somewhere between symbolism and realism—as exemplified by the Byzantine icon. The canons are not an idealized/de-contextualized form of viewing behavior, but rather they are what anchors symbolism in realism (and vice versa) without the dualism between a form of representation and a notion of reality. Likewise, the canonized movement (outlined above in relation to *Portrait of an Icon Maker*) should not be thought in the metaphysical terms of having a strong or weak link between the signifier and signified. Thus, the canons do not have a representational function themselves and should not be limited (in my artistic view) to the specific Byzantine context and medium. Like the Byzantine icon, an artwork can put in a specific physical context, through the image-maker's body, the canons that anchor the desire for transparency in seeing the real. Such an artistic reflection over the canons also points towards the Incarnational dimension of the image, which consequently moves visual criticism toward reconsidering the metaphysics of presence beyond metaphysical iconoclasm. As I observe later in this chapter, Isar provides in her hierotopic reading of Viola's use of the digital screens a meeting point between the artwork and Byzantine icon in the canonic manifestation of the *chōraic* movement.

To that end, my artistic proposition is that a customized basic list of Byzantine guidelines for constructing a Contemporary Byzantine-Inspired Iconic Vision provides a compelling framework for critiquing an iconic/idolic vision in the commoditized age of televisual screens (beyond metaphysical issues). So it is my aim to redefine a list of canons that will guide me in the next sections through Isar's hierotopic analysis and the critique of my installation *Performing the Icon*. More broadly, I see some theological points in critiquing metaphysical claims to an image in: 1) the role of the image-maker's intentionality, 2) the tangible use of the frame for representation, and 3) the balance between the naturalistic/realistic and abstract/symbolic approaches—as previously mentioned, an overuse of either of them would disrupt an iconic vision's visual composition. Following these insights, there are specific reasons image-makers (an implicitly visual criticism) would want to consider when critiquing an iconic/idolic vision through contemporary artistic means:

1) *Eikōn*-Appearance/Copy as Gift. The creative process should be seen as a gift to the viewer for renouncing the image-maker's self.[532] The artistic purpose is to preserve the presence of an image in the hierotopic project without stopping the gaze at the artist's own spectacle. This renunciation is a form of creating room for the *chōraic* trace and can be explored in the movements (withdrawal, navigational, or canonical, which is the movement that I explore in *Portrait of an Icon Maker*) between intentionality and (archetypal) imagination.[533]

2) Technique of In-Imagination. To perform aesthetically an iconic vision is to follow a rigor of seeing the body in a context from a canonic reflective manner—a mimetic mode of seeing that has been lost in the age of mobile screens, as argued in Chapter 3, section 3.2.2 Why the Contemporary Byzantine-Inspired Iconic Vision in the symbolic-realistic critique of the spectacle. Thus, the role of symbolism in the aesthetic experience has to take an Incarnational dimension to avoid the referential logic between a ritual/signifier and myth/signified.

3) Living Essence/Model. There should always be a hand-made connection between the artist and the object of depiction to allow an extraction of images from a living source or signified. The reason for this is that the artist's body needs to be tangibly involved in the act of tracing the presence of an absence/image. And the technique of tracing requires an aesthetic strategy to present the images' play of absence and presence somewhere between an abstract and naturalistic pictorial inscription of the human face.

Since I am rethinking/extracting Byzantine canons from an interdisciplinary perspective at the level of an artist's solitary experience, the above three points of consideration for an image-maker/visual criticism require a certain touch of interpretation. However, based on the Byzantine theology of the image, this list provides a basic way of critiquing how (as opposed to what) a transformative viewing activity, in response to the spectacle, turns iconic/idolic in intent or inspiration. Or, from an aesthetic perspective, how various artistic/hierotopic approaches to create a frame for representation (that does not necessarily include Christian motives) integrate iconic elements to transform a viewer into an image-maker; namely, to present a performative event by enacting/mimicking invisible images from an unseen dimension of images (from a *sensus communis*).

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[532] The notion of an image-maker does not refer only to the artist, but also to the viewer's interaction with the work.

[533] The idea of an *archetypal imagination* is taken from Isar's discussion of Bill Viola's work that I analyze later in the next section. It is the symbolic mode of seeing in its Incarnational/*chōraic* function of inscribing an image in a *sensus communis*.

4.4.4 Probing the Byzantine framework 1: Isar's chorographic reading of Bill Viola's technological screens

> Viola's thinking illustrates in a most exemplary way a phenomenon manifested in contemporary performance art, shared by some other artists, which shows a return to the metaphysical properties of the image and presence, which I call 'contemporary hierotopy', after Lidov's concept.[534]

In this section, I look at how Isar applies a canonic and hierotopic critical eye on Bill Viola's work, which she finds representative of how contemporary art could induce an evocation in a Byzantine sense. Particularly, she analyses how the *chōraic* movement might be traced in a digital screen. While in Byzantine hierotopy, the mimetic device is based on the model of the Cross, Isar indicates that in Viola's hierotopic vision, the mimetic model is based on the *inner image,* which manifests through human's capacity of imagination to create symbolism in an Incarnational sense.[535] She explains that "[i]mage is not only *'that which'* one sees, but also *'that by means of which'* one sees by an act of imagining."[536] Image is generated through an "imagining perspective," which is a performative event that equally involves the human body, the invisible/*inner image* and context/environment.[537] Like in the Byzantine icon, the prototypical nature of the *inner image* is not limited to the perception of bodily senses and emotions, in which the physical eye (the outer eye of personal desires) filters or selectively grasps mere pictures from the visible world. Therefore, Viola makes a difference between a *picture* and an *inner image*. A picture is a phenomenological mode of framing (taking perspective) what is visible or what is presented to the senses (body) from the outside of the mind and an *inner image* is an event of imagining in which the image is perceived from the inside (mind) in the physical world. Viola's view of an event of imagining takes a theological turn in the Nicephorian sense of in-imagination: although transparent, an image is not a Platonic symbol that is in some way opposed to reality. The image is an experienced presence of reality itself. This performative aspect of the image corresponds to the metaphysics of presence in the christic mimetic act of rejoining the image of humanity and divine in the icon. For both, Viola

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[534] Isar, "Vision and Performance," 347.
[535] Ibid., 337.
[536] Ibid.
[537] Ibid.

and the Byzantine beholder, the image is not given in the signifier of a model, but in an "imaginative activity."[538]

