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UNORTHODOX ICONS: RUSSIAN AVANT-GARDE IMPULSES
IN THE WORKS OF RAINER MARIA RILKE

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of the Ohio State University

By

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* * * * *

The Ohio State University
1996

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1996
Rainer Maria Rilke has been classified an "autonomous" artist in opposition to the avant-garde as outlined in Peter Bürger's Theorie der Avant-Garde. In labelling Rilke a l'art pour l'art poet, secondary literature has overlooked the impulses within his work that accommodate revolutionary potential. The purpose of this study is to show that Rainer Maria Rilke disturbed established notions of poetry with the avant-garde purpose of transforming life through his art. A primary impetus for the revolutionary aspect of Rilke's poetry arose from his perceived spiritual connection with Russian Orthodoxy and icons.

Most scholars agree that Rilke's Russia experience influenced his early works, but many deny the impact of Russia on his middle and later works. Yet, Rilke's Easter revelation in the Kremlin echoed throughout his works, and is exhibited even as late as the Duineser Elegien. Rilke's involvement with the visual arts, his connection with Russia, and his emphasis on spiritual transformation enabled the icon to become the symbol for Rilke of the challenge art presents to those who receive it.
Rather than analyze Rilke in terms of the western European avant-garde, I evaluate this Czech poet within the context of eastern Europe. In much the same way that Russian avant-garde artists such as Kandinsky and Malevich upset conventional Russian painting by utilizing the form and content of the icon in new ways, Rilke practiced his own form of "retrogardism," a term coined by Eda Čufer in "The Ear Behind The Painting." If "Postmodernism," that problematic term applied indiscriminately to art, criticism, philosophy, and culture alike, fundamentally involves rewriting traditional scholarship, especially that pertaining to the turn of the twentieth century, then contemporary studies of such modernist artists as Rainer Maria Rilke must call into question established categories both of art and artist.
To My Parents, Doctors James E. and Pauline K. Cushman
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The turn of the twenty-first century is a time of flux, when transformations of society, geography, and artistry are occurring more rapidly than a mere human mentality can accommodate. Theories of chaos abound within and without academia, as paradigms of life, art, philosophy and spirituality are questioned and overturned. Increasing specialization is met with interdisciplinary and multicultural studies, while reactionary and progressive elements battle on political, social, and religious grounds. As they relativize -- or explode -- the traditions of their fields, many artists and scholars are recovering legacies from the turn of the twentieth century, modernist movements that facilitated the development both of avant-garde art and alternative spiritualities. While most modernist artists participated to some extent in spiritual exploration beyond their western European context, much research pits politically progressive and artistically avant-garde movements against a l'art pour l'art aesthetic retreat from the political world. Aesthetic retreat is associated with an involvement in
mainstream religion, the argument being that concentration on the "other" realm draws attention away from social and political involvement within "this" realm.

In its broadest terms, this study continues the practice of smashing borders so popular in academia today. I attack both the division between the avant-garde and the l'art pour l'art modernist artist, and the distinction often drawn between political engagement and concern with the spiritual. I have chosen to focus upon the modernist Czech poet Rainer Maria Rilke, since his critics most often see him as a kind of High Priest for aesthetics. In spite of the widespread opinion that religious concerns preclude avant-garde engagement, it was precisely the spirituality of Rainer Maria Rilke that produced an avant-garde moment in his work, and because of it he continually blurred the boundaries between the inner (=spiritual) world and the outer (=political) world in his art.

Rilke worked to eradicate geographic and artistic borders as well; his involvement with Russia and his concern for the visual arts, for example, illustrate a broader agenda to annihilate the confines of rationality and logic to make room for spiritual transformation. Rilke's love for Russia, his attention to the visual arts, and his hope for spiritual transformation through art converged in his understanding of the Russian Orthodox icon, which became a central motif in his writings. In this study, I argue that Rilke's avant-garde
impulse originated in his Russia experience and echoed throughout his works in icon imagery as late as the Duineser Elegien.

**Rilke and the Avant-Garde**

The association of Rainer Maria Rilke with the avant-garde movement is a claim that must be cautiously maintained. Rilke is not generally associated with the avant-garde; his reactionary political stance as outlined by Egon Schwarz in *Das verschluckte Schluchzen: Poesie und Politik bei Rainer Maria Rilke* has provoked Rilke critics to identify him more often with the l'art pour l'art, or autonomous trend of modernist art. Schwarz's classification steers toward Peter Bürger's categories of the autonomous work of art versus the avant-garde manifestation. For Bürger, art of the late nineteenth century was no longer integrated into society at large. Unlike "sacral art" of the middle ages, which was "wholly integrated into the social institution 'religion'" (Bürger 47), bourgeois art of the nineteenth century became divorced from life, producing a skepticism on the part of the artist toward the institution of art itself. Rather than develop new forms and styles within the institution, the avant-garde artists sought to overturn conventional art forms. Bürger's image of the avant-garde artist refers most often to artists such as the dadaists, for whom "shocking the recipient
becomes the dominant principle of artistic intent" (Bürger 18).

Most of the secondary literature agrees that Rilke’s poetry does not match up with Bürger’s category of the avant-garde, that it is hermeneutic, aesthetic, enclosed, and separated from life. Clemens Heselhaus, for example, states: "es geht ihm...darum, geschlossene notwendige Kunstgebilde herzustellen, die wie die Naturdinge ihr eigenes Leben haben" (Heselhaus 115), and Jost Kirchgraber claims "daß Rilke an der Kluft zwischen Kunst und Leben litt" (Kirchgraber 58). Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane call him "rootlessly self-contained" (Bradbury & McFarlane 633-34), and even S.S. Prawer, who admits that Rilke believed "the poet must capture the images of the outside world and then proceed to transform them through introspection," nevertheless attributes to him the view that "the poet cannot hope, as Jung[es] Deutschland had once dreamed, directly to transform the outer world: he therefore retires within to transform the world in his heart" (Prawer 218-19).

Superficially, Rilke’s poetry does give the impression of distance and retreat from the world, but Rilke’s poetry cannot be read superficially. His concern for transformation can be perceived as a purely internal exercise, but such a reading does not do justice to Rilke’s involvement with the external world. Contrary to the claims of the secondary literature, most of which was influenced by Rilke scholarship of the
hermeneutic Germanistik of the 1950’s, Rilke's concern was not to separate his art from life, but to affect reality directly through his art. He engaged with the world through his art, and his regard for the visual arts exhibits a tendency to concretize his aesthetic experience outwardly. He wrote in a letter to Lou Andreas-Salomé in 1903, "Irgendwie muß ich auch dazu kommen, Dinge zu machen, nicht plastische, geschriebene Dinge, -- Wirklichkeiten, die aus dem Handwerk hervorgehen" (Briefe über Cézanne 7). The appellation of art as Handwerk, craft, is a position Rilke adopted from Rodin, who worked daily with the materials of the world in creating his sculpture. Rilke, too, engaged with the world through the materials of his art:


Rilke is a poet interested in the "things" of this world; his handwerkliches engagement with the physical world is at odds with the notion of the l'art pour l'art aesthete who retires to a Symbolist hothouse of rare and fantastic unrealities.

Nevertheless, Rilke's artistic production still does not fall into Peter Bürger's category of avant-garde art. While Rilke's poetry does seek to shock the reader out of
complacency, to evaluate and change one's life, the connection to an aesthetic tradition remains intact. However, a reevaluation of Bürger's categories and their applicability to Rilke undermines the understanding of Rilke as a l'art pour l'art "autonomous" artist. While Bürger's classifications may be useful within the context of western Europe, where dada was a radical departure from traditional art forms, they lose their helpfulness in the context of a different aesthetic culture.

Although Rilke was born in Prague, and although Russia served as his first significant aesthetic inspiration, Rilke has commonly been analyzed from within the context of western Europe. When viewed in the light of the Russian avant-garde, however, certain parallels with the transcendent concerns of Malevich and Kandinsky become evident in Rilke's aesthetic philosophy that argue for a connection with the avant-garde. Instead of analyzing Rilke within the circumstances of the western European avant-garde, therefore, I evaluate this Czech poet within the setting of eastern Europe, for the revolutionary potential of Rilke's poetry stems from its connection with Russian Orthodoxy and icons. The resulting poetry does not aim to have the shock effect in the sense of the western European avant-garde, but the challenge that the artwork presents to the reader to effect concrete change is no less radical than the goals of the dadaists.
Rilke and Russia

While "all of the works dealing with Rilke's writing of the earlier period...devote considerable attention [to the topic] 'Rilke and Russia'" (Webb 239), and in spite of Rilke's assertions that Russia was never far from his spiritual center, scholarship on Rilke's Duineser Elegien generally ignores Russia as a possible influence. Konstantin Asadowski even goes so far as to claim that "Rilkes bekannteste Spätwerke (Duineser Elegien und Sonette an Orpheus) lassen den Nachklang der Erinnerung an Rußland fast gänzlich vermissen" (Asadowski, 53). Nevertheless, Russia was -- and remained -- for Rilke a spiritual homeland. Even late in his life, only two years before he wrote his grande oeuvre, his Duineser Elegien, Rilke admitted to Leopold von Schlözer: "...was verdankt ich Rußland -- es hat mich zu dem gemacht, was ich bin, von dort ging ich innerlich aus, alle Heimat meines Instinkts, all mein innerer Ursprung ist dort" (Asadowski, 5).

Of the profusion of scholars who have addressed Rilke's later works, Patricia Brodsky and Helmut Naumann stand out as critics who do not dismiss Rilke's passion for Russia as an early and short-lived influence on his life and work. Naumann discusses the intense spirituality with which Rilke approached Russia, and Brodsky notes, "...those elements that initially attracted him -- humility, patience, the many-faced Russian God -- continue to be strongly in evidence in these later works" (Brodsky 177). Rilke's experience of Russia as a
spiritual homeland is key to the understanding of Rilke within the avant-garde context. His experiences in Russia convinced him of the spiritual power visual images hold for transformation of the individual, and he attempted to reproduce this power verbally.

There is a long tradition in western religion and scholarship that discounts or condemns attempts to connect the visual and verbal arts, but Rilke rejected such aesthetics and embraced instead the tradition of Russian Orthodoxy. The Eastern Orthodox church ultimately stems from Greek and Byzantine mystery cults, and it holds the visual image and the word equivalent, as both are manifestations of a higher spirituality. Its icons seek to convey the presence of a higher consciousness, and ultimately produce a transformation through revelation in the viewer.

This introductory chapter provides the background necessary to consider the development of my argument in the following chapters. I begin with a discussion of the relationship between word and image in western scholarship, providing both an historical overview of the debate and a review of contemporary theory in literature and the visual arts. I move on to discuss Rilke's involvement with the visual arts, placing him in the context of current theory while providing a basis for an exploration of his fascination with icons.
My second chapter examines the function of icons in Russian Orthodoxy. I first explore the theology of icons and their role in Orthodox liturgy through a consideration of the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom and the notion of divine light that shines through the window of the icon to transform the liturgical participant. I then turn to specific types of icons, both of Mary and of angels, and the color symbolism of icons as a medium to convey divine light. As recent events in the former Soviet Union open up the study of Russian art to western scholars, this relatively new field reveals an intensity of spiritual life in Russia that appealed to Rilke.

With the advances in science and technology that accompanied modernism, a new technique for cleaning icons was developed at the turn of the twentieth century, and the darkness of dirt and grime was removed to reveal the true brilliant colors of icons. These were seen in a 1913 exhibition for the first time in centuries, prompting many Russian artists to continue the color experimentation occurring in the west under Cézanne and Matisse, but with a specifically Russian color symbolism. In my third chapter, an examination of modernist Russian painters and the ways in which they utilized the liturgical tradition and icons to inspire their artistic production enriches my evaluation of Rilke's involvement with Orthodoxy and icons. A look specifically at Vasili Kandinsky and Kazimir Malevich illustrates the ways in which Russian modernism drew both from
western European movements and its own spiritual and cultural traditions to create an entirely new kind of art. I refer here to "retrogardism," a term applied to contemporary east European art by Eda Cufer to describe the employment of established traditions by artists for revolutionary purposes. Kandinsky's use of color as a manifestation of "spiritual light" serves as a basis for the discussion of a transformative force found in both Kandinsky's and Malevich's works, an avant-garde force that sees the mission of art to transform life.

On the surface, Rilke's engagement with the "things" of the world, the object of the work of art in his Dinggedichte seems to conflict with the Russian avant-garde's development toward abstract art, but below the surface, Rilke has much in common with Malevich and especially with Kandinsky. Kandinsky, too, was an eastern European who is often studied in a western European light. Both Kandinsky and Rilke rejected the external concerns of Impressionism for Symbolism in order to focus on the internal, the spiritual in art. Both incorporate Russian Orthodox icons and liturgical characteristics into their works throughout their lives, and both artists emphasize the interconnection of the arts in their work; Kandinsky's experiments with the musical properties of color are related to Rilke's interest as a poet in the visual arts, for example.
Chapter Four is an in-depth examination of Rilke’s experiences in Russia. An account of his revelatory Easter experience in the Kremlin is followed by an investigation of the appearance of Orthodoxy and icons in his early and middle works, especially in a series of poems from 1912, "Das Marienleben." The evidence of icons in Rilke’s early works that carries through to this middle work provides a bridge to the discussion of icons in Rilke’s late work, the Duineser Elegien.

After discussing the theology of Russian Orthodox liturgy and icons, modernist art in Russia, and Rilke’s involvement with the icon, I finally turn to the Duineser Elegien themselves. In the fifth chapter, I explore the Elegies as a liturgical transformative process that parallels the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, inviting the reader to participate in the "enactment of meaning" (Ugolnik 137) that typifies the Orthodox liturgy. I concentrate on images of Mary and of angels within the Elegies that function in much the same way that icons function within the context of the Orthodox liturgy, as a focus for contemplation and experience of the divine. Through an exploration of these icon images, I not only argue for the far-reaching influence of Russian spirituality throughout Rilke’s life, I argue that this force was not "purely aesthetic," that it was concerned with an avant-garde involvement of art’s potential to transform life.
Word and Image Theory

The claim that Rilke adopted the function of the icon in producing his poetry assumes an intrinsic connection between visual and written art forms that many artists accept, but that many theorists do not. In "Shifting metaphors: interarts comparisons and analogy," Leonard Diepeveen discusses some problems associated with comparing "techniques which are completely bound up in the idiosyncratic media of different arts" (Diepeveen 206). He observes that many interdisciplinary studies, especially as modernist works are concerned, "are suspect because they have 'a tendency to be excessively metaphorical'" (Diepeveen 206-207). Comparisons of Cubism in painting, for example, which has a precise historical meaning, with Cubism in literature, which has no precise or literal meaning, cause the terminology to lose its precision and so, its applicability (Diepeveen 207). Nevertheless, a precedent for describing literary and visual arts in the same terms exists even throughout the tradition that denies their connection.

The Historical Controversy

There is a strong theoretical basis for the connection between word and image that dates back to Aristotle's claim that "the soul never thinks without an image" (De Anima III.7.431a). Aristotle does not directly address poetry's relationship to the visual arts in his Poetics, but there are
numerous illustrations throughout the work that assume a link between poetry and painting. Plato's view of the arts is clearer; for him, all art is only a reflection of the higher Good. In *The Sister Arts*, Jean Hagstrum suggests that word and image were combined so completely within the Greek mindset and culture that no philosophy was needed to address the connection directly (Hagstrum 8-9); he refers to the Greek word *ekphrasis*, or image talking, to express the bond between *logos* and *eikon* in Greek thought.

The visual and the verbal arts were not considered discrete categories until the Enlightenment. Throughout the Middle Ages, literature and the visual arts were united in the service of the divine, just as light and color were used primarily as metaphors for divine illumination and grace. Divisions between academic disciplines were not distinct, and all arts and sciences were closely allied in the teachings of monasteries.

In the late eighteenth century, Isaac Newton broke through religious, philosophical, and artistic definitions of light and color with an empirical work that relegated the rainbow to the realm of science. Newton's *Opticks* (1721) differed from *On Color*¹, and from da Vinci's *On Painting*, in that it explored the physical production of color in empirical

¹First published in 1497, but attributed to Aristotle

(Brusatin 9).
and scientific terms. "My Design in this Book," wrote Newton, "is not to explain the Properties of Light by Hypothesis, but to propose and prove them by Reason and Experiments" (Newton 1). Through a camera obscura, constructed by covering a chamber wall with black cloth, Newton viewed light cast through a prism at an angle of sixty degrees. On the basis of his mathematical calculations and empirical observations, Newton advanced a series of propositions, theories, and proofs concerning light and its "Reflections, Refractions, Inflections and Colours."

With its concentration on the breakdown of light and its attention to scientific proof, Newton's Opticks soon came to stand for the Enlightenment itself, the "light" of reason and analytical thought which dispelled the "darkness" of medieval times. Manilo Brusatin explains the symbolic importance of the Opticks for the Enlightenment:

...darkness was all around, and gradual enlightenment came by way of Newton's empirical findings...The most attractive effect of Newton's optics could be found in the fact that the refraction of a ray of light produced not only decomposition into the Spectrum of colors but the possibility of reconstituting the totality as well by inverting the process and producing white light once again. This phenomenon could be seen by whoever could make use of his own intelligence to think with the same clarity on the cultural, "enlightening" message provided therein to clarify the shadows of falsehood and prejudice...[S]eized by Italian and French intellectuals such as Voltaire and Francesco Algarotti, it was made the entire program of Enlightenment ideals (Brusatin 91-92).

One impassioned disciple of the Enlightenment in Germany was Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, who "enlightened" the field of aesthetics in much the same way that Newton had for science.
His *Laokoon* of 1766 refutes the Platonic notion that all art stems from a higher, abstract beauty, and that the measure of aesthetics should therefore be the same for all art forms. Lessing criticizes those art critics who judge works according to these terms: "Bald zwingen...[die neuesten Kunstrichter] die Poesie in die engern Schranken der Malerei; bald lassen sie die Malerei die ganze weite Sphäre der Poesie füllen" (Lessing 14). Lessing distinguishes between the visual and the verbal arts, identifies the strengths and weaknesses of each, differentiates between the "Schönheit der Farben" and the "Schönheit des Ausdrucks," (Lessing 291) and asserts: "Die eigentliche Bestimmung einer schönen Kunst kann nur dasjenige sein, was sie ohne Beihilfe einer andern hervorzubringen im Stande ist" (Lessing 295).

Lessing's argumentation precludes a platonic higher law of beauty from which art draws purpose, and it compartmentalizes painting and language as philosophically distinct from one another. Such compartmentalization misleads the scholar into a belief that no knowledge exceeds the capacity of human comprehension, and divides related fields into the artificially separated departments that exist in modern universities. To the enlightened thinker, the "possibility of universal knowledge, master of the arts and sciences, still seemed to be open to the ambitious mind...Nevertheless, a rift between the arts and the sciences
was evident, and a need was recognized to reconcile the apparent antagonism" (Burwick 3).

Such rigid artistic distinctions were not in accord with Johann Wolfgang Goethe's belief in the Gesamtkunstwerk; very much a product of enlightened times in his steadfast belief that neither art nor science was beyond his grasp, but highly critical of many enlightened values, Goethe subsequently countered Lessing's Laokoon with an essay of his own. His "Über Laokoon" responds to Lessing's analytical tone with the statement, "ein echtes Kunstwerk bleibt, wie ein Naturwerk, für unsern Verstand immer unendlich" ("Über Laokoon" 129). He then establishes his own "scientific" categories of aesthetics in order to refute Lessing's claim to the authority of science. Goethe analyzes the Laocoön statue according to his own categories, and claims, in opposition to Lessing, that the statue is not frozen, but appears to move. He qualifies this claim with: "Um die Intention des Laokoons recht zu fassen, stelle man sich in gehöriger Entfernung, mit geschlossenen Augen, davor, man öffne sie und schließe sie sogleich wieder, so wird man den ganzen Marmor in Bewegung sehen" ("Über Laokoon" 134). It is difficult to say if Goethe is spoofing Lessing's claim to scientific authority here, or seriously believes that blinking quickly will give one the authentic impression of Laocoön.

More influential than Goethe's "Laokoon" essay was his voluminous Farbenlehre, in which this poet's ideas of the
visual arts were outlined in more detail. In The Damnation of Newton, Frederick Burwick recounts Goethe’s search for an explanation of the power of color over human emotion:

While traveling in Italy...he had visited galleries and studios...He found that one matter always eluded him: ‘es war das Kolorit’...He recalled his study of physics at the University of Leipzig under Professor J.H. Winkler, yet could not remember ‘die Experimente, wodurch die Newtonische Theorie bewiesen werden soll.’ He decided, therefore, to conduct such experiments himself” (Burwick 10).

Never doubting that he was as qualified to conduct scientific experiments as to paint and write, Goethe borrowed a prism, sat in a white room, and stared through the prism at the wall. Without Newton’s camera obscura, however, Goethe’s results, published as Beiträge zur Optick in 1791, differed markedly from those of Newton.

When Goethe looked at the white wall through the prism, he saw — a white wall. He had expected to see the sunlight coming through the window refracted into a color spectrum; to his surprise, the color appeared not where the full light shone on the wall, but in the shadows, where light and darkness met. Goethe felt that his suspicions of Newton were confirmed, and he asserted that light was a manifestation of the highest principle, and as such could not be broken down into color: "Das Licht ist das einfachste, unzerlegteste, homogenste Wesen, das wir kennen. Es ist nicht zusammengesetzt" (Farbenlehre 107). Color, he maintained, was produced not by a breakup of light, but by the tension between light and darkness. "It was not immediately evident to him
that this interaction or tension might be a matter of retinal response, or that he was dealing with colors as qualities not quantities. Rather, he was convinced that he had discovered the fault of Newton’s method” (Burwick 11).

Goethe seized this opportunity to criticize Newton — and, by extension, the Enlightenment in general — for disregarding human subjectivity. He maintained that the mind and the heart are subordinate to "einem höheren Gesetz" (Farbenlehre 9). His concern with higher laws distinguishes his attitude toward light and color as something akin to religious fervor. Albrecht Schön’s Goethes Farbentheologie discusses this "scientific theology," and explains why Goethe attacked Newton so vehemently and fervently, "wie gegen den Menschheitsverderber" (Schöne 44). Newton saw knowledge as analysis, and light as something to be analyzed, but for Goethe, knowledge was sudden revelation, the light Paul saw on the road to Damascus, indivisible and unexaminable. This was the fundamental difference between "Goethes (qualitativ) phänomenologischer Betrachtungsweise und Newtons (quantitativ) physikalisch-mathematischem Zugriff" (Schöne 32). In February of 1799, Goethe "drafted a 'Schema zur Geschichte der Farbenlehre'...in which he intended to reveal how the classical idea of color perception had been subverted by mathematical optics" (Burwick 13). He completed his Farbenlehre in 1805, and it was published in 1810. It represented one of Goethe's forays into the realm of science,
and was his attempt to unify art and science with respect to color.

Goethe's attention to the subjective value of color results from his aspiration to unite the arts and sciences. His artistic investigation draws no distinction between color in the visual and in the verbal arts, and his attention to the subjective value of color is representative of his agenda to merge academic disciplines. Although his criticism of Newton is harsh and his scientific conclusions inaccurate, Goethe's *Farbenlehre* "represents the first criticism of Enlightenment's positivism from one...who did not wish to build simultaneously a fortress for romantic irrationality" (Brusatin 102). Still, the scientific community was outraged. Not only did followers of Newton resent the inaccuracy of Goethe's attempted replications of Newton's experiments, but the arrogance of a poet who claimed to know more about physics than physicists was more than the physicists themselves could bear. In spite of Goethe's influence on artists and philosophers, his claims were never taken seriously in the realms of science and the academy, and strict divisions between artistic and academic disciplines remained rigid, at least officially, until the turn of the twentieth century.

**Twentieth-Century Debates**

With the rise of modernism in the twentieth century and the interest in interconnections between the arts, the
relationship between word and image has not been so distinctly partitioned as in years past. Perceptions of the relationship of word to image have fluctuated between attention to connections between the two and rejection of any important association. In the early part of the century, the Viennese philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein established a link between word and image with *Tractatus logico philosophicus*, in which he postulated that human thought begins as mental pictures. According to Wittgenstein, these mental pictures constitute reality and the world for the individual, in the sense that the image is "ein Modell der Wirklichkeit" (Wittgenstein 38), and "die gesamte Wirklichkeit ist die Welt" (Wittgenstein 38). The word / image link begins when the individual's mental pictures of reality are translated into language. The importance of language in defining reality thus lies at the core of Wittgenstein's early philosophy; "die Grenzen meiner Sprache," he asserts, "bedeuten die Grenzen meiner Welt" (Wittgenstein 148).

Wittgenstein's later philosophy argued against his own reasonings; W.J.T. Mitchell observes that, after *Tractatus* was published, Wittgenstein "then spent the rest of his life fighting against the influence of his own theory, trying to expel the notion of mental imagery along with all its metaphysical baggage" (Mitchell 15). His reluctance to defend his own theories arose in part from his early concern "with the conditions for a logically perfect language" (Wittgenstein 20).
136), as Bertrand Russell notes in the introduction to the *Tractatus*, for he recognized the near impossibility of any human production being logically perfect. Nonetheless, throughout the first half of the twentieth century Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* remained one of the few works in the realm of philosophy that systematically addressed the association of word with image. From the 1920s to about the 1960s, debates on word and image primarily surrounded the rise of the filmic medium, as described in Worringer's *Empathy and Abstraction*. The image was practically ignored in literary studies, which were often limited to "the linguistic construction of the text" (Esrock 1-2).

One exception is a series of essays on iconology by Erwin Panofsky, first published in 1939. His iconological analyses refer primarily to the interpretation of paintings with regard to the historical and mythological meaning of the images they portray, such as "Father Time" as a union of elements from the Greek "Chronos" (time) and the Roman "Kronos" (Saturn) (Panofsky 73). He identifies three levels of interpretation, namely a "pre-iconographical" description of the image, that is, what is seen apart from historical context, an "iconographical analysis" within the mythological context, and the "intrinsic meaning or content" specific to the painter and time period (Panofsky 9). The relationship between word and image assumed by Panofsky is primarily illustrative, that is,
verbal stories (myths) were written down and then illustrated in painting and sculpture in various ways.

After Panofsky, semiotics and deconstructionism dominated the literary scene, and the 1970s witnessed anti-imagist attitudes in literary criticism (Esrock 4). Because the focus of deconstructionism is more often text-oriented than reader-response-oriented, Ellen Esrock claims, literary critics in the deconstructionist vein "are virtually unanimous in agreeing that the activity of visual imaging contributes nothing positive to the literary experience of reading" (Esrock 6). While semiotic discussions involve both sign and signifier, the signifier is viewed less as an image than as an abstract concept or a physical object. Theorists such as Derrida have avoided discussing the issue of imaging in order to concentrate upon structure of words in the text, but poststructuralists are also interested in how words appear on the page. The visual thus comes into play in some contemporary theory, but it is more dependent upon signs and symbols than representational images; indeed, images themselves are viewed as texts. In this way, logocentrism, or privileging of the word over the image, has evolved in the west from the iconoclastic break with Byzantium, through the Reformation, and into contemporary academia.

In opposition to the logocentrism of western scholarship, current interdisciplinary and cultural studies are exploding dominant paradigms of discrete divisions along lines of
academic disciplines. W.J.T. Mitchell’s groundbreaking *Iconology* questions Lessing’s partitioning of visual and verbal arts by asking "What is an image?" He notes that "Derrida’s answer to the question ‘What is an image?’ would undoubtedly be: ‘Nothing but another kind of writing, a kind of graphic sign that dissembles itself as a direct transcript of that which it represents, or of the way things look, or of what they essentially are’" (Mitchell 30). Mitchell then moves beyond poststructuralism to consider the many categories of images from within a sociopolitical context, explaining iconoclastic controversies in terms of the power that religious images hold over the human psyche. Troubles arise when the religious image is seen as possessing divine qualities rather than being a likeness of the divine; the image is then labelled an idol. The true, literal image in this case, Mitchell notes, "is the mental or spiritual one; the improper, derivative, figurative image is the material shape perceived by our senses, especially the eye" (Mitchell 32).

Mitchell’s ideas are helpful in establishing interdisciplinary relationships, since he views the notion of imagery as "a kind of relay connecting theories of art, language, and the mind with conceptions of social, cultural, and political value" (Mitchell 2). He questions Lessing’s division of the arts, drawing from E.H. Gombrich, who sees a "tournament played by a European team. The first round is
against Winckelmann, the German, the second against Spence, the Englishman, the third against the Comte de Caylus, the Frenchman" (Gombrich 139). Mitchell claims instead "that the tendency of artists to breach the supposed boundaries between temporal and spatial arts is not a marginal or exceptional practice, but a fundamental impulse in both the theory and practice of the arts" (Mitchell 98).

Ekphrasis

The Greek term ekphrasis has been appropriated by contemporary scholars to describe the relationship between word and image, logos and eikon. In The Sister Arts, Hagstrum asserts that "the investigator should always begin with the visual side of poetry...when considering the relations between these two arts" (Hagstrum xv). He distinguishes between ecphrasis, "giving voice and language to the otherwise mute art object" (Hagstrum 18), using Homer's description of Achilles' shield as an example of a verbal description of a work of visual art, and iconic poetry, which describes an image in words. To this end, he utilizes Horace's often misquoted ut pictora poesis, noting that painting and poetry are "the two arts that have most commonly been called 'sisters'" (Hagstrum xiii).

Recent attention to interdisciplinary issues can be characterized, in part, as a move from Aristotelian notions of art to a more Platonic understanding. Rather than viewing art
in its mimetic function, Plato claims that all art forms are reflections of a higher good. He links painting with poetry, for both are seen as equal reflections of a higher principle. Current trends in poststructuralist and interdisciplinary studies also relate back to modernist artistic programs, for the turn of the twentieth century witnessed an attention to the concept of "synesthesia," an aesthetic understanding of the intrinsic connections between the arts in terms of the human senses.

This philosophical move from Aristotelian "mimetics" to a more Platonic aesthetic begins with an issue discussed in Max Nänny's "Iconicity in literature," namely, "the mimetic virtue of language" (Nänny 199). Visual art would seem to be a medium more suited to recording our visual impressions of nature, but the human being is not simply a sensory receiver of impressions. If art is indeed to mirror nature, as Aristotle contended, then psychological research concerning the nature of the human psyche would call for a different kind of mimesis, mimesis of the inner world, such as the panoramas presented by Expressionist art. It can be argued that portrayal of the inner landscape is more easily translated into language than the external landscape; the "stream-of-consciousness" style, for example, arose in literature at the turn of the century, around the same time as the birth of psychology, and many other literary techniques seek to mimic inner thought processes.
While Nanny's article provides for a broader understanding of Aristotle's notion of mimetic art, John Hollander's "The poetics of ekphrasis" counters the very idea that art must mirror nature, for "the earliest ekphrastic poetry describes what doesn't exist, save in the poetry's own fiction" (Hollander 209). In this way, all representative art deconstructs itself by pointing to the act of representation. This is closer to Plato's philosophy, which discusses art as reflecting not nature, but higher spiritual forms. If tangible representation of the intangible is the end of art, then the medium, whether verbal or visual, is of secondary importance.

Murray Krieger espouses interdisciplinary interconnectedness in his study that takes its name from the term ekphrasis. While Krieger, like Lessing, discusses the particularity of language as an artistic medium, "the suggestion that language can function as an exclusively aesthetic material ...[is counter to theoretical tendencies that argue] for an undifferentiated, monolithic notion of the way language works" (Krieger 145-46). Krieger draws here from Herder, who "managed to rescue and even privilege poetry precisely because it was free to transcend the limited function of assailing our senses" (Krieger 149). Krieger then connects language with the media of the visual arts in noting that "the visual emblem and the verbal emblem are complementary languages for seeking the representation of the
unrepresentable. Ekphrasis is the poet's marriage of the two within the verbal art" (Krieger 22). Reminiscent of Plato's idea that art forms are representations of the Good, Krieger's discussion of representation echoes throughout contemporary journal articles that address ekphrasis.

In "Ekphrasis and representation," James Heffernan moves from ekphrasis as "the literary representation of visual art" to "the verbal representation of a graphic representation," in opposition to pictorialism and iconicity:

What distinguishes those two things from ekphrasis is that each one aims primarily to represent natural objects and artifacts rather than works of representational art. Of course pictorialism and iconicity may each remind us of graphic representation. Pictorialism generates in language effects similar to those created by pictures...with the aid of pictorial techniques...it uses the verbal equivalent of [the] pictorial...in order to represent a set of objects.

Iconicity is more complicated than pictorialism because it embraces sounds and sets of relations as well as visual properties. But visual iconicity, which is what concerns me here, is a visible resemblance between the arrangement of words or letters on a page and what they signify...iconic literature does not aim to represent pictures; it apes the shapes of pictures in order to represent natural objects (Heffernan 299-300).

In effect, notes Heffernan, ekphrasis is the technique of representing a representational work.

The issue of representation becomes more complex when the question of non-representational art arises. While it can be argued that Kandinsky's abstract art represents the inner landscape, the dadaist program countered the whole tradition of representational art by espousing pure meaninglessness (Tristan Tzara) or meaning beyond representation (Hugo Ball). In "Confessions of a Closet Ekphrastic," Bryan Wolf attacks
the boundary between representational and non-representational art by claiming that all art represents not something in the world, but the concept of representation:

...almost from the beginning art has concerned itself with more than the art of seeing...one must reproduce not just the content of seeing...but the context as well (...[the] semiotic circuit...)...[The goal is] to complicate, if not overturn, the very notion of mimesis that it is supposed to illustrate...And Nature...exists not as an end (the thing to be imitated) but only as a means within the world of art (an instrument for exposing the machinery of vision itself). Nature -- or its imitation -- plays the role of red herring within the history of art history (Wolf 194).

Recent articles advance the word/image debate within the realm of interdisciplinary study. In "The rhetoric of dilation: ekphrasis and ideology," Grant Scott discusses the "suspicion...of visual poetics or ekphrasis" (Scott 309) in literary criticism. Contemporary debates about the influence of television and movies recognize the power of the visual image, but the power of verbal imagery is acknowledged less often. Yet, Oskar Bätchmann's "Text and image: some general problems" includes such section headings as "Logocentricity of Iconography and Iconology" and "The supremacy of language over the image." In addition to providing an overview of Panofsky's essays, Bätchmann's study explores the ways in which the disciplines of art history and literature are beginning to overlap; especially art history, he notes, "appears to be changing from a discipline which until now has concerned itself with a limited area of art, to a discipline which concerns itself with the larger field of visual culture" (Bätchmann 11). As interdisciplinary approaches to academic
studies become more popular, the philosophical borrowing from one field to another that has always occurred enhances perceptions in all fields.

From the realm of psychology comes an important addition to the word/image debate. In psychology, a connection between the visual and the verbal arts is established via mental imagery. While "one of the main thrusts of modern psychology and philosophy has been to discredit the notions of both mental and verbal imagery" (Mitchell 13), this thrust is losing its momentum as links between language and mental imagery are currently being explored by cognitive psychologists and neuropsychologists (Esrock 6).

In Brainstorms, Daniel Dennett claims that "mental images are at least as real as Santa Claus" (Dennett 181). With this statement, Dennet gives an example of "a 'logical construct' that 'exists,' not as someone who can 'cause' presents to arrive, but as an object of consciousness" (Esrock 8). The function of discourse serves thus not only to affect, but also to construct reality for the individual and, indeed, the society. The notion of societal constructs has been a much-addressed topic in recent theoretical debates, as psychology has provided evidence that even images we perceive as "real" are not necessarily any more real than images we perceive as "fantasy" or "dream." What has been variously termed "reality," "the outer world," or "objective reality," has been
shown to be utterly dependent upon human perception and interpretation.

The most recent work dealing with the word and image link as it relates to psychology is Ellen J. Esrock's *The Reader's Eye*, which builds upon Mitchell's work to explore the ways in which mental images are formed through the reading of the written word. Her purpose is to show "that imaging has functional consequences that have applications to literature" (Esrock 16). Like Dennett, Esrock identifies "the role of cultural constructions as a matter of particular interest to literary scholars" (Esrock 11); imaging can thus be seen as having functional consequences beyond literature as well. If mental images produce changes in the perception of the reader, these perceptual changes will most likely produce behavioral changes as well, so that art, through its use of mental images, impacts reality directly.

Esrock argues that the mental images that writers seek to convey exist. Their reality interacts with the reader's daily perceptions of the external world, thereby producing a change first in mindset, then in behavior, and ultimately in outward change in the world. This transformative potential of mental images for the writer and reader of literature is realized through a shift of perspective similar to that which lies at the base of Gestalt psychological treatment. Grant Scott identifies this as a moment of "revelation in the psychology of the beholding eye" (Scott 301). He uses the concept of
revelation in connection with Byzantine textbooks on rhetoric, which emphasized vividness of imagery in writing.

