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A Theology of Imagination & Creativity

Karen Lynn Huseby
Loyola Marymount University

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A Theology of Imagination & Creativity

A Thesis by

Karen Lynn Huseby

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K.L.H. <>

INTRODUCTION

In 1999 Pope John Paul II (JPII) issued a *Letter of His Holiness to Artists (Letter)*. In the *Letter*, he sought to advance a dialogue between practitioners of religion and art that has existed for two-thousand years.¹ By initiating a renewed dialogue, he hoped to mingle the world of art and the world of faith that he felt had separated due to a societal “atmosphere marked by the absence of God and often by opposition to God.”² I suggest the natural representatives to these worlds of faith and art are the theologian and the artist. I expect that both the theologian and artist engage in their respective worlds of faith and art for the sake of experiencing it for themselves as well as to offer it as experience for others. Perhaps this is why JPII declared that, “this dialogue is rooted in the very essence of both religious experience and artistic creativity.”³ The purpose of this thesis is to express how theology conveys elements of religious experience and artistic creativity, as they need not be considered separate endeavors. A theology of human creativity is an articulation of religious experience.

“As fruit of an imagination which rises above the everyday,” JPII asserted that art is, “a kind of bridge to religious experience”.⁴ This statement constitutes the foundation for the central question I will ask and answer: Can the human acts of imagination and creativity be a legitimate bridge to religious experience? My answer to this question entails outlining a theology of the human creative process in order to communicate the bridge to religious experience as humans utilizing their being and moving toward action.

¹ John Paul II, *Letter of His Holiness to Artists*. Vatican website. 1999, www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_2304, accessed December 3, 2012.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

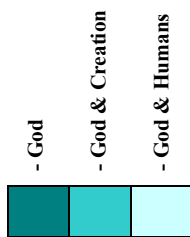
As JPII acknowledges, “God called man into existence, committing to him [a] task.”⁵

The tradition of the creation story, recounted by the pope in his *Letter*, invests in humanity the veracity of being and action as constituting the most basic elements of life.

In order to answer the central question I must acknowledge that the process of human imagination and creativity can be situated within an existing theological landscape. I suggest nine phases comprise what originates in God’s being and creation and flows toward human existence and their creation. (Diagram 1) This diagram is of my own design, yet it depicts major concepts well established in generations of theological conversation. This illustration is oversimplified to represent how divine ontology establishes the human creative process; it is not intended to restrict God to a process. I selected nine realities or events I consider of prime importance to a theology of art and placed them in a diagram to aid conceptualization. Some phases are more relevant than others are to this discussion, but all are positioned sequentially and divided into three categories: God, creation, and humanity. The first three phases marked by the darkest shade of blue reflect God’s being and action by way of ontology, imagination (or vision), and creation. The next two phases represent creation as it is and how it is perceived; characterized in ontology and aesthetics. The last four phases continue a cycle and flow where what humanity initiates through their ontology, imagination, and co-creative acts, results in a new ontology, and another aesthetic. While God is present throughout these nine phases, the flow of initiative shifts midway from primarily God to primarily human; as indicated by the lightest shade of blue in the final four phases.

⁵ Ibid.

Diagram 1



**The
Landscape of Theological Creation
in
9 Phases**



This thesis privileges phases six and seven, human imagination and human creativity. However, what occurs before and after these two phases (specifically; God's being, imagination, and creation) is indispensable to an understanding of how humans mimic and participate in the artistic process tracing back to the being and action of God.

To establish a "bridge to religious experience", I begin with ontology for it constitutes the human person in the likeness of God which suffuses activity. Given the nature of art as human activity, I progress to the phenomenology of the acting person. This argues how being and action, parallel imagination and creativity, to institute religious experience during artistic practice. In this manner, the "bridge to religious experience" is traversed during imaginative and creative acts, as an expression of ontology. Then, I discuss relevant themes in the experience of artist Yves Klein as he exemplifies imagination and creativity. This work is significant because it articulates the dialogue *Letter* proposes between theologians and artists.

Approach

My approach to this subject is one of ontology and phenomenology within the scope of artistry. I address questions such as, what does it mean to be human compared to God? With the understanding that human existence is a result of God, and human-being manifests aspects of God-being because of *imago dei*, assessing this demonstrates God as existent creator of humans as existent co-creators. What is it like for God to imagine and how does human imagination reflect divine being? From the same theological perspective that humans resemble an existent creator, in addition to sharing in existence and action, they can share in His visionary imagination. As I proceed in answering the above stated questions, I engage Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Contra Gentiles*

and *Summa Theologica*. Aquinas' work is a primary source whose ontology proves helpful in articulating the reality of being that pervades the creative process. Another significant source is Rollo May, a psychologist. He was one of the first to research and write about creativity in his discipline of psychology. His book *The Courage to Create* offers simple and practical language inspired by theology.⁶ May's work offers an intermediary viewpoint that incorporates theological and secular thought.