Figure 24: *The Catherine's Room* (2001) by Bill Viola

In his work, Viola explores the prototypical quality of his own images through what he calls "continually repeating actions" that direct the human gaze towards eternity—much in the same way I canonically explore the presence of my imaginary images in *Portrait of an Icon Maker*.[539] The idea of eternity recalls the Byzantine icon technique of inverse perspective, in which past and future events unfold simultaneously into one, present time and space. Viola explains that the knowledge of eternal time (as opposed to the chronological, linear, Cartesian time) was best experienced in the ancient agrarian rituals/festivities that connected "the larger [cyclical] sense of Nature Time" with the human body and the individual time of daily life.[540] In describing the notion of *chōra,* Isar makes a similar point in the connection between the cosmic *chōraic* movement and the repeated agricultural outdoor practice of threshing and winnowing. So, Viola keeps the gaze into eternity by using the video screen technologies to provide an artistic means (based on the canon of inverse perspective) towards "simultaneous levels of time."[541] For example, in the video work, *The Catherine's Room* (Fig. 24), he installed five flat screens displaying Catherine performing daily ritualistic tasks (yoga, lighting candles, etc.) during the five moments of a day, from morning to evening. Here, the viewer is confronted with an inverse perspective that takes place in the present time of viewing:

> [it] represents the idea of parallel time, the fact that right now you can call someone in Rome and simultaneously partake in their field of existence halfway around the world. This was not possible for humans, at least for those without special psychic powers, until the recent developments of communication technologies.[542]

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[538] Ibid., 337.
[539] *Bill Viola: the Passions,* Ed. John Walsh, (London: J. Paul Getty Museum in association with the National Gallery, 2003), 214.
[540] Ibid.
[541] Ibid.. 212.
[542] Ibid., 214.

The technological screen turns into the frame of constructing a symbolic-realistic vision, which is an experienced presence of "the larger field of time," beyond the objectified/commoditized/linear view of time.[543] Isar claims that Viola's video installations are not to be visually seen, but meant to activate (perform) the imagining aptitude of the "inner eye"—which is the "soul itself"—in relation to the viewer's body, space, and the medium (screen for representation) of his work.[544] His hierotopic endeavor is, then to create universally valid mimetic devices for viewers to gaze into "the archetypal imagination, for which the source of all images is to be found inside oneself."[545] The idea of the *archetypal imagination* parallels the Kantian notion of *sensus communis* or the hierotopic space in which the shared image between God and humans rejoin in the crossing of their gazes.

As stated above, the presence of the *inner image* involves an interaction between body, mind, and medium—as Isar notes, "an image is by definition one and *only when seen*."[546] Viola uses the digital screen as a medium to project and share his own images—and this is the very

Figure 25: Memoria (2000) by Bill Viola

purpose of a Contemporary Byzantine-Inspired Iconic Vision. For example, in his video installation *Memoria* (Fig. 25), Viola delves into his memories to reach infinity/the *inner image*. Memory, for Viola, is a mode of creating an imaginary/artistic image that transcends time. By inscribing memories in matter (the digital screen), Viola embodies the infinite in a *chōraic* manner. Isar describes Viola's use of the digital screen as having the quality of flesh that Incarnates mental images as light.[547] Like the Byzantine icon of the Mandylion, *Memoria* presents a face projected on a piece of silk that moves slowly between the visible and invisible. While the gaze in the screen directly addresses the viewers' intentionality as a gateway to "inward looking," the movement of the face enacts as if breathing the *chōraic* trace of the *inner image* (the other) in the visible.[548]

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[543] Ibid.
[544] Ibid.
[545] Isar, "Vision and Performance," 337.
[546] Ibid., 338.
[547] Ibid.
[548] Ibid.

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Isar outlines a hierotopic aura to Bill Viola's video installations from an aesthetic desire to test the metaphysical limits of the image. According to Viola's phenomenology of the image, all viewers shape their existence in the world by generating images from an ontological condition that bounds human nature to constantly seek the invisible other (the *archetypal imagination*). Despite this fact, in order to reach the true inner perception beyond the (idolic) self, the viewer needs to challenge the limits of his/her "imagining perspective."[549] From Isar's view, artworks, such as made by Viola, can provide the very challenge to think the unthinkable through the effect of the hierotopic vision. Or to put this differently, art as an imaginative event can turn into a performative act of *presencing* the *inner image*, which allows the viewer to recognize the prototypical nature of all images beyond the horizon his/her own spectacle. And, if the critique of the spectacle is incomplete without an evocative understanding of the image, this means that an *imaginative experience* is key in gaining knowledge on how viewers construct images by performing a prototypical/*inner image.*

In light of Isar's Byzantine description of Viola's use of the technological screen, I want now to recall my Byzantine aesthetic guidelines and address some metaphysical concerns regarding the artistic notion of *inner image*. In the previous discussion of my canon-directed movement employed in *Portrait of an Icon Maker*, I pointed out that the visualization of an artist's aesthetic judgment has the potential to construct an iconic vision if it turns into *its own image*[550]—depending on how the source of the artist's visualization is filtered through canons. Quenot's theological view of the icon reveals, for instance, that any artistic attempt (as opposed to a Byzantine iconographic activity) to visualize an aesthetic judgment reflects the artist's own quest to estimate an invisible reality.[551] This aesthetic search is a non-theological mode of seeing the image for the reason that it fosters an artistic originality that cultivates the cult of personality, which inevitably deviates towards the two extremes of representation: symbolism or realism. I have summarized this theological concern regarding the artist's imagination under the first point of my basic Byzantine aesthetic rules, *Eikōn*-Appearance/Copy as Gift. Consequently, the artistic tendency to personalize an aesthetic language seems to trigger, on the part of the viewer, a metaphysical suspicion regarding the artist's intention. What if all the viewer sees in an artwork is a presentation of the artist's own spectacle? After all, Isar notes that Viola's phenomenology

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[549] Ibid., 337.
[550] To recap, an image acts as *its own image* when it is not a mere extension of human intentionality.
[551] Quenot, *The Icon*, 71.

of the image relies on the power of the artist's gaze to turn pictures into images.[552] Is Viola's *inner image* just a visualization of his own Nietzschean estimation of the world to mirror an idolic desire for real-presence of his imagination?[553] From this iconoclastic view, one can argue that Viola's idea of *inner image* stands for, yet, another metaphysical principle in providing an ultimate explanation of human existence.