The avant-garde ideal of producing concrete change in the external world through the production of art is always related to the psychological effect of the artwork’s images upon its reception. While this effect cannot be quantitatively measured, its potential for transformation seems undisputable. In this way, art makes a direct claim on the viewer/reader to reevaluate his or her perceptions of the world.

Such studies are revolutionizing academic inquiry, but the views they espouse are by no means new. Most modernist artists, for example, were aware of an interaction of visual and verbal elements in their work, as well as the potential of the image to produce change in the world. Rainer Maria Rilke’s preoccupation with the visual arts indicates not only an awareness of links between word and image, but a concern for the transformative capacity of the image. Thus, it is in Rilke’s relationship to the visual arts that a compelling argument for an avant-garde moment in Rilke’s works begins.

**Rilke and the Visual Arts**

Rilke’s involvement with the visual arts began with his studies of art history in Prague, Munich, and Berlin. It was at the artists’ colony in Worpswede, however, that he became directly involved with visual artists at the forefront of artistic movements of his time. His first visit to Worpswede
directly followed his first visit to Russia in the year 1900. Clara Westhoff (Rilke) describes Rainer Maria’s increasing involvement with the art world, and his introduction to the colony:

Als Rainer Maria Rilke nach seiner zweiten großen Russlandreise in Worpswede eintraf, waren Paula Becker und ich gerade aus Paris zurückgekehrt und die Berichte seines Erlebens begegneten sich mit den Berichten unserer Erfahrungen. Rainer Maria Rilke begann sich damals der bildenden Kunst und den bildenden Künstlern auf eine aufmerksame Weise zuzuwenden (Briefe über Cézanne 5).

A year later, Rilke married the sculptor Clara Westhoff, a student of Rodin, and the following year he moved to Paris to begin work on a series of essays on the famous sculptor. His intuitive understanding of the interconnection of the arts was strengthened during his stay with Rodin, as he was surrounded by the palpable art objects and fragmented sculpted body parts that inspire the fragmentation in his novel Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge and his Neue Gedichte. His aesthetic philosophy resulted in a kind of *ekphrastic* technique in these poems, known as his *Dinggedichte*; the well-known "Archaischer Torso Apollos" is an *ekphrastic* address to a fragmented sculpture; it also points to an early presence of icon spirituality in Rilke’s comprehension of art.

**Archaischer Torso Apollos**

"Archaischer Torso Apollos" begins by pointing out the fragmented nature of an ancient Greek ideal of aesthetics;
Apollo's lack of a head implies that this Greek notion is inaccessible to the modern understanding of art:

Wir kannten nich sein unerhörtes Haupt
darin die Augenäpfel reiften. Aber
sein Torso glüht noch wie ein Kandelaber,
in dem sein Schauen, nur zurückgeschraubt,
sich hält und glänzt...

Rilke's language disturbs any facile interpretation of "Apollo." He continually erases distinctions between the senses, and between the inner and outer, the visible and invisible; "Unerhörtes," for example, immediately introduces the sense of hearing into this otherwise headless, earless statue. Even this missing head is called into question through Rilke's use of "nicht," which allows him to place a "Haupt" at the "top" of the statue, in the first line of the poem. The work of art is physically reproduced throughout the poem, with the "Augenäpfel" present just below the top of the head, where they would normally be, and the torso comes below that.

The poem moves down to the breast, to the genital area, and finally to where the figure stands on its pedestal of stone:

...Sonst könnte nicht der Bug
der Brust dich blenden, und im leisen Drehen
der Lenden könnte nicht ein Lächeln gehen
zu jener Mitte, die die Zeugung trug.

Sonst stünde dieser Stein entstellt und kurz
unter der Schultern durchsichtigem Sturz
und flimmerte nicht so wie Raubtierfelle;
Although the poem physically represents the statue, it represents elements that are not present in the "actual" statue, which itself is a question: Is Rilke thinking of a "real" experience he had in front of a classical statue, or is the entire situation an imaginary one? Again, the answer is moot, since for Rilke, as for Dennet and Esrock, the imaginary is as real as the external, and he blurs the boundaries between "actual" and "fanciful" through his use of the subjunctive.

The poem begins in the past tense ("kannten," "reiften"); in the first stanza and into the second, it moves to the present tense ("glüht," "hält," glänzt"), and finally to the subjunctive ("könnte"). This grammatical journey reflects a movement that begins with "wir," the collective subject, and moves to the statue, the object of vision and the work of art. After this, a dual movement occurs both inward psychologically and beyond the statue, which begins to glow with a transcendent light, so that it blinds the viewer.

By placing the spiritual nature of the experience into the subjunctive, Rilke disturbs a western, logical mindset and allows for the possibility of a mystical experience. With this grammatical structure, and by calling attention to the process of representation through his placement of words in the poem, Rilke is able to move beyond mere ekphrastic description to something more. The reader is invited to participate in a meditation on the artwork that the speaker in
the poem performs by concentrating on the poem itself in the same way. Thus, the poem not only physically mimics the artwork, it functions for the reader in the same way that the visual work of art functioned for the speaker of the poem.

As with concentration on a Buddhist mantra or a Russian icon, the aim of this meditation is spiritual revelation, which is described in the last lines of the poem:

und bräche nicht aus allen seinen Rändern
aus wie ein Stern: denn da ist keine Stelle,
die dich nicht sieht. Du mußt dein Leben ändern.

The revelation that occurs is described in terms of light and visuality; the revelatory quality of divine light in art becomes important for Rilke in his connection with Russian icons. In the Dinggedichten, it manifests itself as a shining forth of the essence of the object of contemplation. This moment of revelation is equivalent to Grant Scott's "revelation in the psychology of the beholding eye," for it takes advantage of the potential for transformation identified by Esrock. Rilke's work in the Dinggedichten and later cannot be defined by the term ekphrasis, for he entirely transcends the debate concerning the association of word and image. His aim is something beyond both, a spiritual end involved with the claim of art upon the viewer to "change your life;" the radical shift from the subjunctive to the indicative in the last line suggests that Rilke has reached some absolute in his perception of art, one that was developed during his
fellowship with Rodin, but which preceded even this influential time in his life.

Rilke's association with Rodin is generally considered to be a turning point in his artistic career. He learned much from his mentor and employer during their years together: to look intensely at the object, and to work both diligently and passionately at his art. He acquired the perception that the creation of art is not merely an aesthetic, but also a physical exercise, the best poets being those whose works, like Baudelaire's, do not "seem to have been written, but moulded; [who create] words and groups of words that...[melt] under the glowing touch of the poet...who...[seek] bodies in which life...[is] greater [my emphasis], more cruel and more restless" (Rodin 15). Baudelaire and the Symbolists were an important influence on Rilke's early development, and Symbolism provides a link not only to the visual arts, but ultimately to spirituality, Russia, and the avant-garde inclination in Rilke's work.

Rilke and Symbolism

Rilke's earliest poems have often been classified as "impressionist," but Rilke's comments on Rodin reveal an interpretation of Impressionism that imbues the artwork with something more:

For erroneous as it is to see in Rodin's plastic art a kind of Impressionism, it is the multitude of precisely and boldly seized impressions that is always the great treasure from which he ultimately chooses the important and necessary,
in order to comprehend his work in perfect synthesis (Rodin 45).

The first series of poems written under Rodin’s influence was published as Buch der Bilder in 1902. For the most part, these poems are Symbolist rather than Impressionist in tone; his "Klage," for example:

...Ich möchte aus meinem Herzen hinaus unter den großen Himmel treten.
Ich möchte beten

recalls Baudelaire’s "Le Voyage:

Un matin nous partons, le cerveau plein de flamme,
Le coeur gros de rancune et de désirs amers;

and, in the same poem:

...les vrais voyageurs sont ceux-là seuls qui partent pour partir; coeurs légers, semblables aux ballons;
...Ceux-là dont les désirs ont la forme de nues (Rees 158-59).

The image of journeying forth under a heavy heart in search of something transcendent, heavenly, and ineffable is strongly Symbolist. Yet, there are also moments of Impressionism in Rilke’s early poems, as in "Die Braut:"

Die Braut

Ruf mich, Geliebter, ruf mich laut!
Las deine Braut nicht solange am Fenster stehn.
In den alten Platanenalleen macht der Abend nicht mehr:
sie sind leer.

Und kommst du mich nicht in das nächtliche Haus mit deiner Stimme verschließen,
so muß ich mich aus meinen Händen hinaus in die Gärten des Dunkelblaus ergießen... (Das Buch der Bilder 19)

The poem begins from the perspective of the woman standing in the window with a kind of stream-of-consciousness, a literary
technique most often associated with Impressionism. The reader enters in medias res, and the poem appears to be a "slice of life," as the Impressionists wished to capture it, a single moment in an individual's experiences. While the character's feelings are brought to the surface in a non-Impressionist gesture, one could nevertheless imagine a passerby (the reader) glancing up and catching her in the moment of looking out the window for her lover, already with a hint of the knowledge that he will not come.

The importance of Rodin for Rilke's Dinggedichte, published in 1907 as his Neue Gedichte, is widely acknowledged. Rilke's attention to everyday "things" in his Dinggedichte signals a radical break from the esoteric concerns of German Idealist and Romantic ponderings, but also from the exterior concerns of Naturalism and Impressionism. Although the Neue Gedichte focus on the object of the work of art, they explore not its outer aspect, but rather the total impact of a thing from the inner vantage point, where the subject and object merge.

Likewise, it is not the transitory, immediate moment that interests Rilke, but rather, as he said of Rodin, "the intense comprehension of hundreds and hundreds of moments of life" (Rodin 52). His description of a woman before a mirror, for example, describes her not in one moment, but over a period of time during which she is absorbed in her own reflection:
Dame vor dem Spiegel

Wie in einem Schlafrunk Spezerein
lösst sie leise in dem flüssigklaren
Spiegel ihr ermüdetes Gebaren;
und sie tut ihr Lächeln ganz hinein.

Und sie wartet, daß die Flüssigkeit
davon steigt; dann gießt sie ihre Haare
in den Spiegel und, die wunderbare
Schulter hebend aus dem Abendkleid,
trinkt sie still aus ihrem Bild. Sie trinkt,
was ein Liebender im Taumel tränke,
prüfend, voller Mißtraun; und sie winkt

erst der Zofe, wenn sie auf dem Grunde
ihrer Spiegels Lichter findet, Schränke
und das Trübe einer späten Stunde (Neue Gedichte 145).

There is in this poem, with the word "gießen," the same
fluidity of motion associated with the woman in "Die Braut";
such movement recalls both van Gogh's vibrant post-
Impressionist skies and Rodin's charged bodies. Just as
Rodin's sculpture was not the soft Impressionism of Degas'
airy ballerinas, but was infused with a powerful sense of
strong movement, just as Gauguin "deliberately abandoned the
direct observation of nature that Pissarro had taught him, in
order to portray a summary and free interpretation of scenes
of Maori life" (Rewald 174), so did Rilke reject the direct
and momentary aura of Impressionism in favor of a kind of
timelessness that was to reach its fruition in his Duineser
Elegien of 1922 (Baron 83).

Rilke wrote not only about the work of Rodin, but also
about the artists at Worpswede, Russian modernist artists, and
especially about Cézanne and Van Gogh. At the time of his
Dinggedichte, Rilke was just developing an interest in the
painting of Cézanne. Above all, he was struck by Cézanne’s use of color. In his letters to his wife, he refers to "Cézannes sehr eigenes Blau" (Briefe über Cézanne 22) and the "inneres Gleichgewicht von Cézannes Farben" (Briefe über Cézanne 46).

The impact of Cézanne’s bright colors on Rilke was far greater than that of the Impressionists’ softer hues. Frank Baron notes: "The principles of composition Rilke observed in Cézanne were soon translated into a new kind of intense poetic expression" (Baron 9) evident in the Dinggedichte. With his focus on the external expression of inner essences, Rilke identified a progression in Cézanne’s use of color to describe an object:

In den ersten [Bildern] war die Farbe etwas für sich; später nimmt er sie irgendwie, persönlich, wie kein Mensch noch Farbe genommen hat, nur um das Ding damit zu machen. Die Farbe geht völlig auf in dessen Verwirklichung; es bleibt kein Rest (Briefe über Cézanne 28).

Rilke’s admiration of Cézanne is related to his perception of colors as a spiritual reflection of the divine revelatory light, a concept connected to icons and explored by Kandinsky. Rilke’s medium, words on a page, is most often black and white; in concentrating on light and color impulses, Rilke tries to break out of his medium to convey the impact that he feels color has on the viewer. Rilke was always aware of the tenuousness of language in expressing meaning; like many writers of his time, he experienced a Sprachkrise during his
artistic development, but Rilke was able to bridge the gap between signified and signifier through his appreciation of the visual arts, and through his concentration on the transcendent value of art. Like other avant-garde artists, he demands of his art that it do something it cannot "really" do, that is, picture images for the viewer.

Both Rodin and Cézanne remained important influences in Rilke’s poetry throughout his life. Even Rilke’s latest poems, his *Duineser Elegien* and his *Sonette an Orpheus*, are infused with Rodin’s movement, and Cézanne’s colorful fruits dance:

... 
Tanzt die Orange. Die wärmere Landschaft, 
werft sie aus euch, daß die reife erstrahle 
in Lüften der Heimat! Erglühte, enthüllt 

Düfte um Düfte. Schafft die Verwandtschaft 
mit der reinen, sich weigernden Schale 
mit dem Saft, der die Glückliche füllt! 
(XV Sonnete an Orpheus)

The oranges in this poem are not a vague impression; they are bright, their smell evokes sensations of their origins in the warm south, and their color describes them completely, for the orange is the one fruit whose name is its color. What Rilke said of Cézanne could be said of his own poetry: "Die Farbe geht völlig auf in dessen Verwirklichung; es bleibt kein Rest."

Very late in his life, between 1922 and 1926, Rilke wrote almost 400 poems in French. These poems have received very little scholarly attention, but they contain much stronger
Impressionistic elements than his German poems. They are related to the "Sonette an Orpheus" in their elegant style and grace of diction (Poulin ix), but they are lighter, airier, and infused more with the mission of French Impressionism to render a surface sensation of the subject. The woman in the window reappears in one of these poems:

Il suffit que, sur un balcon
ou dans l'encadrement d'une fenêtre,
une femme hésite..., pour être
celle que nous perdons
en l'ayant vue apparaître.

Et si elle lève les bras
pour nouer ses cheveux, tendre vase:
combien notre perte par là
gagne soudain d'emphase
et notre malheur d'éclat! (Poulin 28)

In this poem, there is a stronger sense of catching the subject in a passing Impressionistic glance than in the earlier poems. Even here, however, the focus is less on the image of the woman or her feelings, but on the feelings of the viewer, and the poem ends with "malheur d'éclat," a sudden Expressionist brilliant sadness that outshines the softness of its Impressionist beginning.

The most important component in these almost-Impressionist renderings that completely precludes categorizing them as Impressionist is the window frame. In "Die Braut," the woman stands in a window which presumably frames the landscape through which she searches for her lover. In "Dame vor dem Spiegel," the mirror frame is a border for the woman's reflection. Framing devices such as windows and
mirrors were often used in Romantic painting to imply a closed artistic space; for Impressionist painting, on the other hand, the picture frame is incidental to the "slice of life" being portrayed. In "The Impressionists and Edouard Manet," Stéphane Mallarmé discusses Manet's picture frames:

...If we turn to natural perspective...and look at these sea-pieces of Manet, where the water at the horizon rises to the height of the frame, which alone interrupts it, we feel a new delight at the recovery of a long obliterated truth.

The secret of this is found in an absolutely new science, and in the manner of cutting down the pictures, and which gives to the frame all the charm of a merely financial boundary, such as that which is embraced at one glance of a scene framed in by the hands...This is the picture, and the function of the frame is to isolate it... (Frascina & Harrison 42).

Rilke's frames isolate the picture as well, but they are not incidental and delineating, they are part of the picture, for the window frame and the mirror are conscious elements within the poems. The frames themselves add to the aesthetic pleasure of the image; like Symbolist frames, Rilke's frames enhance the image portrayed. Rilke himself spoke to this view of the window frame as an aesthetic tool and beautifying agent; naturally, he delivered his philosophy in the form of a poem:

N'es-tu pas notre géométrie,
fenêtre, très simple forme
qui sans effort circonscris
notre vie énorme?

Celle qu'on aime n'est jamais plus belle
que lorsqu'on la voit apparaître
encadrée de toi; c'est, ô fenêtre,
que tu la rends presque éternelle.

Tous les hasards sont abolis. L'être
se tient au milieu de l'amour,
avec ce peu d'espace autour
dont on est maître (Poulin 28-30).

Rilke’s frames do not merely "decorate" the images in his poetry, however. By incorporating the frame into the image it surrounds, Rilke allows the image, conversely, to break out of the frame that contains it.

The categorization of Rilke as an "Impressionist" is difficult to maintain; it is far more accurate to say that Rilke uses Impressionistic techniques to his own ends. In "Die Braut," for example, his Impressionistic glance is but a starting point on a Symbolist journey that ends in the "Gärten des Dunkelblau," into which the rejected lover wishes to pour herself. Rilke’s use of the frame for aesthetic enhancement of the object of the work of art suggests that his poetry has less in common with Impressionism than with Jugendstil. In Gustav Klimt’s paintings the picture frame is integral to the overall aesthetic impact of the work, and it sets the scene portrayed apart from the "real world" in an enclosed aesthetic realm unto itself.

When the importance of the frame for Rilke’s poetry is considered, it is little wonder that many critics have identified him with delineation of a closed aesthetic space, the l’art pour l’art classification of the modernist artist. However, Rilke is more closely allied with Symbolism than with Jugendstil. The Symbolist decoration of the frame does not separate the picture from reality, rather it obscures the division between art and life:
The delimitation which is the characteristic feature of any text is rendered uncertain, or at the least ambiguous. The principle of inclusion or exclusion is stretched and confused. Limitation, formerly signal of the end of a text, becomes something vague (Delevoy 154).

Kandinsky also decorated his frames so that the picture moves outward toward the viewer; when the division between art and life is thus blurred, the potential for art to transform life grows. Rilke frames another world, but it is not a world separate from, rather behind the physical. It is this spiritual world to which Rilke calls our attention, the world which infuses the physical world with its color and movement, and gives it life.

Although the Symbolist frame blurs the distinction between art and life, Symbolism itself was hardly an avant-garde movement in and of itself. The influence of Symbolism on the early Rilke lies, perhaps, at the base of his classification as a l'art pour l'art artist. While it is true that Symbolism was a movement of intangibilities and psychological motifs, such concerns do not necessarily preclude the artist's engagement with the world through his or her art. Many avant-garde artists grew from a foundation in the Symbolist movement; the question is always whether or not the artist moved beyond merely Symbolist concerns.

In the same way an icon exceeds its frame to penetrate the viewer, Rilke's poetry breaks out of the categories that seek to classify it. Rilke's position exhibits neither the superficial rendering and tendency toward decoration that
developed from Impressionism, nor the self-contained aestheticism that many Rilke scholars would have us believe, but a spiritual conviction. Kathleen Komar identifies the Symbolist strain in Rilke’s work as relating to "transcendental symbolism," a term she commandeers from Charles Chadwick, which "lends to poetry the function of mediation between man and the transcendent realm that was once reserved for religion" (Komar 4).

Rilke’s visual images often refer to religious figures, and his connection to religious art is the basis of a comparison of his poetry with Russian icons. The transcendent realm described in his poetry is seen as "empty" in the same way that icons are devoid of external details, so that attention to the divine is not obscured. The construction of "empty space" figured prominently in the work of Kazimir Malevich, who emphasized the transcendent realm beyond icons in his art. Paradoxically, it is this concentration on the "other" realm that ultimately calls for a turning to "this" world, so that Rilke’s connection with Symbolism and Russian Orthodoxy manifests itself in the avant-garde strains of his work. In "Rilke — Rodin, Cézanne, Klee: Die Schöpfung des Raumes in der Moderne," Peter Por identifies Rilke with Symbolism, but also with the avant-garde:

Von den Neuen Gedichten an steht Rilkes Zielsetzung außerhalb der herrschenden Tendenzen der Lyrik seiner Zeit. Grob eingeteilt: sie richteten sich entweder postsymbolistisch auf die Konstruktion des leeren Raumes, der Leere, oder avantgardistisch auf die Zersetzung des Raumes und seiner Seienden (Por 52).
In the same article, Por cites Rilke’s reference to Russia as his "geistige Heimat," and alludes to his concern for the unity of being, "das, was er in Prag, München, Florenz und Worpswede vergeblich, im außereuropäischen Rußland aber zu sehen vermeinte, [sich] zum Ziel setzt: das totale Universum von Seienden in einem transzendenten Landschaftsraum" (Por 50). It was Rilke’s experience of Russia as a transcendent landscape that caused him to seize the Russian icon for his own art.

A theoretical link exists between West and East through the word eikon. W.J.T. Mitchell writes:

...the critical study of the icon begins with the idea that human beings are created "in the image and likeness" of their creator and culminates, rather less grandly, in the modern science of "image-making" in advertising and propaganda (Mitchell 2).

Mitchell’s neo-Platonic idea of image as likeness is key in discussing artistic production of mental images in the West. It is also important in considering production of religious art, which seeks to portray spiritual likeness of the divine. While western Europe adopted the philosophical tradition of ancient Greece, and the meaning of icon as "image," eastern Europe adopted the theological tradition of early medieval Greece, in its acceptance of Eastern Orthodoxy and Byzantine religious icons as a catalysts for spiritual revelation. Such an understanding is not typical for the West, for, in the history of the Western Church, art tends, with a significant steadiness, in the direction of the illustrative function of the holy image, and Gregory the Great (600) saw images as writing for the illiterate" (Michelson 123).
The logocentrism of western scholarship is apparently not present in eastern Europe. While western religious art developed a didactic and illustrative function, word and image are mystically united in the liturgy and art of the eastern church:

"That which the word communicates by sound, the painting shows silently by representation," says St. Basil the Great. And the Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council repeat these words and specify that "through these two mediums which accompany each other...we acquire the knowledge of the same realities" (Ouspensky 10).

Rilke was undoubtedly struck by this mystical understanding of art for a higher spiritual purpose, and his work reflects his fascination with icons. In order to understand how Rilke viewed the icons he saw in the "great icon centers of Novgorod, Moscow, and Kiev (all known to Rilke...)") (Webb 242), one must first explore Russian Orthodoxy and icon theory divorced from Rilke's comments on the subjects, and learn what Rilke may have learned before he saw the icons themselves. The influence of the visual arts in Rilke's development as an artist must be kept in mind during the discussion of Rilke's relationship to icons, for his belief in the interconnection of the arts is intimately related to his notions of spirituality and art.
In the eighth century the Byzantine church experienced a doctrinal conflict that shook Orthodoxy to its roots. The Iconoclastic Controversy, as it is known, centered around the doctrine of the Word (logos) made flesh, and the image-making that reproduces this divine event. The controversy has often been depicted as a clash between the Platonic / Hellenic and the Judaic elements of Christianity (Horovisky 118), but this is an oversimplification, for both sides used neo-Platonic arguments, and both sides drew justification from Old Testament scriptures.

Unlike western Christianity, which privileged text over image, eastern Christianity found justification for the production of religious images in the doctrine of the incarnation. If the human being is made in the image (eikon) of God, and if God’s Word (logos) was made flesh in the person of Jesus Christ, then the image of Christ is a holy one that brings spiritual light to the believer. The icon in the Eastern Orthodox church is thus very specific -- it is a "likeness" in the sense that human beings are likenesses of
God. On the one hand, God is thought to be beyond human comprehension and expression; on the other, human beings, made in God's image, are portrayals of God, likenesses that, as such, can also create images to convey meaning. The icon, "according to the teaching of the eastern church, corresponds entirely to the 'word' of Scripture" (Ouspensky 10). The doctrine of the incarnation of the Word applies to every icon, for every icon is a microcosm of Christ's passion and the liturgy of the church.

The Iconoclastic Controversy began as a protest against the doctrine of the image of God, or the "imago dei," as espoused by the Quinisext Council in Trullo in 691 (Ouspensky 113). For the iconoclasts, image making was an impossibility, akin to the creation of idols. They held that rendering the divine in an image desecrates the dual nature of Christ. "The very point of their argument was this: they felt very strongly the utter disproportion between all historical ('sensual') images and the state of glory in which both Christ and his saints were already abiding" (Horovsky 115).

Icon Theology

Both the iconoclasts and the iconophiles drew from tradition and the writings of the church patriarchs to justify their positions. Among the precedents found by the iconophiles to support their case were the "original" icons, those that, according to legend, were created by the founders.
of the church. The first of these is the Vera or "true" Icon, called the "Vernicle," or "Our Saviour Not Made By Human Hands:"

FIGURE 2.1: The Vernicle
As the image of God on earth, Christ is the original icon, and he was also the legendary source of the icons that subsequently were made by human hands:

As the Eastern Christian doctrine has it, the Incarnation -- birth of Jesus Christ, God the Son, our Saviour -- made it possible to depict the Lord. Icons could not appear before his birth, for God the Father is invisible, inconceivable and thus undepictable.

According to tradition, the first icon miraculously appeared in Jesus' lifetime on earth. No healer could help Abgar, the leprous ruler of Edessa in Syria, who knew about His wondrous healings in Palestine and believed that a mere look at His portrait would make him whole again. He sent his court artist Ananias to Palestine with the task. The painter heard Jesus preach in Jerusalem but could not get close enough in the crowd to make a sketch. Suddenly, Jesus addressed Ananias, saying He would send a disciple to Edessa to heal Abgar. Then He washed His face and wiped it with a linen towel. His features imprinted on the cloth, which He gave the artist -- hence the name of this holy image, Not Made by Hands. Ananias hurried back to Syria with the precious relic, and Abgar felt better the moment he touched it. Soon he was cured altogether. Such was the first miracle of the thaumaturgical image (Save and Preserve 14).

Thus the first icon "type" was created, the Christ mandilion. Involved in the creation of this original type is an image formed by emanation of light or energy; in the West, it is often equated with the miraculous image of Christ's face on the shroud of Turin, caused, so legend goes, by the force of his spiritual energy as he rose from his death. It is significant, however, that a living Christ made the Vera icon, for icons are said to impart the living essence of the individual they depict.

Another icon type was based on the legend of Luke painting the Virgin Mary:
FIGURE 2.2: St. Luke Paints the Icon of Our Lady
According to tradition, the earliest icons of Our Lady were painted by St. Luke the Evangelist in Her lifetime.

Orthodox Christianity knows about 800 iconographies of the Virgin, over a third of these known for miracles, with liturgies devoted to them. The earliest portrayed Her alone or with the Child. Icons depicting Old and New Testament episodes and saints appeared later.

[There exists an...]...amazing iconographic variety, with every icon illustrating one aspect of the good bestowed by Her on the human family. The Divine Guide, The Joy of All the Afflicted, The Healer, The Hope of All Sinners, The Intercession for Sinners, Joy Unsought-For -- such are only few [sic] of the names of Her icons. Liturgical texts and chronicles preserve ample testimony to their miracles, always against a detailed historical background (Save and Preserve 100).

By extension, justification is given for the portrayal of God's word by a scripture writer, as well as a painter of the word, indicative of the close alliance of word and image in Orthodoxy. The icon must be "read" as scripture; icons "without interpretation are almost without meaning...We have first to learn the language of icons before we can be touched by them" (Russian & Greek Icons 14).

The icon is not "just a symbol," an "algebraic replacement" (Schklovsky 11), but a way to circumscribe the essence and convey the presence of the individual portrayed. The purpose of an Orthodox icon is not to illustrate an event, as religious art in the west traditionally does, but rather to convey the essential meaning of the event:

A true "icon" claimed to be something essentially different from a "symbol." It had to be a "representation" of something real, and a true and accurate representation...The final appeal is not to an artistic imagination or to an individual vision, but to history, -- to things seen and testified (Horovsky 115).
The icon thus is not an object of worship, but rather a focus, or catalyst for worship. Every detail is a microcosm of theological principles; every element in an icon has meaning and significance. For this reason, there are no "symbols" of Christ in icons, such as the lamb or the fish, and the use of the cross symbol is far more ubiquitous in the western than in the eastern church.

In both the east and the west, religious painting was most often done by monks, but the guidelines for the painting of icons are much stricter than for western religious art. "Certain types of faces and poses recur throughout the tradition of the icon" (Webb 241); this is indicative of the importance of tradition for the Orthodox church. Tradition holds that a type or model is established miraculously, such as Christ’s gift to King Abgar, and then is repeated faithfully. These "repeated" icons carry not only the image of the original, but also its essence and power.

The process of icon painting creates a miraculous effect that ultimately seeks to convey the essence of a spiritual nature. Its roots lie in alchemy:

The Byzantine theory of colour almost certainly had its roots in the rich and venerable tradition of alchemy -- at that time a living and highly spiritualized activity. The chemical process whereby the colour was produced by an admixture of various substances was, for the alchemist, inseparably linked with the need to understand the essential nature and spiritual properties of matter (Russian & Greek Icons 19-20)

An icon is essentially a block of wood with a quadrilateral depression carved on its front, over which the canvas is
stretched. Pigments are then applied according to established rules and traditions within particular icons "schools," which changed throughout the history of Byzantium and Russia. Each layer of paint is more luminous than the next, for the many layers are smelted together, and the viewer sees only the result, a kind of "miracle." The mystical effect of this technique is an inner shining that circumscribes the spirituality of the subject.

The miraculous and legendary cannot be separated from the concept of icons, and even scholastic works on the subject refer to the mysticism intrinsic in icon theology:

Medieval Russian icons represent an artistic world on its own. It is not so easy to penetrate it, but once you find the key to its idiom, you discover one hidden value after another. Your mind invests its subtle symbolism and chaste laconicism in the flesh and blood of concrete imagery -- and you no longer contemplate an icon but receive its mystical message (Save and Preserve 11).

Although the mystical aura surrounding icons may be present only for the believer, Ernst Benz identifies a "strangeness" on the part of the western viewer when faced with an icon (Benz 3). In part, this strangeness is due to a lack of attention to narrative logic. The icon does not represent the outer world; instead, it provides access to a deeper spiritual reality:

There are no laws here of the art of recreating natural effects: no perspective, no light and shade, no anatomy. The scale, including heaven and hell, is logically inconceivable. Nevertheless, the imagination is glad to enter that 'other world' into which the artist leads. This is not the world of logical, sense-perceived realities but the world of cosmic and spiritual reality: the unseen world of a struggle in man's inner life (Russian & Greek Icons 15).
Baggley addresses the lack of western "perspective" in icons, calling attention instead to the technique used to engage the viewer with the icon, "inverse perspective:

When this technique is used, the lines of perspective are reversed, to converge not at some distant point in the scene, but in front of the icon in the eyes of the beholder; one is left feeling that the beholder is essential to the completion of the icon. The essence of the exercise has been to establish a communion between the event or persons represented in the icon and those who stand before it...This technique helps to fix attention on the icon by preventing the eyes wandering beyond the figures represented (Baggley 81).

Further "strangeness" is produced by the icon painter's lack of concern for representing a specific historical moment. Because the divine is seen as transcending earthly concepts, signifiers of specific space and time are kept to a minimum, so that the icon becomes a holy place, like the church itself. Concepts of external and internal space break down; interiors are often only sketchily portrayed, and external architectural elements only hinted at. Figures often stand simply on a carpet without being "grounded:"

Icons have no depth. The classic icon...is an emblem of radiance: the New-Platonic concept of ideal or universal truth developed in pagan theology by Plotinus, and then taken over, quite consciously, by the Church... (Russian & Greek Icons 9)

The icon as an emblem of radiance is central to comprehending the power of an icon for the believer. It is also a process, and the viewer must take the time to engage with it. Icons in Orthodoxy, says Webb, are "thought to be the medium by which a supplicant [can] penetrate to the realm of the supernatural
and find union with God. They become mystical conduits, as it were, from everyday reality to the world beyond" (Webb 241).

Benz also discusses the view of the icon as "a kind of window between the earthly and the celestial worlds -- a window through which the inhabitants of the celestial world ...[look] down into ours and on which the true features of the heavenly archetypes...[are] imprinted two-dimensionally" (Benz 6). The windows, or mirrors, convey primarily the light of God that illuminates and enlivens and transforms the image and the viewer. Michelson notes "the inclusion of that known variously as the ozhivka (from ozhivit', "to enliven") or dvigat' ("to move") or svetik ("little gleam"); all refer to the glint in the pupil of the eye which confers light and, through light, movement, and, through both of these, the semblance of life or presence upon the portrait within the icon" (Michelson 120). Michelson explains the connection between image making and light that occurs in the icon: "The notion of the icon as in some way participating in the sacred presence of the figured personage is grounded in Paul's view (1 Colossians, 15) that Christ is an image of God, and that he is also an emanation of God" (Michelson 123). Dionysius the Areopagite elucidated his beliefs concerning the emanation of mystical light in connection with Gnostic belief (Ball 170), and it is upon his writings that much of the notion of divine light is based:

The real human being is not able to perceive the divine without the help of protective layers, and these mediate
between the original and the copy. A good illustration is provided by another time-honored topos, which Dionysius took over from Neoplatonic literature, the topos of light and light rays. It is not possible for us to perceive the divine light directly. The divine ray "can enlighten us only by being upliftingly concealed in a variety of sacred veils which the Providence of the Father adapts to our nature as human beings." Time and again he comes back to the assertion that the veils that cover God’s pure appearance make it possible for us to perceive the divine revelation (Barasch 173-74).

As the most palpable carriers of divine light, notes Alpatov, the colors of icons are imbued with moral and spiritual significance (Alpatov 12). Icons convey primarily "a sense of color that offers tranquility and illuminates the painting from within" (Russian & Greek Icons 9). Although there is no single color symbolism of icons, "colors were originally very bright and carried symbolic meaning (gold: heaven, red: earth)" (Webb 241). An example of a possible system for color symbolism follows:

The greens and browns are identifiable with the earth and its vegetation, being the colours of our earth-bound existence. Blue is the colour of the heavens, and symbolises contemplation and the ethereal. Scarlet-red was always the favorite colour of popular culture. The root of the Slavonic word for red is the same as that for the word beautiful, and red, which is the colour of St. George’s cloak and the blood of martyrs, denotes vigour and vitality. From the twelfth century deep red was the shade usually associated with the 'imperial purple' -- 'colour of the blood of Christ' -- used for the buskins or shoes of royalty.

An orange-red suggests fervour and spiritual purification that has long been associated with fire. White, which stands for purity, is sometimes used as a highlight to lend transparency to solid colour in order to convey a dimension of spiritual depth. In this context it is the 'uncreated light,' synonymouos with the quickening of man’s spiritual powers enabling him to 'reflect like a mirror the glory of the Lord.'... White, which is all colours unmanifest, is further found in 'heavenly garments.' It may be used for the robes of Christ and his angels to represent, on the ikon, their 'invisible presence' (Russian & Greek Icons 20).
Many scholars agree that the use of color in Russian icons differed greatly from the Byzantine type: "The spirit of Byzantium was transmitted to the Slavic world...But they added to this another dimension of mysticism...which was made visible in the icon by a new treatment of form: a visionary abstraction and fiery colors" (Galavaris 3). Some general characteristics of Russian color symbolism are outlined by Alpatov, including the fact that the color red was "esteemed above others by early Russian icon painters. It is significant that later the word krasny (red) came to mean both the colour red and beautiful" (Alpatov 94). Indeed, beauty was an ethical consideration for the Orthodox patriarchs:

Before the church split between Latin and Greek, the supreme aim of such art -- its ideal ultimate Beauty -- was defined by St. Augustine as spendor veritatis. "Splendor" here should be translated as the "shining forth" of truth. Thus the very substance of the icon is light: pure luminosity -- the most immaterial intimation or emanation of God (Russian & Greek Icons 9)

In this context, Alpatov notes, "the representational character of colour was always mitigated by a striving after pure colour," in consideration of the "moral or spiritual significance" of color (Alpatov 95).

The icon corner of the Russian peasant hut is named the "red" or "beautiful" corner. It is considered the spiritual center of the Orthodox family, and the place at the table beneath it is a place of honor. The believer thus engages with the icon on a daily level, often carrying smaller icons on the person for protection and personal contemplation.
Because an icon functions in a broader context than as another work of the visual arts, the "art of icon painting," says Benz, "cannot be separated from the ecclesiastical and liturgical functions of the icons" (Benz 5). It is within the Orthodox liturgy that the icon attains its fullest meaning.