Next, I approach the phenomenon of human creativity, keeping the viewpoint of being in mind. What is the difference between objects and subjects? What then, is the relationship of human activity with creation? How might selection in activity derive from and affect one's being? What makes creative action personal to the individual? My concern for being in the midst of creativity derives from a desire to institute a foundation for the reality that human creative action is co-creation of their being with God's being. I rely upon JPII's (then Cardinal Wojtyla's) phenomenological writings to suggest humans contain the capacity for an immaterial theological process that can be experienced within the process of imagination and creativity.

Due to the idea that actions amounted over a lifetime will free or condemn an individual upon death and judgment, JPII's primary phenomenological concern is one of morality. Nonetheless, I believe his framework is suitable for application to artists in order to demonstrate theoretically and practically the relationship between existence and activity. For in his *Letter* he outlines the distinction between creativity as the shaping of one's life versus artistic talent. On the one hand he says, "As Genesis has it, all men and women are entrusted with the task of crafting their own life: in a certain sense, they are to

⁶ Rollo May, *The Courage to Create* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1975), 8. His book is inspired by and named after Paul Tillich's ontological book *The Courage to Be*.

make of it a work of art, a masterpiece.”⁷ On the other hand, in light of the specific vocation of the artist, “We are speaking not of moulding oneself, of forming one’s own personality, but simply of actualizing one’s productive capacities, giving aesthetic form to ideas conceived in the mind.”⁸ In this manner, JP II is articulating that artistic choices are distinguished metaphors for life choices but are not necessarily isolated or irrelevant to life choices. That is why he concludes his discussion of this topic by asserting, “The distinction between the moral and artistic aspects is fundamental, but no less important is the connection between them.”⁹ If there is a link between artistic choices and life choices that could render eternal consequences, then I find no better way for this thesis to honor this connection than with the Pope’s own words and with his documents of contribution to morality.

What are some foundational concepts that contribute to religious experience? Why is religious experience, as it is traditionally understood, optimal, over other kinds of experience? How is artistic experience like and un-like religious experience? To construct a “bridge to religious experience” I utilize Sandra Schneiders’ work to articulate what religious experience is and how certain concepts transfer from the discipline of theology to art. By doing so, I can legitimize JP II’s claim that art is “a kind of bridge to religious experience.”

Lastly, has there ever been a documented case of an artist maintaining theological awareness? What I mean by theological awareness in this context begins with the reality that artistic creativity is triggered by the perception of God’s creation. Subsequently, the degree to which original ontology was considered and upheld in the co-creative process

⁷ John Paul II, *Letter of His Holiness to Artists*.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

indicates the level of theological awareness. It is this accuracy of interpretation and intentionality during the co-creative process that is evaluated in the aesthetic of human crafting. From the concept of theological awareness, I need to inquire: how is a theological model of the creative process realistically implemented? Since I am considering a practical application of theology that can be felt as religious experience, I must ask how a religious experience of imagining and creating might be demonstrated?

An approach of practical theology necessitates that I provide evidence that this theology can be lived and expressed in the artistic process of an artist. There is sufficient evidence that Yves Klein believed in the innate nature of imagining and creating, for he made the claim that his artistic creativity was a religious experience and suspected it as a universal truth for humanity. The artistic career of Yves Klein will therefore serve as a case study to demonstrate how he embraced the practical and theological elements of art, as religious experience, for himself and his audience.

Method

I employ an interdisciplinary method in this thesis. I am attempting to incorporate these disciplines, and place them into an inter-disciplinary dialogue with art. I begin with ontology because I propose that art is fundamentally ontological. Presupposing nothing existed before God and God is from which all other things derive then the ontology of God permeates all that follows including what created humans bring into existence artistically. I employ ontology as a systematic concept of God's being, shared and mimicked in creation. This scheme demonstrates the theological connection between the God who is and the human who is. Utilizing ontology is, practically speaking, innate, because when the human subject initiates an artwork their whole being is involved with

God's being. Furthermore, loosely defining art as something constructed from existent materials and therefore making something that did not exist before, we arrive at the importance of existence. Lastly, as we will find, existence is an integral boundary to adequately define the experience of imagination as something real but falling short of actualized existence. For these reasons, I have selected ontology as the most suitable method to discuss a theology of imagination.

After the being is considered, what follows is the acting agency, for the human subject has an experience that prompts their artistic initiative and continues through the duration of their artistic process. Due to subjective experience, phenomenology is taken as another methodological consideration in order to provide a realistic accounting of how artistic experience can be likened to religious experience. Phenomenology is relevant to creative process because both operate with passive and active components. Whether speaking of religious, artistic, or any experience, there includes the experiences that befall us and the experiences we seek out. In order to answer questions regarding choices and actions we must commence with the understanding that they arise from and contribute to the narrative of the self, known as experience.