Therefore, it is the iconoclastic doubt in contemporary cases of image making (from artistic images to the cult of commercial identities) that I try to challenge in this thesis from a practical view of the Byzantine canons. My attempt is to question how does the canonic practice of painting a Byzantine icon unveils the evocative aspect of the image (in an artistic, tangible context), which the metaphysical thought categorizes as real and unreal/appearance or idol and icon. The answer to this should open a path in critiquing the image that is wider than metaphysical concerns. As discussed throughout this thesis, an image can be critiqued/seen from an idolic or iconic view depending on what metaphysical argument is employed to challenge notions of reality or claims to real-presence. The difference between the idol and icon, therefore, appears to make sense within a metaphysical framework of thinking that is concerned with what makes the image symbolic or realistic. Again, this approach to visual criticism gets stuck when describing and defending a metaphysical perspective of reality in either a Platonic or Nietzschean direction. These two metaphysical views "[stand] out as an enduring attitude in the deconstruction of the metaphysics of presence."[554] Rather, my artistic concern is more focused on how the transparency of the image is actualized in the visible world to offer an alternative mode of critiquing the possibility of the image to attain presence. In fact, through my aesthetic approach to the Byzantine canons (and where I contribute to opening the critical eye to the metaphysics of presence), I reveal that the image is formed when symbolism and realism are canonically combined or spatially balanced. I particularly explore this spatial relationship between symbolism and realism in *Performing the Icon*, which I reflect on in the next section.

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[552] Isar, "Vision and Performance," 337.
[553] The meaning of imagination here is taken in its Kantian sense.
[554] Isar, "*Chōra*: Tracing the Presence," 40.

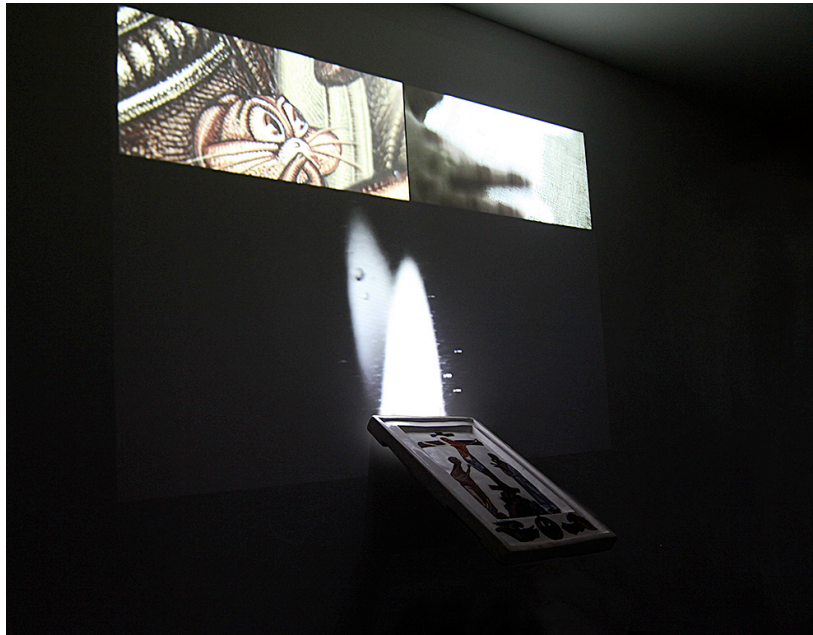4.4.5 Probing the Byzantine framework 2: *Preforming the Icon*

Figure 26. *Performing the Icon*, *Divine Expo*, Hillel's center of University of Montreal, Nov.-Dec., 2014. Video documentation available on the companion DVD and at: http://youtu.be/tI887PLtJ0E

4.4.5.1 Technical/realistic and symbolic description

The installation includes two elements:

1) Single-channel (split screen) video projection with sound (Fig. 26)**.** The video documentation of the installation in the Divine Expo exhibition at Hillel's center of University of Montreal, Nov.-Dec., 2014, shows some of the viewers' reactions to the work.

2) Wood-panel *icon* (in progress), gold leaf, egg tempera paint pigments, wooden panel, 18' x 12 1/2', 2014

To create the installation, the wood-panel *icon* was placed on a stand in front of the video projection—a slanted position towards the viewer is key to radiate light directly from the screen. Some chairs were also placed at a distance from the installation for viewers to sit and watch like in a theatre. The main conceptual implication of *Performing the Icon* alludes to the traditional mode of performing a Byzantine icon by incorporating imagery belonging to a different visual culture (the American entertainment industry) and treating it as if a true icon. I was inspired by the mnemonic function of the icon in the Byzantine context (church, public outdoor events) to

visualize a mental (divine) image in the real physical space. Mimicking this mental image through a poly-sensory experience with the icon, the Byzantine viewer forms a union between his/her body and the material world that moves past senses (in a way that he/she feels the presence of the invisible (divine) image). In this installation, designed for an art gallery space, I explored with new and old screen media the role the canons, such as The Symbolic-Realistic technique, The Face and Body, Color, Light, Stillness, and Movement to generate an event of image-making (a Contemporary Byzantine-Inspired iconic vision). From an artistic perspective, I see *Performing the Icon* as a learning visual experience that touches on how we spatially construct images in general.

The wood-panel *icon* depicts in a Byzantine style and through the classical theme of the Crucifixion, mass media, and human physical elements presented in the video projection. I have been working on this particular wood panel painting for two years now, however from my perspective as an artist, the purpose is not to finish it right away. The theological/conceptual implication of painting in a Byzantine canonic manner is that although I incorporate imagery from the capitalist/entertainment industry, I develop an aesthetic technique of making and seeing an image that challenges the pictures of my own imagination. I believe that this very iconic experience is possible in a consumerist context due to the Byzantine techniques of ritualistically using the tools and materials in a hierotopic way—that is, a performative mode of creating an image in space that mimics the presence of the sacred/invisible.

The top right side of the video projection shows the first stages in preparing the wood-panel for painting. These are video clips taken from *Portrait of an Icon Maker*. In the top left side of the video projection, I present a sequence of human hands and feet, Disney animated characters, and Apple products. The human elements are included to draw attention to the importance of the human body in preforming an *icon*. They ground the conceptual use of images in our most visceral experience of the world. The reason for choosing the commercial imagery is due to their cult following, which parallels the religiosity surrounding the Byzantine icons in the way they incite consumers to participate in their consumption.