The Orthodox Liturgy

The aim of the Orthodox liturgy is spiritual transformation. It is a process of esoteric initiation, "a quest, through the science of self-knowledge and the application of precise psychological techniques, for steps in the ascending path of personal evolution" (Temple, 19), which culminates in the transformation that occurs with the celebration of communion. Benz identifies the Orthodox liturgy, especially the administering of the Eucharist, with the Greek mystery plays that set up a drama to invite the initiated to partake of a divine mystery (Benz 34). "The whole ritual is a mystery drama," he observes, "reenacting the entire history of redemption, the incarnation, death and resurrection of the Logos and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit" (Benz 36).

Icons aid in this process by becoming a focus for meditative contemplation of the divine. They function primarily as the visual moment in a liturgy that engages all of the senses. Icons in the Orthodox church are found primarily on the iconostasis, a wall that separates the
FIGURE 2.3: Iconostasis
congregation from the sanctuary and acts as a kind of border between the divine and the earthly realms, with the icons providing access from one to the other. The iconostasis is a focus for the congregation during the liturgy, a contact point for worship. "The interplay between the immaterial and the sensory worlds is denoted by the sanctuary and the nave" (Michelson 122) and brought into focus at the Royal Doors, where Christ's life intersects with human life.

As each believer enters the church, he or she moves to the front and kisses the icon for that particular feast day, which is brought down to be put on display for this purpose; thus touch is engaged in an intimate way. As the liturgy begins, the priest waves incense over the entire church and all the icons, so that the sense of smell also contributes to the experience. Taste is involved with the bread dipped in wine in communion, and the sound of singing fills the air, for the liturgy is a text that is sung.

Two main liturgies have been accepted by the Orthodox Church. The longer one, written by St. Basil the Blessed, is more poetic and is sung during the Lenten season. Beauty was also an ethical consideration for St. John Chrysostom, a native of Antioch (b. 344/54), but his liturgy is the shorter, "functional" version in the Orthodox church. St. John described a stepladder movement to God that builds upon both "Jacob's ladder" and the Scala Paradisi discussed by John Climaxus. Genesis 28: 10-17 describes a vision that appeared
FIGURE 2.4: The Vision of the Ladder of St. John Climacus
to Jacob in a dream, a ladder on which angels ascended and
descended, and above which God stood. St. John Climaxus, an
abbot of a monastery on Mount Sinai in the seventh century,
presented "a guide to monastic life which is seen as a steady
but difficult climb to salvation" (Bird 27). Dionysios the
Areopagite also discussed the so-called Scala Paradisi in his
Celebral Hierarchy, drawing from the Gnostic tradition of the
stages to the divine through which the believer must pass. It
was because of the distance between human beings and God in
the hierarchy that the many veils, of which icons were an
example, were needed to screen the divine light from burning
the earthly consciousness. Dionysios, the so-called pseudo-
Dionysios, also explicated the "division of angels into ranks
already found in the Epistles of Saint Paul -- who names
thrones, kingdoms, principalities, forces and powers"
(Eckhardt 11). This strict hierarchy is enacted in the
Orthodox liturgy, structured after the Scala Paradisi with
movement from the heavens to the earth and back again. The
overall arrangement includes:

The Blessing
"Ektenia of Peace"--The Great Synapse (litany) by the
priest with Kyrie eleison ("Lord have mercy") choir responses

The three stanzas of the Antiphons (hymns), for which
there is a Sunday and a daily version, interspersed with
troparies:

Antiphon 1 -- Psalm 102 (103)
Small Ektenia
Antiphon 2 -- Psalm 145 (146)
Small Ektenia
Antiphon 3 -- the Beatitudes (Matthew V, 3-12)
The Small Entry (Introit) with the gospel; troparies:
apolytikion and kondakion

65
The Trisagion (acclamations taken from Isaiah 6,3: Lord most holy, Lord most powerful, Immortal Lord, have mercy upon us)

The Prokeimenon (verse put before the psalm for which it serves as a response and preceding the epistle) and reading of the Epistle, Alleluias interspersed with verses from the psalms and readings from the gospel, including the Ektenia of the Catachumens ( unbaptized)

Cherubikon, or the Hymn of the Cherubims, the Great Entry (through the Royal doors), during which the transfer takes place of the Holy Gifts of the Prothesis (the place of preparation of the gifts) to the altar

The Litany of the Offeratory, the Kiss of Peace and the Symbol of Faith

The Anaphora (Eucharistic Prayer) with Sanctus and the prayer of Thanksgiving: "we praise thee..."

The Lord's Prayer

The Kinonikon (communion chant)

The Dismissal Hymns

The Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom thus involves an ascent toward revelation that culminates in holy communion; this is the process that occurs when a believer takes part in the liturgy, or contemplates an icon, and "scales the divine ladder" to achieve communion with God.

The liturgy begins with blessing and praise to the Trinity: "Blessed be the Kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, now and for ever and unto ages of ages." In "Textual Liturgies: Russian Orthodoxy and Recent Literary Criticism," Anthony Ugolnik notes that, for the Orthodox Church, "the 'plural persona' of liturgy...is extremely important...The emphasis upon Trinity is continual and strong. Liturgy in Russian Orthodoxy is active and dialogic; it doesn't have an audience, but only actors" (Ugolnik 138). The entire liturgy is a dialogue between God and creation, enacted by the community of worshipers. Such a
conviction is by no means unique to Orthodoxy; Lossky notes that it "was Israel who first understood and -- much more -- lived life as a dialogue between man and God" (Lossky 1985 129). The uniqueness of the familiar relationship between God and the supplicant in Judeo-Christian thought has been elaborated by such theologians as Martin Buber1; because of its Judeo-Christian nature, the Orthodox liturgy is not meant to be merely a weekly ritual, rather, it is an extension of a life lived in intimate dialogue with God.

The dialogue of Orthodoxy involves not only the relationship of the human being to God, but to the church patriarchs and fellow believers as well. Ugolnik comments on this "liturgical consciousness" (Ugolnik 136) of Orthodoxy; he draws here from the Russian scholar Mikhail Bakhtin's "emphasis upon...dialogue...as a vehicle for meaning" (Ugolnik 140). In enacting the liturgy, the congregation engages also with St. Basil, St. John, and the other two main church fathers, St. Gregory the Theologian and St. Gregory of Nyssa. Last Judgment icons illustrate the significance of the heavenly congregation in Orthodoxy. The Scala Paradisi is dramatized by the ascent of the saved and the descent of the damned, and the universal congregation takes part.

1In "Ich und Du" ("I and Thou"), Buber discusses the peculiarity of a people who address their supreme deity in the informal second person.
FIGURE 2.5: The Last Judgement
The "Ektenia" that follows the blessing begins with the heavenly kingdom, then moves to the world, to the church, to the church administrators, governmental authorities, and on down the "ladder." It is called the "Great Synapse:"

For peace from on high, and for the salvation of our souls, let us pray to the Lord.
For peace of the whole world, for welfare of all the holy Churches of God and for the union of all, let us pray to the Lord.
For this holy temple and for those who enter it, with faith, piety and fear of God, let us pray to the Lord.
For His Holiness, the Universal Supreme Pontiff (N), the Pope of Rome, let us pray to the Lord.
For our most reverend Archbishop and Metropolitan (N), for our God-loving Bishop (N), for the venerable Priesthood, the Deaconate in Christ, for all the clergy and laity, let us pray to the Lord.
For our God-protected Emperor (N), or: King (N), or: our sovereign authorities, and for all armed forces, let us pray to the Lord.
For this city (village or holy monastery), and for every city, village and country, and for the faithful that dwell within them, let us pray to the Lord.
For good weather, for the abundance of the fruits of earth and for peaceful times, let us pray to the Lord.
For those who navigate or travel by land, for the sick, the suffering, the imprisoned, and for their salvation let us pray to the Lord...

Once the ladder of being has been scaled to bring the divine attention down to the earthly realm, the Virgin is invoked as an intercessor for the human being. Mary is always to be remembered before each stage of the liturgy, for she plays a central role in supplication. The congregation then makes its first pledge, followed by a repetition of the Trinity:

Having commemorated the most holy, most pure, most blessed and most glorious Lady, the Mother of God and every-Virgin Mary, with all the Saints, let us commend ourselves, each other and our entire life, to Christ our God.

C: To Thee, O Lord.
For to Thee is due all glory, honour and adoration, to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost, now and ever and unto ages of ages.
C: Amen.

Three hymns are then sung, interspersed with repetitions of the Mary supplication and pledge. At the end of the third hymn, the priest presents the book of Gospels to the faithful, with the words: "Wisdom! Let us arise!"

The dialogue continues as the choir and the priest alternate praise, after which the priest commands: "Wisdom! Let us attend." Then the Epistle is read, and the priest repeats exhortations to "attend" and listen to the gospel. This is indicative of the Orthodox insistence on the involvement of the individual with the "Word" and image of God.

The community of heaven is then invoked in the persons of the choir, who proclaim:
Let us, who mystically represent the Cherubim, and offer the thrice-holy hymn to the life-giving Trinity, now put aside every earthly care.

This is the fulcrum upon which the liturgy pivots; until now, most references in the worship service have been to earthly concerns, but with the invocation of the angels, who live closest to the mystery and can facilitate understanding of it, the worshipper becomes a co-participant in the heavenly sphere. Accordingly, this is the moment when the priest makes the Great Entry with the bread and wine through the Royal Doors of the iconostasis, marking the entry of the divine realm into the earthly. Like the icons with which they
are covered, the Royal Doors permit two-way access between the heavenly and earthly realms; once they are opened, the divine mystery can be revealed through transsubstantiation of the elements and communion of the congregation, or reception of the mystery through revelation. Accordingly, just before the Eucharist begins, the priest proclaims: "The door! The door! In wisdom let us attend!"

The goal of the Orthodox liturgy is for the individual to ascend the ladder to God, to take part in the transfiguration of Christ and attain the divine light. Baggley notes that "the essence of the Orthodox tradition was to make visible that which could not be perceived by the ordinary senses, and create a way into the realm of transfigured humanity" (Baggley 77). The individual is transformed through involvement in the community of faith and dialogue with God.

The focus of the liturgy occurs with the transformation of the elements into the body and blood of Christ. "The transformation of the elements themselves is not the central issue for the Orthodox believer" (Benz 36), rather it is the significance, by extension, for the incarnation of Christ, and his transfiguration. The moment of the transubstantiation is one of meeting between heaven and earth, reunion between God and the human being. "What is more," notes Benz, "in the Eucharist there takes place the meeting of the entire congregation of heaven with the earthly congregation" (Benz 8). The congregation welcomes Christ in their midst, they
"encounter...the living, resurrected Lord" (Benz 38) in this mystery play. Through partaking of the Eucharist, the congregation directly experiences both the incarnation of Christ and the second coming, the birth and the rebirth through death.

The two most important aspects of Christ's life, the incarnation and crucifixion (with emphasis on the subsequent resurrection), are inseparable in Orthodox thought; likewise, the "correct" Orthodox response to an icon or the Orthodox liturgy is a combined moment of sorrow and joy. The dialogic of simultaneous opposites is also presented visually, in icons. For example, on the reverse of processional icons, one often finds another, complementary iconography, such as the instruments of passion on the reverse of a nativity icon. Consequently, each icon is a microcosm of the liturgy and the church, a visual moment in the mystery.

In the liturgy, the words are put into action by the people; the incarnation of the word signified by the icon demands performance by the people beyond the liturgy. The final element, as in worship services in the west, involves a charge, a benediction that requires something from the participant beyond the circle in which the worship takes place. Right after communion, that is, after the incarnation and transformation have been celebrated, the following occurs:
We have seen the true Light, and have received the heavenly Spirit; we have found the true Faith; and we adore the undivided Holy Trinity, for That has saved us.

(Turning towards the people the priest sings):
Always, now and ever and unto ages of ages.
C: Amen.
(Stand).
C: Let our mouths be filled with Thy praise, O Lord, that we may sing Thy glory, for Thou has deigned to make us partakers of Thy holy, divine, immortal and life-giving mysteries; preserve us in Thy holiness, that we may learn Thy righteousness every day. Alleluia.
Arise, having received the divine, most holy, immortal, heavenly and life-giving, the awesome mysteries of Christ, let us give thanks to the Lord.
C: Lord, have mercy.
Help, save, have mercy and protect us, O God by Thy grace.
Having prayed that this entire day be perfect, holy, peaceful and sinless, let us commend ourselves, and each other and our entire life, to Christ, our God. 
(Chrysostom 103-104)

The Orthodox service, the ceremony which has engaged all the senses and all the art forms (music, architecture, painting, literature, drama), subsequently insists that the faithful devote their entire lives to God. The congregation says, both at the beginning and the end of the service, "let us commend our entire life." Orthodoxy requires constant commitment from its believers, and each day in the Orthodox year commemorates a specific personage or event within Orthodoxy to which the daily life should be dedicated.

The Orthodox liturgical calendar is divided into three cycles: the Life of the Virgin, the Infancy of Christ, and the Ministry of Christ. Mary is often a symbol of the Church, with Christ serving as High Priest. Consequently, icons of Christ and of Mary are especially prevalent in Orthodoxy, for the "Saviour and the Mother of God are both seen as mediators
between heaven and earth and thus occupy a central position in the iconostasis" (Michelson 122).

Icons of Mary

The conception of Mary in the Orthodox Church differs somewhat from the so-called "Mary cult" of Roman Catholicism. She is given the title "Theotokos," the Mother of God, as well as many other appellations that designate her intimate relationship to Christ and to human beings, and her particular role as intercessor. Mary icons appear in the deesis, the image of Christ flanked by Mary and John the Baptist that appears above the Royal Doors of the iconostasis. She also appears in icons of feast days of the Life of the Virgin, including such events as the Birth of Mary, the Annunciation, and the Death and Assumption of Mary.

There are many other icon "types" of Mary that have evolved through the course of the Orthodox history. The oldest icon of Russia, "Our Lady of Vladimir" is of the umilenie, "tenderness" or "lovingkindness" Mary type. It was brought to Kiev from Constantinople, then to Vladimir in 1155, and finally to Moscow in the fourteenth century; it conveys a degree of human emotion that was not often present in Byzantine icons: "The type, Lovingkindness, whilst rare in Byzantium, was to become extremely widespread on Russian soil, becoming one of the principal themes of Russian icon-painting, whose tendency towards expressing human feelings purified by
Divine Light seems to find its personification in the image of Lovingkindness" (Ouspensky & Lossky 92).
The religious significance of umilenie involves the Mother's embrace of the son. This recalls his redemptive sacrifice and future death on the cross. It is an image both of passion and compassion, one that contains the whole history of salvation from the birth to the death of Christ.

The intimacy present between Mary and Christ in the umilenie icon is not evident in the hodigitria ("she who shows the way") type, in which "the right hand of the Hodigitria, raised towards the chest...is a gesture of presentation: the Theotokos shows to men the Son of God" (Ouspensky & Lossky 81).

FIGURE 2.7: Hodigitria
Nor is it manifest in the znamenie, the Virgin of the Sign, or the Virgin Orans.

FIGURE 2.8: Apparition (Znamenie icon)
The sign of the orans is Mary's gesture of prayer and adoration, with her arms raised; "Christ is represented in a mandorla in front of the bosom of His Mother. Suspended mysteriously, He seems to escape the very laws of earth's gravity" (Quenot 122). Mary's gesture is also one of protection, and the znamenie type is often credited with protecting armies in battle, for example. The Great Panagia is an extended version of the znamenie icon, in which Mary is shown full length, usually standing on a carpet.

FIGURE 2.9: Great Panagia
In this full Mary Orant, which reproduces the liturgical gesture of the priest at the moment of consecration of the elements, a symbol of the church and liturgy as a whole is also present, in which the virgin is the Church and Christ serves within her as high priest.

Orthodoxy also relates Mary to the Scala Paradisi via Jacob’s vision of the ladder. The text of Jacob’s ladder is read at the Great Vespers of the Birth of the Virgin (Sept. 8), the Annunciation (Mar. 25), and the Dormition (Aug. 15)...
The struggle with the angel...can be justified in this context on genealogical grounds, for the renaming of Jacob as Israel signified that he was the preordained progenitor of God’s chosen people, so that through Mary, his descendant, the messianic expectations of the children of Israel would finally be fulfilled (Underwood 224-25).

Jacob’s vision of the ladder is thus linked with his other dream, that of wrestling with the angel. Indeed, the divine ladder cannot be contemplated without mention of the angels that stand upon it in the hierarchy:


Mary and the angels are connected through the image of the ladder, but also in their shared roles as intercessors between heaven and earth.

Icons of Angels

In the “Cherubikon” of the Orthodox liturgy, the congregation sings: "Let us, who mystically represent the Cherubim, and offer the thrice-holy hymn to the life-giving
Trinity, now put aside every earthly care." The Old Church Slavonic word translated as "represent" is obrazuyoshe, or "give image to;" the process of image-making that occurs is an invocation of the angels, a call to make the mystery "visible" to the spirit. Invoking the angels, who are closest to the mystery, facilitates our understanding of it. In the drama that is the liturgy, the actors give voice to God; in this way, the congregation gives voice to angels, just as icons give a kind of "living voice" to an event or person.

While icons of the saints, and even of Christ and of Mary, can be said to impart the essence of a historical individual, theological justification for creating icons of angels, ahistorical personages, is not so easy to find. Nikephoros, a church patriarch, meditates upon the Orthodox view of angels, and his "discussion of angels ultimately is directed to the justification of pictorially representing the spiritual world. The claim to be proved is that angels, by nature incorporeal and spiritual, can be represented in art" (Travis 33). Eastern Orthodoxy holds that angels are beings of light. Orthodox angels live closer than mortals to the sun that is God, and they are both burned by its fire and reflect the brilliance of God's revelation to the human world:

Living in the Glory of the "Triune Sun," the angelic spirits are deified creatures, vehicles of the uncreated glory: "God-fearing embers, enflamed by the fire of the divine nature." "Secondary lights," they spread through the universe "the fire of the inaccessible Divinity, ceaselessly chanting with lips of flame the hymn of the Trinity: Holy, Holy, Holy our God" (Lossky & Ouspensky 108).
Angels in Orthodoxy differ greatly from the angels of the western church:

Child angels are unknown to Eastern art. The little angels of the late Gothic period who wear robes with long trains are absent, as are the naked putti, or the children's heads with wings so typical of the Baroque. Angels of the Eastern church are never "sweet" or "cute" but have great dignity (Eckhardt 11-12).

Because of the communal nature of Orthodoxy, angels in the eastern church are not the personal guardian angels of the west, but guardians of the community of believers. They are awe-inspiring, for, living so close to the divine light and fire, they burn with its glory so that they are terrifying to human eyes. "The facial expressions and body pose tended toward the dignified or even the stern (Webb 241)," emphasizing the distance between their existence and that of human beings:

The cosmos of celestial power, which the Father created by the Word and sanctified in the Holy Spirit is higher by its nature than the terrestrial world. The appearance of angels is intolerable for the human being (Dan. viii, 17-18; x, 5-17). The liturgical texts call them "redoubtable, terrifying" (Lossky & Ouspensky 108).

Angels are of great significance in the Old Testament, and it is from here that Orthodoxy draws most of its information on angels. They basically serve two (related) functions in Orthodox thought: that of Messenger of the Word, and Praise-Giver through liturgical song. "The angels are known to us above all by the ministry which they exercise vis-à-vis the terrestrial world, ministry in which they appear as ministering spirits...Hence the name angelos, 'messenger,'
sent to announce or accomplish the will of God" (Lossky & Ouspensky 108) and the arrival of the ruler of the world. "The mystery of ...[the] ministry [of the angels] is illustrated when the angels 'sing unceasingly and resoundingly concerning the divine goodness'" (Travis 31). They participate in the Orthodox liturgy through their singing; together with the function of messengers of "the word," icons of angels combine aural and visual moments, word and image in one. In this way, angel icons are another reflection of the incarnation of the word. Ultimately, the justification for producing icons of angels lies in the belief that angels "are able to assume a corporeal form visible to the human senses. It is this corporeal form that can be pictorially represented" (Travis 35).

The existence of angels in Orthodoxy points to a strict hierarchy; angels are closer to God than the human being, and in constant communion with God's divine light: "These angelic powers are in constant service to the Triune God and are the first to be 'in communion' (en metousia)' with his glory. They are 'forever filled by the divine and most beautiful light [of God]" (Travis 31). There is also a hierarchy within the orders of angels, based on "each order's approximate relation to God as defined in the way through which each becomes a communicant of the divine wisdom and beneficence" (Travis 33); higher orders are closer to God and rendered as less human. The seraphim, at the top of the hierarchy, have
six wings and a face, but no human form; they are most often red, sometimes black, for they have been "burned" more by the divine light. The cherubim are similar to the seraphim, except they have only four wings. Both cherubim and seraphim are often portrayed with the wings covering their many eyes in a sign of humility.

The archangels are closer to the human level, and they are portrayed as having human shapes. Their closeness to humanity (like Christ's incarnation) makes them most likely to be portrayed in threes, reflecting the triune concept of God, and they are most often blue, the color of the heavens from the human perspective. Color symbolism in icons is particularly related to angels, for "certain liturgical colors of the earthly Church are related to the colors of corresponding choirs of angels in the celestial hierarchy, and each of the colors is given specific spiritual and moral significances on the basis of its celestial archetype" (Benz 17)

Because of the angelic function of singing in the liturgy, "icons of angels as participants in the singing have their fixed liturgical place in the sanctuary as well as on the iconostasis" (Benz 16). The Tchin, or "order" (that is, monastic order, those who devote their lives to the church) level of the iconostasis, directly above the royal doors, is reserved for icons of saints and angels. These are the only
FIGURE 2.10: NEW TESTAMENT TRINITY
portraits of angels as historical figures, and include primarily the archangels Michael and Gabriel.

Above the Tchin level of the iconostasis are the icons of the liturgical feast days. Angels are prevalent in this level, portrayed as witnesses to or participants in events in the life of Mary or Christ, such as the annunciation, the nativity, Christ’s baptism, and the crucifixion. For one feast day only are angels a central element in an icon, however, namely the Old Testament Trinity icon, an icon of Pentecost. In the New Testament Trinity, the Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost are portrayed, with the Holy Spirit pictured as a dove, for it cannot be imaged or circumscribed. The angels are the closest to the divine light of the trinity, and in the Old Testament Trinity, they embody the three persons of the Triune God:

The theologians of the early Church searched the Old Testament for references to the Trinity. They settled on a passage that, but for their exegeses, would scarcely seem to have this hidden meaning, at least to the modern mind. The passage deals with the visit of the three angels to Abraham in the grove of Mamre (Gen. 18:9 ff.). The theologians of the early Church took this visit to signify a manifestation of the Trinity (Benz 13).

In this way, the Orthodox tradition emphasizes that the New Testament is continually fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies. The most famous and the most emulated rendering of the Old Testament Trinity was painted by Andrei Rublyov (also written "Rublëv") in the early fifteenth century.
FIGURE 2.11: RUBLYOV'S OLD TESTAMENT TRINITY
Andrei Rublyov was a monk at the Spaso-Andronikov monastery in Moscow. His style of icon painting signaled a break with the Byzantine style, and is often hailed as the "pivot on which Byzantine art turned into Russian" (Tarkovsky, xi). Both Byzantine and Russian icon painters sought to bring the viewer to a kind of spiritual awareness, to pull the believer past the image being portrayed to a higher, divine realm. While the philosophy is similar, there are nevertheless noticeable stylistic differences. Byzantine icons rendered the image statically, impersonally, and two-dimensionally in order to convey the timelessness and "placelessness" of the spiritual realm, but the Russian icon after Rublyov was more grounded and personal, and included more extraneous detail and decoration than its Byzantine predecessor. In *The Russian Icon*, Nikodim Kondakov explains the importance of Rublyov in the history of Russian icon painting:

Rublev was an artist, a creator, in the full sense of the words: he did not merely hand on the severe design of the Byzantines but added to it his own very characteristic touch, and, most of all, created new religious types with a new expression in them which meant informing religious art with a new spiritual significance...He was no mere craftsman but a true artist and his special style brought life back to the Byzantine type, face, hands and body, drapery and general composition, drawing as well as colouring (Kondakov, 85).

Rublyov's *Old Testament Trinity* displays the finest example of his skill as an icon painter. "The Russian icon [of the Trinity] speaks exclusively in the rarefied language of mystical knowledge. The design emphasizes the perfect
accord of the three men who, since the tenth century, are shown in their divine aspect, that is, as angels. The stillness of their eternal contemplation conveys to us an activity that is taking place outside time and not in sense-perceived, three-dimensional space" (Temple 31). Its elegant simplicity extends to the table, from which all extraneous objects have been cleared; only the communal chalice of spiritual and emotional nourishment remains. The angels, with the intense blue and golden-green of their robes, provide color to the otherwise earthy tone of Rublyov’s Trinity, much as the spiritual world, according to Orthodox belief, infuses the physical world with its color, movement, and life. Rublyov was of the Novgorodian icon painting tradition, which used very bright colors. The fiery red in the middle indicates the dynamic word made flesh, the son; it also relates to the shedding of blood and the wine of communion. The two extended fingers are an indication of Christ’s dual nature, God and man; the blue of his sash is a reflection of the spiritual blue of the robe of the angel to the right, who holds out only one finger, just as the son is the reflection of the father. The angel to the left exhibits the most muted colors but the most energetic lines, representing the quietude and energy of the Holy Spirit. The ethereal quality of this angel is very different from the others; it is emphasized by the translucence of its colors, the divine light that radiates through the icon, as God radiates through angels.
Fluidity and grace are present in the lines of the robes and the delineation of the bodies, and each angel is unique in its dress, positioning, and facial expression. In this uniqueness they are not the universal "types" of Byzantine figures, but individuals united in a higher purpose. The overall composition of Rublyov's icon is one of serenity, to be sure, but it is less the strange, otherworldly quietude of the Byzantine icons than a peaceful harmony evident in loving human relations. The faces of the angels provide the strong human element; they transmit differing degrees of serenity and sadness, and, while each face is an individual, all shine with the "divine light." There is an inexplicable quality present in their golden wings and the circles of light surrounding their heads. While the angels rest their feet on this earth, their halos draw light not from the physical sun but from God's; they thus appear to the (human) viewer to be both accessible and inaccessible, beautiful and terrifying.

Icons and Modernism

The dual nature of Christ is reflected in the corporeal form that angels take on; because of the angelic function of singing praise during liturgy, icons of angels combine the written word, the sung word, and the word incarnate, that is, the painted word. Pelikan recognizes this unification of media in his use of the term "The Melody of Theology" (Pelikan 133). The liturgy not only combines music and words, it
engages all of the senses: smell (incense), sound (singing), sight (icons), taste (bread immersed in wine), touch (kissing icon), and total body involvement (stand up / sit down). Each icon represents not only the visual aspect of the liturgy, but the totality of the experience. Alpatov claims that icon painters created "true symphonies of colour" (Alpatov 93); the use of a musical term to describe painting is familiar to any student of Kandinsky, for it is indicative of an aesthetic mindset that prevailed at the turn of the twentieth century, that of synesthesia, or an interconnection of the senses. While synesthesia in the west was a reaction to traditional divisions of artistic disciplines, in the east it was in harmony with the traditions of Orthodoxy.

Western and eastern Europe evolved more or less independently of one another for a long period of time. Differing tribal heritages and geographic characteristics initially permitted little cultural exchange; the rift between eastern and western Christianity further deepened the cultural crevasse. From its beginnings, Christianity in Russia was more of an aesthetic than a philosophical endeavor:

The early Russians were drawn to Christianity by the aesthetic appeal of its liturgy, not the rational shape of its theology. Accepting unquestioningly the Orthodox definition of truth, they viewed all forms of expression as equally valid means of communicating and glorifying the faith. Words, sounds, and pictures were all subordinate and interrelated parts of a common religious culture. In Russia - as distinct from the Mediterranean and Western worlds - "Church art was not added to religion from without, but was an emanation from within" (Billington 9).
Because they were seen as a direct emanation of God, icons were not traditionally viewed as "art" by Orthodox believers. "The notion of taste may be applicable to the artistic value of the image, but not to its value as a liturgical image...The Church did not fight for the artistic quality of its art, but for its authenticity, not for its beauty, but for its truth" (Ouspensky 17). Viewing icons as works of art independent from their liturgical significance began in the first half of the eighteenth century.

In the late nineteenth century, the nationalist impulses of Russian art movements facilitated the placement of many icons in the Tretyakov Gallery. It was at this point that many modernist Russian artist began consolidating their Orthodox tradition with the experiments occurring in the west. In a way, these artists' own cultural traditions called to them parallel to the concepts and techniques of western artists, for they already had a cultural model upon which to build. Modernist Russian artists engaged in radical experimentation with color and form that, on the one hand, involved the principles of synesthesia and, on the other, related to the emanation of the divine light of icons that shines through their colors.
Like a flash of black lightning, a line splits a blue sky diagonally in two. The line gradually curves downward and to the left into a rosy ball that swirls amidst green clouds. Its roundness is balanced at the upper right by a rainbow of concentric circles; this white light fractured into red, orange, and green is, in turn, reflected in the fracturing of the center of the black line into prismatic rectangles of red and orange.

Vasilii Kandinsky's *Light* of 1930 depicts a phenomenon that strikes from the heavens and breaks up into color, a phenomenon that is both straight and curved, both particle and wave, both white light and the spectrum of color. Incongruously, a grey rectangle with seven orange bars floats in the upper left of the painting, seemingly out of place among the blues and greens of the sky. This series of bars grounds Kandinsky's artistic play of light and color in the realm of science. The seven bars recall the seven colors of Newton's spectrum, and the rectangle with its vertical divisions suggests a picture recorded by some scientific
instrument directed at a distant star to determine its color shift.

Scientifically speaking, cone cells in the human eye perceive and interpret various wavelengths of light as the different colors of the spectrum, with light itself but a narrow, visible band in the broader spectrum of largely invisible electromagnetic waves. Modern physics, and its explanations of light and color are to a large extent the result of ideas developed by the most revolutionary theorist of our century. When Albert Einstein introduced his Theory of Relativity in 1905, Newtonian physics was overturned, and physicists' eyes were opened to a universe of atomic particles and electromagnetic waves. At the same time, as psychologists were exploring the subjectivity of human perception, and as Rudolph Steiner's Theosophy emphasized the spiritual world over the material, colors were found to exist not empirically in nature, but only in their perception by the human eye.

The concentration of intellectual energy on the nature of light and perception at the turn of the twentieth century coincided with a series of artistic experiments with color and line, as a reaction to nineteenth-century materialism permeated artistic circles in Europe. Just as Matisse and the Fauves "were singing the praises of light in the form of color...Einstein was enthroning light as the quintessence of the universe" (Shlaim 170). The emphasis on subjectivity and the relativity of perception in the sciences ultimately led to
the development of abstraction in art; this development occurred separately in eastern Europe and in the west.

The move to abstraction in the Russian art world occurred initially through the works of Vasilii Kandinsky, and it was furthered primarily through the Suprematist efforts of Kazimir Malevich, who claimed to "discover" abstract art simultaneously to but independently from its development in western European circles. Although the Russian avant-garde initially looked to Paris, a strong argument can be made for the development of abstraction in Russia along distinctly different lines from western European movements. The approach of Russian modernist artists was philosophically distinct from the programs set forth by the western European artists who allegedly served as their inspiration; for them, art was "a form of mystical experience, a means through which eternal beauty could be expressed and communicated -- almost a new kind of religion" (Gray 48). The development of abstract art in Russia relates to the cultural function of icons and their place in Eastern Orthodox liturgy; both Vasilii Kandinsky and Kazimir Malevich arose from this culture that included a "passion for seeing spiritual truth in concrete forms" (Billington 6). The abstraction developed by Kandinsky and Malevich was no mere play of color and line, but contained "specifically spiritual and ultimately ethical values" (Hamilton 239). Camilla Gray notes that "although in life these artists made no contact, in ideas they have much in
common and are both fundamentally related to the symbolist movement" (Gray 143).

The Russian Symbolists

Symbolism as such, with its roots stretching back to the writings of Baudelaire, arose originally in France, a nexus of avant-garde art at the turn of the twentieth century. Not all French movements appealed to the Russian modernists, however; John Bowlt notes that "the profound spirituality of Russian art" (Bowlt "The Blue Rose" 566) could connect more easily with the program of Symbolism than with that of Impressionism, which scarcely existed in fin-de-siècle Russia (Bowlt "The Blue Rose" 566). Bowlt contends that "the whole problem of symbolist art and its influence on the development of Russian abstract painting, particularly on the formation of synthetic / subjective abstraction (Kandinsky, Kazimir Malevich) as opposed to analytical / objective abstraction (El Lissitzky, Vladimir Tatlin) is one that deserves serious study" (Bowlt Russian Art xxvi).

As Europe at the turn of the century quivered with the rush of artistic experimentation, the Russian avant-garde movement began with the revolutionary Mir iskusstva ("World of Art") group, led by Alexandre Benois and Sergei Diaghilev. Mir iskusstva was so termed partly because of its concern for artistic synthesis in making use of opera and theater, and partly due to its international aspect and concern for
cultural integration (Bowlt Life of Kandinsky 5). Between 1898 and 1904, the group published a journal of the same name and sponsored exhibitions of works by their contemporaries in western Europe.

Like western European artists, the Russian avant-garde soon began to use line "for its own expressive qualities" (Bowlt Life of Kandinsky 4) and tended toward abstraction and decoration, but it would be inaccurate to classify Mir iskusstva as a unified group dedicated purely to l'art pour l'art ideals:

...together with its advocacy of the Symbolist heroes, Ibsen, Nietzsche, and the Russian poet and philosopher Vladimir Soloviev, the World of Art tolerated, sometimes propagated names such as Dostoevsky, Ruskin, Tolstoi and even the Realist Ilia Repin. In this way, the World of Art acted as a junction of interests, rather than as the champion of a single trend (Bowlt Life of Kandinsky 5).

Gradually, the differing interests of the members of Mir iskusstva began to lead them in different directions, and after 1900 Mir iskusstva had divided into the St. Petersburg school of line and the Moscow school of color. Due in part to the decorative and erudite aesthetics of Schukin and the Mir iskusstva members, a second generation of Russian Symbolist painters arose "in contradistinction to the first, i.e. the World of Art, whose members...tended to regard art only as an aesthetic experience" (Bowlt "The Blue Rose" 569). This new Russian avant-garde continued the bold experiments in color begun by Monet and Van Gogh and developed further by Cézanne and Matisse, color experimentation that liberated color from
the bounds of form and set it loose in a way that Goethe would have applauded. In this way, reverberations of Goethe's *Farbenlehre* were felt as far afield as Russia, where *die blaue Blume* of the German Romantics gave way to Golubaya Roza, or the "Blue Rose," of the Russian Symbolists.

Golubaya Roza consisted of sixteen artists who "came together as a distinct entity after the 'Union of Russian Artists' exhibition of December, 1906" (Gray 72) in Moscow, and "existed as a titled group only for a few months after its single exhibition in Moscow in March - April, 1907" (Bowlt *Life of Kandinsky* 12). Concurrent with the Spanish painter Picasso's blue period and the Belgian poet Maeterlinck's *Bluebird*, these avant-garde artists utilized the color blue in their paintings to express the "essence" of external objects, as "the description of the ulterior world, of the higher, spiritual reality" (Bowlt "The Blue Rose" 571). Although they never articulated a specific program, "we assume that their theoretical aim was...to record and...incite subjective, psychological experience, implemented by replacing analytical observation by individualistic interpretation" (Bowlt *Life of Kandinsky* 13).

Although their successors in the Russian avant-garde opposed western European culture and aesthetics, an affinity

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1John Bowlt acknowledges a possible connection between Golubaya Roza and *Die blaue Blume* of Heinrich von Ofterdingen (Bowlt *Russian Art* 571).
existed between the Russian Symbolists and western European art. Yet, even the Symbolists in Russia were affected by the mysticism of Eastern Orthodoxy, and they emphasized not only the psychological but the spiritual qualities of color. The prominence of the spiritual nature of color for the Russian symbolists realized its culmination in the works of Vasilii Vasilievich Kandinsky.

Vasilii Kandinsky

Inspired by the enthusiasm of Mir iskusstva for modernist European art, Vasilii Kandinsky left his position as a law lecturer at Moscow University in 1896 to study painting in Munich. Born in Moscow in 1866, he was "of an older generation...and of a very different artistic sensibility" than other members of the Russian avant-garde (Bowlt Life of Kandinsky 1), but he maintained constant connection with his homeland by contributing to the journal Mir iskusstva, where a review of the 1902 Munich Secession was also published. Together with Franz Marc in Munich, Vasilii Kandinsky formed the Neue Künstlervereinigung, a group that later developed into Der blaue Reiter, one of the two main groups within German Expressionism.