Finally, to render these concepts relevant, a case study will be made of French artist Yves Klein to illustrate how he presented these conceptions in his life and work. This segment requires we dialogue with the discipline of art. In his utilization of color, Klein attempted to illustrate his own aesthetic perception of the created world. That being said, it could be disputed that his religion influenced the insight of his artistic creativity rather than the innate activity confirming his religion. That Yves Klein was a devout Catholic does not diminish his credibility to the argument that ontological essence

plays a critical role in artistry. Rather, I argue that his Catholicism allows us to discuss this paradigm for reality in the same language.

Significance

The significance of this work includes the dialogue that it achieves between the practitioners of art and theology. Furthermore, it may contribute to the sub-disciplines of systematics, aesthetics, and phenomenology. The ultimate intention behind this work, however, is to have an effect within artistic communities. That it might be able to help artists conceive and experience their work differently would be a significant consequence. The goal of this thesis is to demonstrate that theology, in its most rudimentary form, can contribute relevant, practical, and pleasurable benefits to persons and society.

Outline

Chapter 1: Imagination in the Human Being, begins with the starting point of Thomistic ontology. In order to sanction the human imagination as a receptacle for divine revelation and divine interaction this method examines God-being and human-being within the context of the ontology of the created world. By identifying the differences in human-being and God-being, I can more accurately construct an awareness for divinity present in human imagination; and consequently how human-being and God-being converge through imagination. I conclude by connecting imagination as part of our *imago dei*.

In Chapter 2: Creativity in the Human Acting, I define and discuss creation and human craftsmanship as similar but different to God's capacity. I continue with the phenomenology of creativity. I begin by establishing the difference between object and subject in the midst of God's creation so that the artistic attempts of human acting with

created objects is more concrete. This allows for a discussion on co-creation as a gateway to religious experience.

Chapter 3: Art as a Bridge to Religious Experience is the final construction of this thesis. It takes into account the themes of limits and intensity as a way to illustrate how the ontological nature of the human person unites people. A comparison of religious versus spiritual experience will be made in an attempt to perform the theological task of articulating a practical theology.

In Chapter 4: Imagination and Creativity in the Artistic Experience of Yves Klein, Yves Klein's display of color attempted to invoke what theologians would describe as its ontological nature. His devout personal practice of Roman Catholicism and his prolific artwork challenges those who would suggest that religious tendencies, like tradition or morality, restrict selection and stifle possibilities in a way that confines imagination and limits creative output. Klein was inspired by his religion and critics will argue that his work triumphantly preceded other artists of his time.¹⁰ The connections between his artistry and theology are palpable, and perhaps intentional. He claimed making art was a religious experience for him. If an ontological model of imagination and creativity is innate to artistic practice then Klein demonstrates my point. His notions of "immaterial" and "sensibility" were indeed revelatory. He endeavored to re-define the purpose of art itself. Klein's attempted materialization of the immaterial provides a concrete example for the differentiated realms of Thomistic existence versus essence that correspond well to imagination and creativity.

¹⁰ For example, almost thirty years after Klein's concept of the void inspired his invisible painting in the installation: "Surfaces and Blocks of Pictorial Sensibility. Pictorial Intentions"; famed American artist Andy Warhol performed a similar stunt in a photograph where he stands in front of his *Invisible Sculpture*. See Denys Riout, *Yves Klein Expressing the Immaterial* (Paris: Éditions Dilecta, 2010), 38, 72.

CHAPTER 1: IMAGINATION IN THE HUMAN BEING

I suggest the two major steps in the artistic process include imagination, primarily, and creativity secondarily. This chapter will explore imagination. Yet the creative process begins two phases prior to imagination. As noted in my diagram (The Landscape of Theological Creation in 9 Phases, on page 3), phases four and five are essential precursors and catalysts to imagination, the first phase of the creative process. My notion of “process” includes pertinent markers within a typical creative process.¹¹ These markers include the detailing of phases four to six: the ontology (or reality of being), the aesthetic (or perception or cognition) of these realities upon encounter, and the interactive, selective, and limited nature of imagination.

Phase 4: The Ontology of the Created World Including Humans

In this section, I hope to demonstrate that ontology is fundamental to a theology of art.¹² Phases one to three comprise the being and action of God that parallel the human artistic process. Beginning at phase four, allows us to explore the being-ness of humans (and objects) for the subsequent encounter of them in phase five. Discussion of God’s ontology throughout is necessary because it is where human ontology originates.

¹¹ It is nearly impossible to survey and discuss every point in the creative process because it varies by the individual artist and their method of expressed form. While I may be excluding some of all that is typical, I include that which I believe to be most relevant for theological discussion. The reader might note that these are specific enough to apply to artistic process yet expansive enough to remain pertinent beyond artistic creation.