The merging of religious iconography and pop-culture images (the liturgical and consumer symbolism) in the wood panel painting for this installation is not as overt as in my previous Byzantine-ish icons such as in *Holy Earbuds* or *The Offering of Elmo's Head*. For example, the figure of Bugs Bunny appears discreetly, from the darkness of the cave underneath the cross,

with his face illuminated by a small light from a candle that he holds in his hand. This unobtrusive association of pop culture with the Byzantine visual language allows me to test the limits of the image to perform a Byzantine iconic vision in a non-monastic environment, such as in the space of a gallery—an aspect of this project that is more important than the finished piece.

The bottom half of the video projection was designed to directly engage a digital wavering candlelight with the wood-panel *icon* in the physical space of a gallery. The electronic flickering light (that imitates the real light of a wax candle) creates a visual effect that sinks and recedes the wood-panel in shadow.

Additionally, the video contains an experimental sound piece that includes Byzantine elements heard in monasteries such as chants, bells, and carpentry tools.

4.4.5.2 Byzantine reflective analysis

From my video documentation and observation of viewers' interaction with *Performing the Icon* in the Divine Expo exhibition at the Centre Hillel (November to December, 2014) the metaphysical-critical eye could argue that there is a conflict in the viewing experience between the video projection and the wood panel—one that prevents a full aesthetic/immersive experience. The viewer might be challenged with two situations here: one that requires spectatorship (as if watching a narrative on a TV/cinema screen and one that invites for a direct tangible aesthetic relationship with the painting).

The top part of the projection is descriptive, showing a narrative (predefined symbolism) of making the wood panel and the bottom part asks the viewer to discover, under a flickering digital light, in a dim space, a hand made painting positioned right in front of the projected image. The viewer can make the point that the connection between the real/physical painting and the artificial/cold digital candlelight creates a link between the digital light of computer screens and the material world, which can be felt as disconnected in today's audio visual culture. Particularly, the aesthetic feeling is potentially triggered by the unusual connection between the old media (wood, pigments, etc.) and new media (technological screen), which creates a phenomenological shift in seeing and feeling the digital light projected on the wall and the wood panel as the real warm light of a candle. Like Viola's Incarnational approach to the digital

screen, I investigate this phenomenological shift in *chōraic* manner of in-imagining the digital light.

This technological simulation of a real candlelight in my installation is not the same as the targeted spotlights that illuminate an art object in a museum/art gallery. The spotlights are too still, uniform, and harsh for viewers to understand how a Byzantine icon performs under the natural light of a candle. Although cold as it comes from the projectors' beam, I manipulated the mechanical, digital existence of the light to act in the physical space of the installation with the life and warmth of a natural wax candle. In my artistic view, the digital candlelight parallels the light projected in the back of the cave from Plato's allegory. Similarly to the light from the cave referencing the true light of the sun, the digital light from the installation references the real light of a wax candle. The tangible aspect of the wood panel also emphasizes this animated appearance of the electronic beam of light. What is interesting about the digital imitation of the wax candle is that it perceptually challenges the viewer to ask what is real and illusory in *Performing the Icon*. Having in mind that the wood panel painting is a physical object and the digital light is vibrating as if a real wax candle, the viewer is faced with a spatial effect that is both tangible and imaginary. Could the cool, however pulsating simulation of the wax candle evocate, in the neutral space of the gallery, the invisible image of the sacred as in a Byzantine context (hierotopy)? This is a question that addresses a universal concern regarding our faith in visual representations (religious or otherwise) to depict notions of truth and reality. And, to add another layer of meaning in the illusory effect of the installation: once the viewer notices the intrusion of commercial images in the classic religious theme of the Crucifixion, do they still see the wood panel painting as a traditional religious piece?

The cinematic type of viewing that the projection might induce prevents the actual viewing experience of the flickering light for the reason that the narrative/symbolism at the top of the projected screen can dominate the viewer's gaze. It can direct the gaze away from a potential transformative/performative aesthetic experience triggered by the odd spatial effect created by the electronic light of the digital candle in relation to the physical wood panel *icon*—I use here the word *icon*, as the wood panel painting may appear to be a traditional (Byzantine) icon only at the first sight. Later, after closely seeing, the viewers can recognize the non-religious/commercial/subjective symbolism in the composition of my painting, such as the cartoon character Bugs Bunny underneath the cross.

I noticed, as well, how groups of people were sitting and standing quite far away from the wood panel to simply gaze upward for making sense of the story provided in the video documentation. However, ironically, the flickering digital light was transforming their faces (looking upward toward the projected video on the wall) into a play of shadows and light that reminded me of the believers' upright gaze in a church while praying in front of an icon wall.

There were also viewers who directly went towards the wood panel trying to distinguish the painting under the flickering light. What was interesting was that the movements of light and shadow, reflected on the surface of the wood panel, gave them a hard time to see the painting. Basically they had to position their heads a bit lower, to see more clearly the actual painting. Again, they almost seemed to kiss the painting as if believers in front of a Byzantine icon.

But to me (as an artist), the most intriguing viewing attitude was of those hesitating in seeing the wood panel under the gaze of the other viewers. The hesitating behavior came from those standing and walking towards the wood panel to get a close look. They first looked at the top of the screen, imitating the group of viewers who were already positioned in front of the installation (particularly the viewers sitting on the chairs like in a theatre). When the standing viewers showed signs of curiosity in seeing the actual wood panel, they seemed quite hesitant for not disturbing the others' viewing experience. And in turn, this hesitation of the viewers sent the message to everyone gazing at that moment that the wood panel is the very center of everyone's attention—to be seen one person at a time like a Byzantine icon in front of a viewer's individual moments of veneration. I feel that the flickering light had also contributed to this sense of curiosity and uncertainty in the viewing attitude.