Kandinsky's hope for spiritual transformation in the modern world ultimately stemmed from his Russian Orthodox upbringing; his paintings were to have the impact of an icon within the liturgical setting. Kandinsky drew from his
religious background to claim that the new artists would be "true prophets and priests" (Bowlt Life of Kandinsky 3). He "compared himself to the early Christians...and frequently referred to his love for the Russian church" (Bowlt Life of Kandinsky 45). Much of his philosophical writing is couched in biblical language; he sees the artist, for example, as called by the holy Word: "Es ist natürlich, dass in den Fragen der Kunst als erster der Künstler selbst auch zum Wort berufen ist (Kandinsky & Marc 314)."

The Orthodox word is equivalent to the Orthodox image as a manifestation of divine essence; consequently, Kandinsky did not restrict himself to painting, but extended his aesthetic world to include music, drama, and poetry, as in the Orthodox liturgy. In fact, Kandinsky called his first collection of woodcuts in 1904 "poems without words." His play Der Gelbe Klang, which appeared in the first publication of the journal Der Blaue Reiter, illustrates his view of interrelation of the arts based not on surface, outer characteristics, but on a deeper spiritual unity of all things. With its lack of narrative and its emphasis on the stage scene, the play is an early example of performance art. Colors on stage interact with music, so that the viewer intuitively draws parallels between the two.

Kandinsky's poetry also reflects his interest in combining art forms, and he highlights the visual. Color
words, especially, predominate, and they are associated with phycial movements:

SEHEN

Blaues, Blaues hob sich, hob sich und fiel...
Dickbraunes blieb hängen scheinbar auf alle Ewigkeiten.
Scheinbar. Scheinbar.
Breiter sollst du deine Arme ausbreiten.
Breiter. Breiter.
Und dein Gesicht sollst du mit rotem Tuch bedecken...
(Kandinsky Sounds 121)

Many elements of Orthodoxy are present in this poem, including the emphasis, through the word "Scheinbar," on the radiant value of color in its connection with light. The poem describes a ritual, with the gesture of arms open in worship, that very closely approximates the making of the original "Vera" icon upon a towel on the face of Christ.

Kandinsky’s main emphasis in his poetry is on the musical qualities of language; his collection, in fact, is entitled Klänge. Because of this, he often concentrates on rhythm to the exclusion of logic, but never to the exclusion of spiritual meaning and visual imagery:

HYMNUS

Innen wiegt die blaue Woge.
Das zerrissne rote Tuch.
Rote Fetzen. Blaue Wellen.
Das verschlossne alte Buch.
Schauen schweigend in die Ferne.
Dunkles Irren in dem Wald.
Tiefer werden blaue Wellen.
Rotes Tuch versinkt nun bald.
(Kandinsky Sounds 126-27)

The red towel (stained with blood?) reappears in this poem, torn like the curtain of the temple at Christ’s crucifixtion.
The "altes Buch," the book of scripture, is closed to the unbelievers, who are lost in the forest.

In both poems, an image of falling or sinking is present, but the image is not unambiguously negative. In the Judeo-Christian context, "fall" conjures up the negative stories of the Fall of Adam and Eve, or of Lucifer, or "sinking" into the Flood of Noah. Even with the Flood story, however, the sinking does not only denote destruction, but also cleansing, and in Orthodoxy, where the negative is never present without its positive complement, the ascent of the believer upon the Scala Paradisi is complemented by the descent of God to the earth through the person of Christ. Each person of the trinity experiences such a descending moment; just as the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles at Pentecost and upon Christ at his baptism (also a "sinking" into the waters), Christ "sunk" into Hell for three days after his crucifixion and before the resurrection. In addition, the downward motion is one of supplication on the part of the believer, through baptism and prayer. Blue, a spiritual color for Kandinsky, both rises and falls in the worship process of the first poem, and the red towel of the second poem sinks into the depths after its crucifixion, but retains the hope of resurrection and salvation.

The connection between painting and music was especially strong for Kandinsky, who had grown up with the function of icons in the Orthodox liturgy. He wanted his paintings to
beat with the rhythm of life and strike the 'inner sound' through the liberation of color on the canvas. It is important to understand that "the term 'sound' or 'music' is being used...not necessarily in its notational or instrumental sense, but rather in its wider sense of 'essentiality' or inner harmony" (Bowlt *Life of Kandinsky* 26). While Rimsky-Korsakov equated musical notes with colors, and Skribian attempted to draw parallels between the seven colors of the spectrum and the seven notes of the diatonic scale, Kandinsky was influenced by Albrecht Schöne's work with atonal music and "felt a stronger expression of his ideas could be achieved if the various arts were used to produce contrasting effects" (Bowlt *Life of Kandinsky* 52).

The Russian Orthodox concept of *dukhovnost*, or spirituality, lay at the base of Kandinsky's understanding of art, expressed in "Über die Formfrage," which also appeared in the *Blue Rider* journal:

In dem Augenblick...in welchem [der Zuschauer]...sich sagt, daß der praktische Gegenstand auf dem Bilde meistens nur eine zufällige und nicht eine ausschließlich rein malerische Bedeutung hatte, in diesem Augenblick ist die Seele des Beschauers reif, den reinen inneren Klang dieser Linie zu empfinden (Kandinsky & Marc 161).

The totality of Kandinsky's notions of art relates directly to the function of the icon within the holy space of the Orthodox church, and also within the home sphere of the Russian peasant hut, with its icon corner. Kandinsky's artistic sensibilities had been heightened by a trip he took in 1889:
... during [an] expedition to the Vologda Region, he entered a peasant hut and was astounded by the richness of color and form: "In these extraordinary huts... I learnt not to look at the picture from the side, but to revolve in the picture myself, to live in it" (Bowlt Life of Kandinsky 2).

The concept of living within the work of art was integral to Kandinsky's development as an artist, first in terms of connecting with the spiritual elements of a painting, and later, in keeping with his Bauhaus philosophy of constructing a work of art in which to live. Like icons, his paintings were to function within a spiritual space; in addition, they were to draw the viewer in to engage with the art and thereby to transform the world through "das geistige 'Erwachen'" (Kandinsky & Marc 313).

Along with a number of other articles written between 1889 and 1923, sections of many of which also appeared in the Blaue Reiter journal, Vasilii Kandinsky wrote a kind of response to Goethe's Farbenlehre over a period of at least ten years. His essay Über das Geistige in der Kunst, the Russian version of which was presented at the All Russian Congress of Artists in St. Petersburg in December, 1911 by Dr. Nikolai Kulbin, was an attempt "to resolve the dilemma of how to effectively communicate a vision of... spirituality while avoiding both materialistic representation on the one hand and decorative ornament on the other" (Bowlt Life of Kandinsky 44). Impressed both with the bold color of the Fauves and by the spiritual emphasis of Golubaya Roza, Kandinsky developed a philosophy of color that ran more deeply than the purely
aesthetic concerns of his contemporaries in France, for "die Farbe," he says, is "ein Mittel, einen direkten Einfluss auf die Seele auszuüben" (Kandinsky Geistige 42).

Kandinsky begins Über das Geistige in der Kunst with an assertion that society is like a pyramid, with the artists at the top. Within art there is also a hierarchy, equivalent to the Orthodox hierarchy of being signified in the Scala Paradisi, and he draws a distinction between what he sees as the "purely" representational art of Naturalism and art with "soul," or abstract art. Just as the spiritual is above the terrestrial, so is art that pursues a spiritual end higher than art that seeks to mirror the external world.

Like Goethe, Kandinsky includes a section called "Wirkung der Farbe", but he discusses not only the "rein physische Wirkung" but also, influenced no doubt by Freud and the birth of psychology, the psychological impact of color. As an abstract artist, Kandinsky was aware of the power of color as a medium for human emotion, but his upbringing in Orthodoxy imbued color symbolism also with the spiritual principle of divine light.

Kandinsky adds a musical note to Goethe's associations, comparing varying shades of blue to a flute, a cello and a bass violin (Kandinsky Geistige 64), and yellow to the sound of trumpets. Kandinsky also relates individual colors to specific shapes, seeing the most spiritual color, blue, best portrayed in a circle, the symbol of the eternal sphere. He
relates yellow not only to trumpets, but to the triangle, and red, because of its more earthly, fiery nature, he sees as best portrayed in a square, the symbol of the earth. The ornamentation of French abstract art was avoided by Kandinsky by this strict system of color symbolism worked out in Über das Geistige and utilized in his Expressionist works. Although Russian Orthdoxy lay at his base, German Expressionism was greatly influenced by Kandinsky, and any study that addresses him is not complete without a look at this significant art movement.

German Expressionism

Although Expressionism was never a unified movement, and although it differed from city to city, some common threads united the differing manifestations of the movement with each other and with Romanticism. In the same way that Goethe had rebelled against the empiricism of Enlightenment times, the Expressionists responded to the Entgeistigung of positivism with an extreme Durchgeistigung, a "charging of every action with spiritual significance, with soul" (Lynton, 35). As with the Romantics, the subject took precedence over the object for the Expressionists, and proponents of both movements were influenced by Goethe's concern for human experience as outlined in his Farbenlehre. The Expressionists were especially intrigued by Goethe's attention to the emotional
FIGURE 3.2: ICON OF ST. GEORGE

FIGURE 3.3: KANDINSKY'S ST. GEORGE
value of color, for color was primary to these avant-garde painters, and took precedence even over form.

*Über das Geistige in der Kunst* played an important role in the development of German Expressionism before the First World War, and Kandinsky became a leading figure in the Munich *Der blaue Reiter* group. His emphasis upon spirituality connects with medieval notions of art, what Peter Bürger termed "sacral" art. Thus, the "rider" element within the Munich group is indicative of a hearkening back to simpler, pre-industrialized times, especially the middle ages and chivalric ideals. Although western European in many respects, the notion stemmed in part from *Mir iskusstva*: "In their aspiration to regain 'totality' and 'wholeness,' the Russian Symbolists, especially the World of Art artists, looked back to history and to epochs which, in contrast to the fin-de-siècle, seemed to contain a social harmony and unity" (Bowlt *Life of Kandinsky* 6). Kandinsky's *Blaue Reiter* paintings often focused on medieval Russian icon imagery, including Russia's patron St. George killing the dragon as a metaphor for the artist's mission to attack the evils of the world and usher in a new, transformative, and transcendent moment for humanity.

Kandinsky's colleague Franz Marc concentrated on the horse aspect of the Blue Rider, valuing the simple goodness of domestic animals. His earlier works are smooth, harmonious, and rounded. As the impending doom of World War I drew ever
closer, however, Marc's works of 1913 and 1914 tended to become more fractured. In "Stables" of 1913-14, for example, the rounded simplicity and symbolic purity of a white horse in the upper left corner is cut off at the neck, suggesting decapitation and destruction of innocence.

FIGURE 3.4: STABLES

A spiritual blue is present in a rounded object at the top, middle, but it is likewise cut off by the edge of the painting
itself, as if to suggest that its transcendence has been halted or that its very act of transcendence will divorce it from the chaos of the earth. Indeed, the earth is portrayed chaotically, with bright spears of primary colors and intersecting cubist-like diagonals that pierce the form of an angry red horse in the left foreground; to the right, two disturbingly multi-colored horse forms that arch their backs and necks in a pose of suppressed energy and tension. The total effect is one of disjointed alienation and disturbed serenity, an indication that Marc was less and less hopeful of a spiritual transformation as the reality of World War I loomed ever more threateningly.

Besides the Blaue Reiter group in Munich, there was the Brücke group in Dresden and then Berlin, which included such artists as Ernst Ludwig Kirchner and Erich Heckel. These artists were concerned with presenting a bridge from the old (seen as the tired, ultra-sophisticated, dehumanized and technological city) to the new, that is, new hope and belief in the simplicity and beauty of humanity. Many of Kirchner’s paintings between 1911 and 1913 portray the sophistication and decadence of Berlin streets, sometimes with a hint of innocence in the form of an animal, reminiscent of the innocent roundness of Marc’s horses.

Interconnectedness of artistic disciplines was the key to the similarities between Expressionism for painters and the writers who arose after the war. The collection of
Expressionist poetry Menschheitsdämmerung of 1919 had as its subtitle "Symphonie jüngster Dichtung," pointing to Expressionist followers' belief in the deep-seated unity of music and text. Similarly, the poems collected in Menschheitsdämmerung exhibit many of the same themes and characteristics as the paintings of Kirchner, Kandinsky and Marc. The innocent but threatened white animal of Marc's Stables recurs, for example, in Georg Trakl's "In den Nachmittag geflüstert:"

In den Nachmittag geflüstert

Sonne, herbstlich dünn und zag,
Und das Obst fällt von den Bäumen
Stille wohnt in blauen Räumen
Einen langen Nachmittag.

Sterbeklänge von Metall;
Und ein weißes Tier bricht nieder.
Brauner Mädchen rauhe Lieder
Sind verweht im Blätterfall.

Stirne Gottes Farben träumt,
Spürt des Wahnsinns sanfte Flügel.
Schatten drehen sich am Hügel
Von Verwesung schwarz umsäumt.

Dämmerung voll Ruh und Wein;
Traurige Gitarren rinnen.
Und zur milden Lampe drinnen
Kehrst du wie im Traume ein.

Just as in Expressionist painting, there is in Trakl's poem a sense of impending doom that seems to be caused by the technological world; the Sterbeklänge emanate from metal as the innocent animal "breaks down," as if it were a machine; the living is threatened with mechanization. As in many of Kirchner's sophisticated Street Scenes, there is a sense of
tiredness and decadence; autumn, afternoon, twilight and decay point to the "twilight of humanity" perceived by the Expressionists and identified by the title *Menschheitsdämmerung*. Both Wagner’s *Götterdämmerung* and Nietzsche’s *Götzendämmerung* are contained herein, but this time it is humanity that faces extinction at the approach of World War I.

Colors, too, figure prominently in Expressionist poetry. Blue appears in Trakl’s poem, and it is the transcendent silence of the universe that inhabits it. The animal is an innocent white, and the "songs of brown girls" recall the Expressionist attraction to tribal art. Inspired by Gauguin’s paintings and incorporated in such woodcuts as Erich Heckel’s *Sleeping Negress* of 1908, the Expressionist fascination with things "native" reflects an interest in a return to the origins of humanity and a simpler way of life. God’s dreaming forehead is seen as pure color, as the Expressionist Trakl incorporates Freud’s analysis of dreams and the psychological effects of color to express his own vision of an internal reality. Ultimately, the Expressionist answer in this poem is as internal as that of the Romantics, for, in the end of Trakl’s poem, it is the turning to "the light within" that promises hope in an otherwise bleak vision.

Although Expressionism emphasized the spiritual, and portrayed inner rather as opposed to outer reality, it differed from Romanticism in that it by no means uniformly
advocated ignoring or retreating completely from the external world. Their concern for abstraction and the liberation of color came from a strong social conscience and the awareness of the urgent need for change. Even Kandinsky’s and the Russian Symbolists’ erudite “inner sound” were in response to the dehumanization he witnessed at the turn of the century:

Belyi’s ‘natural melodiousness of the poet’s sound,’ Borisov-Musatov’s ‘endless spirit’ were the products of a profound awareness that the key solution to the problems of man’s isolation and moral disintegration caused by nineteenth-century materialism lay not only in the application of particular symbols...but also in the deliberate cultivation of rhythm, of the melody of construction (Bowlt *Life of Kandinsky* 14).

Yet, the Expressionists posed no solutions to the problems they identified, and their apocalyptic concerns ultimately left little room for any kind of positive social action, so that the only tenable solution seemed to be war. After the reality of such a nightmare was experienced, however, many disillusioned artists began to focus upon more concrete aspects of the world, in an effort to change the world in more physical ways. The spiritual was superceded by the constructive, but here, too, Kandinsky played an influential role, as a teacher in the German school of the Bauhaus.

**Kandinsky and the Bauhaus**

The Bauhaus was formed in Weimar in the spring of 1919 to champion the egalitarian goals of the new Weimar Republic. Disillusioned and beaten, the Germans after World War I were well aware of the problems the Expressionists had so
forcefully sought to identify, but they were more than ever lacking in positive solutions to their plight. The German Revolution of 1918 established the Weimar Republic under the leadership of the Social Democrats, who "encouraged Utopian hopes for a new society, which the arts sought to advance" (Poling 1983 36). Writers and artists were eager to emphasize Germany's cultural heritage rather than its ignoble military defeat, and Walter Gropius gathered together artists who wished to embrace a new kind of union of aesthetics and functionality to begin the new school of Bauhaus.

In the meantime, back in his native Russian homeland, Kandinsky was encountering opposition to "his ideal of a pure abstract art with an expressive function" (Poling 1983 27). He had returned to Russia with the outbreak of the war in 1914, and became head of a studio at the Moscow Svomas in Oct. 1918, after which he directed the theater and film section of the Visual Arts Section (IZO) of the People's Commissariat for Enlightenment (Narkompros, or NKP). The "latter activity is indicative of his continuing interest in the relationships among the various arts and indeed their potential synthesis" (Poling 1983 26), but such concerns were taking a different bent in Russia. With the Revolution of 1917, the goals of Soviet artists became more concrete and less erudite than their Russian predecessors, and Kandinsky found himself being criticized by Tatlin and other artists of a younger generation.
and a different social stratum (Bowlt *Life of Kandinsky* 29) as being too mystical and elite.

Even when Kandinsky had published it, his *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* had not been "particularly 'avant-garde'...[it was] a clear echo of the Symbolist epoch, by then passé" (Bowlt *Life of Kandinsky* 22), and he was conscious of a clear ideological rift between himself and the Russian avant-garde:

The emphasis of the avant-garde on materials, on objective visual characteristics over subjective qualities, and on the rational, organizing features of construction as opposed to the intuitive process of composition constituted an argument from which Kandinsky dissented (Poling 1983 28).

Kandinsky had designed cups and saucers even during his Munich period, but his conception of applied art was decorative rather than utilitarian or Productivist. With "the growing importance of Constructivism within Inkhuk², Kandinsky’s program was rejected, and by the end of 1920 he left the Institute. He had also been involved with the International Bureau of IZO, where he came into contact with Walter Gropius, the director of the Bauhaus. Subsequently, he helped with the formation of...the Russian Academy of Artistic Sciences (RAKhN)...but his program was not instituted, as he departed for Berlin at the end of the year" (Poling 1983 28).

While Germany after the First World War provided a less auspicious environment than Russia, the new Weimar Republic

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²The Moscow Institute of Artistic Culture, which opened in May 1920 with Kandinsky at its head (Poling 1983 27).
nonetheless offered a niche for one with such strong ties to German Idealism as Kandinsky, for Weimar had been the site of the Classicism of Goethe and Schiller. In March of 1922, Kandinsky was invited by Gropius to become one of the revolutionary teachers of the Bauhaus, which until 1922 had distinctly Expressionist aims (Bax 30). Just at the time Kandinsky joined the Bauhaus, however, Constructivism was becoming an important artistic force also in Germany "with the presence there of other Russians, such as Lissitzky, and artists from elsewhere in Eastern Europe, for example Hungarians, including László Moholy-Nagy, who had come to Berlin after the collapse of the Hungarian Revolution" (Poling 1983 37). The increased emphasis on Constructivism in the Bauhaus did not affect Kandinsky in the way that it had in Russia, for "the seven years Kandinsky spent in Russia occasioned a transition in his art, from the expressionist abstraction of the immediately preceding Munich years to the geometric style of his Bauhaus period" (Poling 1983 14).

Along with his fellow faculty members Lionel Feininger, Johannes Itten, Paul Klee, and Oskar Schlemmer, Kandinsky taught the classes that "constituted a program that stressed the direct handling of materials, experimentation with design elements and discussions of theory in which both students and faculty participated" (Poling 1983 42). Although the Bauhaus became increasingly functional and Productivist oriented, and Itten was replaced by the more practical Moholy-Nagy, the
theoretical teachings of Kandinsky and Itten lay at its base until its closing by the Nazis in 1933. By this time it had moved first to Dessau in 1925, and then Berlin in 1932, and had changed leadership twice, first to Hannes Meyer in 1928 and then to Mies van der Rohe in 1930.

Kandinsky stayed with the Bauhaus until it closed, and he wrote *Punkt und Linie zur Fläche* during the Dessau period. With its basis in geometry and Gestalt psychology, this work was more scientifically oriented than his earlier *Über das Geistige in der Kunst*. His interest in mathematics, which was a direct correlation to his interest in the abstract and the musical, was the major difference between him and Goethe. Goethe, in his rebellion against the Enlightenment, had relied on information from his senses and on concrete observation, and had rejected mathematics:

"Der heftige Streit gegen Newton" which Goethe conducted in the "Polemik" of his *Farbenlehre* was prompted in large part by his inability to understand the methods of physical optics...he rejected mathematics...his access to physics...was effectively blocked by his unwillingness to accept mathematical reasoning...he had merely insisted that the qualitative must precede the quantitative study of nature. The fact remains, however, that Goethe persistently neglected the quantitative (Burwick 5).

In contrast, Kandinsky concentrated more on formulas and mathematics in his rebellion against empiricism and positivism:

"Es ist das Geheimnis der Kunst Kandinskys, daß sie immer mathematischer und dabei immer sinnbildlicher wird. Die Beziehung zu Mathematik und Zahl ist wie in der Musik unverkennbar... (Grohmann 11)."
Kandinsky thus corrected "Goethe's deafness to musical effects" (Brusatin, 136) and, in the process, tended more and more toward "non-objective," abstract art. Kandinsky's abstraction at this point was influenced by Constructivism, however, and its geometricism implied an avant-garde involvement with the world that was not present in his earlier Symbolist works.

Kandinsky had been unable to connect with Russian Constructivism, which developed earlier than Constructivism in western Europe. While the movement toward Constructivism in Germany occurred only after the war, the art of Kazimir Malevich and his movement of Suprematism paved the way for an acceptance of Constructivist ideas earlier in Russia. This resulted in part from the Russian avant-garde rejection of the more "western" art with which Kandinsky was involved.

Kazimir Malevich

Born near Kiev in 1878, Malevich was only twelve years younger than Kandinsky, but of an entirely different artistic generation. Rather than ally himself with the cosmopolitan World of Art group, Malevich exhibited three works at the more radical Knave of Diamonds exhibition of 1910. Through this, Malevich became involved with the second generation of modernist artists, led by Mikhail Larionov and Natalia Goncharova, who developed consecutively neoprimitivism, cubofuturism, and rayonnism. Beginning in 1909, at the third
exhibition of the Golden Fleece, "these two painters...emerge as the new leaders in Russian painting" (Gray 92).

Larionov and especially Goncharova experimented initially with the techniques found in so-called "primitive" painting, structuring their work especially according to native Russian artworks such as the liubok (peasant woodcut) and the icon, and emphasizing "the dynamic qualities of the canvas - tension, rhythm, contrast" (Bowlt Russian Art xxviii):

The neoprimitivists...found in naïve art a complex of devices that had little in common with the basic aesthetic of Western idealist painting, and these they emphasized often to the detriment of mimetic value. Their disproportionate concentration on such specific artistic concepts as inverted perspective, flat rendition of figures, distinct vulgarization of form, outline by color rather than by line, and consequently the shift in visual priorities began a process of reduction that one is tempted to relate ultimately to Malevich's White on White (1918) (Bowlt Russian Art xxvii).

Many of these techniques employed by Goncharova and Larionov were those used by icon painters to draw in the viewer to interact with the work of art. With the development of cubofuturism, other similarities with icon painting emerged, such as "brilliantly contrasting colour-blocks" and a "centrally placed foreground figure [that] runs almost the length and breadth of the picture, dominating the scene" (Gray 150). In other works, "the three-dimensional perspective has been replaced by colour-contrast...it is a timeless, spaceless situation isolated from the natural world" (Gray 153), like the holy realm created by the icon and the Orthodox liturgy.

In 1912, "Larionov and Goncharova formally dissociated themselves from the 'Knave of Diamonds' group" (Gray 131), the
leading Russian avant-garde group that had connections to France and Germany, and, in the process, rejected western European art altogether, "shaking off the Munich decadence" of Kandinsky and the "cheap Orientalism of the Paris school" (Gray 122). Cubofuturism merged into rayonnism, a short-lived movement that utilized the concept of light rays that permeate and delineate objects in the everyday world; "it was based on this [rayonnist] rationalization that Malevich went on to found Suprematism, the first systematic school of abstract painting in the modern movement" (Gray 141). Suprematism was essentially a one-man movement that explored the dilemma of abstract art, to communicate without representing.

Immersed in the writings of Bergson (Matter and Memory) and Kandinsky, Russian modernist artists engaged with "two philosophical interests which dominated the new Russian art at the beginning of 1912...the search for essence and the effective use in art of the human psyche" (Douglas 18). The notion of the fourth dimension as a new kind of consciousness (Moszynska 56) to which human beings could transcend was much discussed at this time; in literature the concept of zaum, a "transrational language that goes beyond the meaning of words" (Fauchereau 16) was being developed. Vladimir Mayakovsky expresses the trans-dimensional concepts that lay behind this language experimentation:
Silence
And only
expanses,
open for worlds to wander in.
Below me,
above me
and a transfixing radiance.
This really is
what one might call space!
Even groping with both hands for 22 dimensions
Space has no edges,
Time has no end.

Malevich did not wish to limit the universe to only four dimensions: the transcendent potential of art was his particular focus. Through Suprematism, Malevich rejected the object entirely, claiming that it obscures the view to the transcendent realm with which art must ultimately be concerned. His Suprematist images, such as Suprematist Painting, 1915, were essentially shadows and residues of theoretical objects that had transcended; the painting itself acted as a border between our world and the "other" realm, in much the same way that an icon serves as a conduit from the divine realm to the supplicant. Just as the Orthodox priest intones: "the Door, the Door; in wisdom let us attend," Malevich wished the viewer of his paintings to attend to their potential to provide access to the spiritual realm.

Many of Malevich's early memories involve icon paintings (Fauchereau 8), and his autobiography is replete with the colors of the peasant world, the beauty of the icon and its intuitive grasp of artistic reality (Fauchereau 11). For Malevich, "this interest was not a passing fad but a
FIGURE 3.5: SUPREMATIST PAINTING
fundamental element or even the foundation stone of the totality of his work" (Fauchereau 12). He made no secret of his connection to Orthodoxy; he labelled his Black Square of 1915 the "icon of our time" and placed it in the "beautiful corner" of his Suprematist exhibition hall, the traditional corner of the family icon in the peasant hut.

FIGURE 3.6: BLACK SQUARE
While Kandinsky's relationship to the object of the work of art is like that of an icon painter to the divine, for both Kandinsky and the icon painter attempt to convey the essence of their subject, Malevich's relationship to the object of the work of art was actually closer to that of the early iconoclasts. For him, the divine could not be portrayed. Malevich's development to abstraction was not a result of portraying the spiritual within, but rather apart from the object, which impeded the view into the divine realm. He "felt that painting had the power to transport the individual into a further realm of consciousness, and that only abstract means were appropriate to achieve this" (Moszynska 62). In his essay "From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism: The New Painterly Realism" of 1915, he claims: "I have transformed myself in the zero of form and have fished myself out of the rubbishy slough of academic art" (Malevich "From Cubism" 118).

Also in this Suprematist statement, Malevich, like Kandinsky, points out the importance of color in abstract art:

Being a painter, I ought to say why people's faces are painted green and red in pictures. Painting is paint and color; it lies within our organism. Its outbursts are great and demanding. My nervous system is colored by them. My brain burns with their color. But color was oppressed by common sense, was enslaved by it. And the spirit of color weakened and died out. ...

The subject will always kill color, and we will not notice it. Whereas faces painted green and red kill the subject to a certain extent, and the color is more noticeable. And color is what a painter lives by, so it is the most important thing.
And here I have arrived at pure color forms.
And suprematism is the purely painterly art of color whose independence cannot be reduced to a single color (Malevich "From Cubism" 129-130).

In moving away from representational art, Malevich seeks to enter "infinite" space; the "void" he approaches is not empty of meaning, but boundless in an openly religious sense. While empty of details, it is full of something larger.

As its name suggests, Suprematism was a totalitarian art movement whose "object" could neither be named nor depicted, for it was none other than the divine. Malevich did not wish to depict the essence of a natural subject; he wished to recreate nature entirely by connecting with the infinite. In contrast to dependent mimetical art (defined as 'slavery before causality'), Suprematism must prove itself through becoming its own cause (i.e. 'free from all causes')" (Oblak 40). The artist is seen as creator: "through zero [I] have reached creation, that is, suprematism, the new painterly realism - nonobjective creation" (Malevich "From Cubism" 133). Likewise, Malevich’s paintings were a manifestation of his philosophical position put forth in his Suprematist statements, and thus related to the icon which manifests the word of scripture.

Malevich’s White on White is the absolute expression of Suprematism; only a faint textural difference on the canvas circumscribes the outline of the object that has almost completely transcended. The absurdity of White on White has been registered by many a disbelieving museum-goer; Hans Arp
noted that "aridity ...striving for the absolute [leads] ...to the brink of madness, to end in the impossible masterpiece and total nothingness. Only a man like Malevich would go to the lengths of a square monochrome" (Hancock 67). On the other hand, only a dada artist would characterize Malevich's "impossible masterpiece" as "total nothingness." It would be more accurate to identify Malevich's work as the search for "total everythingness."

FIGURE 3.7 SUPREMATISM: WHITE ON WHITE

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Rather than paint in color, which is ultimately only refracted light, Malevich chose to paint the unity of all colors, the shining of white light that radiates from the divine to "enliven" the icon. He proclaimed in 1919:

I have torn through the blue lamp shade of colour limitations, and come out into the white; after me, comrade aviators, sail into the chasm...Sail forth! The white, free chasm, infinity is before us (Malevich "Suprematism" 122).

Thus, White on White was "the supreme exaltation of painting and of the act of painting" (Fauchereau 27). Like Kandinsky’s Light, White on White attempts to convey light itself, that element so important for icon theology.

After his numerous white on white paintings, which signified the logical extreme of his aesthetic philosophy, Malevich turned away from easel painting around 1920 to concentrate on pedagogical concerns at the Vitebsk School of Art. He became involved with Unovis, or uchilishche novovo iskusstva, "affirmers of the new art." Like the Bauhaus, the new soviet art was to reject the architectural heritage of Greek and Rome in favor of a modern and utopian architectural vision. What exactly this vision entailed was not clear, nor was it uncontested; while Suprematism flourished at Vitebsk at the expense of Chagall (Fauchereau 28), Tatlin and Constructivism provided a rival force, even though Malevich’s experimentation had involved breakthroughs that had opened the door also for Constructivism.

Although the turn to architecture and away from easel painting in the Soviet Union indicated a change toward
functionality and away from aesthetics, Malevich's architectural projects were more utopian than functional. His Architektons of this period look like scale architectural models, but they do not represent habitable buildings.

FIGURE 3.8: BETA (ARCHITEKTON)
In spite of Malevich's opposition to pure functionality and Constructivism, his reception at the Bauhaus was quite favorable. During a trip to Dessau in 1927,

Malevich was reacquainted with Kandinsky and introduced to Walter Gropius, Mies van der Rohe, Hannes Meyer and Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, with whom he had some stimulating discussions on architecture, which was now a keen interest of his. Moholy-Nagy, converted to Suprematism by Lissitzky, supervised the publication of a summary of Malevich's writings on Suprematism and the "additional element in art" under the title of Die gegenstandlose Welt (The Non-Objective World) for the Bauhaus... (Fauchereau 32).

His reception in the Soviet Union, however, was under attack at this time. After the death of Lenin in 1924, traditional painters had slowly gained more government support to the detriment of the avant-garde, although Socialist Realism was not yet the official state art form.

Malevich was accused by conservative journalists of not being productive enough (Fauchereau 31), but he responded with attacks upon the return to traditional art. Nevertheless, partly in a reevaluation of painting he underwent in preparation for a retrospective of his work to be held in 1929, Malevich returned to the easel in 1928. His later paintings reintroduce the figure, often faceless, and return to peasant life as a subject, a lifestyle which came under attack with Stalin's policies of mechanization. The faceless quality of Malevich's work of this period has caused much speculation among art critics, including Emmanuel Martineau's explanation:

The question is no longer the alternative between abstraction and figuration; the question is that Suprematism emphasized a
certain image, and that image was initially an image of the world, and it must now become an image of man... (Fauchereau 35).

FIGURE 3.9: TWO PEASANTS
Martineau's words gain significance in relationship to the icon painter's task of image-making. Indeed, when viewed in the light of icons, Malevich's later works make a kind of spiritual sense in connection with his earlier experiments. Fauchereau says of paintings of this new Suprematist period:

...behind the tubular and conical structure of the bodies and limbs of the subjects, the rest of the painting is simply a composition of bright colours which lacks depth of field and where the half tones disappear. When applied to radically geometrical forms, it is the colour rather than the construction that dominates the canvas (Fauchereau 33).

With words such as "composition of bright colours" -- the same colors that had played such a vital role in Malevich's earlier Suprematist works -- and lack of "depth of field," Fauchereau's description could apply to icons; the full frontal quality of Malevich's figures underscores this connection.

In 1931, Malevich wrote, "I am thinking of undertaking some painting, of doing some symbolic pictures. I am trying to produce an image" (Zhadova 114). The Orthodox meaning of production seems pitted against the Soviet meaning in this statement. After this, his paintings contain more detailed facial features, but even this was not a concession to Socialist Realism:

The painter returned to a more realist style in the works of 1932-33, but only to relative Realism...The painter was not only obeying an interior urge but also a contemporary tendency which was very distant from Socialist Realism, in which even Tatlin and Rodchenko had participated; it was a tendency which had already brought back several painters like Severini and Herbin to figurative painting (Fauchereau 36).
FIGURE 3.10: SELF-PORTRAIT
Malevich's self-portrait of 1933 illustrates the close alliance that his later figurative portraits claim with icons:

Malevich painted himself against a pale background and without background details or accessories. He is standing immortally in front of eternity with an open hand as if he were offering something coming from himself, his life and his work, thirty years of painting. In the bottom right-hand corner there is a final reminder of his revolution: the Black Square (Fauchereau 36).

Malevich's offertory gesture is not simply a late concession to the Orthodox charge to give one's life to God; although esoteric, Malevich's earlier aesthetic system also contained an ethical component related to "the social conscience that has always been so active in the Russian artist" (Gray 116). Mojca Oblak relates Malevich's ethical system to Immanuel Kant's term of the "sublime" in art, where "Kant explicitly links the experience of sublime to the feeling of respect. For Kant, the will is free only to the extent that it is motivated by respect for the moral law. (Free will and the will under moral law are one and the same)" (Oblak 35).

The ethical component of Malevich's aesthetics can also be seen as an extension of the Orthodox founders' emphasis on beauty as an ethical consideration. Like icon painters, Malevich's artistic mission was not one of pure aesthetics, rather he sought direct involvement with the world through his art. Even in his earlier works, he not only portrayed transcendence in his paintings, he also intended for the viewer to expand his or her consciousness and ultimately revolutionize the world. Similarly, Kandinsky sought "das
Werk, welches ein inneres Leben hat, im Zusammenhang mit der Grossen Wendung stehend" (Kandinsky & Marc 313). For both artists, therefore, the move to abstraction involved an avant-garde program of transformation for the individual who engages with the work of art as the believer engages with the icon.

Orthodoxy and Retrogardism

The avant-garde nature of Malevich's works is hardly contested. It is acknowledged that Malevich hurled "himself against the wall of public and official conservatism" (Fauchereau 27) for years, and, although he criticized the Bolshevik officials, Malevich was "obviously on the side of the Revolution" (Fauchereau 27). Kandinsky's categorization as avant-garde is not so clear; although he was involved with the revolutionary art of the Bauhaus, his artistic philosophy drew more from previous art movements such as symbolism. The geometric style Kandinsky developed during his Bauhaus years was part of a "striving for a universal formal language" (Poling 1983, 12), but it paradoxically was unable to reach much of his intended audience.