¹² Not all agree ontology remains a helpful sub-discipline. See for example, Jean-Luc Marion, *God without Being* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012). Marion argues the need to abandon the subjectivity of modernity that has falsely emphasized God as being as the sole source for theology and faith. His disposition stems from his conviction that theology has become an idol-like obstacle to the true understanding of God. His post-modern vision is revelation-centered, non-correlational, and post-metaphysical that chooses instead to focus on categories such as: face, excess, gift, goodness, and most importantly, agape. He suggests these are more conducive to true faith for they require neither deduction nor legitimation. From his perspective, our theological characterizations of God as reason, being, or moral, should be under considerable question.

Most significant to an ontology of humans and objects is that while they derive from God and may possess an element of God, they are not God. Once God created objects and human subjects, they became autonomous beings apart from their creator. Thomas Aquinas' ontology is useful for substantiating this foundation. I adopted Aquinas's ontology because his theological system articulates and emphasizes existence. In his chapter on Thomistic ontology, Luis Cortest author of *The Disfigured Face*, notes that while Aquinas was neither the first nor the last to distinguish between essence and existence, his theological system however, "turned existence into the most fundamental principle for our understanding of reality."¹³ This section examines this "reality" of the ontology of the created world because it triggers imagination.

In the *Summa Contra Gentiles* Aquinas states, "God is his essence or nature."¹⁴ He is original nature from which all other nature is derived. God is the first and supreme being, being itself in whom, "the divine essence is predicated."¹⁵ Summarized another way, philosopher Thérèse-Anne Druart calls this, "nature of being inasmuch as it is being without qualification."¹⁶ As for the being of a human, since "the divine nature is communicable by likeness...the diversities of forms arise from the fact that things imitate the divine essence diversely."¹⁷ With respect to animals or inanimate objects, according to Aquinas, they possess being also in so much as they exist, yet they do not possess the same level of divine essence as humanity. The form where divine essence is most

¹³ Luis Cortest, *The Disfigured Face* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 11.

¹⁴ SCG, I, ch. 21, ¶ 1.

¹⁵ SCG, I, ch. 21, ¶ 4.

¹⁶ Thérèse-Anne Druart, "Averroes on God's Knowledge of Being Qua Being" in *Studies in Thomistic Theology* ed. by Paul Lockey (Houston: Center for Thomistic Studies, University of St. Thomas, 1995), 194.

¹⁷ SCG, I, ch. 50, ¶ 9.

signified is in humanity¹⁸ because Aquinas says, “the essence of a thing is either the thing itself or is related to the thing... as its cause; for a thing derives its species through its essence.”¹⁹ Aquinas’ ontological theology declares that in their relational likeness to God, the human species possesses divine being and that being is their first knowable object through reason. The commonly used term *imago dei* (image of God) is another way to express the ontological reality that humans share in the nature of God. This much is made clear by Aquinas in the *Summa Theologica* in writing of how God’s nature and perfection is shared by others.²⁰ When speaking of this partaking of being Aquinas seems to use the terms “participate” and “share” interchangeably. While beings are different and apart from God, there remains a shared involvement as he asserts, “All beings apart from God are not their own being, but are beings by participation.”²¹ Aquinas’ importance of shared divine being corroborates with the notion of *imago dei* so it is enough to establish that any experience of human existence is an experience of God. I will continue in order to elaborate how this further manifests in the artistic process.

In the artistic process, phase four: the ontology of the created world, including humans, is a precursor and catalyst to imagination. We presupposed God’s existence then utilized Aquinas to suggest that God’s being-ness is demonstrated in the existence of creation including humans. Neither creation nor humans are God but they have autonomous being-ness from their creator God. In this way, Aquinas sought to explicate existence as the understanding to our reality. In a reality whose nature derives from God human likeness to God is to share in His being. Although different and apart from God,

¹⁸ SCG, I, ch. 21, ¶ 6.

¹⁹ SCG, I, ch. 21, ¶ 5.

²⁰ ST, I, q. 10, art. III; ST, I, q. 14, art. VI.

²¹ ST, I, q. 44, art. I.

humans have an involvement or participation with God. Ultimately, this was to stress that existence is an experience of God.

Now that we have established that humans have being, like that of God, we can examine one major element of such being, the assessment of other beings outside of ones being.

Phase 5: The Aesthetic of the Created World

Autonomous beings that can observe their surroundings bring us to phase five: the aesthetic of the created world. Given that Aquinas states, “Now the nature of man requires that he be led to the invisible by visible things”²² this section will explore perceiving the visible. It begins with definitions of aesthetics as a subject including theological aesthetics, and a psychological study of art viewing will help us distinguish between perception and cognition. The bulk of this section relies upon Rollo May’s two step creative process of encounter and intensity. Encounter introduces us to the reality of subject-object interaction while intensity can solve two common complications often resulting from aesthetic encounter. With the aims of aesthetics as the apprehension of existence and providing a vision for reality it serves as a precursor and catalyst to imagination.