To conclude, *Performing the Icon* allows the viewer to participate in a type of aesthetic engagement through a multisensory experience (sound, light, and a physical *icon* appealing to the sense of touch) that portrays, in the Byzantine mode of making and seeing images, my experience of embodying (making present) social media products and religious figures. If this illustration of an iconic vision would be seen as eerie-looking to the consumptive eye or blasphemous to the theological eye, it would raise questions on the role of images in instigating iconoclastic/consumerist debates. For instance, through the Byzantine technique, the Looney Tunes' characters take on religious features, thus challenging their usual representation in mass media and the viewers/consumers' expectations. Conversely, by integrating pop-idols into Byzantine icons, I challenge the traditional understanding of the religious figures. These

conflicting interpretations around images are a pressing issue in today's visual culture. We are currently witnessing an increasing exploitation of images through mass-media strategies to enforce ideological convictions from corporate agenda to religious acts of terror.[555] Thus, although this experimental installation merges a digital projector (new media technology), with Byzantine canons of painting an icon, I do not imply that the viewer should transform the surrounding elements into an evocation of my aesthetic judgment. What I offer is an understanding of an iconic experience in a space designed for displaying art so that the viewers will be able to see and question the role of the beholder in perceiving it (as an image or a picture).

My Byzantine reflective analysis into the phenomenological shift of light in *Performing the Icon* exposes that an image turns into a creative event when the human gaze moves through a performative process of in-imagination (an experience that is theologically defined as iconic). In aesthetically probing the Incarnational elements that craft the feeling of presence in the Byzantine icon's performance, visual criticism acquires a practical view into the meaning of an iconic/idolic vision. It is a view that does not limit the understanding of performativity to a "collapse of the metaphysics of presence'"[556] in contemporary art. It is also a view that does not stop at critiquing (symbolically or realistically) metaphysical claims to reality within a dualistic framework, such as real/truth versus illusory, idol versus icon, etc.. So, I suggest that through a practical Byzantine inquiry into image making, the relationship between art and theology (initiated by Marion through the phenomenology of the icon and idol) can turn into a more complex (symbolic-realistic) method of analyzing a creative event/experience.

Based on key canons of incarnating the invisible, which I summarized in my Byzantine list of aesthetic guidelines, such as Technique of In-Imagination, Living Essence/Model, and *Eikōn*-Appearance/Copy as Gift, the critique can contemplate in *Performing the Icon* on the mediational role of the wood panel painting to trigger the phenomenological shift. Without the theological union between 1) the materiality of the frame for representation, 2) the image, and 3) the viewer/artist, visual criticism cannot explain the relation between symbolism and realism in the process of image making. That is, *when* and *how* symbolism and realism dominates over the other in the abstract and naturalistic visual experiences that subject the image-maker

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[555] This point regarding today's state of the spectacle is particularly emphasized by Bruno Latour in the exhibition catalogue, *Iconoclash* (2002), and by Sven Lütticken in his book, *Idols of the Market* (2009).

[556] Isar, "Vision and Performance," 328.

(artist/viewer) to metaphysical pictures of reality. Or, when the spatial construction of symbolism and realism is harmonized/canonized by evoking a feeling of presence/participation in an image. The effect of this Byzantine framework is that it allows 1) contemporary artists to reflect on the various levels of creativity in making an image present and on the role of a hand-made frame for representation to mediate the invisible (the face of the other) and, 2) visual criticism to question the image in relation to presence by avoiding "any moral overtones—in terms of opening onto transcendence versus reflecting an image of the idolater."[557]

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[557] Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion,* 125.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary of Byzantine symbolic-realism

Throughout the past four chapters, I have analyzed the symbolic and realistic suspicions towards the image that mark the metaphysical limits of human vision and desire. These fears of images are driven by iconoclastic/consumptive arguments that categorize them as either idolic or iconic (depending on their relation to notions of reality). In turn, these metaphysical viewing attitudes impact the modes of making, seeing, purchasing, and critiquing a screen for representation (from paintings, installation and performance art to televisual and touch screens). I have examined the interactive form of the Byzantine icon (conceptually and practically) to probe how the Byzantine appreciation of an aesthetic judgment (contingent on an artist's intentionality) regarding the spectacle informs and influences these debates with an eye for presence—especially since the increasing dissemination of screen technologies worldwide transforms today's consumer society into a fundamentalist spectacle.[558]

To better understand the Marionian critique of the spectacle (as a picture in a linear perspective versus an image in the crosses of two gazes), I have noted the Byzantine iconoclastic dispute that stems from the clash of the two metaphysical conceptions of reality (and the sinful practice that accompanies it): the realistic and symbolic. Primarily, the iconoclasts have accused the icon-worshippers of blasphemy on the account that 1) the icon circumscribes the divine, therefore it reduces Christ to human flesh (this is a mode of seeing the image realistically) and 2) the icon represents only the image (a symbolic representation) of Christ's body, which lacks divinity.[559] The purpose of this Byzantine theological account of the image was not to provide a historical/scientific (symbolic or realistic) research on the ontological and epistemological arguments about the icon, which defined the iconoclastic debates during the church councils from 727 to 843 CE. Rather, the focus was to outline an aesthetic alternative to the critique of the spectacle that acknowledges the image as totally transparent and symbolic-realistically contextualized.

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[558] Or a spectacle of the extreme ends of metaphysical beliefs: the symbolic and realistic. For an extensive critique of the fundamentalist spectacle and the war of images, see Sven Lütticken (2009), Bruno Latour (2002), W.T.J. Mitchell (2011), Boris Groys (2008).

[559] Elsner, "Iconoclasm as Discourse," 379.

Therefore, I have looked into the theorization of the image during the eight and ninth century to specifically pinpoint the performative relationship between the type (image) and prototype (Christ himself). I have examined the redefinition of Damascene's shift to Christology in defending the icon by the Patriarch Nicephorus and St. Theodore the Studite in the second Iconoclastic era[560]—an epistemological shift in viewing the icon that marked the end of the Byzantine iconoclasm. This move from ontological concerns toward the epistemological interrogation of the icon's relationship to the prototype made possible, according to the art historian Jaś Elsner, "a fully thought-through theoretics of the image in which its materiality, sanctified by God having become matter in the person of Jesus, allowed epistemological access through ritual to the holy."[561] The Christological arguments over images offered by the eighth and ninth century Byzantine theologians point to the icon as an *object-to-think-with*.[562] So, in adopting the practical mode of making an icon, this thesis facilitated a concrete aesthetic access to the Byzantine "theoretics of the making and the…[venerating] of icons" that account for "one of the deepest conceptual contributions to the [metaphysical] problem of the image as representation ever conducted."[563] I then used this Byzantine framework of crafting the presence of an image to discuss examples of performative events (given by contemporary Byzantine thinkers and scholars of performativity) that pick up essential canons of framing a relationship between the symbolic and realistic modes of seeing. Mainly, I used Jenkins as he uses the Byzantine icon to critique the canonical framing of a product's cult following; Verhoeff and Lechte as they analyze the creation of a *screenspace* by actualizing or making present (in a non-referential/hierotopic way) the on-screen space in the off-screen space; and Isar as she enables an aesthetic critique of an iconic vision through the Byzantine idea of chorographic movement. In conjunction with these performative inquiries, I rethought the Byzantine tradition of icon making within the context of an *art practice as research*. The video documentations, *Portrait of an Icon Maker* and *Performing the Icon*, illustrate canonical elements for constructing an artistic iconic vision (in a solitary and public space) with the aim of exposing the metaphysical constraints in critiquing the making of images. As a result, I have identified a list of key Byzantine/Incarnational criteria to address and see performative strategies for crafting the