Oblak notes the difficulty of applying Kant's terminology to art, for "Kant himself could probably not connect the sublime to art" (Oblak 35). The question is, how can the artist communicate such ethical impulses, however noble, through abstract art. Ultimately, both Malevich and Kandinsky were faced with the difficulty of calling for concrete change.
through an abstract medium, and ended up "concretizing" their move to abstraction, Kandinsky through his concentration on science and geometry, Malevich through a focus on architectural elements and a subsequent return to depiction of the subject. Malevich’s efforts have been criticized as "giving in" to mainline art, and Kandinsky has been criticized for being abstract to the point of depersonalizing the human element:

Noch stärker emanzipieren sich den Kandinsky, Klee und Georg Muche von jeder Naturbezogenheit: sie konzentrieren sich rein auf die 'geistigen' Ausdruckswerte bestimmter Form- und Farbkonstellationen...von der hochgepriesenen 'Natur' bleibt bei diesem Prozeß nicht viel übrig. Selbst da, wo Pflanzen, Tiere oder Landschaften dargestellt werden, tritt sofort eine merkliche reduzierung ins Formale und Mathematisierte ein...Noch deutlicher zeigt sich diese Depersonalisierung und Entnatürung, wenn man sich den Menschen selber zum Sujet erwählt" (Hamann & Hermand, 171).

The same criticisms raised in connection with Kandinsky’s move to abstraction can also be directed at Malevich. White on White is, perhaps, abstract art ad absurdum; it can be argued that, at least for the general public, its meaning can be derived only from specific knowledge of its philosophical content. Similarly, engagement with icons can occur only through specific knowledge of Christianity and the lives of the saints.

It can be argued that a link drawn between Orthodoxy and both Kandinsky and Malevich subverts an avant-garde reading of these artists. The hierarchy of the Orthodox Scala Paradisi runs counter to the goals of many avant-garde artists, who aim for "achieving new levels of spiritual enlightenment and
artistic liberation and then making their insights available to the broad masses in their train" (Sheppard 41-42). In contrast, icons are for "the elite," the faithful; an unbeliever will have no transformation before an icon; the priest’s call of "Holiness to the holy!" points out the exclusive nature of this mystery. Likewise, Kandinsky begins Über das Geistige in der Kunst with an assertion that society is like a pyramid, with the artists at the top, a hierarchy is similar to that of the Orthodox Scala Paradisi, for only the few elite at the top have the spiritual insight to create art that impacts the world, in Kandinsky’s model. Thus, Richard Sheppard refuses to apply the term "avant-garde" to Kandinsky, seeing him instead as a member of the "rear guard:"

...Kandinsky’s move to abstraction, along with other related examples of modernist experimentation...appear as conservative attempts. A diminishing number of real or imagined areas of privileged experience was to be saved from obliteration by those thought-forms -- secularism, functionalism, materialism and rationalism -- which have established themselves as the conceptual basis of late capitalism, and a sense of totality was to be conserved in the face of social fragmentation, commodification of the art object, loss of artistic identity and the resultant sense of ‘panic terror’ (Sheppard 42).

Sheppard completely discounts the importance of spirituality for Kandinsky’s actual paintings, identifying a rift between his words (in Über das Geistige in der Kunst) and his actions (paintings), claiming:

Kandinsky’s theory of abstraction, rooted in a gnostic theology and an optimistic conception of "History"... is not a reliable account of his oeuvre. Because...there is no sense in which Kandinsky’s poems and early paintings work in the abstract, mystical way described in On the Spiritual... it seems evident that Kandinsky’s theory functioned as a means by which he was able to preserve a sense of direction and meaning
as more and more of his geographically or historically rooted "islands of spirituality" disappeared or were overwhelmed by chaos (Sheppard 64-65).

While Sheppard's concerns are valid in the context of the western European avant-garde, he does not consider the contexts of Russia and Orthodoxy from which Kandinsky sprung. The Russian avant-garde was not equivalent to western avant-garde movements such as dada, which sought to overturn the artistic tradition and establish a new kind of art, or to destroy the basis of art itself. Instead, they utilized elements from their tradition to create a new art form. In "The Ear Behind the Painting," Eda Cufer labels contemporary eastern European art with the term "retrogardism." This term is perhaps more useful for understanding Kandinsky and Malevich than the term "avant-garde," for it conveys the notion that revolutionary impulses can arise from traditional contexts.

The importance of tradition in the Russian Orthodox Church cannot be overemphasized. While tradition is often associated with repressive and oppressive tendencies that allow little room for growth or creativity, Russian Orthodox tradition is not necessarily tied up with conservative or harshly rigid codes. Benz notes that the "proclaiming of a specific, official standard for the entire Orthodox Church did not mean a 'freezing' of the liturgy. The impulse toward variations in the divine services could find expression in the most multifarious ways" (Benz 27). In addition, much of the
secondary literature emphasizes that icon painting did not stifle the creativity of the individual, but rather that tradition provided certain guidelines within which the artist could freely express creativity. One conclusion to be reached from this is that an institution based so utterly in tradition can only continue to survive if inherent within this tradition exists potential for development.

The Russian avant-garde impulse to draw from Orthodox tradition for its art relates to the fact that many elements within the Orthodox tradition parallel concepts explored in the west only at the turn of the twentieth century; even artists in the west were aware of the value of icon painting for creating modernist art:

The French Impressionist painter, Matisse, who visited Russia in 1911, believed that a study of the theory and technique of Byzantine art was of immense value to the modern art movement, a conviction which Russian painters shared. Vrubel' was fascinated by the treatment of draper and the Byzantine method of building up successive planes of colour from dark to light. Goncharova and Kandinsky were both struck by the use of pure, strongly contrasting primary colour, such as is found in Novgorod icon painting, while Tatlin owes something of his mastery of line to the Byzantine technique (Russian & Greek Icons 18).

Many such parallels can be drawn between Orthodox techniques and modernist art, like the use of color symbolically for emotional impact. For Russian modernist artists, especially Kandinsky, color becomes the artistic element that conveys spirituality and the inner state of the subject. The emphasis on color points to a turning to the "light" to achieve spiritual revelation through abstract art:
The art of the icon is an abstract art: it aims to express not the physical world, perceived by the senses, but the non-material world which can only be explored by the mind and the inward spirit. The principles of imagery, form, and colour by which the realities of the 'unseen world' are made visible perfectly correspond to the ideals of Eastern Christian philosophy and are thus themselves an artistic ideal (Russian & Greek Icons 13).

This move to abstraction on the part of Russian modernists is a most important link between Orthodoxy and the Russian avant-garde, and it was a liberatory moment within a conservative tradition:

The Byzantine was not, of course, bound to adhere to the same colour scheme found in nature. His treatment of colour is similar to the musician's handling of musical notes, for he aims at synchronising his colour-tones to create a harmony... (Russian & Greek Icons 20).

The fusion of art forms is a modernist concept in the west, but in the east it was already a component of the cultural mindset. Mir iskusstva was so termed partly because of its concern for artistic synthesis in making use of opera and theater, and partly due to its international aspect and concern for cultural integration (Bowlt Life of Kandinsky 5). Like Mir iskusstva, the Orthodox understanding of community is global, and oriented toward the congregation. Through tradition, connections with past and future congregations are established, so that it can be said that the entire church worships together as one. Ugolnik's notion of "liturgical consciousness" (Ugolnik 136) applies also to the theatrical aspect of the liturgy relating to Greek mystery plays which became important to the Russian avant-garde.
The aims of icons and modernist art are very similar in that both require something of the viewer, that is, a conscious attempt to focus energies. Perception of art becomes something disarming, not facile. With the aid of the "strangeness" of the icon, ostranenie, or de-familiarization, the Orthodox liturgy is always calling the worshipers to pay attention, or, more communally, saying, "let us attend." Likewise, the avant-garde calls attention to the artistic process itself, or to the political philosophy surrounding the art, so that one cannot walk passively by the art, but rather must engage with it. This is why Kandinsky was so reticent to title his works; the viewer was thereby invited to confront the image "on its own terms," rather than the preconceived notions of the viewer.

Icons and the liturgy include a strongly political moment within their spiritual context; consider the Iconoclastic Controversy's political impact. Although they seem to relate only to the spiritual world, they demand something concrete from the (faithful) viewer; they engage with the life of the viewer. At the end of the Orthodox liturgy, the congregation says, "let us commend our entire life." This is the ultimate demand of the icon and the liturgy, and is perhaps the most avant-garde moment of the liturgical process. The dialogue, or interaction with the work of art involves a charge from the artwork and to the viewer: "Our minds must be converted... Our own perspectives have to be changed as we enter into the
realms that the icons open up for us" (Baggley 81). This transformative potential of art is a leading idea of avant-garde thought, which seeks to change the individual, as well as the broader social and political world, through artistic production. Even where the political object of Orthodoxy is conservative, that is, if the purpose is to exclude or to remind the individual of his or her place in the hierarchy, for example, this political moment can nevertheless be appropriated, even subverted, by avant-garde artists for their own purposes.

"Retrogardism" is a useful term not only in analyzing Kandinsky and Malevich, but the Russian avant-garde artists in general. These artists utilized elements from within the Russian tradition, such as the communal focus of the Orthodox liturgy, the notion of transformation through art, and the spirituality of icon colors, in order to create a new art form. Together with techniques of icon painting that only became important with modernist art in the west, Russian modernist artists were able to create an entirely new kind of art that resembled western modernist art movements, but that drew its power from the Orthodox tradition. In spite of the many similarities between techniques in western modernism and in icon painting, some basic differences underlay the superficial similarities:

Both the ikon painter and the Impressionist are concerned with depicting light. But whereas the Frenchman was absorbed with the problems of the fluctuations of light as it strikes the surface of an object, the Byzantine understood light as
radiating from a source behind the painting and illuminating it in the same way that the rays of the sun glow through stained glass (Russian & Greek Icons 18).

The spiritual nature of Orthodoxy was not only absent in much western modernist art, it was antithetical to many of the more radical avant-garde movements such as dada. Consequently, Hamann and Hermand's Marxist criticism of Kandinsky devalues geistige Ausdruckswerte in favor of more material representations of the outer world. In doing so, they overlook the ethical element associated with abstract art in Russia. Drawing from the more liberal teachings of Orthodoxy, Kandinsky and Malevich each outlined a strongly ethical program that involved an intention to change the world through their art.

Because tradition does not necessarily limit or confine, the observance of "retrogardism" practiced by Russian modernist artists was not a conservative process, but a liberatory one. Within the Russian context, this experimentation was as bold and as dada experiments were in the west. Whether or not the exclusive and hierarchical moment ultimately works against the avant-garde impulse is a question that can be raised in connection with many modernist artists generally accepted as being avant-garde.
Rainer Maria Rilke has been described as a God seeker and a God hater, both as intensely spiritual and as avidly anti-Christian. The contradictions that appear throughout the body of Rilke criticism lead one to the conclusion that Rilke's relationship to spirituality in general and to Christianity more specifically is too complex to be easily classified. Many scholars explain Rilke's use of Christian symbolism by claiming that he incorporated religious themes into his art without really "believing" in them, either in a purely aesthetic exercise, or solely in order to turn them against themselves. Heinrich Imhof, for example, speaks of "Rilkes fast zwanghaftes Bedürfnis, religiöse Vorstellungen oder biblische Texte ihres religiösen Gehaltes zu entleeren und sie für seine persönlichen Anliegen auszubeuten, indem er sie mit psychologischer Bedeutung neu auffühlt" (25). In claiming that Rilke empties religious symbolism of its meaning, Imhof assumes that a more general emptiness is present in Rilke's view of religion and spirituality.
Rilke has often been analyzed in the context of the so-called Sprachkrise, or language crisis experienced by many authors at the turn of the twentieth century. After Goethe had said all there was to be said in a way better than anyone else could say it; after the Romantics had used and reused potent words and symbols until they appeared to be drained of power; after time and the industrial revolution had brought all the "modern" characteristics of weariness, disillusionment, and a loss of belief in religion, magic, or any force but the power of money and machines—the fin de siècle writers felt unable to rise to the challenge of Baudelaire and the other symbolists and attain "a writing freed of the conventions of 'art' and made out of the entrails of the verbal system" (Delevoy, 16).

One response to the Sprachkrise was the total rejection of poetry as an art form; other responses varied according to the socio-political outlook of the poets involved. The western avant-garde as defined by Peter Bürger was embodied in the dada movement; the dada response to the Sprachkrise was to create a kind of poetry that defied the meaning of words by including an element of nonsense, or chance. The "sound poems" of Hugo Ball and the "simultaneous poems" of Tristan Tzara both reveal the meaninglessness of language and overturn traditional notions of art and aesthetics.

Rilke was one of the few poets of his generation who was able to overcome the weariness of the language crisis and
approach language originally and effectively, while still retaining an intact notion of meaning and essence. After a short "Pause" from 1910-1911, during which he waited for "eine neue Berechtigung seines Dichtertums" (Fuerst, 91), Rilke seems to have achieved the needed validation and claimed for himself the power of words, which had been widely thought to be irrevocably lost. As Norbert Fuerst relates:

Zu einer Zeit, als der begabteste deutsche Lyriker, Hofmannsthal, die Lyrik mit gutem Grund aufgegeben hatte oder sie vielmehr resigniert rettete in die Rollenlyrik seiner Dramen...als der größte unter den deutschen Lyrikern, George, sein Gedicht auf eine esoterische Pseudomystik einengte: zu dieser Zeit trieb eine trübe Mischung von Sinnlichkeit, Intelligenz und Zufall den Dritten...sich allem Modernen hinzugeben...Ein fabelhafter Instinkt trieb ihn immer an den Rändern der deutschen Sprache entlang, immer hatte er ein exzentrisches Verhältnis zu ihr" (Fuerst, 45-46).

Rilke's "exzentrisches Verhältnis" to language involves a deep spirituality that was not present in the l'art pour l'art authors of the west, with whom Rilke is so often associated. Rather than finding himself in a world devoid of meaning, Rilke recognized essential meaning in everybody -- and everything -- that surrounded him. His "Neigung zum Spiritismus" recognized by Wolfgang Leppmann was fostered at an early age by his strongly mystical Catholic mother, and the engagement of his contemporaries in religious exploration and occult activities contributed to his preoccupation with things spiritual. His view of art was "purely" aesthetic only insofar as the aesthetic realm, for Rilke, related to the spiritual in every respect.
Rilke has been analyzed primarily within the context of western Europe, the justification being that it was Paris that served as his locus of artistic inspiration. Yet, in order to discover the source of Rilke's spirituality that he retained even in opposition to the crises of his time, one must look beyond western Europe. As a Czech poet, Rilke was exposed to currents both from the east and from the west, and his love for Russia was at least as strong as his love for Paris. Imhof's term "entleeren" becomes interesting in the context of the Russian avant-garde, where, in Rilke's time, the concept of "void" or "emptiness" becomes associated with contemporary notions of a fourth dimension as a new kind of consciousness (Moszynska 56), a transcendent potential for the human being.

In literature the concept of zaum, a "transrational language that goes beyond the meaning of words" (Fauchereau 16) occupied Russian writers of the avant-garde. Rilke's "exzentrisches Verhältnis" to language thus relates to the zaum of the Russian avant-garde, but his aesthetic impulse was not confined to the realm of language, for the visual arts were always influential in his artistic production. His intuitive understanding of the relationship between the visual and the verbal arts found reflection in the Russian avant-garde, where intermingling of the arts was much less self-conscious than in the western avant-garde.

In the visual arts in Russia, Kazimir Malevich focussed primarily on the transcendent potential of art symbolized by
zaum. His Suprematist images [SEE FIGURE 3.7] were essentially two-dimensional shadows and energy residues of theoretical three-dimensional objects that had transcended; the painting itself acted as a border or window between our world and the "other" realm, in much the same way that an icon serves as a conduit from the divine realm to the supplicant. Exactly that point of spatial transcendence and "full emptiness" that Malevich garnered from the icons that surrounded him became important for Rilke as well. The notion of Raum for Rilke thus relates primarily to the religious realm of icons. According to August Stahl,

die Vorstellung daß die Ikone die Frömmigkeit nicht begrenze, sondern ihr Raum gebe, indem sie das im Bild Gemeinte als abwesend anzeige, daß also die Ikone insofern leer sei und hohl, hat es ermöglicht, daß sie zu einem der bedeutendsten Symbolträger und Symbolspender der Rilkeschen Dichtung werden konnte (Stahl 89).

In "Rilke — Rodin, Cézanne, Klee: Die Schöpfung des Raumes in der Moderne," Peter Por analyzes Rilke's transcendent use of "space" in connection with his western European contemporaries: "[es]...entsteht ein... unbegreiflicher, offensichtlich künstlerisch beschaffener Sprachraum, wo alles ein künstlerisches Sein hat, weil alles von dem zwei-einen Künstler-Gott erschaffen und an ihn gerichtet wird" (Por 51). Although it recognizes a kind of religious impulse in Rilke, Por's analysis nevertheless confines this impulse within a purely artistic realm, as is typical for the western European l'art pour l'art aesthetic classification, but not in accord with Rilke's own intense relationship to spirituality.

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The opposition between Rilke scholarship on and Rilke’s own statements about spirituality is mitigated when we comprehend that, although Rilke rejected western Catholicism, his relationship to Russian Orthodoxy was quite different. Recent Rilke criticism is rediscovering the role of Russia in Rilke’s life, for, as Anna Tavis notes,

To examine Rilke’s Russia is to recapture the past that he shared with his Russian contemporaries, but memory of that past was lost in the historical turmoil of the Russian Revolution and the following years of the Communist state. Only in the last two decades has contemporary Russia gradually begun to reclaim its past, and it is now timely to retrace Rilke’s steps (Tavis xiv).

Rilke’s Russia Experience

Like many Europeans of his time, Rilke looked to religions of the countries to the east to find a spiritual outlook that could connect with his artistic philosophy. When he undertook his journeys through Russia with Lou Andreas-Salomé in 1899 and 1900, she “introduced him to many of the leading contemporary writers and artists and sought to communicate to him her own sense of the essence of Russian culture” (Webb 239).

The day after their arrival in Moscow the 25th (Tavis x) of April 1899, Rilke and Andreas-Salomé attended Easter services in the Kremlin’s Uspenski, or Dormition Cathedral. Helmut Naumann relates:

Der Zeitpunkt war...von besonderer Art; denn nur zum Osterfest war etwas sonst Verborgenes zu sehen. Das Allerheiligste, der Altar- oder Mysterienraum ist zu anderen Zeiten nur für die
FIGURE 4.1: DORMITION CATHEDRAL

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Kleriker zugänglich und durch die hoch aufragende Bilderwand, den Ikonostasis, abgetrennt (Naumann 15).

Rilke was thus able to see into the Holy of Holies, the area closed off by the iconostasis, that symbolic realm to which Malevich's paintings most often refer. The impression upon him was overwhelming and immediate; he experienced a revelation of almighty proportions. The symbolism of Easter for Rilke's sensation of rebirth was not lost on Lou Andreas-Salomé, who saw Rilke's Russia episode as a kind of divine revelation or, in her stronger words, a resurrection; she connects Rilke's impression of the celebration of Christ's resurrection with Rilke's own resurrection: "...nach der zweiten mehrmonatigen Reise durch Rußland...[gedenkt er] dieses Landes überhaupt in einem so österlichen Sinne... wie einer Auferstehung für ihn..." (Andreas-Salomé 20).

More than any other incident in Russia, the Easter episode is key in understanding Rilke's relationship to Orthodoxy and icons, for here he directly experienced the Orthodox liturgy and icons in their most appropriate context. Through this encounter, Rilke found himself violently attracted to a kind of Russian liturgical consciousness. The emphasis on transformation through communion within the Orthodox liturgy apparently struck a corresponding chord within Rilke, and his subsequent Russia encounters were all colored by this initial and crucial event.

Rilke's experience of Russia was thus primarily spiritual. His Tagebuch entries and letters from Russia are
reverentially written and replete with references to Orthodoxy. One letter to Paula Modersohn Becker describes the "Kirchen...mit ihren großen stehenden Glocken, und Lieder, die Blinde und Kinder singen" (Briefe und Tagebücher 52-53), and his "study notes and sketches show a particular fondness for Russian church architecture, Russian icons, and other Russian objets d’arts" (Webb 242). Leppmann recounts: "Rilke entdeckt Rußland auf zwei verschiedenen Ebenen: als kultivierter Tourist und, besonders auf der Reise in den Süden, als frommer Pilger" (Leppmann 137). These are the same two strains set in opposition by many Rilke scholars, the atheistic modernist and the spiritual seeker of God. Helmut Naumann sides with the latter in his study that contradicts the belief that Rilke’s travels in Russia were devoid of spiritual content:

Nach der heute in der Forschung herrschenden Auffassung war also Rilkes Slawophilie der wesentliche Grund seiner Hinwendung zu Rußland. Die folgende Untersuchung muß dem widersprechen...daß Rilke allen oder doch vor allem aus religiösen Gründen nach Rußland gereist ist...Rilke suchte in Rußland Gott, den er in Westeuropa verloren hatte. Er hat ihn gefunden...

Because of its spiritual nature, Rilke’s encounter of Russia and Russian Orthodoxy was by no means objective. This has led Rilke critics to devalue Rilke’s time in Russia as a series of sustained projections rather than a genuine encounter. Patricia Brodsky notes that he found in Russia "precisely what he sought" (Brodsky 16), and, according to Leppmann, "Rilkes
Rußland-Bild setzt sich...aus vielen kleinen Illusionen zusammen" (Leppmann 131).

It is true that Rilke’s view of Russia was replete with preconceived notions. His expectations were initially colored by Russia’s reception at the time in German speaking areas, based somewhat on the novels of Dostoevsky. Many German speakers of the time felt "a brotherhood of the soul" (Rice 132) with Dostoevsky. In his novels, Dostoevsky defines such character traits as strong, mystical religious belief in the face of adversity and a capacity to suffer long and nobly as "typically Russian" (Dostoevsky 155).

Theorists such as Sigmund Freud then stereotyped the "Russian nihilist" with self-destructive and aggressive factors (Rice 82). Freud identifies "ambivalence" as a central feature of the Russian character (Rice 93). James Rice notes that the "doctrine of a destruction instinct was in great part a Russian contribution to psychoanalysis, which Freud at first resisted as an inherent feature of the Russian psychic material, rather than a genetic trait of the human species" (Rice 19). In psychoanalytic thought, this "doctrine of destruction," or thanatos, is balanced in the psyche by an equally strong drive for creation, called eros, yet Freud did not associate eros with Russia as strongly as thanatos.

It is reasonable to assume that Rilke’s conceptions of Russia would have resembled those of Freud. Both Freud and Rilke hailed from within the political borders of Austria-
Hungary, both had strong ties to the Czech region (Rice 14), and both became personally involved with Lou Andreas-Salomé, who affected the understanding of Russia for both men. Yet, Rilke's conception of Russia was much less complex and more affirmative than Freud's clinical appraisal of the Russian character. Having a Catholic rather than a Jewish background, Rilke experienced a less ambiguous -- and less critical -- reaction to the Christian symbolism in Orthodoxy than Freud. At the same time, unlike Freud, Rilke, who had studied and participated in Orthodoxy, would have acknowledged the paradoxical juxtaposition of both life and death in all Orthodox icons. In psychoanalytic terms, Rilke would have associated eros with Russia just as much as thanatos.

In this context, it is important to note that Rilke never claimed an "objective" view of Russia; in fact, Rilke rejected objectivity in favor of a kind of intersubjectivity, more than mere projection, that occurred when he visited Russia, or, according to Rilke, when any individual visits a new land. The images of a country meet corresponding images deep within the viewer's psyche; these images can then serve as artistic inspiration:

Im Grunde sucht man in jedem Neuem (Land oder Mensch oder Ding) nur einen Ausdruck, der irgendeinem persönlichen Geständnis zu größerer Macht und Mündigkeit verhilft. Alle Dinge sind ja dazu da, damit sie uns Bilder werden in irgendeinem Sinn. Und sie leiden nicht dadurch, denn während sie uns immer klarer aussprechen, senkt unsere Seele sich in demselben Maße über sie. Und ich fühle in diesen Tagen, daß mir russische Dinge die Namen schenken werden für jene fürchtigsten Frömmigkeiten meines Wesens, die sich, seit der
Rilke’s reference to "jene fürchtigsten Frömmigkeiten... [seines eigenen] Wesens" is key in understanding Russia’s appeal for Rilke. While the strong spirituality that had haunted Rilke since childhood found no home in western Catholicism, it embraced the more (in his perception) primitive and mystical impulses of Russian Orthodoxy. The prejudices Rilke held toward Russia before his arrival were thus particular to his own psychological makeup:

...there was something in his nature which was drawn to what he found in Russia. Russia was, for Rilke, primarily the patient peasant and the vast slumbering countryside, the magnificent but bloody history, the splendid rituals of the Orthodox church, and the slow, silent, omnipresent Russian God (Brodsky 23-24).

Rilke was by no means ignorant of Orthodox theology. Rilke and Andreas-Salomé prepared for their Russia trips by painstakingly studying the language, history, and culture. This preparation began before Rilke’s significant Easter experience, and points to an affinity for Russian spirituality that precedes even this crucial event. According to Anna Tavis,

To assert that Andreas-Salomé (and later Rilke) did not know much about Russia...is to suggest that there was only one "real" Russia to represent -- the essential Russia -- and to assume that all Western "visions" and "textualizations" suppressed the authentic native humanity (Tavis 22).

Tavis claims here that Rilke’s encounter with Russia was as "authentic" as anybody else’s; he experienced Russia with the eyes of an artist, not a politician. What drew Rilke to
Russia was not a fantasy, but that aspect of Russia to which he could most readily relate: its cultural theology. Although he ignored monumental political strains, he focussed in on other equally integral aspects of Russian culture. According to Leppmann, "da er aber ein Dichter war, hat Rilke auf seine eigene Art doch vieles von Rußland gewußt, was anderen verborgen blieb" (Leppmann 150). Likewise, Rilke's response to Russia was particular to that of a poet.

Russia in Rilke's Early Works

The immediate impact of Russia's impression on Rilke was the production of a short poem, "Die Znamenskaja" ("The Znamenie Painter"), written between his two Russia trips. The znamenje icon type, or Virgin of the sign, was apparently Rilke's favorite; he wrote to Yelena Voronina on the 27th of July 1899 concerning his next Russia trip, "Dann werde ich mich vor der Znamenskaja (die liebe ich vor allen) verneigen tief, dreimal und auf rechtgläubige Art." Helmut Naumann and August Stahl have analyzed this poem in detail with respect to Rilke's Russia experience, and both recognize the importance of Orthodox theology, and especially the art of icons, to Rilke's Russia. Stahl speaks of the "hervorragendes Exempel -

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1For a fuller exposition on "die Znamenskaja," see Stahl's "...und es war die Znamenskaja: Rilke und die Kunst der Ikonenmaler" in Blätter der Rilke Gesellschaft 7-8 (1980-81) 84-91; and the chapter "Die Znamenskaja" in Helmut Naumann's Russland in Rilkes Werk, pp. 30-37.
- wenn auch nur eines unter anderen -- für Rilke's Beschäftigung mit der bildenden Kunst" as "die besonders fruchtbar gewordene Begegnung mit der Kunst der russischen Ikonenmaler" (Stahl 84).

Shortly after "Die Znamenskaja," Rilke began Das Stundenbuch: Vom mönchischen Leben, between 1899 and 1903. Impressed by icons rendered in brilliantly spiritual colors that enigmatically darkened through time, Rilke wrote this series of poems from the perspective of a Russian monk. "There God, a dark, protean, essentially Russian deity, is envisioned as an unfinished work of art, the ever-growing, not yet completed product of man" (Brodsky 23). The speaker/monk contemplates God and life, but also the painting of icons. For Rilke, artistic creation culminates in the art of the icon painter, who directly mimics divine creativity in his work. Stahl acknowledges, "die Technik der Ikonenmalerei kam...dem eigenen Stil Rilkes sehr entgegen, einem Stil, der mehr auf Andeutung und Anregung angelegt war, mehr dem diffizilen Verhältnis der Ahnung entsprechen wollte als der Eindeutigkeit der Orthodoxie" (Stahl 87). In taking on the role of a monk and icon painter to write Das Stundenbuch, Rilke himself draws a parallel between his poetry and the art of icons.

Rilke soon came to consider Russia his "geistige Heimat" (Asadowski 5), and his trips through Russia provided material not only for Das Stundenbuch, but also for numerous essays and poems concerning Russian art and his impressions of Russia.
His essay "Russische Kunst," written between his two trips, elucidates his notion that aesthetics and spirituality are intrinsically connected in Russia through the art of the icon: "Wir haben es hier mit einem vorgliottesken Volke zu tun, dessen alle Erlebnisse religiöser Natur sind und so stark, daß sie uns in verdunkelten byzantinischen Bildern eine Schönheit erkennen lassen, welche diese handwerksmäßigen Kopien griechischer Mönche vom Athos niemals besaßen" ("Russische Kunst" 495-96). The communal nature of Orthodoxy also finds expression through celebration of feast days, the events of which are depicted in icons, and the icon depicting serene celestial countenances and robes infused with otherworldly energy incarnates the work of art par excellence for Rilke, for it contains the potential for spiritual transformation in those who regard it. The role of the icon as a work of art that directly influences the lives of the people appealed to Rilke throughout his life.

Rilke's comprehension of Russian art was not limited to the medieval art of the icon; he was also familiar with modernist Russian art, just as he continued to keep abreast of the artistic movements of his time in all of Europe. Rilke displays his knowledge of Russian art history in his essay "Moderne Russische Kunstbestrebungen," which begins with an explication of the historical lack of "great painters" in Russia. Rilke, like many art historians, attributes this
"fact" to the mimicry of western art that began with Peter the Great:

Freilich man empfing sie nicht gern. Man nahm sie auf, wie man die ganze Kultur aufnahm, die Peter der Große hereinbefohlen hatte; mit mehr oder weniger gut verstecktem Mißtrauen, zögernd und von einer gewissen unbefohlenen Hochachtung erfüllt, etwa so wie ein Kleinbürger seinen Vorgesetzten empfängt, den er, durch die Umstände gezwungen, zu Tische laden mußte ("Moderne" 614).

Rilke names Levitsky as the first "real" Russian painter of note to arise at the end of the eighteenth century. He recognizes many painters of the early and mid-nineteenth century, such as Ivan Kramskoi and, of course, Ilya Repin, and focusses especially on Victor Vasnetsov’s task, "die neue Kirche des heiligen Wladimir in Kiew nach den Vorschriften der rechtgläubigen Liturgie auszumalen...[und] in jahrelanger, unermüdlicher Arbeit, die alten Symbole mit neuer Kraft zu erfüllen" ("Moderne" 619). His interest in this modern artist’s attempt to recreate the power of medieval art extends also to Vrubel’, who "was fascinated by the treatment of drapery and the Byzantine method of building up successive planes of colour from dark to light (Russian & Greek Icons 18). Rilke’s admiration is reserved for those modernist Russian artists who do not copy western styles, but who draw from the art of their native soil in creating their works. He mentions Mir iskusstva and Alexander Benois in particular, saying of the cosmopolitan attitude of the World of Art:

Die Frage liegt nahe: sind diese jungen Leute Kosmopoliten geworden? Im Gegenteil: das Ausland ist nicht mehr gefährlich für sie. Sie haben es studiert, um sich von ihm zu befreien. Sie haben viel gesehen, um gerecht sein zu können
Rilke's esteem for the modernist artists who acknowledge their "heimische Kunst" suggests that Rilke had models to follow in utilizing Orthodoxy for his own artistic endeavors.

Russia in the Dinggedichte

According to most Rilke critics, the influence of Russia in Rilke's works lessens greatly with his move to Paris. But Rilke's bond with "his" Russia was central to his aesthetic inspiration, and it impacts not only his early work, but his middle and later work as well. Even Rilke's Dinggedichte, which supposedly exemplify a material and a-religious focus on the concrete world, intimate that there is indeed a God that lives "in den Dingen." The poem "Bildnis" (Neue Gedichte 608), for example, implies that Rilke's task in the Neuen Gedichten is to convey an image or picture of the subject matter; these images are concentrated for contemplation like the images in icons.

Among the many icon themes that appear in the Neuen Gedichten are "Der Engel," "Auferstehung," "Die Marien-Prozession," "Ein Prophet," "Kreuzigung," "Der Auferstandene," "Adam," "Eva," "Sankt Georg," and "Das Jüngste Gericht" (1907). Saint George is not only the patron saint of Russia, he was also a key figure in the Blaue Reiter movement and in Kandinsky's earlier work [SEE FIGURE 3.3], and it is significant that such a figure appears also in Rilke's work.
The Last Judgement is also a popular icon subject, and it was a common motif in German Expressionism, with its predilection for the revolutionary. It is hardly surprising that it would appear among Kandinsky's paintings of the Expressionist period; it is less easy to explain Rilke's treatment of the theme in the Neuen Gedichten: Anderer Teil. Although Rilke's relationship to Expressionism is unclear, parallels with Kandinsky are easy to draw. Both Kandinsky and Rilke were influenced by Orthodoxy, and both lived in the German-speaking west. More importantly, both artists were concerned with the spirituality that underlay their art, and that led both to an understanding of synthesis of the various art forms.

Elements of Last Judgement icons are present both in Kandinsky's painting and Rilke's poem of the same subject. Last Judgement icons [SEE FIGURE 2.5] are a riot of colors. The rich ochers, oranges, and reds convey the confusion of the souls on the day of their eternal redemption or damnation, and God appears in an orb of light at the top, enthroned, establishing a hierarchy of order within the chaos. Kandinsky's version of the Last Judgement (1912) also gives the impression of a chaotic assemblage of color and line, but without the appearance of order established by the hierarchy within the icon. Oranges, ochers, and reds predominate, with hints of blue and purple throughout. A throne like structure is suggested in the center top of the painting, and a concentration of blue appears in the upper right-hand corner.
FIGURE 4.2: LAST JUDGEMENT
in a recognizable "divine" orb, with a yellow trumpet projecting from it; angel wings in the upper left complete the notion of a hierarchy that mirrors the ordering influence in the icons. To the lower right, figures emerge from a large black hole as if from the grave, while to the lower left a red and orange sun represents the fires of hell into which some of the unfortunate and writhing figures of color are tossed. A city at the base of a mountain appears right of center in the picture, the earthly realm from which the more fortunate souls must make their journey upward, along a line that meanders left and then up, like the procession in the icon.

Rilke’s 1907 poem begins in a chaos of rhyme, alliteration, and color, where, again, ochre predominate:

So erschrocken, wie sie nie erschraken,  
ohne Ordnung, oft durchlocht und locker,  
hocken sie in dem geborsten Ocker  
hires Ackers, nicht von ihren Laken  
abzubringen, die sie liebgewannen.

The lack of "Ordnung" apparent also in the word "locker," and the "geborsten Ocker" mirror Kaninsky's turbulent bursts of color. The "Laken" suggest both the heavy saturation of brine and the sheets wrapped around the dead, who are still held down in their graves. Also in Rilke’s poem, angels appear to provide a sense of order in the chaos:

Aber Engel kommen an, um öle  
einzuträufeln in die trocknen Pfannen

Rilke upsets the ritualistic worth of oil in these lines by setting it within the household context of cooking. The image
is not comforting or "homey," however, but threatening, as one imagines that it must be the damned who will "cook" in the fires of Hell.

    und um jedem in die Achselhöhle
das zu legen, was er in dem Lärme
damals seines Lebens nicht entweihte;
denn dort hat es noch ein wenig Wärme,
daß es nicht des Herren Hand erkälte

The emotional value of colors is utilized by Kandinsky to create areas of warmth and cold on the canvas; Rilke, too, offers the reader words with contrasting emotional value.

    The peculiar image of laying that which was good in one's life into armpits of the dead is followed by an explanatory passage in which God reaches down from above, as in the icon and Kandinsky's painting, to pass judgement:

    oben, wenn er aus jeder Seite
leise greift, zu fühlen, ob es gälte.

Just as the lines in Kandinsky's painting are less ordered and more omnipresent than the lines of an icon, so Rilke's God is not restricted to the upper part of his "icon," for his God comes from "jeder Seite." Like the giant in Jack and the Beanstalk, the strangely ominous God of the poem reaches down to pick up the puny figures and decide whether or not to cook them in his fires. Oddly comical, this image draws the reader's attention to the emotional intention behind the familiar story in the same way that the "strangeness" of icons calls the viewer to attend to their deeper meaning.
The final word of the poem draws attention to the value judgement that must be passed within the thematic context, but Rilke leaves the outcome ambiguous -- God has not yet passed judgement. There is thus no progressive narrative in this poem, rather the emotional content of the biblical narrative is presented in an image, like in an icon. Similarly, regardless of what one can "read into" Kandinsky's painting, it remains in a realm beyond narrative logic, for it is an abstract painting that, like an icon, defies merely symbolic interpretation.