By aesthetic, I mean the internal human response of perceiving a being. Internal interaction with the physical world is what summarizes this fifth phase often characterized by a responsive feeling. According to Richard Viladesau in *Theological Aesthetics*, in Greek, aesthetic means anything perceived by the senses, which causes

²² ST I q. 43 a. 7.

sensation or feeling.²³ The aesthetic viewer however should take care not to become idolatrous to feeling or forget the ontological source of what is being viewed.²⁴ In addition, Viladesau reminds us that the concept of aesthetic varies depending on if the emphasis is subject-oriented, as in the person having the feeling or object-oriented, as in the object causing the feeling.²⁵ To embrace the subject-oriented perspective is to acknowledge the significance of the ontology of the human subject.

The aesthetic of human crafting is comparable to what is being outlined here as phase five: the aesthetic of the created world. To aid us in understanding the stages occurring in a moment of aesthetic viewing, I suggest H. Leder et al's "A Model of Aesthetic Appreciation and Aesthetic Judgments," an influential psychological study that formulated four stages. The first two stages are passive experiences where "perceptual analysis" is the automatic intake of features such as color, lines, and contrast. The next stage of "implicit memory integration" influences the experience when what is viewed matches with and recalls any memories. The next two stages entail more deliberate processing where "explicit classification" notices the artwork by its content such as objects or people. The final stage where lasting judgments and feelings derive is also, where "cognitive mastering and evaluation" evokes an interpretation from personal history and/or art related knowledge. Next, evaluation of all determines whether or not meaning and understanding is consistent with what is being viewed.²⁶ I offer this study for two reasons: First, because it helps us in defining and distinguishing the difference

²³ Richard Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics: God in Imagination, Beauty, and Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 6. While beauty, taste, and its exclusive application to the fine arts are often associated with the study of aesthetics, those notions fall outside the scope of this thesis.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 10, 20.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁶ H. Leder, B. Belke, A. Oeberst, & D. Augustin, "A Model of Aesthetic Appreciation and Aesthetic Judgments" *British Journal of Psychology* 95 (2004), 489–508.

between perception and cognition. Perception is an automatic reception of sensory data, whereas cognition is a focused effort of thinking resulting in judgment. Secondly, I suggest that the stages outlined by Leder et al apply to what occurs when humans experience the created world because that experience provokes imagination.

Everyday humans view the visual surroundings of the created world, from the subtle features of colors and lines, registering and triggering memories, to the assessment of people and objects. Rarer however is the final stage of cognitive mastery and evaluation where focused attention seeks meaning and understanding. Discovering and articulating religious meaning in the created world defines theological aesthetics for Viladesau identifies it as, “Considering God, religion, and theology in relation to sensible knowledge arising from sensation, imagination, and feeling, and the arts.”²⁷ To observe the existence of our surroundings is to begin to understand reality.

According to Rollo May, how a person engages with what they experience in their outside world bears a strong influence on their imaginative and creative endeavors. While he is not utilizing “aesthetics” by name, years of analyzing artists has led May to describe the artistic creative process as beginning with a moment of encounter. Encounter elucidates how an artist observing their outside world is moved to artistry, so what is seen is incorporated into their work..²⁸ The artistic creative process of Rollo May has two parts: encounter and intensity.²⁹

For May, encounter, initiates the creative process, and it includes two entities: subject and object.³⁰ Objects comprising the world affect our tendencies, “Creativity is

²⁷ Viladesau, 11.

²⁸ May, 41.

²⁹ Ibid., 40-54.

³⁰ Ibid., 50.

the encounter of the intensively conscious human with his or her world,”³¹ May says.

He continues to outline the complexity:

World has objective reality, to be sure, but it is not simply that. World is interrelated with the person at every moment. A continual dialectical process goes on between world and self and self and world; one implies the other, and neither can be understood if we omit the other. This is why we can never localize creativity as a subjective phenomenon; one can never study it simply in terms of what goes on within the person. What occurs is always a process, a doing—specifically a process interrelating the person and his or her world.³²

May holds an artist’s relationship with their objects in balance, for artist and object affect one another. Chapter two will explore the subject-object interaction in greater detail. As for now, this will be important to understand the eventual transition between the imaginative and creative phase. More than just experience occurs when a subject interacts with an object, encounter causes change. When an artist’s vision begins due to an experience of objects, this inspires and changes how they experience objects like paint, clay, instruments, and paper. Similarly, these objects aid in transforming the subject handling them.

As outlined here, an aesthetic of the created world suggests that upon encounter of objects feelings emerge that compel imagination and creativity. However, two complications can arise in a moment of aesthetic viewing; dis-unity of vision and mistaking the origin of vision. The first pertains to the subject-object interaction and its basis is explained by phenomenologist Violetta Waibel who says, “the imagination produces a unity of subject and object”³³ for there needs to be a kind of authenticity to fantastical ideas and/or a possible practicality to permit imagination to translate to

³¹ Ibid., 54.

³² Ibid., 50.