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[560] The second Iconoclastic era began with the ascent to power of Leo V (813-20) who has convocated the second iconoclast Council of Constantinople of 815.

[561] Elsner, "Iconoclasm as Discourse," 385.

[562] Ibid.

[563] Ibid., 385-86.

presence/real-presence of an image in a frame for representation, without limiting the analysis to strictly iconoclastic/consumptive debates. The goal of this doctorate was to offer visual criticism to image-makers by combining an interdisciplinary approach to theological/metaphysical/art historical studies with a practical/performative sense of the canonical technique of creating an icon—which I dubbed the Contemporary Byzantine-Inspired Iconic Vision. In the next section I recap on how the Contemporary Byzantine-Inspired Iconic Vision offers an evocation of an aesthetic form of truth/reality (from the view of an artist), grounded/contextualized symbolic-realistically in the physical world. This performative-canonized act provides, in turn, a critique of image/picture-making in relation to the screenic vision of the spectacle that transcends metaphysical iconoclasm into an aesthetic mode of speaking about presence.

5.2 Summary of the Contemporary Byzantine-Inspired Iconic Vision aesthetic contribution to visual criticism

My artistic approach to visual criticism was (and will continuously be) to follow the Byzantine symbolic-realism through its painting techniques, which cultivates an awareness of a counter-intuitive gaze in the construction of an iconic visual experience. I do not suggest, of course, a complete return of contemporary art to the doctrine and Church by saying that an iconic vision cannot be built without believing in the Incarnation. The reverse is also not my concern: it is not by modernizing the Byzantine style of painting to incorporate new symbolism in creating a Contemporary Byzantine-Inspired Iconic Vision. But rather, my research interest lies in how the artistic use of the canons, that visually/spatially frame the mystery of God's image as human, helps to acquire a new/in-imaginational way of critiquing the cult value of the spectacle.

Based on Marion's phenomenology of the idol/icon in relation to the Byzantine theology of image, I can state that the notion of creativity in an iconic and idolic vision takes different levels of perspectives, without the clear-cut metaphysical differentiation between real and unreal, symbolic and realistic, internal and external, visible and invisible, etc. In an iconic vision, a creative experience opens the viewer's perspectival gaze/imagination to an inverse perspective outside of the power of the thinking and sensitive viewer. In front of an icon, the viewer venerates an image *as its own* origin by making it present in the very act of performing it. In an idolic vision, creativity stops at a particular (conceptual or visual) perspective that turns into a

picture of the *I*. In front of an idol, the viewer responds like a reflection to an image of his/her own metaphysical demand for reality (categorized/pictured/framed conceptually and/or sensually).

Having in mind that human vision is bound to a perspectival gaze in both the iconic and idolic vision, to what degree is an idol (especially in today's spectacle of technological screens) a creative experience? To what extent can a spectacle that draws attention to an artist's self—or, in a broader sense, to an image-maker's power of reason and imagination—turn into an image? Does a creative/performative event mean to experience a totally new phenomenon, and if yes, can this experience actualize an aesthetic judgment? This practice-oriented research contributes significantly to these questions. In using the Byzantine method of creating an image at the solitary level of the artistic perspective, I offer an aesthetic approach that can be seen either 1) idolic by representing a picture of a subjective symbolism/narrative or 2) iconic by monastically performing an evocation. It is important to recap next the difference in meaning between the icon and idol from Plato and Byzantines, to Marion and the Contemporary Byzantine-Inspired Iconic Vision.

Plato's *eidôlon*-appearance manifests as a false being or a copy that has no connection to an essence. Marion connects this Platonic version of the idol to the current state of television screens and the spectacle: a world of signifiers that stopped referencing any real referent by mirroring the human's perspectival gaze. Nevertheless, in his phenomenology of painting, Marion rediscovers in the idol a sense of invisibility in the referentiality between the copy and its model. In a way here, Marion seems to regain faith in Plato's *eikōn*-appearance to reveal a half-presence of essence/image/invisibility. Although imperfect due to its material likeness, Marion reassesses the idolic painting (Plato's *eikōn*-appearance) as a semi-transparent phenomenon that reveals the invisible "by a lack of light."[564] Therefore, he makes an important step that draws away from metaphysical dualism. For the Byzantines, on the contrary, the idol is an epistemological issue referring to a wrong way of seeing images. They make a difference between how the idol and icon are worshiped.[565] The idolic vision takes the copy for its model and the iconic vision contains the model (prototype) only in its absence as a trace (type) through

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[564] Marion, "The Saturated Phenomenon," 196-7.

[565] As noted in Chapter 1, section 1.2.2 The Byzantine view about the image, John of Damascus' Christological view clarifies that the matter of the image-matter (Christ) is honored in light of its prototype (Father). The Idol is worshiped directly for what it is. The best example of idolatry would be when the statue of an emperor is worshiped as if it multiplied the emperor himself.

a performative event. In the Byzantine icon, the unbalanced metaphysical relationship between the copy/inferior/unreal and model/superior/real turns into a canonical/balanced/chorographic movement between the type and prototype without claiming one more real/present than the other. Marion acknowledges this iconic relationship between the type and prototype in the crossing of the human and divine gazes, however he appears to have a dematerialized understanding of this interaction. For him, the material opaqueness of the human body seems to be in the way of revealing the divine light. Instead, the Byzantines take the materiality of the human body as central for the Incarnational logic of the image and the canons become the in-imaginational technique of venerating (instead of worshiping a picture through an idol) the image in the tangible space and present time. Accordingly, the Byzantine icon is constructed from the canonical relationship between the human body, the image, the frame for representation, and the spatial context.