Rilke had studied traditional icons and the theology surrounding them, be they of Christ (the incarnation of the Word), the Saints (who have lived in his image, and are thus living icons), the angels (beings of light that adopt a corporeal form), or Mary. He was familiar with the various and pervasive Mary icons in the Eastern Church, and the notion of Mary in Orthodoxy as "Theotokos," the Mother of God, who intercedes on behalf of the earthly congregation. For Rilke, too, Mary was a central figure of Christianity, at least partially because he had been dedicated to and named for her. In 1912, in the castle Duino on the Adriatic, two years after Kandinsky's Über das Geistige in der Kunst, and at the same time he was beginning work on what was to be considered his crowning work, Rilke composed a series of poems on the life of Mary.
Das Marienleben

The influence of Orthodoxy on Rilke’s "Marienleben" is indisputable. Stahl notes:


Rilke’s "Marienleben" consists of thirteen poems that can be grouped into three groups of four, with a final three-part poem. The initial three groups parallel the Orthodox liturgical calendar, which uses the trinitarian model for its three cycles of the Life of Mary, the Infancy of Christ, and Christ’s Ministry; furthermore, each of Rilke’s poem titles depicts an icon representative of a specific feast day within the cycle.

The first group includes "Geburt Mariae," "Die Darstellung Mariae im Tempel," "Mariae Verkündigung," and "Mariae Heimsuchung," or Mary’s visit with her cousin, the mother of John the Baptist. The first three, the birth of Mary, the presentation of Mary in the temple and the Annunciation are traditional icon scenes from the Life of Mary; to these, Rilke adds a fourth episode from Mary’s life that is not an icon "type," that of the visit of Mary with her cousin, the mother of John the Baptist. It could be that Rilke wished to emphasize Mary’s communal nature, or perhaps he was here, too inspired by Orthodoxy. A Christ icon is always placed above the Royal Doors on the Orthodox

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iconostasis, flanked by Mary on the left and John the Baptist on the right; this trinity of icons taken together is called the deesis, and it is possible that Rilke wanted to include a deesis in his cycle by introducing the figure of John the Baptist in "Mariae Heimsuchung."

FIGURE 4.3: DEESIS
The next four poems draw from events surrounding the Nativity of Christ, including "Argwohn Josephs," "Verkündigung Über den Hirten," "Geburt Christi," and "Rast auf der Flucht in Aegypten." Joseph Reproaching the Virgin (Underwood 85) is an icon included in the liturgical cycle of events surrounding the infancy of Christ, as are the Nativity of Christ and the Flight into Egypt.

Mary also appears in icons of the Ministry of Christ, including the Marriage Feast at Cana, and the Crucifixion. Rilke's third group of poems represent the following events of Christ's ministry: "Von der Hochzeit zu Kana," "Vor der Passion," "Pietà," and "Stillung Mariae mit dem Auferstandenen." Although these poems deal with moments from the life of Christ, the emphasis is not upon Christ's miracles and crucifixion, but upon Mary's thoughts and actions surrounding these events. In keeping with Rilke's emphasis upon the life of Mary rather than Christ, the thirteenth and last poem is "Vom Tode Mariae (Drei Stücke).

The fact that Rilke arranged his poems in accordance with the Orthodox feast days is marked enough, but each poem also concentrates its images not in the style of western narrative religious art, but in a contemplative, synchronic manner characteristic of icons. A few examples from the cycle compared with icons of the same subject matter illuminates the connection between icons and Rilke's poetry.
FIGURE 4.4: PRESENTATION OF MARY IN THE TEMPLE
Darstellung Mariae im Tempel

The presentation of Mary in the temple is an Orthodox feast day celebrated on Nov. 21. The textual source of this event is a passage from the Apocryphal Gospel of James, the so-called Protevangelium:

And the child became three years old, and Joachim said: Call for the daughters of the Hebrews that are undefiled, and let them take every one a lamp, and and let them be burning, that the child turn not backward and her heart be taken captive away from the temple of the Lord. And they did so until they were gone up into the temple of the Lord.

And the priest received her and kissed her and blessed her and said: The Lord hath magnified thy name among all generations: in thee in the latter days shall the Lord make manifest his redemption unto the children of Israel. and he made her to sit upon the third step of the altar. And the Lord put grace upon her and she danced with her feet and all the house of Israel loved her" (Protevangelium 7:2).

If we view an icon portrayal of this event while reading Rilke’s version, "Die Darstellung Mariae im Tempel," it becomes apparent that he is describing the scene as portrayed in an icon. The same selective detail of architectural background provides a holy space within which contemplation of the meaning of the event can occur, and the poem is directed at the reader, just as icons are directed at the viewer (my italics; they signify elements that appear in the icon):

Um zu begreifen, wie sie damals war, mußt du dich erst an eine Stelle rufen, wo Säulen in dir wirken: wo du Stufen nachfühlen kannst; wo Bogen voll Gefahr den Abgrund eines Raumes überbrücken, der in dir blieb, weil er aus solchen Stücken getürmt war, daß du sie nicht mehr aus dir ausheben kannst: du risses dich denn ein. Bist du so weit, ist alles in dir Stein, Wand, Aufgang, Durchblick, Wölbung--, so probier den großen Vorhang, den du vor dir hast, ein wenig wegzuzerrn mit beiden Händen:
da glänzt es von ganz hohen Gegenständen
und übertrifft dir Atem und Getast.
Hinauf, hinab, Palast steht auf Palast,
Geländer strömen breiter aus Geländen
und tauchen oben auf an solchen Rändern,
daß dich, wie du sie siest, der Schwindel faßt.
Dabei macht ein Gewölk aus Räucherständen
die Nähe trüb; aber das Fernste zielt
in dich hinein mit seinen graden Strahlen--,
und wenn jetzt Schein aus klaren Flammenschalen auf
langsam nahenden Gewänden spielt: wie hältst du's aus?

"Abgrund eines Raumes" skillfully describes the holy sphere
surrounding an icon, which often appears to be an isolated
scene floating in space. This is not the narrative depiction
of scenes within the context of the bible that appears in
western Renaissance art, but rather a point of contemplation;
there is no attempt at realism in the icon or in Rilke's poem,
for both strike to the spiritual core of the event rather than
its external manifestation.

By inviting the reader to partake in the event, with the
invitation to enter the realm and pull back the curtain to the
Holy of Holies, Rilke is, in effect, inviting the reader to
take part in the divine experience, to enter through the
window of the icon to experience the realm beyond, to some to
some greater insight concerning the event that will affect the
reader (icon viewer) in a personal way. One recalls here
Rilke's own experience of being allowed visual access into the
Holy of Holies at his Easter experience in the Kremlin church
dedicated to Mary; his invitation is thus that of a kind of
"insider." The "Strahlen" that come from afar "in dich
hinein" are reminiscent of the divine light that
conventionally infuses icons with their luminescence. The play of light noted on the ecclesiastical robes ("Gewänder") is typical of icons; this "Schein aus klaren Flammenschalen," the awe-inspiring fire of God, burns so that Rilke may well ask: "wie hältst du's aus?"

The next lines contrast the anticipated fear within the reader with Mary’s lack of fear:

Sie aber kam und hob
den Blick, um dieses alles anzuschauen.
(Ein Kind, ein kleines Mädchen zwischen Frauen.)
Dann stieg sie ruhig, voller Selbstvertrauen,
dem Aufwand zu, der sich verwöhnt verschof:
So sehr war alles, was die Menschen bauen,
sehr überwogen von dem Lob

in ihrem Herzen. Von der Lust
sich hinzugeben an die innern Zeichen:

This self-possessed "kleines Mädchen" with uplifted gaze who appears in the middle of Rilke’s poem also stands at the center of the icon; likewise, the positioning of Mary in Rilke’s poem directly parallels the placement of Mary in the icon:

Die Eltern meinten, sie hinaufzureichen,
der Drohende mit der Juwelenbrust
empfing sie scheinbar:

Icons of Mary’s presentation in the Temple typically present a later scene from the same story, where Mary sits on the steps of the Holy of Holies and receives food from an angel. "This...served as a means of illustrating its most significant points, namely, that the Virgin actually entered the Holy of Holies and sat upon ‘the third step of the altar,’ where she was divinely nurtured" (Underwood 91). This little
scene is presented above the larger scene, as the importance of Mary in the hierarchy of Orthodoxy is superior to that of the other figures present. Rilke, too, implies that her small stature belies the lofty fate that awaits her:

...Doch sie ging durch alle, klein wie sie war, aus jeder Hand hinaus und in ihr Los, das, höher als die Halle, schon fertig war, und schwerer als das Haus.

Mariae Verkündigung

Other poems in Rilke’s cycle of events more commonly portrayed in the Catholic church also indicate a stronger relationship to Orthodoxy than Catholicism. "Mariae Verkündigung" is more easily compared with icons of the Annunciation of the Virgin than with western portrayals of the same event. In Van Eyck’s painting, the story is shown within the Renaissance "frame of reference," so that the painting acts as a frame for the natural world. Icons, on the other hand, do not frame; instead, they act as windows to impart the essence of the event directly to the viewer. Similarly, Rilke’s poem begins with none of the narrative typical in western religious art, but rather with a presentation of the emotional impact of the event upon Mary:

Nicht daß ein Engel eintrat (das erkennen), erschreckte sie. Sowenig andre, wenn ein Sonnenstrahl oder der Mond bei Nacht in ihrem Zimmer sich zu schaffen macht, auffahren --, pflegte sie an der Gestalt, in der ein Engel ging, sich zu entrüsten;
FIGURE 4.5: THE USTYG ANNUNCIATION
FIGURE 4.6: THE ANNUNCIATION
After the angel enters the room, Rilke contemplates the nature of angels in accord with Orthodoxy, as beings of light that adopt physical forms:

sie ahnte kaum, daß dieser Aufenthalt mühsam für Engel ist.

After his characterization of the nature of angels, Rilke includes a parenthetical discourse on the purity of Mary, illustrated by a legendary account from her childhood:

... (O wenn wir wüßten, wie rein sie war. Hat eine Hirschkuh nicht, die, liegend, einmal sie im Wald erkügte, sich so in sie versehn, daß sich in ihr, ganz ohne Paarigen, das Einhorn zeugt, das Tier aus Licht, das reine Tier --.)

The almost sexual union associated with the penetrating nature of seeing ("in sie versehn") not only compares the future birth of the "pure" Christ with the virginal birth of the unicorn, it also refers directly to the penetrating impact that icons, those images "aus Licht" can have on the believing viewer. It is this penetration of light that Mary feels, and which impregnates her with the "son of light." After this short digression, Rilke returns to the original thought which was broken off in the moment of considering the physical form of a being of light, the angel:

Nicht, daß er eintrat, aber daß er dicht, der Engel, eines Jünglings Angesicht so zu ihr neigte; daß sein Blick und der, mit dem sie aufsah, so zusammenschlugen

The two figures, Mary and the angel, come together through their "Blick." It is precisely the "look" of the face that becomes important for the Russian icon after Rublyov, so that
the face and eyes of the icon connect with the face and eyes of the viewer to provide a revelatory experience of mutual seeing. The meeting of the eyes of Mary and the angel also becomes a sexually laden moment, and the action is stilled in a "pregnant" pause:

als wäre draußen plötzlich alles leer
und, was Millionen schauten, trieben, trugen,
hineingedrängt in sie, nur sie und er;
Schaun und Geschautes, Aug und Augenweide
sonst nirgends als an dieser Stelle -- :

The saturated emptiness that surrounds the figures is the divine realm to which Malevich's painting refer, and in which icons are set, and the "Millionen" of the congregation that participate in the Orthodox liturgy are also present in this moment of praise. These millions are invisible, however, for the focus is only on the two figures of the icon, the angel and Mary, "nur sie und er," the One who sees through the angel, and the one who is seen, or penetrated by light. The image then demands that the "viewer"/ reader also see the import of the scene:

sieh,
dieses erschreckt. Und sie erschraken beide.

The "erschrecken" of the penultimate line connects with the "erschrecken" of the second line to form a unified image that ends with the singing of the Orthodox liturgical choir of angels:

Dann sang der Engel seine Melodie.

The similarity of presentation in icons and Rilke's poems of events in the Life of Mary suggests a common source of
inspiration, if not direct influence, and Rilke's familiarity with Russian icons and Orthodox theology also supports this theory. The final poem provides even more evidence that Rilke's thoughts were centered around Orthodox icons in the creation of the cycle.

FIGURE 4.7: THE DORMITION OF OUR LADY
Vom Tode Mariæ

Significantly for this thirteenth poem in the cycle, it had been in the Church of the Dormition of Mary [SEE FIGURE 4.1] exactly thirteen years previously that Rilke had experienced his "resurrection." The Russian word ouspenski means both dormition, or sleep and death, and assumption; accordingly, in these icons we see Mary on her deathbed in the lower section, and Mary enthroned with the heavenly hosts above. Rather than illustrating a narrative, as is the function for western religious art, this icon, like all icons, contains within it simultaneously the paradoxical union of life and death, in order to convey to the viewer the mystery of the resurrection.

For Rilke, it is Mary's death and eternal life that receive attention rather than Christ's. Although the Russian word embraces both Mary's death and assumption, Rilke chooses to title his poem "The Death of Mary." Andreas-Salomé, in her role as Freudian analyst, recognizes in Rilke's psyche "ein Bezogenheit zwischen dem Dichter und dem Tod" (Andreas-Salomé 7), but Rilke's preoccupation with death always included a moment of resurrection and hope. "The Death of Mary" is indicative of this propensity; although the title emphasizes death, his three-part poem addresses both parts of the icon, Mary's death and her assumption, as well as a final consideration of the icon as such.
In the first section, Rilke focuses not on the image of Christ standing over the deathbed, but on Gabriel, the angel who had brought the news to Mary in the Annunciation poem previously. This angel is not the fat cherub of the western Church, but an Orthodox being of light, a "große[r] Engel," who "strahlte," as he commanded Mary also to shine forth, with the double meaning of "erscheinen:"

Derselbe große Engel, welcher einst
ihr der Gebärung Botschaft niederbrachte,
stand da...
und sprach: Jetzt wird es Zeit, daß du erscheinst.

Rilke then refers to Mary's "schmale Bettstatt" that can no longer contain her soul, which is reaching up to the second half of the icon, mediated by the figures of Christ and, synchronously, Mary, the intercessor for the congregation, who still recognizes the earthly faces of the mourners surrounding her:

und hob ihr Antlitz auf zu dem und dem
(O Ursprung namenloser Tränen-Bäche).

Just as the Orthodox Mary, in giving birth to the incarnation of the creator, contains all of creation within her, [SEE FIGURE 2.8] so Rilke's Mary has power over the heavens, to call upon God to bring them closer to Jerusalem in the act of her death. This bringing of the heavens closer relates again to the function of Mary as intercessor between the human and the divine, a function she can perform only because she is totally human and therefore mortal and subject to human weakness, but still endowed with a godly nature:
Sie aber legte sich in ihre Schwäche
und zog die Himmel an Jerusalem
so nah heran, daß ihre Seele nur,
austretend, sich ein wenig strecken mußte:

schon hob er sie, der alles von ihr wußte,
hinein in ihre göttliche Natur.

In the act of pulling the heavens closer, Mary is lifted up by Christ, "der alles von ihr wußte."

Although Christ raises Mary, she is enthroned alone at the top of the icon. The second part of Rilke’s poem begins with the notion that the heavens had been unfinished, or imperfect, before Mary’s coming. Next to the "Auferstandne," or Christ, "war leer der Sitz." Again, there is a reference to the empty space that contains pure nothing, "die reine Lücke," Malevich’s void that transcends meaning but is not therefore meaningless. Rilke’s Mary hesitates to fill this meaning-full emptiness, awed by the emanation, the "Strahlung" of Christ. Yet, Mary’s own "Glanz" blinds even an angel, a being of light, and the angels place her in her rightful position as queen of heaven:

Die Engel aber nahmen sie zu sich
und stützten sie und sangen seliglich
und trugen sie das letzte Stück empor.

So, too, the Orthodox Church places icons of Mary alongside icons of Christ above the royal doors of the iconostasis [SEE FIGURE 4.3].
Rilke's third and final section of "Vom Tode Mariae" moves beyond the specific Dormition icon to consider the meta-icon, the whole notion of capturing the essence of an individual's energy within an image. In a scene reminiscent of the events at Christ's tomb, the angel orders the stone aside so that the reader can glimpse Mary's physical resting place.

Involving both the Orthodox belief expressed in Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*, that the bodies of saints do not smell after death, and the King Abgar legend of the original or vera icon, complete with the "Tuch." The holy emanation that causes the image is pure, not foul-smelling, and it is this energy that is the source of the icon, the imprint of the body on cloth from the inner divine light:

"Vom Tode Mariae" thus explores first the lower part of icon, then the upper part, and finally the origin or idea of the icon as such. This exploration is carried out not in a western narrative style, but in an "Orthodox" simultaneous juxtaposition, and the images act as icons, as points of focus for contemplation for the reader. The Orthodox believer is said to be transformed by contemplation of and contact with
the divine light, a transformation directly equated with the transsubstantiation of the host into the body and blood of Christ, and the consequent transformation of the individual in partaking of the Eucharist. Rilke’s final stanza of the "Marienleben" is a personal invitation to transformation, for the reader to contemplate and, through contemplation, arrive at an inner realization that will "shake the heavens" of the individual’s world, so that the only response is worship and praise:

Staunst du nicht, wie sanft sie ihm entging?
Fast als wär sie’s noch, nichts ist verschoben.
Doch die Himmel sind erschüttert oben:
Mann, knie hin und sieh mir nach und sing.

The Russian word for "sing" also means "to pray." Rilke’s final image of worship refers to the Russian liturgy, the most potent context of the icons he has just delineated.

Rilke’s Russia

For Rilke, the icon was the perfect work of art. His religiosity, informed by Russian Orthodoxy, found articulation in his work, and the resulting aesthetic includes a strong devotional and spiritual moment. The Russian God, for Rilke was

Leppmann is unable to unify the two seemingly conflicting strains within Rilke, so he classifies him as an atheist rather than a believer. But Rilke's artistic production immediately following his Russia trip is more complex than this. Andreas-Salomé recognizes Rilke's love for Russia and Orthodoxy as an expression of his drive for artistic creation:

Eben die Kindlichkeit und Primitivität der Grundvorstellung ist es, die dem Dichter am russischen Wesen und Frommsein die Zunge löste: dies Zurückgeführtsein auf das gewissermaßen Familiäre des Gottschöpferischen in der Menschheit (Andreas-Salomé 21).

Rilke viewed his artistic creation as a religious or spiritual impulse, a use of the Word to create Worlds. Through his experiences in Russia, Rilke was able to give a name to his aesthetic philosophy.

Rilke's spirituality gathered from Russian Orthodoxy the transformative potential of art for the individual and society. Bürger's category of "sacral art" becomes useful here, for Rilke hoped to integrate art into life in the way that it had been in the middle ages. This was not simply a reactionary process, especially when viewed in relation to the works of Kandinsky and Malevich. Rilke's usage of icon imagery is similar to that of Kandinsky; both utilized the ancient themes and techniques to create something entirely new in their art. Just as Kandinsky and Malevich drew from their Orthodox backgrounds to create art that was distinctly different and new, Rilke also utilized Orthodox themes and concepts to create a new kind of poetry that was unlike that
of his contemporaries in both eastern and western Europe, a practice that can be labeled "retrogardism."

The divine light "emanating" through icons conveys the spiritual essence of the individual portrayed to the believer. This inner shining of essence impressed Rilke, the poet famed for his Dinggedichte, which also attempt to convey the essence of an object. The demand that the icon places on the viewer particularly struck Rilke, for whom the work of art, embodied in the Torso of Apollo, commands: "Du mußt Dein Leben ändern." In this way, Russia's images found a home in Rilke's artistic works far beyond the Stundenbuch. "Für immer blieben ihm die Menge betender Gläubiger vor dem Kircheneingang, die kleinen Kapellen mit den von der Zeit dunkel gewordenen Ikonen, der eigentümliche orthodoxe Gottesdienst...in Erinnerung" (Asadowski 22). As late as 1922, Russian Orthodoxy and the transformative potential of art inform Rilke's aesthetics and provide an important backdrop even for the Sonnete an Orpheus and the Duineser Elegien.
CHAPTER 5

THE DUINO LITURGIES

It was in the Duino Castle on the Adriatic in that Rilke first heard the voice calling from the winds, "Wer, wenn ich schrie, hörte mich denn aus der Engel Ordnungen?" Ten years after recording this first line, along with what were to become sections of the Fifth Elegy, he wrote down the entire cycle of the ten Duineser Elegien. He had struggled with their conception from 1912 to 1922, and their eventual birth was, in Rilke's words, a revelation.

It seems only natural that elements of Orthodoxy would appear in the Elegies. At the same time he recorded the first lines in 1912, he was also writing Das Marienleben, that series of "icons" that he declared were inspired by the album of painting from Mt. Athos. The themes of death and transcendence that figure so strongly in the Mary cycle also weave their way through the Elegies, and the revelatory nature of their emergence implies a connection to spirituality. Indeed, all of Rilke's writings seem to have been divinely inspired, for "Rilke empfindet sich...nicht als einer, der dichtet, sondern als einer, in dem bzw. aus dem es dichtet"
(Leppmann 144); just as the godly flows through the icon, so spirituality coursed from Rilke.

Rilke’s spirituality was always wrapped up in his Russia experience. Even as late as 1922, Rilke insisted upon the importance of Russia for his religious character:

Für immer blieben ihm die Menge betender Gläubiger vor dem Kirchgang, die kleinen Kapellen mit den von der Zeit dunkel gewordenen Ikonen, der eigentümliche orthodoxe Gottesdienst...in Erinnerung" (Asadowski 22).

In spite of the enduring influence of Russian spirituality on Rilke, most of the secondary literature on the Elegies regards them as a purely aesthetic exercise, through which Rilke examined the difficulties of artistic production through the medium of language, and in which the Russian religious element is all but absent. Kathleen Komar sees the Elegies as exploring "the difficulties of seeking transcendence by means of a limited human consciousness and culminat[ing] in the affirmation of poetic transformation" (Komar 7), while Frank Baron comments that "the entire Duino Elegies...may be seen as a dramatic attempt to interpret and rationalize, once and for all, the mission of the poet as one that articulates the spiritual meaning of great art works (Baron 9). Although Baron recognizes a kind of spirituality in Rilke’s work, it is an aesthetic spirituality relating only to art, and not to any manifestation of organized religion.

Adriana Cid draws from Kurt Goldammer in Mythos und Religiosität im Spätwerk Rilkes to present a convincing study of Rilke’s religiosity in his later works, claiming that his
renunciation of Catholicism in 1901 signified a rejection of a "traditionelle Vorstellungsweise" of religion in favor of a "modernen Individualreligiosität,"
die dem einzelnen Menschen eine noch größere religiöse Freiheit und Unabhängigkeit von Gruppenbindungen und Lehre und Kult zu geben versucht, als es schon die Universalreligionen taten (Cid 104).

While Rilke's spirituality was undeniably unique, he never completely rejected the call of organized religion. His spirituality was not individualistic and self-serving, but was focussed upon communal aspects of religion that are manifested through an assemblage of worshippers. The importance of the community of believers for Russian Orthodoxy enabled Rilke to derive a spiritual mission for his art. By no means did Rilke "replace" his Catholicism with Orthodoxy, but he did connect with certain Orthodox ideas that, he maintained, remained important spiritual forces throughout his life. The most important of these was the religious tradition of the icon, which

struck Rilke as a uniquely Russian combination of religious mysticism and recognition of the inherent spiritual value of the physical object itself. This particular conjunction of the transcendent realm and the physical object shaped much of Rilke's early poems as well as the Elegies (Komar 3).

Since their appearance in 1922, the Duineser Elegien have been considered Rilke's crowning achievement. Consequently, these contemplations of the alienated mortal have been studied "to death," and any new examination of the Elegies must reserve as its task a kind of analysis that enlivens them, as the ozhivka glint in the eye of an icon. This is no mere
linguistic play, for Rilke's concentration on death as subject matter is the obverse of his equally fervent passion for life. According to Lou Andreas-Salomé:

...ein Mißverständnis liegt dabei ganz nahe, und es hat Rilkesche Poesie oft und oft in eine falsche Romantik gerückt; denn der da sang, meinte schon früh, schon von Beginn an, mit dem Hinweis auf das Sterbliche nicht den Tod, sondern das Leben, ihm war Poesie diejenige Wirklichkeit, worin beides eins ist (Andreas-Salomé 7-8).

As "elegaic" poems, the cycle ostensibly addresses the melancholy of being mortal, but, on a deeper level, the Elegies also confront the difficulties of living a transient life to its fullest. Within the context of Russian Orthodoxy, they reveal the paradox inherent in Dormition/ Assumption icons, that death implies rebirth and that sadness and joy are merged.

The fusion of life and death is just one of many connections that link Rilke's Duineser Elegien with the spirituality and aesthetics of Russian Orthodoxy, for "here, at his greatest moment, it seems that among the powerful winds of inspiration that overtook Rilke and carried his major work to its completion may have been one blowing across time and space, from Russia" (Brodsky 205). Just as Orthodox belief sustains paradoxes of space and time, so Rilke's Elegies work to transcend the boundaries of the delineated world and break down the border between external and internal reality. Throughout the Elegies, Rilke "seeks to surpass isolated self-consciousness in order to recreate a unity with the world which was lost in the fall into self-awareness" (Komar 3). He
attempts this through use of the grammatical devices that obscure demarcations (between "falling" and "rising," for example) and incorporating aural and visual moments into his poetry. In fact, the entire mystical expanse of the Orthodox liturgy is recreated in the Elegies, as they follow a transformative process that merges musical, verbal and visual incarnations of Eastern Orthodoxy.

Throughout the Elegies, concentrated images of traditional Orthodox themes, such as Mary and the angels, function within the cycle as icons function within the Orthodox liturgy, that is, as points of focus for connection and communication between the divine realm and the speaker, between the speaker and reader, and, ultimately, between the reader and the sphere of transcendence. As such, the cycle of the ten Elegies can be viewed as a kind of Orthodox liturgy that moves from invocation, to contemplation, to transformation and communion. Although Rilke often undermines the external liturgical structure, the essential "meaning" of the liturgical process, that of spiritual transformation, remains the same.

The Duino Elegies as Liturgy

The liturgical process Rilke follows in the Elegies begins in self-doubt and alienation, but ends with a more or less hopeful reconciliation with the universe and mortality. Theodore Ziolkowski comments:
In the course of his meditations the reflective self is led from his initial despair — "Wer, wenn ich schrie, hörte mich denn..." — to a level of higher awareness, a moment of anagnorisis, at which he is enabled to see life as a new unity and to appreciate the meaning of human suffering. In the middle of the reflective core — the Fifth Elegy — there is a turning point at which the moment of ideal balance to be achieved at the end of the cycle is anticipated in the play of the acrobats, but not yet attained (Ziolkowski 251).

Ziolkowski outlines this structure within the context of the Classical German Elegy, but the process described is identical to that of the Orthodox liturgy, with its invitation to higher awareness, and the turning point of transsubstantiation of the elements, turned outward in communion. Each Elegy in itself recreates the journey from contemplation to revelation hoped for by Orthodox believers in a liturgy, and just as each icon is a microcosm of the entire Orthodox liturgy, so each elegy mirrors the larger process. The transformation in part involves the move from the suffering and alienated modern individual to an embracing of all of life, the negative and the positive, leading to a holistic existence exhibited in the dialectic of joyful and sorrowful moments in Orthodox icons.

Rilke does not simply follow the Orthodox process of transformation, however; instead, he follows a singularly unorthodox process of continually turning the Orthodox liturgy back on itself. For example, the Orthodox liturgy begins with an invocation of the heavenly realm, followed by the concern for the salvation of the individual: "For peace from on high, and for the salvation of our souls, let us pray to the Lord"
Chrysostom 55). Rilke, too, addresses the heavenly sphere in the first line of his first elegy:

Wer, wenn ich schrie, hörte mich denn aus der Engel Ordnungen?

but he reverses the Orthodox order by invoking the angel hierarchies only after mention of the individual, the ich. Such self-reflexive moments focus and hold the attention of the reader, just as the priest continually calls the congregation to attend to the Word; they are less a rejection of Orthodoxy than an attempt to prevent familiarity with ritual from obscuring the spiritual experience. The subjunctive voice often prevents Rilke’s exercise from becoming an unambiguous dismissal of Orthodox views. Rilke uses this grammatical device throughout his works to blur boundaries between inner and outer reality and to point to the realm of transcendence that shines through the Archaischer Torso Apollos. In the Elegies, the subjunctive becomes a means of questioning both the religious or spiritual world and the so-called "real" world. Rilke collapses the border between the two realms, as he searches for a transcendent means of experiencing life.

The "Great Synapse:” The First Elegy

In the first elegy, Rilke defines the topics and problems to be explored in the course of the ten elegies...He examines the human realm for possible models to guide him...and he settles upon lovers (particularly unrequited lovers), heroes, and those who die young (Komar 25).
In this way, the first elegy acts as the "Great Synapse," the first litany of the Orthodox liturgy in which the priest and choir call upon the entire congregation of heaven and earth to become characters in the drama about to unfold. In it, Rilke presents the "fallen" nature of the human being hungry for salvation. This is the state of a worshipper before the liturgy, that is, before transformation has taken place within the life of the individual.

The angels are immediately invoked as intercessors to the divine realm, but their presence is not certain to the imperfect petitioner:


Rilke's searching attitude is evident in the first word, the question word "wer." This "who" is the ich's cry of anguish at the alienated condition of the isolated modern individual. This cry, along with "hörte," introduces the sense of sound (Cid 60) into the liturgy of the Elegies, but it contrasts with the "music of the spheres" enacted in the Orthodox liturgy. The call also evokes Christ's censure of God, so that "Why have you forsaken me?" is implied in its meaning.

The ich's expression of chaotic emotion contrasts with the Engel Ordnungen, the strict order of beings who are aware of their favored place within divine creation. Contemplation of these beautiful and frightening beings by the ich recollects an Orthodox believer's meditation before an icon.
The initial feeling of distance from such radiance and perfection produces a corresponding sense of inadequacy, which provides the humility necessary to begin the process of spiritual transformation.

Transformation is sought through contact with the holy in the form of angels, but a too hasty ("plötzlich") encounter is perceived as dangerous to the as yet unprepared ich. Because of his alienated and imperfect state, he fears annihilation "von seinem stärkeren Dasein." This understanding of angels as beings of light whose existence is stronger than that of human beings, because of their proximity to the celestial fire, is an Orthodox rather than Catholic one. The pure beauty of the angels thus "burned" involves an ethical dimension in Orthodoxy, and the transcendent beauty of angels is dangerous to the unprepared, for it can shock and destroy the complacent existence of the individual:

...Denn das Schöne ist nichts als des Schrecklichen Anfang, den wir noch grade ertragen,
These beings are pure and dangerous, but they are also "das Schöne," the embodiment of the essence of art. As such, their magnificence is terrifying, for beauty and the arts challenge the viewer in the same way that icons summon the believer to contemplate one's own life, and destroy it (in order to be reborn) if it does not measure up:

und wir bewundern es so, weil es gelassen verschmäht, uns zu zerstören. Ein jeder Engel ist schrecklich.
The angel, this absolute being that shows us by comparison our own insignificance and shortcomings, and whose relationship to the divine only emphasizes distance of human beings from the heavenly realm, this angel is "schrecklich," and the German word communicates both terror and awe, in the older sense of the English word "terrible."

Because of his dread, the "ich" in the First Elegy holds himself back from a move to the angels. The result is a sentence replete with harsh consonants:

Und so verhalt ich mich denn und verschlucke den Lockruf dunkelen Schluchzens.

Just as the individual stumbles in the face of life's harsh realities, so the reader stumbles over the hard consonants "schl," "ck" and "chz" repeated in a combination impossible to recite fluidly. Rilke's language reflects an emotional state; like colors for Kandinsky, words are the material of his art, and he brings attention to this material to produce the sense of strangeness present in icons, and to remind the reader, as a priest reminds the congregation, to "attend" to the meaning behind the artwork.

After invoking the heavenly spheres for the salvation of the individual, the Orthodox liturgy turns to the worldly realm, asking "For peace of the whole world, for welfare of all the holy Churches of God and for the union of all" (Chrysostom 55). Rilke, too, moves from the heavenly back to the worldly realm, in the Scala Paradisi:
Ach, wen vermögen
wir denn zu brauchen? Engel nicht, Menschen nicht,
und die findigen Tiere merken es schon
daß wir nicht sehr verläßlich zu Haus sind
in der gedeuteten Welt.

Although Rilke subtly incorporates the ladder of being into
his *Elegies*, he does not recognize the hierarchy inherent in
the Orthodox movement from heaven to earth. The "gedeutete
Welt" of the human being has been created by philosophical and
religious structures that carry many people from the cradle to
the grave. For the individual concerned with the sufferance
of Being, all such interpretations break down into
arbitrariness and meaninglessness; not only does the speaker
refuse to acknowledge the "gedeutete" division between heaven
and earth, he also sees the animals as possessing a kind of
resourcefulness that the human being has lost in erroneous
sketches of the world.

This reversal of Judeo-Christian hierarchy is typical for
Rilke; he continually reverses upward and downward motions, in
order to highlight that the transcedent can only be attained
through an internal journey. Rilke's emphasis on the inner
world is characteristic of his notion of *Weltinnenraum*, where
human consciousness seems to fuse with the unconscious world
of things (Grosholz 424-425). Thus he blurs borders between
inner and outer reality, to presents a psychic landscape:

Es bleibt uns vielleicht
irgend ein Baum an dem Abhang, daß wir ihn täglich
wiedersähen; es bleibt uns die Straße von gestern
und das verzogene Treusein einer Gewohnheit,
der es bei uns gefiel, und so blieb sie und ging nicht.
The inner images that "remain" to us in memories of the "gedeuteter Welt" provide some comfort for the lost individual by their very familiarity, but they cannot forestall the dark night of the soul:

O und die Nacht, die Nacht, wenn der Wind voller Weltraum uns am Angesicht zehrt --,

This is the night that forces the human being to contemplate the "Weltraum," the infinite space to which the paintings of Kandinsky and Malevich refer. Although the wind seems to cry for attention as the speaker had in the first line, and seeks to endow the face ("Angesicht") with the sight ("Sicht") inherent within it, the individual is not yet capable of "seeing." Before revelation changes the sight of the sufferer, infinity seems empty and without meaning, and the small despair of the individual is swallowed by the huge despair of a night no longer peopled even by the order of the angels, but only empty wind.

A presence then enters the poem that is vaguely comforting and somewhat mysterious:

wem bliebe sie nicht, die ersehnte, sanft enttäuschende, welche dem einzelnen Herzen mühsam bevorsteht.

This is already a reference to the tender comfort conveyed by icons of Mary. Just as the Orthodox liturgy remembers Mary before each section, so Mary images scatter throughout the Elegies as moments of comfort that, for the speaker, are "ersehnt," but at this point still disappointingly ineffective in combatting the speaker's suffering. Ultimately, however,
it is the Mary reference in the Tenth Elegy, sign of "Our Lady of Sorrows" who suffers humanly, that will enable the speaker to transcend his suffering and achieve revelation. At this point in the cycle, Rilke juxtaposes this first hint of a comforting presence with a reference to earthly love, the medium through which many human beings attempt to conquer their alienation:

Ist sie den Liebenden leichter?
Ach, sie verdecken sich nur mit einander ihr Los.

Rilke implies, however, that such love cannot make existence "leichter," but only "hides" the problem; ultimately even love cannot conquer the solitary nature of existence.

The speaker's next cry is again like the call of the priest to "attend," finally to "see" that which has been invisible only through the individual's refusal to perceive, the "gnosis" or knowledge of the divine that is present but always shrouded in mystery:

Weißt du's noch nicht? Wirf aus den Armen die Leere zu den Räumen hinzu, die wir atmen; vielleicht daß die Vögel die erweiterte Luft fühlen mit innigem Flug.

In rejecting comfort even in the arms of a lover, Rilke's speaker embraces the night of despair and the "Leere" within it. In doing so, he experiences the expansiveness that typifies the beginning of the transformative process. He embraces the negative in order to transform it, ultimately, into the positive.

The "Vögel" in Rilke's Elegies relate to angels; in the Second Elegy, for example, he refers to angels as "Vögel der
Seele." His purpose is to emphasize the paradoxical "upward" movement of "downward" exploration; as "Vögel der Seele," his angels occupy a transcendent position "not in the external heavens, but within consciousness. The dual implication of internal and external positions...destroys the boundaries between the two concepts and establishes the division-free state of the angels" (Komar 42). They move within "die erweiterte Luft" that the speaker experiences, paradoxically, through his "inward flight."

As the subject moves away from his own self-absorption to the wider spaces within, his address changes from "ich" to "du:"

Ja, die Frühlinge brauchten dich wohl. Es muteten manche Sterne dir zu, daß du sie spürtest. Es hob sich eine Woge heran im Vergangenen, oder da du vorüberkamst am geöffneten Fenster, gabe eine Geige sich hin. Das alles war Auftrag.