³³ Violetta L. Waibel, “Horizon, Oscillation, Boundaries” in *Art and Phenomenology*, ed. by Joseph D. Parry (New York: Routledge, 2011), 80.

creativity. May points out the necessity of this unity otherwise; the complication arises, where the expressed creativity based on the encounter with the objective world does not appear to accurately portray reality:

The trouble begins whenever anyone dogmatically sets himself or herself up to defend either extreme. On the one hand, when an individual insists on his or her own subjectivity and follows exclusively his or her own imagination, we have a person whose flights of fancy may be interesting but who never really relates to the objective world. When, on the other hand, an individual insists that there is nothing “there” except empirical reality, we have a technologically minded person who would impoverish and oversimplify his or her and our lives. Our perception is determined by our imagination as well as by the empirical facts of the outside world.³⁴

As Waibel and May just articulated when phases nine and five do not match, there is an issue of authenticity for there is not a unity of vision. At the beginning of this section I compared phases five and nine not simply to correlate observational methods. Rather, because an artist is observing the world and expressing their judgment, a person observing an artist’s work critiques the artist’s observation and judges the expressed vision in the artwork. Disagreement from the viewer about the artist’s portrayal is the result of a dis-unity of vision.³⁵

Whereas the first complication is a disunity of vision arising from the subject-object interaction, the second complication stems from the inability to distinguish to whom the vision is attributed to ontologically. For the sake of this thesis, I am oversimplifying the true nature of the aesthetic of the created world phase. I articulate it,

³⁴ May, 118.

³⁵ This statement is supported by a psychological study by Pablo P. L. Tinio “From Artistic Creation to Aesthetic Reception: The Mirror Model of Art” *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts* 2013, 1-11 where it is asserted that the early stages of aesthetic viewing correspond to the final stages of art-making, likewise, the late stages of aesthetic viewing correspond to the initial stages of art-making. More specifically, upon aesthetic viewing it is the small details that are noticed first, such as highlights, whereas those are the final additions made by the artist. Conversely, aesthetic viewing in its latter stages renders insight into what is being conveyed when this was the initial step of the artist, to discern what vision they have and how it will be conveyed in their artwork. For this reason, the beginning step of an artist and the final step of an aesthetic viewer will find either agreement or disagreement, unity or dis-unity.

in its most basic form as the challenge to see God's creation and re-articulate it. What actually occurs is that humans are observing a mixture of God's creation and human creation during this phase. Due to these various visions, it can be difficult to clearly identify authorship. A difference of vision origin marks the difference in ontological origin that is being articulated or viewed in an artwork. For better or worse, whether from God or a human, perception is often misattributed to its proper origin. Therefore, the transition from observed reality to subjective reaction provokes countless discrepancies in the unity of vision.

This is where May's second part of the creative process is important: intensity. For May, intensity amounts to the passion, depth, and commitment a person is willing to engage in during the encounter.³⁶ He insists, "absorption, being caught up in, wholly involved, and so on, are all used commonly to describe the state of the artist when crafting. By whatever name one calls it, genuine creativity is characterized by an intensity of awareness."³⁷ He also uses the term ecstasy because he says, "ex-stasis means 'to stand out from,' to be freed from the usual split between subject and object."³⁸ Presumably, the more committed a person is to an aesthetic encounter the more likely they are to properly perceive the ontology to be found there, a vision that if duplicated in an artwork, should find agreement among viewers. In this way, May agrees with Waibel that unity of subject and object is a necessary step in the creative process.

³⁶ Ibid., 44-48.

³⁷ Ibid., 44.

³⁸ Ibid., 48.

Our human intention for imagination and creativity originates from what we see.³⁹ In his *Letter*, JP II states, “[God] created the human being to whom he subjected the visible world as a vast field in which human inventiveness might assert itself.”⁴⁰ When appropriated to this fifth phase, JP II’s statement confirms that the ontology of the person is engaging with the ontology of an object or other person. Like May, encounter is also an important starting point but JP II favors the term cognition. The following passage cautions against an overly subjective oriented aesthetic where a person creates their own reality, “cognition does not in any way create ‘reality’ (cognition does not create its own content), but arises thanks to the various kinds of [being], thanks to the enormous richness and complexity of reality.”⁴¹ In other words, humans take in reality, they do not generate it. This is an important point, that apprehending existence offers a vision of reality. JP II goes on to say, “If reality were identical with cognition, then the necessity of cognition to tend toward the truth would be completely unintelligible.”⁴² It is because we are not certain of things that we search outside of ourselves to know things certainly. Although we seek unity, we are not “one” with other beings or objects otherwise we could not be directed toward them.⁴³

The created world provides the content for imagination once that aesthetic is perceived by an artist. This section helped us to understand the rudimentary role of intense cognition in theological aesthetics; to find God in what is viewed. The creative process of Rollo May, introduced the subject-object change that occurs in a subject-

³⁹ Even in instances where imagination and creativity arise from the unconscious, what instills in the unconscious mind still embeds because of what is perceived, it is simply without conscious awareness.

⁴⁰ John Paul II, *Letter of His Holiness to Artists*.