Returning to my solitary artistic practice of the canons (Contemporary Byzantine-Inspired Iconic Vision), my wood panel painting(s) can be seen as follows: On the one hand, idolic if it is seen in a referential relationship with my power to *take perspective*—that is, what I represent is a copy/*eikōn*-appearance of my own aesthetic judgment. On the other hand, iconic if my performative act is seen by way of evocation, as described in Lechte's analysis of Jeffery Shaw's *The Golden Calf*. Even if the symbolic source of the image in my evocation is as idolic as the Golden Calf, the icon is formed in the present moment between my body, the environment, and the canonic mode of inscribing the image in the frame for representation—and this is how my practice-based doctorate makes a step forward towards a metaphysics of presence through Marion's phenomenology of the invisible. Due to these two modes of critiquing the Contemporary Byzantine-Inspired Iconic Vision, visual criticism can acknowledge (theoretically) how an image shifts between an invisibility and visibility according to in-imaginated canonized performance or claims for real-presence. From a practical view, I unveil that 1) the very metaphysical struggle between an iconic and idolic perspective in the performance of image/picture-making and 2) the possibility of an icon to transform into an idol and vice versa—a shift in modes of seeing that causes the ongoing iconoclastic battle over the metaphysical aspect of an image.

5.3 Last reflections on the fine line between the iconic and idolic visions in response to metaphysical iconoclasm

My discussion of metaphysical iconoclasm in Chapter 2 (and throughout this thesis), indicates that the metaphysical ambiguity of frames for representation comes from their mediational function. Visual tools/screens oscillate between an iconic or idolic status in the process of negotiating perceptions/notions of reality. For example, the consequence of positioning Christianity under the framework of metaphysical thought is that it turns the image of Christ into an idol. The idols of metaphysics are the effects of humans' thinking skills to define and reach their transcendental desires. In modern idolatry, the subject's intuition is approached as a base for abstracting and formulating objective knowledge of the tangible and non-tangible world. In this conceptual framework, the *I* becomes the authoritative figure (the transcendental/absolute subject in Kant and Husserl's work or the immanent force of the *will to power* in Nietzsche's idea of the *overman*) in the subject-object relationship, who aims to signify phenomena and name the *truth*.

Nietzsche believed that the Death of God opens a non-metaphysical/iconic space that is freed from the restrictive moral values of an other/Platonic invisible world. By disclosing the Christian "God" under "full daylight"—at "[n]oon; moment of the briefest shadow; end of the longest error,"[566] the *madman*'s gaze not only aims at eliminating the divine world, but also the understanding that the physical world is an apparent/inferior one. Thus, Nietzsche claims that the metaphysical dualism is abolished when the things of this world are seen in their clearest forms: "the thing appears in the full light where not even the least shadow obscures it from a complete evidence."[567] The visible light that allows the world to be seen in its concrete form, without reference to a reality beyond itself, brings forth the *Übermensch*'s own perspective over the world. Marion interprets that Nietzsche is just reversing the metaphysical perspective (the superiority of the invisible world over our material world) with a human perspective. Despite the fact that he desired to overcome metaphysical idolatry, Nietzsche perpetuated another idolatrous perspective in which the *overman* plays the role of Being of beings, i.e. the evaluator of the *ens communes*. In unmasking the idols that live in the dark corners of a temple, the world is engulfed

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[566] Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Twilight of the Idols," *The Portable Nietzsche*, Trans. Walter Kaufmann, (New York: The Viking Press, 1954), 486.

[567] Marion, *The Idol and Distance*, 38.

by a visible/earthly light that in fact obscures its natural forms defined by shadows in perspective: "[l]ight without shadow allows the world to freeze, or to dissolve—it doesn't matter which, precisely because a world demands a perspective. Only shadow establishes relief, delimits forms, puts things in place."[568] Marion points to the logical disjunction in Nietzsche's text, when saying that a world without shadows denies "the perspectival character of being (Dasein)."[569] The *overman* is doomed to fail in eliminating the true/divine and apparent/physical worlds since his quest of making a new world (an icon of the *Übermensch*) is bound to beings' dependency on perspective. One can only evaluate, organize, and place things in the world by way of seeing forms as revealed by shadows in a perspective.[570] Finally, the Dionysian *will to power* inverts the psychological process of inventing idols based on feelings of *ressentiment,* merely to offer an opportunity for beings to affirm themselves as Being in the same metaphysical/idolatrous organization of the world.

Returning to the idea of a creative vision as an alternative to the metaphysical critique of the spectacle, I would like to recall the question: having in mind the perspectival character of the viewer, to what extent is the idolic vision a creative experience? The answer requires three explanations: 1) theological, 2) phenomenological, and 3) artistic/practical.

1) From a Byzantine view, the image constructs a communion between the visible and invisible, and the face of Christ becomes a performative event of acknowledging that all humans in-imagine the same divine image—a mutual-image transfer between the divine and humans that materializes in the Christian society through the concept of economy. The icon is constructed when this common image (given/gifted in a pictorial trace beyond the individual perspective/desires of a *thinking I*) is made present through the canonized mimetic performance of the icon. The idol appears to prevent this sense of iconic communion by addressing the real-presence of a particular picture of reality. If the answer to the above question reflects Christological concerns, the icon is the only creative event as it opens onto new phenomena, beyond the viewer's finite mind. Since the idol is limited to human intentionality, it does not create new phenomena.

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[568] Ibid., 39.
[569] Ibid.
[570] This Marionian statement outlines, in fact, the importance of his idea of the idol in attaining a sense of invisibility.