In this shift of perspective, the speaker not only invites the reader to participate in the upcoming process, he also recognizes the "Auftrag" inherent in the perception of the world. As nature meets the human being, it demands a mission; beauty in the outer world "needs" us to become aware of it, for the Orthodox concept of beauty is an ethical demand. Those elements in our world that could provide comfort if we would notice them all contain a revelatory aspect. Spring implies rebirth and cyclical change, while stars illuminate the night of despair with their celestial light. Waves could imply light and sound waves that enable us to see and hear, or
the waves of memory that overtake us in times of transformation. The violin that "gibt sich hin" is the Kandinsky’s inner sound and the music of the Orthodox liturgy that echoes the songs of the angels.

The speaker then realizes that all of these moments of revelation had gone unheeded because of his preoccupation with other aspects of life:

Aber bewältigtest du’s? Warst du nicht immer noch von Erwartung zerstreut, als kündigte alles eine Geliebte dir an? (Wo willst du sie bergen, da doch die großen fremden Gedanken bei dir aus und ein gehn und öfters bleiben bei Nacht.)

"ATTEND!" says the priest in the liturgy, and Rilke calls the reader not to become "zerstreut" by daily life. He points out the futility of losing oneself in and lamenting the transitory nature of all experience:

Sehnt es dich aber, so singe die Liebenden; lange noch nicht unsterblich genug ist ihr berühmtes Gefühl. Jene, du neidest sie fast, Verlassenen, die du so viel liebender fandst als die Gestillten. Beginn immer von neuem die nie zu erreichende Preisung; denk: es erhält sich der Held, selbst der Untergang war ihm nur ein Vorwand, zu sein: seine letzte Geburt.

"Sing," commands the priest Rilke, for this is what the angels do; lovers only mimic this sound, but theirs is not "unsterblich" like the song of the angels.

The next figure to enter the Elegies is the hero, archetypal character both of Christ and the ego. Icons of Mary and of angels are complemented by icons of Christ; Rilke mentions both the "Untergang" into Hell, mirrored in the speaker’s journey through the dark night of the soul, and the
"Vorwand," the "accusatory curtain" in the temple that split in two at Christ’s death. For the first time, the speaker acknowledges the possibility of rebirth in "seine letzte Geburt," but the strength to create "zweimal" is still doubted:

Aber die Liebenden nimmt die erschöpfte Natur in sich zurück, als wären nicht zweimal die Kräfte, dieses zu leisten. Hast du der Gaspara Stampa denn genügend gedacht, daß irgend ein Mädchen, dem der Geliebte entging, am gesteigerten Beispiel dieser Liebenden fühlt: daß ich würde wie sie?

The suffering of a rejected lover, embodied in the story of Gaspara Stampa, is the greatest of worldly distress, but Rilke contrasts the negativity of this anguish with her "gesteigert" example, and appeals again for transformation:


The penetration of pain attains a sexual dimension as misery is commanded finally to "bear its fruit." The creativity and eroticism of these lines are restated in the quivering arrow, trembling with desire and pain -- the German word "Leidenschaft," in which "Leiden" plays a role, is implied here. The arrow penetrates only after its tension is released; so, too, the supplicants must "release" their desperate grasping for permanence in a transitory world, "denn Bleiben ist nirgends." Orthodoxy demands such a release, not in order to concentrate upon some distant afterlife, but to be able to live without perpetual regret.
Icons of saints remind the believers of individuals who have turned from themselves to serve others in this life, and Rilke also refers to the call of the saint in the population of voices:

Stimmen, Stimmen. Höre, mein Herz, wie sonst nur Heilige hörten: daß sie der riesige Ruf aufhob vom Boden; sie aber knieten, Unmögliche, weiter und achtetens nicht: So waren sie hörend.

The aural moment of Orthodoxy is repeated and internalized as the speaker demands of himself that he hear the great call "with his heart," just as the Orthodox priest repeatedly exhorts the congregation to listen to the Word. Again, Rilke muddles spatial distinctions with the juxtaposition of "aufhob" and "knieten." In the same way, Rilke breaks down barriers between the speaker and the reader by moving from "mein Herz" to "du:"

Nicht, daß du Gottes erträgst die Stimme, bei weitem. Aber das Wehende hörte, die ununterbrochene Nachricht, die aus Stille sich bildet.

The danger of approaching the infinite is reiterated, as well as the demand of the world surrounding the individual. Rilke’s congregation of readers is charged to attend to the unending "Nachricht" that composes itself out of the "Stille" of the sacred space.

The next section begins to speak of "die Toten," the subject of most Elegies and the ostensible subject of these. Rilke especially addresses those who die young, whose deaths we can least easily explain and accept:

Western churches, with their emphasis on death and the crucifixion, enter Rilke's cycle here. He refuses to allow his Elegies to become such graveyards, and the speaker receives the command to remove the "Anschein" of "Inschriften" on tombs. It is these inscriptions that cause the living regret their passing, but these young dead wish instead to "shine" with the pure gesture of an icon, the portrait that conveys the living essence of an individual rather than the death.

A new movement then enters Rilke's score, for with this new listening, the poet could hear of those taken back into the totality of existence, i.e., the recently dead. The image of the young man recently dead will return as the unifying image of the tenth elegy, here his function will be precisely to communicate back to the poet the message of achieved final reunification (Komar 34).

In the next lines, the poet contemplates how the dead must experience their continued existence:

Freilich ist es seltsam, die Erde nicht mehr zu bewohnen, kaum erlernte Gebärude nicht mehr zu üben, Rosen, und andern eigens versprechenden Dingen nicht die Bedeutung menschlicher Zukunft zu geben; das, was man war in unendlich ängstlichen Händen, nicht mehr zu sein, und selbst den eigenen Namen wegzulassen wie ein zerbrochenes Spielzeug.

As the speaker meditates for the first time on the transcendent realm, he refers back to the elements of the
"gedeutete Welt" that the living need to provide order and meaning in the natural world (Komar 35). Even that which defines oneself in life, the name, is left behind, as are the hopes and desires of daily existence:

Seltsam, die Wünsche nicht weiterzuwünschen. Seltsam, alles, was sich bezog, so lose im Raume flattern zu sehen. Und das Totsein ist mühsam und voller Nachholn, daß man allmählich ein wenig Ewigkeit spürt.

Rilke points out the "strangeness" of that other realm that is so apparent in icons, as he deconstructs the elements that "cover" or "darken" like clouds, but also hold together. Rilke’s own language reflects his subject, as the various meanings of "bezog" interact, and the "meanings" both of the world and the word flutter through Malevich’s empty-ful space.

The speaker then returns to the problem of the living, that they too eagerly define and "deuten" the world around them:


He compares mortal existence with that of the angels, who recognize no distinctions in the congregation of being, for all are "enlivened" by the same breath, the "ewige Strömung" of winds that flows out of icons from the other realm.

Rilke’s final stanza of the First Elegy again contemplates those who die early, the "Früheentrückten," related to the "Frühlinge" of the earlier stanza who needed us
to notice them; these figures, in comparison, "brauchen uns nicht mehr."

Schließlich brauchen sie uns nicht mehr, die Früheentrückten, man entwöhnt sich des Irdischen sanft, wie man den Brüsten milde der Mutter entwächst.

The Mother refers both to the earth and the intercession of Mary, which is no longer necessary for those who have moved to the side of the divine. The dead no longer need the living, but the living still require the inspiration of the mystery play enacted in the liturgy:

Aber wir, die so große Geheimnisse brauchen, denen aus Trauer so oft seliger Fortschritt entspringt —: könnten wir sein ohne sie?

Progress of the soul can only be achieved through reenacting the old rituals, and retelling the old sagas:

Ist die Sage umsonst, daß einst in der Klage um Linos wagende erste Musik dürre Erstarrung durchdrang; daß erst im erschrockenen Raum, dem ein beinah göttlicher Jüngling plötzlich für immer enttrat, das Leere in jene Schwingung geriet, die uns jetzt hinreißt und tröstet und hilft.

Kathleen Komar recounts the myriad myths surrounding Linos, which all "involve the unexpected, early, and abrupt death of a young, godlike man and the consequent development of song (the Linus) to console and enlighten those who remain behind" (Komar 38). If the myth is read within the Christian context, then the consequent song directly relates to the Orthodox liturgy, for it resulted from the "death of a godlike man" and has as its purpose enlightenment and consequent consolation. Consolation occurs when the emptiness of the void "geriet in
Schwingung," so that this icon "void" of Malevich is saturated with vibration in the form of Kandinsky's music of the spheres. The ultimate message of the Elegies is thus relayed already in this first, that is "Trost und Hilfe" through a revelation of meaning. The following nine Elegies repeat the characters and themes introduced in the first. Like music, the following scores provide new movements and insights to themes already played; they enact the transformative process, and invite the reader to participate in the "eucharistic" sharing of revelation and change that finally occurs.

**Icons of Intercession: Elegies 2, 3, and 4**

Throughout the ten Elegies certain images recur, each time with new movements and more intense moods, like the repetition of traditional motifs in icons. These elements function in the Elegies much as icons do within the Orthodox liturgy, that is, as a point of concentration for the reader to be drawn into the spiritual realm, and as windows through which the spiritual realm can shine. It is through these Orthodox windows that the divine light shines most powerfully in the liturgy of the Elegies, thus symbolism of light and color is especially prevalent wherever these images occur. The most common icons used by Rilke in the Duineser Elegien are those of angels, of Mary (the mother), and of Christ (the hero). It is significant in Rilke's search for the divine that the angel and Mary, both of which serve as intercessors between the
human and the divine realms, figure prominently in the
Elegies.

Angel Icons: The Second Elegy

The first "icon" to be developed in the Elegies is
encountered already in the first lines of the First Elegy, the
angel figure. Much has been written of the nature of Rilke's
angels in the Elegies. Hank Lazer sees them primarily as the
embodiment of linguistic/ poetic concepts:

in Duino Elegies Rilke does not want language to be seen "merely" or finally as a temple for the holy. Language is
where we are; it is where and how we affirm our existence.
Language is the means by which we hold up our treasure to the
angel (Lazer 178),

while Adriana Cid sees them as signifying the mythology of
paradise lost (Cid 149-5). Adler claims of angels: "Strictly
speaking, they are objects of thought not of imagination"
(Adler 13), but Grosholz states "instead of ideas, Rilke had
angels" (Grosholz 419).

Few critics regard the angels of the Elegies as their
most literal denotation, as spiritual manifestations, but when
examined within the light of Russian Orthodoxy, another level
of meaning to Rilke's angels is illuminated. The angel recurs
throughout the ten Elegies, but it is at it's "purest," that
is, farthest from human existence, in the first two Elegies.
It is in these poems that Rilke's angels most resemble
Orthodox icons of the same. The image of the angel is a
distinctive nexus within the Elegies, for Rilke's angels
contain within them the union of life and death, of the
material and spiritual realms, that is so important both to
Orthodoxy and to Rilkean aesthetics:

For Rainer Maria Rilke the interchange between the two realms
is resolved as the interaction between two simultaneously
existing worlds: the world of the living and the world of the
dead. In Sonnets to Orpheus Rilke explains that it is the
poet, Orpheus, who can bring these worlds together...But
Rilke’s most important contribution to this poetry of the two
realms is found in Duino Elegies with its creation of the
figure of the angel (Lazer 165).

This is why, in the First Elegy the angels are said not to
distinguish between the living and the dead. They not only
act to unify disparate worlds, however, they also consolidate
various art forms, as in Orthodoxy, so that the aural, the
visual, and the verbal all have their moment. Because of
their sheer distance from human experience, all mentions of
angels throughout the Elegien are phrased in the subjunctive;
as a result, human contact with the divine is never entirely
excluded, preventing Rilke’s "liturgy" from becoming an "anti-
liturgy."

The same "terrible" quality of angels in the First Elegy
is present in the angels of Rilke’s Second Duino Elegy. They
are not the comforting guardians of Western Christianity,
rather they are members of the strict hierarchy of the Eastern
church, pure and distant inhabitors of the realm between
heaven and earth, and therefore in direct contact with the
divine. "Jeder Engel ist schrecklich," he begins, with almost
the same words as "Ein jeder Engel ist schrecklich" of the
last line of the first stanza of the first Elegy:
One function of Orthodox angels is to sing to the divine, and this musical element is a substrain in Rilke's *Elegies*. He invokes them in the second elegy with the cry "ansing ich euch." His "dennoch" signifies an eradication of the worldly concerns of the First Elegy; in spite of fear and imperfection, he still chooses to sing to the angels through the liturgy of the *Elegies*.

The dual implication of the external and internal in the designation of "Vögel der Seele" has already been noted; their "division-free state" (Komar 42) is desirable to the speaker, but also feared as deadly to his daily existence. Rilke then provides a kind of scripture reading in the liturgy:

Wohin sind die Tage Tobiae, da der Strahlendsten einer stand an der einfachen Haustür, zur Reise ein wenig verkleidet und schon nicht mehr furchtbar; (Jüngling dem Jüngling, wie er neugierig hinaussah).

Komar notes that "what attracts Rilke about the story of Tobias is the total ease and familiarity with which Tobias encounters Raphael in the Biblical account" (Komar 43). The passage from the Apocrypha cited by Komar reveals that humanity, too, formerly experienced a kind of "division-free state." Now, however, we do not know the angels, and can only speak of them "subjunctively:"

Träte der Erzengel jetzt, der gefährliche, hinter den Sternen eines Schrittes nur nieder und herwärts: hochaufschlagend erschlug uns das eigene Herz. Wer seid ihr?
"Hinter den Sternen" is, again, the heavenly realm of light, while "hochauf-/schlagend" is an interesting rift that emphasizes Rilke's "up and down" relationship.

Rilke then enters the "invisible" realm of the angels, that realm implied in the timeless and placeless quality of Byzantine icons. He uses high, "umlauted" vowels in the first two lines of the second stanza:

Frühe Geglückte, ihr Verwöhnten der Schöpfung, Höhenzüge, morgenrötliche Grate
to carry the reader "up" into this realm, much as icon painters attempted to bear the viewer to a higher spiritual plane. Rilke presents a series of celestial characteristics that appear faster and faster throughout the second stanza, with flower imagery that refers back to the fruit of the First Elegy:

--Pollen der blühenden Gottheit,
Gelenke des Lichtes, Gänge, Treppen, Throne
Räume aus Wesen, Schilde aus Wonne, Tumulte
stürmisch entzückten Gefühls und plötzlich, einzeln,

It is these "Räume aus Wesen," Malevich's essential void that lead the reader "plötzlich" into a revelation of the nature of angels, the moment at which the icon viewer / reader is pulled through the image to the realm beyond. The divine light reflects from and streams through the face of the angels, just as the halos surround the divine expressions on the faces of angels in icons:

Spiegel: die die entströmte eigene Schönheit
wiederschöpfen zurück in das eigene Antlitz.
While transformation has not yet been achieved, contemplation of the icon has revealed a glimpse of the divine light, the expression of ultimate wisdom glimpsed briefly upon the angels' visages that is carried through to the third stanza:

Denn wir, wo wir fühlen, verflüchtigen; ach wir atmen uns aus und dahin; von Holzglut zu Holzglut geben wir schwächern Geruch. Da sagt uns wohl einer: ja, du gehst mir ins Blut, dieses Zimmer, der Frühling füllt sich mit dir... Was hilfts, er kann uns nicht halten, wir schwinden in ihm und um ihn. Und jene, die schön sind, o wer hält sie zurück? Unaufhörlich steht Anschein auf in ihrem Gesicht und geht fort.

In this line appears a human cry, a longing for the higher realms which are closed to mortals. As the elegy progresses, Rilke moves more and more toward the human realm, and his angels begin to bear a human face, like the angels of Rublëv in the transition from Byzantine to Russian icon painting.

In the fourth and fifth stanzas, the poet addresses the angels not as "Frühe Geglückte," but as "Liebende;" they thus come "down to earth," just as Rublëv's angels condescend to visit Abraham and Sarah in the Old Testament Trinity [SEE FIGURE 2.11].

The speaker moves from questions about the nature of angels to musings upon how they perceive human beings, and "wer seid ihr?" changes to "wir sind doch." This reversal of
perspective leads to musings upon the mortal state in relation
to the heavenly, rather than as entirely separate from it:

Sind wir in ihre
Züge soviel nur gemischt wie das Vage in die Gesichter
schwangerer Frauen? Sie merken es nicht in dem Wirbel
ihrer Rückkehr zu sich. (Wie sollten sie's merken.)

The reference to "vagueness" in the faces of pregnant women
relates directly to the facial expressions of Mary icons in
which she still carries Christ and, by extension, all of
creation, within her [SEE FIGURES 2.8 AND 2.9].

The next two stanzas move from intense concentration on
the angels to speculations on lovers. In spite of the attempt
at communion through earthly love,

Wenn ihr einer dem andern
euch and den Mund hebt und ansetzt - : Getränk an Getränk:
o wie entgeht dann der Trinkende seltsam der Handlung.

it is only at the end that Rilke returns to the interaction of
"Liebe und Abschied," which touches again upon the realm of
Gods:

Erstaunte euch nicht auf attischen Stelen die Vorsicht
menschlicher Geste? war nicht Liebe und Abschied
so leicht auf die Schultern gelegt, als wär es aus anderem
Stoffe gemacht als bei uns? Gedenkt euch der Hände,
wie sie drucklos beruhen, obwohl in den Torsen die Kraft
steht.

Diese Beherrschten würsten damit: so weit sind wirs,
dieses ist unser, uns so zu berühren; stärker
stemmen die Götter uns an. Doch dies ist Sache der Götter.

In the final stanza Rilke explores the possibilities for the
human being to reach a divine state, but at this point in the
process it is still only in the subjunctive:
Such a "rein" human place would run counter to the divine space of the icons, which is not "schmal," but the speaker's plaintive wish to find a sympathetic home that fulfills the mortal heart echoes a kind of longing for past religions and a mystical homeland that he had glimpsed as a youth in the icons of Russia. The late Rilke of 1922 recalls Russia, but cannot yet return to it, and his final lines convey the sense of a lost faith not yet attainable through icons ("nicht mehr nachschaun in Bilder") or the "göttliche Körper" of angels.

The second elegy invokes the angels specifically; in addition to being a misordered "Cherubikon," a liturgical invocation of the angels (literally "angel-icon," or symbolically giving image to the angels on the part of the congregation), it is an icon-like concentration within the cycle that focuses attention on one image within the multitudes presented in the "Synapse." Significantly, this first image to be contemplated is that of the angel, divine messenger who easily moves through the divisions perceived by inhabitants of the earthly realm. Rilke rebuts this celestial effigy with an intensely human encounter with the sublime, that is, with the experience of lovers. The angel icon having
been contemplated and dismissed, Rilke then turns to a more human figure of intercession, that of Mary.

**A Mary Icon: The Third Elegy**

The third elegy explores the origins of the human condition through the pain of childhood and awakening. It opens with the awakening of desire within the "Jüngling," but moves immediately from a lover’s desire to the desire of a boy for his mother. This Freudian relation also recalls the conjunction of Mary both as the mother and the bride of God; the first stanza closes with an icon of Mary enthroned in heaven:

*Ihr Sterne,
stammt nicht von euch des Liebenden Lust zu dem Antlitz
seiner Geliebten? Hat er die innige Einsicht
in ihr reines Gesicht nicht aus dem reinen Gestirn?*

The linguistic connection between "Sterne" and "Stirn" through the word "Antlitz" focuses on the light that emanates from the face of an icon; these meanings join "Gesicht" with "Einsicht" to imply inward sight achieved through beholding an external countenance, the process of icon viewing.

Directly after introducing this icon theology, Rilke turns to the Mother image:

*Du nicht hast ihm, wehe, nicht seine Mutter
hat ihm die Bogen der Braun so zur Erwartung gespannt.
Nicht an dir, ihn fühlendes Mädchen*

The following stanza describes the mother leaning over the small "hero" in an icon of tenderness, the umilenie [SEE FIGURE 2.6]:

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Mutter, du machtest ihn klein, du warsts, die ihn anfing;  
dir war er neu, du beugtest über die neuen  
Augen die freundliche Welt und wehrtest der fremden.

Rilke then describes the function of Mary icons, that of  
warding off the dark night in the chaos of the world through  
her loving, shining presence:

Wo, ach, hin sind die Jahre, da du ihm einfach  
mit der schlanken Gestalt wallendes Chaos vertratst?  
Vieles verbargst du ihm so; das nächtlich-verdächtige Zimmer  
machtest du harmlos, aus deinem Herzen vol Zuflucht  
mischtest du menschlichern Raum seinem Nacht-Raum hinzu.  
Nicht in die Finsternis, nein, in dein näheres Dasein  
hast du das Nachtlicht gestellt, und es schien wie aus  
Freundschaft.

While appeal to the Mary icon seems no longer effective, Rilke  
uses "lindern" to describe the effect on the hero, and the  
word "zärtlich," the German equivalent of umilenie, in  
referring to the Mother:

Und er horchte und linderte sich. So vieles vermochte  
zärtlich dein Aufstehn;

The Orthodox meaning of the umilenie icon also contains a  
moment of sorrow, as the embrace of the son recalls the  
redemptive sacrifice to come. This image of passion contains  
the whole history of salvation from birth to death of Christ.  
This Third Elegy, too, moves on to explore the suffering of  
the hero through "das Entsetzliche" that the Mother cannot  
conquer. In the last two stanzas, Rilke explains the  
ineffectuality of this image, as he compares the love of Mary  
for the Christ child with the more confusing desires of the  
human being, setting up a kind of alternative icon, with its  
own psychic landscape:
daß wir liebten in uns, nicht Eines, ein Künftiges, sondern das zahllos Brauende; nicht ein einzelnes Kind, sondern die Väter, die wie Trümmer Gebirgs uns im Grunde beruhn; sondern das trockene Flußbett einstiger Mütter --; sondern die ganze lautlose Landschaft unter dem wolkigen oder reinen Verhängnis--

The "zahllos Brauende" within this icon suggest the znamenie icon, Rilke's favorite, in which Mary contains all of creation within her. Consequently, Rilke's rejection of the umilenie icon does not entail a rejection of Mary imagery in general; although the umilenie was effective only for the child hero, he still calls upon the "einstiger Mütter" of his own icon, joined with the image of the lover, for intercession and peace:

...O leise, leise,
tu ein liebes vor ihm, ein verläßliches Tagwerk, --führ ihn nah an den Garten heran, gieb ihm der Nächte Übergewicht......
Verhalt ihn.....

The ellipses with which the Third Elegy end prevent the closure necessary in a total rejection of the Mary image. Like the use of subjunctive in connection with angels, the possibility remains that the function of Mary as intercessor may yet reach its fruition through the course of the Elegies, but in a form other than the icon of tenderness.

Just as in the Orthodox service, where Mary is to be remembered after each section, the Mary icon is never far from Rilke's struggle in the Elegies. While her tender presence in the third elegy appears to fail to mitigate the chaotic soul of her Jüngling, this umilenie image is associated with the
lover, a Freudian connection later recalled in a more effective mediation between the earthly and the divine.

Christ Icons: The Fourth Elegy

Heinrich Imhof discusses the symbolism of the tree in Rilke’s work first in terms of the tree of life or, by extension, as representing God. The tree ultimately comes to symbolize Mary, the stem from which the "branch" of Christ sprang:

Rilke versucht in der Folge, die zunächst mit "Gott" verbundene Baumsymbolik, die eine Projektion darstellt, stufenweise von "Gott" abzulösen und der Reihe nach auf die Mutter Maria, dann auf den Menschen und schließlich auf sich selbst zurückzunehmen (Imhof 81). Imhof uses as illustration another of Rilke’s "Verkündigung" poems in which the angel addresses Mary directly with "...du aber bist der Baum," which endows the tree symbolism in Rilke’s poetry with a "neue, weibliche Symbolbedeutung" (Imhof 81). In the context of a parable of Christ, Mary (the tree) acts as intercessor between Christ (the fruit) and human beings (the earth) to facilitate understanding of the Word.

The tree appears already in line 14 of the first elegy as a comforting and familiar presence, and recurs as an organic image throughout the ten Elegies; the "tree" of Mary from which the branch of Christ sprung begins the Fourth Elegy:

O Bäume Lebens, o wann winterlich?  
Wir sind nicht einig.

With these words, the "hero" of the cycle, the ego also associated with Christ signifies his separation from the
Mother that was lamented in Elegy Three. In this Fourth Elegy, the hero comes into his own and explores conflicts inherent in human beings. This is the incarnation of Christ, the becoming-human that serves as the basis for all icon theology, the embodiment of the divine in a visible, corporeal form. Rilke especially addresses the misery of being a transcendent soul in a mortal body, and he uses images of dancers and puppets, caught between desires and actualities, to illustrate this predicament. Heinrich Imhof equates the dancer with the icon-painter of the Stundenbuch:

Diese Verse haben zu manchen Mißverständnissen geführt, weil man den "Tänzer" nicht recht zu deuten gewußt hat. Mit diesem Wort bezeichnet aber Rilke sich selbst als Stundenbuch-Dichter; denn im Stundenbuch hat Rilke sich selbst "Tänzer der Bundeslade" genannt und dem Künstler, also sich selbst, im Bilde des "tänzenden Mönchs" vorgeführt (Imhof 23).

This dancer appears upon a stage where "die Szenerie war Abschied;" the speaker initially rejects these too-human images in favor of "fuller" puppets on an "empty" stage:

Ich will nicht diese halbgefüllten Masken, lieber die Puppe. Die ist voll.

... wenn auch von der Bühne das Leere herkommt mit dem grauen Luftzug,

Later, these same puppets are related to the angels, as both participate in the visual play (Rilke makes use here of the visual element in the word "Schauspiel"):

wenn mir zumut ist, zu warten vor der Puppenbühne, nein, so völlig hinzuschau'n, daß, um mein Schauen am Ende aufzuwiegen, dort als Spieler ein Engel hinmuß, der die Bälge hochreißt. Engel und Puppe: dann ist endlich Schauspiel. Dann kommt zusammen, was wir immerfort
Only with the "sight," the realization that nothing separates the earthly from the heavenly ("Puppe und Engel"), comes the revelation needed for transformation. Christ, embodiment of the divine in the earthly, is the icon that teaches this lesson most fully.

In answer to the Mother of the third elegy, the "Father" also makes an appearance in this elegy, although he has already died, a reference both to the actual death of Rilke's father and to the perceived death of God the Father by Nietzsche and others at the turn of the century (Imhof 19-20).

The allusion to God the Father and the dramatic presence of dancers and puppets recall the origins of the liturgy in Greek mystery plays, as well as the logos, or word of the Father to the children at the moment the scripture is read to the congregation.

The death of the Father corresponds with to birth of consciousness and the realization of mortality; this fourth elegy ends with the ineffectuality of words (in the wake of the obsolete logos) to describe such an alienated state:

Aber dies: den Tod
den ganzen Tod, noch vor dem Leben so
sanft zu enthalten und nicht bös zu sein,
ist unbeschreiblich.

The "unbeschreiblich" is also a reference to God who, iconoclasts would claim, can never be represented or circumscribed. Rilke's "representations" contain the paradox
inherent in icons that they seek to portray that which cannot be portrayed, not by "describing" it, as western religious art most often does, but by attempting to convey something of the essence of the beyond through a transformative artistic process.

With the conclusion of the Fourth Elegy, contemplation of the three intercessory icons is complete. The meditation has moved from the heavenly (angels) to the earthly (Mary) to the union of the two (incarnation of Christ), and the time of transformation is at hand. Before communion can occur, the ingestion of the elements that leads to individual revelation, the elements of the Eucharist must first be transformed. In the Fifth Elegy, Rilke transforms the elements of his poetry — dancers, puppets, and angels — into one image of the divine on earth, the acrobat.

Transubstantiation: The Fifth Elegy

It was in an atmosphere of intense language consciousness in Venice, the summer of 1912, that Rilke wrote the first four stanzas of his fifth Duino Elegy. Challenged by the effectiveness of painting in directly communicating images, Rilke was inspired by Picasso's *La famille des saltimbanques* to express the inexpressible within the limitations set by language.
FIGURE 5.1: La Famille des Saltimbanques
The Fifth Elegy seems at first to be an ekphrastic description of the Picasso painting; the characters of the poem depict the posture and implied actions of the Picasso figures. Already this implication, however, moves beyond the realm of *ekphrasis*, and into an attempt to convey the essential nature of the picture rather than its outward appearance.

Having already communicated his fascination with the 1905 Picasso, Rilke had an opportunity to observe a live performance of such a wandering troupe of acrobats (Steiner 101), and he recorded his impressions in a letter on 14 July 1907:

nachkam, im Witz nicht und nicht in der Arbeit. Unter den Zuschauern waren welche, die ihn kannten: Hé, Père Rollin! Aber er nickt nur nebenbei; das Trommeln ist eine große Sache und er nimmt es ernst" (Steiner, 102).

Both the Picasso and Rilke’s observations contributed to the initial verses of the Fifth Elegy; ten years later Rilke was able to use the earlier four stanzas as a springboard for deeper and more complex musings in the final section, making the Fifth the longest of the Duino Elegies.

Patricia Brodsky has identified a further source for elements in Rilke’s portrayal not found in the Picasso. A Russian modernist Mikhail Vrubel painted Tanec (The Dance) in 1889, and Brodsky argues for this additional influence on the Fifth Elegy (Brodsky 205). Vrubel, like Rilke, was “deeply interested in old Russian art” (Brodsky 205), and, although “Vrubel does not appear in Rilke’s essays on Russian art,...he is among the painters mentioned in Rilke’s private correspondence” (Brodsky 206).

A troupe of wandering acrobats is portrayed in La famille des saltimbanques; the designation ‘saltimbanque’ emphasizes the wandering aspect:

The French term saltimbanque derives from the Italian saltimbanco which is a combination of saltare (to leap), in (on), and banco (bench). By its origin, saltimbanco not only indicates that the entertainer was athletic but also suggests he was itinerant, as his only stage was a portable bench” (Carmean 18).

Picasso chooses to emphasize this transitory nature of his subject, perhaps as a tool to suggest movement and fleetingness in a two-dimensional medium. To this end, he
uses the plight of the wandering acrobat, a common theme in art of the nineteenth century. Rilke, however, wishes to capture the timeless essence at the heart of the acrobats' apparently fleeting nature and consequently begins his fifth Elegy with the question "Wer aber sind sie?" This beginning thrusts the reader immediately into existential musings on the nature of each of the enigmatic words "who," "they" and especially "are."

The "they" of the question is initially the easiest to approach, as "they" are subsequently named: "die Fahrenden." Who exactly is meant by this designation, however, has apparently been the subject of much controversy for many "streitfreudige" literary critics. Some say these "traveling ones," besides being the acrobats themselves, symbolise the artist; some say the writer in particular, some say humanity in general, and some say a number of combinations and permutations of all of the above (Steiner 103). In the context of the Elegies as a whole, such questions are most often posed concerning the nature of angels; in this way, the angel icon first makes its appearance in the Fifth Elegy, but the angel has been "incarnated" into the earthly image of the acrobat. This is the first element that becomes "transsubstantiated" in Rilke's Fifth Elegy.

Finally, then, comes the question of the word "are," the third person plural present form of the verb "to be." In this grammatical explanation lies a clue to the nature of the
entire poem, reminiscent of Rilke’s third Sonnet to Orpheus. "Wann aber sind wir?" he asks, while questioning the ability of human beings to produce song or art or poetry. Art should be perfect and created; Gods, says Rilke, are perhaps perfect and created, but human beings never are, rather, we are in a continual process of becoming; how, then, can we produce perfect art that is, simply exists in beauty and unchanging? The answer lies in the creation of an icon, art that does not serve the human being, but reflects the light of a transcendent realm.

Rilke then moves to describe "die Fahrenden:"

Wer aber sind sie, sag mir, die Fahrenden, diese ein wenig Flüchtigern noch als wir selbst, die dringend von früh an wringt ein wem, wem zu Liebe niemals zufriedener Wille?

Purely on the superficial level, "die Fahrenden" refers to Picasso’s acrobats; the word incorporates the acrobatic traveling through the air in the performances, but also the traveling to the performances, and even through time—the human condition. It also refers to the travel of the angelos, the messenger, between the earthly and the divine realm, "up and down" which, for Rilke, become so interconnected. But these acrobats are also intensely human; being wandering players, they are "Flüchtigern noch als wir selbst," fleeting but also fleeing, driven "dringend von früh an" by an unknown and never-satisfied will—their Nietzschean own? An external force? Free will or predestination? Again, there appears the human condition—not to know.
In the subsequent lines, Rilke revels in the possibilities of language to suggest movement, using a series of action words to create an image of the acrobats sailing through the air, moved by this same "wem zu Liebe/ niemals zufriedener Wille," which takes hold of them:

Sondern er wringt sie, biegt sie, schlingt sie und schwingt sie, wirft sie und fängt sie zurück; wie aus geölter, glatterer Luft kommen sie nieder auf dem verzehrten, von ihrem ewigen Aufsprung dünneren Teppich, diesem verlorenen Teppich im Weltall. Aufgelegt wie ein Pflaster, als hätte der Vorstadt-Himmel der Erde dort wehe getan.

Some external force "wringt sie,/ biegt sie, schlingt sie und schwingt sie,/ wirft sie und fängt sie zurück," like the human being tossed by the waves of life. Up, over, and around, they eventually come down to the "dünneren Teppich," which emphasizes their wandering and destitute nature, "their stage reduced to a small, bare rug" (Carmean 21). This rug—the word "Teppich" conjures up images of medieval tapestries—seems to be suspended in space, symbolist and surreal, a "verlorenen Teppich im Weltall." It is also a flying carpet, a medieval relic indeed and a monument to humanity’s ancient belief in power, now lost in the modern, technical world, covering this "wound between heaven and earth" (Steiner 105) "wie ein Pflaster." Such carpets out of space and time are those upon which the feet of icon figures such as Mary often rest, the only signifier of earth that "grounds" the icon in the "Weltall." Rilke then places a letter into his icon:
Letters on icons spell out the name of the figure portrayed; they provide a linguistic reference to a visual image that circumscribes its essence in a union of word and image.

"Und kaum dort," the moment after movement has just ended and just before it will begin again, the desired "still point" captured in painting but which, even in painting is an illusion, there, finally, though "hardly there," is the moment of Picasso’s painting, where the acrobats appear "aufrecht, da und gezeigt." They form "des Dastehns großer Anfangsbuchstab," another medieval image suggesting heavy sacred books in monasteries with the first letter ornately and painstakingly decorated by awe-stricken monks. Not only does the image hearken back to the time of belief in power, it is also a perfect union of the arts of painting and writing. Rilke probably used the positioning of the acrobats in the shape of a "D" to refer to the beginning letter of the word "Dastehn" (Steiner 106).

But then the hallowed moment of Picasso’s painting is gone, fleeting as the human condition itself. The state of the individuals was not "Dasein," but only "Dastehn;" the mysterious powerful Will "rollt sie wieder," simply "zum Scherz," with as much rhyme found in modern poetry—or reason as in Kurfürst Friedrich August I von Sachsen (1670-1733).
showing off to his guests (Steiner 107). The image of the acrobats rolling like tin plates calls to mind the da Vinci sketch of the human body in a wheel. Da Vinci was concerned with understanding the body; da Vinci's time, the Renaissance, was the beginning of the end of the Middle Ages, as well as the birth of modern analytical thought, which directly coincides with the slow dying of the belief in power.

This circular shape is reflected into the next stanza; the perspective widens and the "rolling wheel" of the acrobats shrinks to become the center of a rose of "watching" which blooms and withers as people come to watch the performance and then leave (Steiner 107):

Ach und um diese
Mitte, die Rose des Zuschauns:
blüht und entblättert. Um diesen
Stampfer, den Stempel, den von dem eignen
blühenden Staub getroffen, zur Scheinfrucht
wieder der Unlust befruchteten, ihrer
niemals bewußten, --glänzend mit dünnster
Oberfläche leicht scheinlächelnden Unlust.

The rose, being one of those tired old romantic symbols which had almost lost its power through overuse, was infused with new potency through Rilke's writing, as was the tired rose of poetry at the turn of the century. The rose was often used as a symbol by Rilke, and its Novalis related symbolism for "Poesie" is clear. Its use in the sixth Sonnet to Orpheus provides an interesting basis for interpretation. The petals are portrayed as "Kleidung" which are "um einen Leib aus nichts als Glanz." Applied to the fifth Elegy, one could see the acrobats, the "Mitte" of the rose as nothing but illusion-
as are, by extension, poets and all human beings and all their hustle and bustle on the earth.