⁴¹ Idem., *Person and Community* ed. by Theresa Sandok (New York: P. Lang, 1993), 116-117.

⁴² Ibid., 116.

⁴³ Ibid.

object interaction the concepts of which will figure more prominently in the next chapter. Following encounter, intensity helped us resolve two complications that often arise because of aesthetic encounter and it relied heavily upon vision, which was established in the previous chapter. Ultimately, to apprehend existence provides a vision of reality that is re-articulated in the artistic processes of imagination and creativity.

Now that phases four and five have established the precursors and catalysts of ontological reality and aesthetics, the next two phases, compose the creative process of imagination and creativity.

Phase 6: Humans Imagine

The exploration of phase four and five culminates here, in phase six, to support human imagination as a receptacle for divine disclosure and interaction. For this reason, Aquinas' ontological method will aid in distinguishing the notions of being God and being human. By identifying the differences between human-being and God-being I will isolate divinity present in human imagination and consequently, the convergence of human-being and God-being through imagination.

Imagination is to envision something not yet known or actualized tangibly. In my framework of imagination what is not yet known amounts to knowledge of essence and what is not yet actualized tangibly is existence. I begin with the ontological link to knowledge then continue with the ontological reality of essence and existence because my major point is that due to its ontological nature, imagination is interactive through selection. I attempt to demonstrate how imagination is selective and why selection is theologically significant.

Since my intended definition of imagination is to envision something not yet known or actualized tangibly, it is necessary to illustrate the knowledge of God and the knowledge of humanity. To Aquinas, ontology has a profound link to knowledge. When conveying God's knowledge of humans he writes, "He knows the nature of being through a knowledge of Himself."⁴⁴ If God can know His self, any part of himself instilled in another is still known to him.⁴⁵ This is simple deduction and it should work both ways, by humans knowing their nature they can know God. This is how imagination is interactive. Yet in this interactivity, in light of human choice, can God know what is not, never has been, nor will be in reality? Humans can, for this is the obvious character of imagination. It is significant that humans can represent something in the mind without giving it form or bringing it into actuality. How Aquinas answers the question at hand illustrates how intangible imagination differs from created actuality. The difference lay in how Aquinas distinguishes essence versus existence. He shows this by distinguishing how we can know what something is and still know something that does not actually exist.⁴⁶ He believes both essence and existence are a form of being, yet they differ in human visibility or degree of knowledge. When speaking of God he states, "His Essence can be represented by many things that are not, nor will be, nor ever were."⁴⁷ Imagination works in the arena of essences, which are concepts that are alive but intangible and possibly non-existent. While both essence and existence live, only existence lives in a tangibly actualized sense. From this, we can redefine imagination: it

⁴⁴ SCG, I, ch. 50, ¶ 2.

⁴⁵ Not all scholars are in agreement on the extent to God's knowledge. For example, Thérèse-Anne Druart after assessing Averroes and Aquinas's critique of him, still finds both of their arguments unsatisfactory in ensuring that God has knowledge of humanly things. Druart, 196-198.

⁴⁶ SCG, I, ch. 66, ¶ 5.

⁴⁷ SCG, I, ch. 66, ¶ 9.

is a knowledge of an essence that may or may not have come into existence as a tangible actualization. In fact, it is only because a concept lives elsewhere, intangibly, as essence, that it can be conceived by the human imagination and cross over into actuality through the act of creativity.

Aquinas says, “The things that are present, past, or future to us God knows in His power. The knowledge of such things is said to be a knowledge of vision.”⁴⁸ On this basis, I suggest that knowledge, vision, and imagination subsist equally and are interchangeable in the sense that they are of the same import. Another passage from Aquinas suggests knowledge is equivalent to imagination. He offers the metaphor of an artist to depict how God can know what is not yet in the same way that an artist knows what is not yet in his or her work:

Again, the knowledge of the divine intellect is to other things as the knowledge of an artisan to artifacts, since through His knowledge God is the cause of things. Now, the artisan knows through his art even those things that have not yet been fashioned, since the forms of his art flow from his knowledge to external matter for the constitution of the artifacts.⁴⁹

This is a contextual way for Aquinas to state, “The knowledge of the maker determines the form for the thing made.”⁵⁰ To re-iterate, the form of artwork flows from knowledge or imagination and this inspires the manipulation of matter. This is cohesive with previous statements about encounter influencing the role of imagination. The more encounter we have the more our knowledge increases, the greater our degree of knowledge, the larger our scope of vision.⁵¹ The significance of God as pure knowledge,

⁴⁸ SCG, I, ch. 66, ¶ 8.

⁴⁹ SCG, I, ch. 66, ¶ 3.

⁵⁰ SCG, I, ch. 50, ¶ 3.