2) In his theological work (up to his central work *The Crossing of the Visible*), Marion endorses the Byzantine difference between the icon and idol, but only to a certain point by taking a phenomenological turn (a shift that is developed in *In Excess*): both the idol and icon are creative events according to the degree of invisibility present in the frame for representation.[571] The notion of creativity corresponds to the level of constructing a phenomenon in perspective and its power to challenge human intentionality. From a phenomenological view of the Incarnational logic of the image, the iconic vision invites the viewer to generate an image that recognizes a viewer's self in the self of another (divine) viewer—as Marion puts it, through a feeling of love that reveals the face of the other. The icon, therefore, is defined as the full-presence of the shared image between the divine and humanity in the crossing of the gazes. The idolic vision, instead, invites to fashion an image that reveals a viewer's self in the image of his/her own self. The phenomenology of the idol is, then, the half-presence of the common image between the divine and humanity since it is acknowledged only from the human's perspective. Although the idol is resumed to the perspective of a human gaze, its very deficiency of light also unveils low levels of transparencies. From this phenomenological position of seeing in the icon/idol various intensities of perspectival experiences, I have attempted to find a common ground between the epistemological definition of the Byzantine icon and the Kantian idea of aesthetic experience in the parallel between *chōra* and *sensus communis*. In so doing, I located where my contemporary artistic practice can integrate Nicephorus' epistemological definition of the icon in order to connect the human body and symbolism in the aesthetic experience of the image.

3) From my artistic/practical approach to the canons, the link between aesthetics (idol) and the Byzantine icon was required to show how today's critique of the spectacle can be enriched with the Incarnational dimension of the image. And, through the Byzantine theology of image, I have proposed a series of canonized artistic techniques to understand how my aesthetic judgment of the spectacle turns into an iconic or idolic vision. The core question in my practice-oriented research is whether the level of artistic creativity is directly proportional to the amount of invisibility of the image. Does a true creative event demand a total transparency of the image? From this Contemporary Byzantine-Inspired Iconic Vision—also employed (conceptually) by Jenkins, Verhoeff, Lechte, and Isar in their analysis of the technological/digital screens—the

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[571] Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion,* 125.

aesthetic universality of the canons can be explained by their technical function of making present (incarnate) an uncircumscribable (divine) image. Furthermore, my performative claim is that the line between what makes an image an idol or icon is drawn in the eye of the beholder according to the symbolic/realistic and symbolic-realistic modes of seeing. This oscillation between the iconic and idolic visions applies to the spectacle as much as it applies to a Byzantine wood panel painting. A traditional religious painting or a pop culture figure/product can be idolized and placed into a human perspective or can be seen as an icon and taken outside of any human perspective.

5.4 The future of the Byzantine-inspired artistic research

This thesis has proposed a mode of observing the Byzantine process of image making at the level of artistic research that is especially relevant when critiquing the iconic/idolic appearance of the spectacle. With this aesthetic understanding of how I (as an artist) perform an iconic/idolic vision through the practical implementation of the canons, image-makers and visual criticism can note a number of practical insights that are difficult for textual/verbal criticism to make: 1) in what way an image is reduced to a metaphysical perspective or elevated to an inverse perspective, 2) how the viewers take the mimetic role of copying (desire/product) in the idolic community of emotions and tastes and how viewers take the active role of creating/manifesting an image in the iconic community of feelings, and 3) to what extent the idolic vision draws its creativity from reproducing an image presented/circumscribed to a certain Nietzschean point of view and how the iconic vision turns into a creative event by imitating an image that cannot be circumscribed in any human perspective.

In sum, the artistic research into the epistemological/Incarnational dimension of the image shifts from the moral and metaphysical insinuations of the symbolic and realistic eye toward the visual techniques of constructing an idol/icon in space. In future artistic research, an image-maker could implement the canonic infrastructure of tools and methods to probe the evocative effect of various modes of taking perspective, even if limited to a solitary experience or to a specific metaphysical belief/desire. The proposed Byzantine reflective analysis allows to practically research how (as opposed to what it depicts) a frame for representation presents an

image or declares the real-presence of a picture. By explicitly incorporating the Byzantine canons into an interdisciplinary context, this thesis provides in a concrete way of critiquing a creative visualization of the spectacle, which includes current metaphysical concerns regarding the impact of technological screens. Thus, this study strives to influence future artistic research into how an image is performed and in-imagined in the way it framed the Byzantine theology of the image as a productive lens for contemporary artistic practice. My performative shift to the Byzantine canons helps to further investigate how and when an idol acts like an icon or the other way around, which is particularly relevant for critiquing the viewers' interaction with screen technologies. It is a fine relationship between the idolic and iconic modes of seeing that is best analyzed through the Byzantine canonical balance of symbolism and realism at the level of artistic research.

One artistic research question that persists regards the idolic creativity of the Nietzschean type of artist: can the spectacle induce an iconic vision? As argued throughout this doctorate, Nietzsche's artistic vision liberates the image from its Platonic status—the relation of similitude between the visible and invisible is reversed so that the image is not seen as an imperfect imitation of an ideal (invisible) reality. Further artistic research is needed on the performative/evocative process of reversing the signifier and signified. For example, anthropological philosopher René Girard (1996) provides a performative and a mimetic perspective on the creative aspect of Nietzsche's style of writing that opens the door for exploring the role of evocation in an idolic vision.[572] The point made by Girard is that the aesthetic aura of Nietzsche's work comes from the dramatic meaning of the *madman*'s announcement regarding *the collective murder of God*. The sense of deictic involvement that we subconsciously experience when reading the news of the murder in the Aphorism 125 from *The Gay Science* ("*We have killed him* – you and I! We are all his murderers. But how did we do this?") "resembles…our general reaction to the theme of *the collective murder of God*" in a contemporary context.[573] The artistic vision (the idolic creativity) of Nietzsche's text stems from this performative shift in the perception of God as being dead to being killed. The announcement unconsciously involves today's reader as much as it did a century ago, to literally evoke (like in Jeffery Shaw's *The Golden Calf*) the symbolic implication of *the collective crime*. God's death

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[572] René Girard, *The Girard Reader,* ed. James G. Williams. (New York: Crossroad, 1996), 243-261.
[573] Ibid., 254.

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becomes our crime. Although Marion points to the role of the *will to power* in constituting individualization, which renders destitute Nietzsche's genealogical project of disclosing the psychological process of inventing Platonic "Gods," the *Übermensch*-artist should not be simply disregarded for the metaphysical treatment of his/her claims/idols. Rather, visual criticism needs to see the aesthetic appeal of the Dionysian counter-narrative to Christianity beyond any metaphysical approaches. A Contemporary Byzantine-Inspired Iconic Vision on what places Nietzsche's text and artistic vision close to the theology of the image can provide a broader, symbolic-realistic understanding of an idolic creative practice.

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