Rilke criticizes those "who only stand and wait" here, for they are peripheral to life, and are drawn to the illusory "Scheinfrucht" of transitory elements on earth. The plant imagery is fully played out in the etymological relationship between the "Stampfer" and "Stempel" (Steiner 108), fertilized by its own "pollen," or, the better, non-fertile translation of "dust." This self-pollination, a "Narzistische Rückwendung zu sich selbst" (Steiner 108), produces only a "Scheinfrucht" of "scheinlächelnden Unlust:" creativity is neither brought to fruition, nor even enjoyed, and this "schein" contrasts with the "true" light and gets in the way of a revelatory experience. This is a turning point of the Elegies, as the speaker recognizes elements that keep him from "attending" to the drama of the liturgy.

The next six stanzas likewise involve a shrinking of perspective, not only back to the acrobats as a group, but closer, to the individuals. The focus is first on "der alte, der nur noch trommelt," who focuses the plant imagery by serving as the "welke Stemmer:"

Da: der welke, faltige Stemmer,
der alte, der nur noch trommelt,
ingegangen in seiner gewaltigen Haut, als hätte sie früher
zwei Männer enthalten, und einer
läge nun schon auf dem Kirchhof, und er überlebte den andern,
taub und manchmal ein wenig
wirr, in der verwitweten Haut.
The drum, carried on a shoulder in the Picasso, figured prominently in Rilke's letter, and was often used by the traveling acrobats to "drum up" customers (Carmean 21). It was also used to keep "time," another symbol of the three-dimensionality and transitory nature of the human condition. The old man, victim of time, is contrasted with the young man:

Aber der junge, der Mann, als wär er der Sohn eines Nackens und einer Nonne: prall und strammig erfüllt mit Muskeln und Einfalt.

Oh ihr, die ein Leid, das noch klein war, einst als Spielzeug bekam, in einer seiner langen Genesungen...

"Der junge," like all human beings, is caught between two worlds, the sacred and the profane, "Sohn eines Nackens/ und einer Nonne." His virility is therefore, like the "Scheinfrucht," only an illusion. He is in the same category as the old man, both addressed as "ihr," mere toys for sorrow, a theme that recurs in the Tenth Elegy; as acrobats they are also yo-yos—sometimes up, sometimes down, jerked by the finger of fate.

Rilke then turns to the children. The first focus is the boy; continuing the organic metaphor, he is "unreif," not yet aware of the limitations of time:

Du, der mit dem Aufschlag, wie nur Früchte ihn kennen, unreif, täglich hundertmal abfällt vom Baum der gemeinsam erbauten Bewegung (der, rascher als Wasser, in wenigen Minuten Lenz, Sommer und Herbst hat)—abfällt und anprallt ans Grab: manchmal, in halber Pause, will dir ein liebes Antlitz entstehn hinüber zu deiner selten
zärtlichen Mutter; doch an deinen Körper verliert sich, der es flächig verbraucht, das schüchtern kaum versuchte Gesicht... Und wieder klatscht der Mann in die Hand zu dem Ansprung, und eh dir jemals ein Schmerz deutlicher wird in der Nähe des immer trabenden Herzens, kommt das Brennen der Fußsohln ihm, seinem Ursprung, zuvor mit ein paar dir rasch in die Augen gejagten leiblichen Tränen. Und dennoch, blindlings, das Lächeln...

The boy’s senses have not yet been numbed, and he still feels the pain strongly—and, because of his inexperience and clumsiness, often (Steiner 112). This falling imagery "to one’s grave" is again picked up in the Tenth Elegy, but by then it is transformed into a positive element. Similarly, the boy’s pain is a direct result of his "Ursprung," his initial jump into the human condition. Because he can still feel pain, however, he can also feel real pleasure; his "Lächeln" contrasts sharply with the "scheinlächelnden Unlust" of the second stanza.

This real emotion contains something of the longed-for still point, the realm of the timeless and immortal. The poet immediately appeals to this realm, "Engel!" to preserve the healing plant which contrasts with the tired rose symbol:

Engel! o nimms, pflück, das kleinblütige Heilkraut. Schaff eine Vase, verwahrs! Stells unter jene, uns noch nicht offenen Freuden; in lieblicher Urne rühms mit blumiger schwungiger Aufschrift:

>Subrisio Sal tat.<.

Inherent in the act of picking, prompted by the wish to preserve a plant, is also its very death. Such permanance cannot be attained in a mortal lifetime, and the vase used to preserve the plant inevitably becomes an urn.

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The girl, in contrast, is seen as almost less than human. Introduced after the urn and with the same adjective, "lieblich" (Steiner 117):

Du dann, Liebliche,
du, von den reizendsten Freuden
stumm Übersprungne. Vielleicht sind
deine Fransen glücklich für dich--,
oder über den jungen
prallen Brüsten die grüne metallene Seide
fählt sich unendlich verwöhnt und entbehrt nichts.
Du,
immerfort anders auf alle des Gleichgewichts schwankende
Waagen
hingelegte Marktfrucht des Gleichmuts,
öffentlich unter den Schultern.

It is the girl's role as a vessel, the archetypal female with "jungen prallen Brüsten" which is emphasized. She remains ignorant of the boy's fleeting joy, "von den reizendsten Freuden/ stumm Übersprungene" and is treated like a "Marktfrucht," seen only in her economic value as a performer. Like the passionless "Unlust" of the second stanza which is neither love nor hate, she is treated with "Gleichmut" by the passionless analyzing modern mind—fruit not tasted and enjoyed, but only weighed "auf alle des Gleichgewichts schwankende Waagen."

The tragedy of the scene and the human condition finally overcomes the poet, and he cries out for the lost past, held now only in memory—treated by Rilke here, as in other poems not as a time, but as a place:

Wo, o wo ist der Ort--ich trag ihn im Herzen--,
wo sie noch lange nicht konnten, noch von einander
abfiehn, wie sich bespringende, nicht recht
paarige Tiere;--
wo die Gewichte noch schwer sind;
Wo noch von ihren vergeblich
wirbelnden Stäben die Teller
torkeln...

In contrast to the unicorn of "Mariae Verkündigung,"

daß sich in ihr,
ganz ohne Paarigen, das Einhorn zeugt,
das Tier aus Licht, das reine Tier --.

The animals of this poem -- and this earth -- couple, but not
quite correctly. The speaker longs to flee from the
"Gleichmut" and "Gleichgewicht," to the place "wo die Gewichte
noch schwer sind," before the modern world, when words and
emotions still carried weight. This is the cry of all of the
poets of the Sprachkrise, to overcome the smooth
sophistication of the industrialized world so that the tin
plates, the da Vinci human wheels, do not roll predictably and
smoothly, but retain their individuality, though it be
imperfection and "torkeln..."

Und plötzlich in diesem mühsamen Nirgends, plötzlich
die unsägliche Stelle, wo sich das reine Zuwenig
unbegreiflich verwandelt--, umspringt
in jenes leere Zuviel.
Wo die vielstellige Rechnung
zahlenlos aufgeht.

The specific point in time, however, when the modern
world emerged, "wo sich das reine Zuwenig/unbegreiflich
verwandelt--umspringt [like an acrobat]/ in jenes leere
Zuviel" is impossible to identify; it is "die unsägliche
Stelle" to which icons refer. This is the concern of the
Sprachkrise poets and of Rilke especially--to express the
inexpressible with words which no longer carry weight. Some
poets, like Hoffmannsthal, ceased writing poetry, thereby
giving in to the stifling, sophisticated atmosphere of
cynicism which, though quite fashionable, kills:

Plätze, o Platz in Paris, unendlicher Schauplatz,
wo die Modistin, Madame Lamort,
die ruhlosen Wege der Erde, endlose Bänder,
schlingt und windet und neue aus ihnen
Schleifen erfindet, Rüschen, Blumen, Kokarden, künstliche
Früchte--, alle
unwahr gefärbt,--für die billigen
Winterhüte des Schicksals.

"Madame Lamort," death, manipulates like the unknown Will at
the beginning of the poem, "schlingt und windet," and
precisely and analytically "erfindet." Some poets, on the
other hand, like George, settle for beautiful and mysterious
but inorganic, "künstliche Früchte--, alle/ unwahr gefärbt."

For Rilke, to break from the pervasive mood of
Sprachkrise death and weariness, there is first, like his own
ten-year period of struggle with the Elegies, the "lange Pause
des Unaussprechbaren" (Steiner 123) and the punctuation which
normally indicates the passage of time in a text. For Rilke,
however, the ellipse indicates the passage from time into the
realm of timelessness:

............................

Engel! Es wäre ein Platz, den wir nicht wissen, und dorten,
auf unsäglichem Teppich, zeigten die Liebenden, die's hier
bis zum Können nie bringen, ihre kühnen
hohen Figuren des Herzschwungs,
 ihre Türme aus Lust, ihre
längst, wo Boden nie war, nur an einander
lehnnenden Leitern, bebend,--und könntens,
vor den Zuschauern rings, unzähligen lautlosen Toten:
 Würfen die dann ihre letzten, immer ersparten,
immer verborgenen, die wir nicht kennen, ewig
gültigen Münzen des Glücks vor das endlich
wahrhaft lächelnde Paar auf gestilltem
Teppich?
"Engel!" he cries again, invoking the being that has been present throughout the Fifth Elegy, and with this cry, the transsubstantiation of the elements occurs. The lovers of the first Elegies are transfigured in their new setting, and they form icon towers of pleasure which are not grounded, like western depictions, but suspended on the inexpressible carpet of an icon in the realm of the subjunctive. No longer "Scheinfrucht" or "Unlust," there would be erotic "Türme aus Lust," and never the pain of landing for the boy, but only a place "wo Boden nie war."

Exploring the limits of language, Rilke ends the Fifth Elegy in the icon realm, also a symbolist world of eroticism and death, eros and thanatos unified. The "Zuschauern" in the nether reaches would necessarily be the dead, a figure from the First Elegy that participates with the congregation of Elegy characters in saying: "This is the body!" the magic words of transformation. They possess the eternal, timeless (emphasized by the repetition of "immer" and "ewig") "Münzen des Glücks," which they would throw before a couple, the focus of Rilke's final question.

The couple at rest at the still point contrast sharply with the hasty movements of the acrobats in the beginning to achieve, finally, real pleasure and become "das endlich wahrhaft lächelnde Paar auf gestilltem Teppich," the carpet which is no longer flying, no longer moving through space or time. The entire image becomes a focal-point, much as the 235
acrobats are the center of the rose of watching, but stationary and not illusory. It is the origin of the circle for the entire poem, and it resembles the full Mary Orant of the Great Panagia icon [SEE FIGURE 2.9]. The "blessed couple" of Mary and Christ are joined as Mary stands on a carpet and makes the liturgical gesture of priest at the moment of consecration of the elements.

The Fifth Elegy has been called the center of the cycle, the balance point, and "the two parts [of the Elegy] reflect the two paintings -- a Western and a Russian one -- which function as sources for the poem's basic imagery" (Brodsky 207). In effect, Rilke creates an icon in his final question, a window through which mortal human beings can glimpse the realm of timelessness. A number of celestial and mundane images converge in a moment of transformation equivalent to the transsubstantiation of the elements during the Eucharist. Just as common bread and wine are imbued with a spiritual force, so are the commonplace acrobats of the fifth elegy equated with angels. This fulcrum of the transformative process ends with a vision of the peace yet to be achieved, a subjunctive znamenie icon invoked for strength for the remainder of the journey.

Communion: Elegies 6, 7, 8, and 9

The next four Elegies turn the transformation glimpsed in the Fifth Elegy outwardly to the speaker and, ultimately, to
the reader in a Eucharistic sharing of revelation that culminates in the Benediction of the Tenth Elegy. The Sixth Elegy is a mirror image of the Fourth, for it concentrates also on the hero, but the hero has been transformed. It begins with a Feigenbaum, a reference to a gospel reading within the broader liturgy, in which Christ’s wrath falls upon the poor fig tree. Related to the Mary/ tree imagery of the Fourth Elegy, the fig tree is revered here for its sudden fruition as the divine enters the earthly, “wie der Gott in den Schwan.” This reference to Greek mythology equates the impregnation of Mary by the Holy Spirit with the seduction of Ledo by Zeus.

The elegy moves on to contemplate the fruit, the “Held,” the Christ figure throughout the elegies. Both a hodigitria [SEE FIGURE 2.7] and a znamenia icon are hinted at, as the Mother “shows the way” to the hero developing in her womb which, by extension, contains the “Tausende” of all of creation:

War er nicht Held schon in dir, o Mutter, begann nicht dort schon, in dir, seine herrsche Auswahl?
Tausende brauten im Schooss und wollten er sein, aber sieh: er ergriff und ließ aus --, wählte und konnte.
Und wenn er Säulen zerstieß, so wars, da er ausbrach aus der Welt deines Leibs in die engere Welt...

Like the womb of Mary in icons, the world of the mother’s “Leib” is more expansive than this world; it is endless, like Malevich’s realm of the beyond. The final words of the sixth elegy convey the transfiguration of the hero through love:
Denn hinstürmte der Held durch Aufenthalte der Liebe, jeder hob ihn hinaus, jeder ihn meinende Herzsclag, abgewendet schon, stand er am Ende der Lächeln, --anders.

This is the moment of Christ's transfiguration, face turned away from the apostles lest he blind them, and the moment at which he appears to the Orthodox congregation so that they may take part in the transformative process and become, like him, "anders."

The Seventh Elegy begins with the "Schrei" of the First Elegy, but without the agony of the voice that has grown away from such "Werbung" for the self:

Werbung nicht mehr, nicht Werbung, entwachsene Stimme, sei deines Schreies Natur; zwar schrieest du rein wie der Vogel, wenn ihn die Jahreszeit aufhebt, die steigende, beinah vergessend, daß er ein kümmerndes Tier und nicht nur ein einzelnes Herz sei, daß sie ins Heiter wirft, in die innigen Himmel.

Rilke reconsiders the "Vogel" and the "Tier," in these lines, as well as the interaction of up and down through "steigend" and "innigen Himmel." Instead of the "Archaischer Torso Apollos," in which there is "keine Stelle, die dich nicht sieht," this icon emphasizes the invisible reception of sound rather than sight:

In connection with the angels, no longer the distant and
feared but recognized in the "Vogel" and "Frühling," this emphasis on hearing the word leads to the annunciation, not of Gabriel to Mary, but of the "good news" of the affirming day.

The ladder of being reappears, as the speaker sees the "light" at the end of his journey, not an upward movement, but a "Fallen" inward:

Dann die Stufen hinan, Ruf-Stufen hinan, zum geträumten Tempel der Zukunft --; dann den Triller, Fontänte, die zu dem drängenden Strahl schon das Fallen zuvornimmt im versprechlichen Spiel

"Ruf-Stufen" and "versprechlich" emphasize the call to which the priest Rilke charges his readers to attend; the extension of transformation to the listener is promised in the transformation of the "dark night" into clear (with its meaning of seeing the truth clearly, or "Ahnen") starry summer nights:

das atmende Klarsein,
nicht nur der nahende Schlaf und ein Ahnen, abends...
sondern die Nächte! Sondern die hohen, des Sommers, Nächte, sondern die Sterne, die Sterne der Erde.
O einst tot sein und sie wissen unendlich,
alte die Sterne: denn wie, wie, wie sie vergessen!

The speaker then calls upon the "Liebende," changing his earlier despairing cries into the affirmatory "Hiersein ist herrlich." He affirms existence, with his "Adern voll Dasein," and recognizes the inner transformation that enables outer despair to lose its sting:

The speaker then turns to the ancient accomplishments of human beings, such as the Sphinx; now, instead of envying the angels their transcendence, the speaker has himself transcended life so that he can, paradoxically, enjoy it and say:

War es nicht Wunder? O staune, Engel, denn wir sinds, wir, o du Großer

The speaker finds the best of human accomplishments in the building of cathedrals such as Chartres and the creation of music to fill them with. Yet, he does not want the angel to mistake his hymn as a call to the disembodied state of the angels, and the last lines of the Seventh Elegy warn the angel to keep his distance:

Glaube nicht, daß ich werbe.

The “upward” realm is rejected in favor of the "inner" journey and the earthly focus. While this seems to contradict the transcendence wished for earlier in the Orthodox liturgy, the ultimate goal of is actually transformation in daily life rather than a move to the realm beyond, which would imply death. In celebrating the earthly, Rilke simultaneously affirms life in a liturgical hymn that signifies transformation within, and the readiness to turn the individual’s transformation into the outside world, through distributing the Eucharistic elements to the congregation.
The "hearing" of the Seventh Elegy leads to "seeing" in the Eighth Elegy, which begins:

Mit allen Augen sieht die Kreatur das Offene. Nur unsere Augen sind wie umgekehrt und ganz um sie gestellt als Fallen, rings um ihren freien Ausgang.

Throughout this elegy, Rilke emphasizes the importance of seeing "das Offene," the wider realm that lies beyond our rational vision. Within the context of Orthodoxy, Rilke calls for a turning to the "light." Rudolf Kassner, to whom this elegy is dedicated, discusses the concept of "Umkehr" that is introduced here and permeates the entire transformative cycle:

man lese die achte seiner "Duineser Elegien." Sie ist mir gewidmet und kehrt sich gegen den Begriff der Umkehr, dem er in meinen Büchern begegnet ist (Kassner 7).

Max Delbrück, the founder of microbiology, noted a connection between Rilke's concept of light and quantum mechanics, for the "Licht, das in die 'Augen' der organischen Natur fällt, eröffnet und bringt Leben" (Wesche & Voelkel 46). Rilke's use of "Fallen" to describe the human eye being trapped in its logical confines plays also with this notion of light as "falling" down to the physical world to provide an opening, or revelation and light. Again, Rilke conflates upward and downward motions to emphasize the inward/outward and earthly/transcendent process described in his liturgy.

The concentration of this elegy on the earthly realm is appropriate at this point in the liturgy, as the transformation is about to be passed out physically, in the form of the Eucharist, to the congregation. The elegy's
connection to the physical world provided a "shock" to Delbrück, who intended to write an analysis of the Eighth Elegy in terms of quantum mechanic complementarity. According to the modern sciences, there is no longer a belief in the absolute and objective understanding of the human mind; instead, object and subject merge like the scrutiny of the Rilke narrator in the Dinggedichte:


The merging of subject and object that occurs with the ingestion of the Eucharist in the Orthodox liturgy also overturns the classical sciences in favor of a more mystical, quantum mechanical understanding of the interrelation of forces in the universe.

Ulrich Wesche and Norbert Voelkel expand upon Delbrück's intention to map the process of human consciousness through the elegy:


Human consciousness is seen initially as a barrier to "seeing" and experiencing the physical world as it is. The animals of
the natural world, in contrast, are "Frei von Tod," because they are not conscious of death as a barrier:

*Ihn sehen wir allein; das freie Tier hat seinen Untergang stets hinter sich und vor sich Gott, und wenn es geht, so gehts in Ewigkeit, so wie die Brunnen gehen.*

Kassner relates Rilke's preoccupation with death in the *Elegies* to an Egyptian belief, the "Idee vom Gebären des eigenen Todes" (Kassner 24). Through being born, the human being is condemned to die; birth and death are thus intimately intertwined, as in nativity and Dormition icons. In order to be able to "bear" death, the human consciousness must accept it as the natural world does, not as an "end" to life, or as the beginning of the "afterlife," but as another stage of existence.

In the "Pietà" of Rilke's "Marienleben," Mary laments

*Jetzt liegst du quer durch meinen Schoß, jetzt kann ich dich nicht mehr gebären*

Mary's birthing of Christ, who is destined to die, thus provides another dimension to the idea of "bearing death."

From here, says Kassner, it is but a short way to the Eighth Elegy's

*O Seligkeit der kleinen Kreatur, die immer bleibt im Schoße, der sie austrug; o Glück der Mücke, die noch innen hüft, selbst wenn sie Hochzeit hat: denn Schoß ist Alles.*

The inner journey of transformation experienced in the *Elegies* is also one back to the womb, in Jungian terms or, in religious terms, to Mary and rebirth through Christ.
This vision concerning death (as symbolized in the Christian passion story) eases the pain of departure, and despair over the transitory nature of human life. This is the "good news" that Rilke hopes to spread through his Elegies; in the last lines of the Eighth Elegy, his revelation is turned outward, as he entreats his readers not only to "watch," but to "see" into the realm beyond his poetry and to which it points:

Und wir: Zuschauer, immer, überall, dem allen zugewandt und nie hinaus! uns überfüllts. Wir ordnens. Es zerfällt. Wir ordnens wieder und zerfallen selbst. Wer hat uns also umgedreht, daß wir, was wir auch tun, in jener Haltung sind von einem, welcher fortgeht? Wie er auf dem letzten Hügel, der ihm ganz sein Tal noch einmal zeigt, sich wendet, anhält, weilt—, so leben wir und nehmen immer Abschied.

Rilke's reversed spaciality causes those who climb "the last hill" of death and look backward to "zerfallen." In always taking leave, the individual cannot turn to greet what is coming; only by letting go of the physical world can one, paradoxically, truly embrace it.

Rilke's Ninth Elegy moves from the physical world to the problem of communicating the vision concerning life and death revealed through the eucharistic sharing of Christ's death. It becomes a self-reflexive "communion" between poet and reader, and a sharing of the "light" through the medium of language. It begins with the "Dasein" explicated in the prior elegy, but moves quickly to instill meaning into this existence:
Aber weil Hiessein viel ist, und weil uns scheinbar alles das Hiesige braucht, dieses Schwindende, das seltsam uns angeht. Uns die Schwindendsten.

"Scheinbar" plays upon connotations of "shining" through of truth, but also on the betrayal of language to the speaker because of its constant ambiguity of meaning. Like Kandinsky, Rilke draws attention to his artistic tools, calling the congregation of readers to attend to the meanings behind his words as he returns from the "mountaintop" of revelation:

Bringt doch der Wanderer auch vom Hange des Bergrands nicht eine Hand voll Erde ins Tal, die Allen unsägliche, sondern ein erworbenes Wort, reines, den gelben und blaun Enzian.

The "pure" colors of icon theology complement the aural component of the word, and both become manifestations of the desire to represent and circumscribe our world through art and language:

Sind wir vielleicht hier, um zu sagen: Haus, Brücke, Brunnen, Tor, Krug, Obstbaum, Fenster, -- höchstens; Säule, Turm....aber zu sagen, verstehe, oh zu sagen so, wie selber die Dinge niemals innig meinten zu sein.

The word "höchstens" plays upon Rilke's up/down spatiality, but also connects the meaning of "at the most" with human expressions of the superlative through columns and towers. Word and image interact, as the speaker attempts to join his language with the things of which he speaks, in a gesture of complementary in the sense of modern physics.

Rilke in the guise of high priest in the liturgy of the Elegies returns to charge the congregation to communicate the
transformative power of the Word, to "take, eat" of the transmutated elements of his poetry:

Hier ist des Säglichen Zeit, hier seine Heimat.
Sprich und bekenn.

He means with this the importance of living in the present, of incorporating the liturgical message into daily existence:

Preise dem Engel die Welt, nicht die unsägliche, ihm kanns du nicht großtun mit herrlich Erfühltem; im Weltall, wo er fühlender fühlt, bist du ein Neuling.
...

--Und diese, von Hingang lebenden Dinge versteh, daß du sie rühmst; vergänglich, traun sie ein Rettendes uns, den Vergänglichsten, zu. Wollen, wir sollen sie ganz im unsichtbarn Herzen verwandeln in -- o unendlich -- in uns!

Salvation, the "Rettendes," can come to the despairing individual only when the outer "things" of the world are converted within, "im unsichtbarn Herzen." Rilke's speaker finds meaning in life through the process of transformation that connects the visible world with the invisible, through the sharing of the Eucharist in the liturgy:

Erde, ist es nicht dies, was du willst: unsichtbar in uns erstehn? --Ist es dein Traum nicht, einmal unsichtbaar zu sein? --Erde! unsichtbar!
Was, wenn Verwandlung nicht, ist dein drangender Auftrag?

Like Christ appearing to the congregation through communion, Rilke commands the reader:

Siehe, ich lebe. Woraus? Weder Kindheit noch Zukunft werden weniger....Überzähliges Dasein entspringt mir im Herzen

These last lines of the Ninth Elegy point again to the timeless realm, in order that the reader might remember the
meaning of life before the final icon and benediction that appear in the Tenth Elegy.

**Benediction: The Tenth Elegy**

Ziolkowski says of the final poem in the cycle:

In the Tenth Elegy...the poet puts into practice the insights achieved through the meditation of the earlier poems, especially the Ninth. Here he attempts to perform that translation of human reality into mythic vision.

The first lines of the Tenth Elegy return to the angels as co-worshippers to the supplicant in the praise of creation. The final hymns of praise follow the "insights" achieved through sight turned inward:

Daß ich dereinst, an dem Ausgang der grimmigen Einsicht, Jubel und Ruhm aufsinge zustimmenden Engeln.

Through partaking in the liturgical process, Rilke's speaker has "given image" to the angels and has himself become a living icon from which the divine light streams:

Daß mich mein strömendes Antlitz glänzender mache; daß das unscheinbare Weinen blühe.

Rather than experience the illusory anguish of the First Elegy, the converted individual feels joy coupled with "das unscheinbare Weinen" that accompanies joy and places a demand on the transformed believer.

The benediction and charge of this final elegy begins with a tour through the City of Grief, "die Gassen der Leid-Stadt." This mythical journey is taken by the "Jüngling," the transformed hero of the poem who is led by "eine junge Klage"
to recognize and accept the suffering in the world. Through these mystical "Klage-Fürsten," "Tränenbäume und Felder blühender Wehmut," the hero contemplates the constellations of the night sky, where he finds a clue to the identity of his guide:

Aber im südlichen Himmel, rein wie im Innern einer gesegneten Hand, das klar erglänzende M, das die Mütter bedeutet......

The eternal mother, Mary, is identified in icons by the first letter of her name; in her capacity of queen of heaven, she shines through icons of the Dormition [SEE FIGURE 4.7] and Mary Enthroned [SEE FIGURE 4.8]. The Mother of God, rejected as the umilenie icon in the Third Elegy, returns in this final elegy as "Our Lady of Sorrows," to instruct the hero to embrace his weeping: Und da umarmt sie ihn, weinend. Einsam steigt er dahin, in die Berge des Ur-Leids. Und nicht einmal sein Schritt klingt aus dem tonlosen Los.

The final lines of the Tenth Elegy call for the awakening of the image, "Gleichnis," in us that will lead to eternal life, seen as equal to death:

Aber erweckten sei uns, die unendlich Toten, ein Gleichnis, siehe, sie zeigten vielleicht auf die Kätzchen der leeren Hasel, die hängenden, oder meinten den Regen, der fällt auf dunkles Erdreich im Frühjahr.

Und wir, die an steigendes Glück denken, empfänden die Rührung, die uns beinahe bestürzt, wenn ein Glückliches fällt.

Rilke uses low vowels against high in the phrase "Glückliches fällt" to convey the dialogic of simultaneous opposites present in the Orthodox liturgy. As in Kandinsky's poems,
with their references to sinking and falling, "fällt" accommodates an ambiguous value. Linguistically, Rilke connects it to a "lacking" element; in a letter to Lou Andreas-Salomé of July 25, 1903, he records his emotional "descent:" Es -- fällt, fällt jahrelang, und schließlich fehlt mir die Kraft, es aus mir aufzuheben." According to Grosholz,

Again and again, these poems [New Poems and the Elegies] present a thing, person or event at whose heart lies a negativity or absence: the absences create the space and play needed for the reversals, and finally lead to a totalization which they seemed, at first, to make impossible (Grosholz 428).

The "lack," or emptiness, thereby becomes "full" in Malevich's sense of the void beyond the icon.

On the other hand, "falling" also reveals a kind of surrender through "falling to one's knees" in worship. In a letter written from Russia, Rilke described the up and down motion of a peasant in front of an icon in a church: "[so] beginnt er den Gott in sich zu wiegen...so wiegt er es, auf ab, auf ab." The notion of the "Fall" of humanity is complemented by the "descent" of the Holy Spirit to Christ and the disciples; it also recalls the human descent into the spiritual depths through contemplation, a motion that is also, paradoxically, upward, as it results in ascension to God. Again, Rilke blurs the distinctions between the inner and outer world, and "falling" becomes an action to be desired because of its value for ultimate transformation.

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Suffering was made the material of art for Rilke. The Tenth Elegy sings in affirmation that the value of suffering is that it leads to an inner transformation. Not the escape from suffering is welcomed, but the growth, the opening up that it provides; the perpetual dissatisfaction we face in hoping for permanence is rejected and change is embraced and affirmed as a transformation equal to the transsubstantiation within the Orthodox liturgical cycle. Just as Russian Orthodoxy sustains the union of opposites in one moment, especially in the portrayal of icons, the inwardness exhibited in Rilke’s works implies accepting and sustaining the tragic element in the passion of humanity. In the Elegies, Rilke struggles, like Jacob, with the angels. He connects with Jacob’s other dream through his spiritual journey up the divine ladder to see God face to face.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUDING REMARKS

If "Postmodernism," that problematic term applied indiscriminately to art, criticism, philosophy, and culture alike, fundamentally involves rewriting traditional scholarship, then contemporary studies of modernist artists must call into question established categories both of art and artist. One example is Peter Bürger's classification of avant-garde versus autonomous art. According to Bürger, the avant-garde artist intends to shock the viewer from a complacent mindset by overturning the artistic tradition itself; it involves progressive political engagement, but the term is slippery enough to include both an aesthetic and political progressive element. Consequently, some of the most radical and progressive artists of the twentieth century were more concerned with shocking their audience than with engendering any kind of concrete change; likewise, some of the so-called "autonomous" artists followed programs that demanded concrete reevaluation of society and individual lives.

Rainer Maria Rilke has been classified as an "autonomous" artist who retreats from political and social concerns to an exquisite fantasy world of symbolist aesthetics. In labeling Rilke
a l’art pour l’art poet, secondary literature has overlooked the impulses within his work that accommodate revolutionary potential. Such impulses arise both from his connection with the visual arts and his involvement with Russia. Rilke engaged in the world through engaging with his art:


Rilke’s relationship to Rodin and the visual arts reveals a concern for physicality and the "things" of this world, about which some of his most famous poems are written. Furthermore, his poems draw attention to their own makeup by pointing out the artistic process of representation, and thus to the materials of his art.

Rilke’s outlook on the visual arts is more related to that of Orthodoxy than western Catholicism, for he assumes a connection between the arts that is not simply illustrative. It is evident that Russia’s influence on Rilke extends even to his Duineser Elegien. The angels that soar through his inner heavens are not the fat cherubs of western European Baroque, nor the exquisite Symbolist renderings of many of his contemporaries. His presentation is simpler and more human than that of poets such as Stefan George, who retreated into a rare, aestheticized realm of hothouse sensibilities. Rilke grounds his mystical exploration of
the celestial in the realm of this world, just as Russian icon painters after Rublev increasingly attempted to do. His familiarity with icon types enables him to represent not a single work of art, but an entire tradition of representation that has as its goal the transformation of the individual who sees or reads the work.

Rilke's poetry emphasizes a transcendent realm, but it does not retreat from, nor preclude involvement in the outer world. The importance of the outer world for Rilke's otherwise more spiritual poetry arises from the fact that he refused to distinguish between inner and outer reality. He rejected the tradition of German Idealism and its dichotomy between mind and matter:

Niemand...stand dieser idealistischen Weltansicht des Deutschen so fremd gegenüber, niemand war so wenig "Idealist" wie Rilke...Rilke akzeptierte so etwas nicht wie Trennung von Wesen und schein, Ich und nicht-Ich... (Kassner 41).

In exceeding the confines of the external world, Rilke approached the understandings of modern physics, which recognizes the intersubjectivity inherent in human observation of the world. Max Delbrück was radically influenced by the Duineser Elegien long before he developed the notion of complementarity: "zuerst war Max [Delbrück] durch die Elegien geschockt. Dann setzte ein fünfzig Jahre währendes träumerisches Nachdenken über diese Wortgebilde ein" (Wesche & Voelkel 45). Delbrück's creative process as a natural scientist mirrors that of Rilke as a poet, which involves the "intense listening to one's own depth" (Rodin 25). This concept is illustrated by Rodin's "The Thinker," who "sits absorbed and silent, heavy with thought: with all the strength of an acting
man he thinks" (Rodin 39). Rilke hoped to tap into the kind of energy Kandinsky discusses in "Über das Geistige in der Kunst," to contemplate his inner self and draw from it creative potential.

If Rilke had stopped there, he would indeed be guilty of the inactivity and uninvolvement with the world that many scholars ascribe to him. Thinking, however, for Rilke, is not enough. The artist must subsequently turn the thought outward and bring it concretely into the world through the work of art. Yet even that is not enough; the artwork thus created must have an impact on the outer world, it must demand something of the viewer, as Cézanne's works demand something, for Rilke wrote of Cézanne that he was an artist, "der einen...in Anspruch nimmt mit seinen starken Bildern" (Briefe Über Cézanne 20). Rilke's search for meaning in the face of an existential crisis speaks not only to himself, but directly to the reader, challenging the reader to examine his or her own life and to respond in some concrete way. Rilke's poems invite the reader to participate in the processes that they outline, to shock the reader into changing one's life. It is this moment of shock that is the avant-garde element in Rilke's work.

Whether or not Rilke's art actually produces change in the reader, it was nevertheless his goal to affect people the way Rodin's sculpture affected him, the way an icon affects the believer, to produce in the reader the realization that comes at the end of his contemplation of the "Archaïscher Torso Apollos:" "Du mußt dein Leben ändern." What is demanded is concrete change, and it is in this way that Rilke can be understood as an avant-
garde — or "retrogarde" — artist who seeks to transform reality through his art, not as the l'art pour l'art aesthete many scholars claim that he is.

Still, Bürger’s category of avant-garde can never apply to Rilke. The word "avant-garde" itself refers to art at the forefront, producing new things, but the radical nature of overturning artistic traditions is more readily applicable to western than eastern European artists. While Rilke hoped to shock the reader in a transformative moment, he did not challenge the artistic tradition. In fact, like Kandinsky and Malevich, his art gained power through its very references to artistic traditions. For this reason, the term "retrogarde" is perhaps more fitting than the term "avant-garde" for a broader Rilke classification.

Some significant obstacles remain to the classification of Rilke as an avant-garde artist, even in the light of Eastern Orthodoxy and the Russian avant-garde. Kandinsky and Malevich were both involved with organizations that openly espoused progressive notions, including the Bauhaus and Soviet art schools. Rilke, on the other hand, never affiliated himself with any progressive organization, and lived a lifestyle that depended upon the support of the upper classes and the status quo. Thus, he continued to be elitist in a way that precluded any too radical transformation of society. Furthermore, since Rilke drew from such varying sources in the creation of his art, it is difficult to identify elements that are purely Orthodox, and that are distinct from western Christianity.

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The art of the icon is the main element here; through it Rilke was able to retain the old symbolism but imbue it with new meaning and separate it from the Catholicism that he rejected. It also transcends many debates concerning avant-garde versus autonomous art, and also word and image disputes. The icon calls for an interaction between art and artist, and also art and viewer; this intersubjectivity enabled Rilke's art to influence his readers in ways that move beyond his own more reactionary attitude.

The theoretical psychological process identified by Ellen Esrock in connection with mental images and shifting paradigms was actualized in Delbrück's revelatory experience of Rilke's poetry. In terms of ekphrasis, Rilke does not merely describe visual artworks; rather, his poems function like a visual work of art, to produce the revelatory moment mentioned by Scott, outlined by Esrock, and produced in Delbrück. Thus, some intuitive understanding of the interaction between the physical and spiritual universes echoed through Rilke's poetry and into modern science.

Recent developments in physics point to an interconnectedness of all things that provides new fuel for the debate surrounding word and image today. The intuitive understandings of religion and aesthetics are now finding a basis in scientific thought, as chaos theory points to the near impossibility of factoring in all the influences that can cause or affect the phenomena within the natural world. The implications for aesthetics are evident: The holism of the new aesthetic also brings out a new (and very old) relationship between the observer and the object observed. The Greek roots of the word aesthetic suggest that an aesthetic
experience involves a transformation which takes place in both the object and its observer (Briggs 30).

Rilke's involvement with the visual arts, his connection with Russia, and his emphasis on spiritual transformation enabled the icon to become the symbol for Rilke of the challenge art presents to those who receive it. Throughout his Duineser Elegien, Rilke draws from the tradition of Orthodox icons to create mental images through words. As literary criticism today struggles with the importance of visual images for literature and a new aesthetics, explorations of such "visual" poets as Rilke can provide new insight into this theoretical debate.
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MODERNISM (GENERAL)