⁵¹ That imaginative capacities increase with an increase of knowledge is more than a theological conclusion, it is a scientifically verified observation. See Roger E. Beaty and Paul J. Silvia, “Why Do Ideas Get More

means the more pure knowledge humans have the more they are consistent with God's vision. God has a knowledge of all that is actual in tangible reality and all that is potential within human power. However, humans can know much of what is actual and only some of what is potential.⁵² In this way, imagination is often incomplete compared to the known choices God has knowledge of. This is how imagination is selective. God knows all that humans have, could ever, and never imagined. Human imagination is therefore not original thought, merely selection of possibilities coming to be known to the individual or the human race, from the ultimate divine intellect of God. Imagination is selecting among real and alive essences for the likely sake of actualization and existence.

Although May's starting point is more psychological than theological, he would seem to agree with my assessment that knowledge, vision, and imagination are equivalent concepts as he illustrates, "Imagination is the outreaching of mind... It is the capacity to 'dream dreams and see visions' to consider diverse possibilities before ones attention."⁵³ Since knowledge, vision, and imagination are equivalents, their manifestation in humans differs in comparison to God. Keeping in mind an extension of May's notion of encounter, "Receptivity is the artist's holding him or herself alive and open, alert to see whatever can be glimpsed when the vision come[s]."⁵⁴ As he acknowledges, being open to an array of possibilities can be overwhelming. A human cannot know all possibilities nor can they act them out. From May's psychological point of view, "Consciousness is the awareness that emerges out of the dialectical tension between possibilities and

Creative Across Time? An Executive Interpretation of the Serial Order Effect in Divergent Thinking Tasks" in *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts* Vol. 6 No. 4 2012, 309–319. Their study concludes that people deliver output that is more imaginative over time not because they jump to remote ideas but because a duration of time permits an increase in information stimulating their imaginative faculties. They assert that retrieval and manipulation of knowledge allows for higher creative productivity.

⁵² SCG, I, ch. 69, ¶ 4.

⁵³ May, 122.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 80-81.

limitations.”⁵⁵ More than the shaping of the mind, limitations contribute to the health of the mind, a careful balance is needed, “As imagination gives vitality to form, form keeps imagination from driving us into psychosis. This is the ultimate necessity of limits,”⁵⁶ he says. The selective nature of imagination is essential because humans are limited, and in turn, require limits.

Aquinas arrives at this conclusion through ontology, “the essence of God is of an infinite perfection, whereas every other thing has a limited being and perfection, it is impossible that the universe of things other than God equal the perfection of the divine essence.”⁵⁷ Commenting in *The Creative Retrieval of St. Thomas Aquinas* on the interactive nature of Aquinas’ essence-existence doctrine W. Norris Clarke affirms for us, “This is a participation doctrine.”⁵⁸ He elaborates, “It is a doctrine both of creatures and of God in their mutual relations, the central vantage point from which he views all creatures as participating in limited fashion through their respective essences in the unlimited plenitude of God’s own perfection.”⁵⁹ Imagination deriving from our divine nature means humans have an incomplete connection to God who is complete divine nature. Yet it amounts to a potential for interaction nonetheless, a person can strengthen this connection but need not establish it because the connection already exists by human nature. Although Clarke does not say the following in the context of imagination, he remains helpful in offering that with respect to humans, “essence, in its turn, becomes nothing but the interior limiting principle,”⁶⁰ so he offers the term, “limited-

⁵⁵ Ibid., 114.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 122.

⁵⁷ SCG, I, ch. 66, ¶ 4.

⁵⁸ W. Norris Clarke, *The Creative Retrieval of St. Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), 118.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 117.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 129-130.

participation”⁶¹ to convey the proper theological reality present in a capacitated though restricted human.

In the context of imagination, while it can and does surpass what exists in reality, our limitedness prevents us from exceeding all the possible essences that amount to the full imagination of God. Imagination as part of our divine nature allows us to envision greater possibility than current reality may convey but what we actualize is always an abbreviated form of divine essence. In other words, a limited being will perform in a limited fashion, which in the context of imagination is the requirement to select for the sake of creative formation.

In summary, during imagination, divine interaction of a human with God is the arrival into realms of knowledge from a previous state of unknowing. As a result, imagination must be selective because humans by their nature are more limited than God, and are not capable of being open to all of the knowledge God is capable of. No matter how deep or vast, human knowledge is always incomplete. Nevertheless, however close to reality as potential future or however far from reality as impractical fantasy, imagining diverse possibilities exercises our capacity for divine-human convergence. Furthermore, the reason imagination is selective is due to the receptivity within their limited nature. Encounter with nature or any humanly actualized essence is engagement with a sense of God’s being from the myriad of potential essences awaiting actualization. Divine disclosure in the human being then appears in the realm of essences. For this purpose, I defined knowledge, vision, and imagination as equivalent terms as they all pertain to real, alive, essences that may or may not have transitioned from God’s exclusive enclosure,

⁶¹ Ibid., 131.

disclosed to the realm humans consider existence. Within this framework, an act must precede an existence so we turn to the second phase of the creative process.

CHAPTER 2: THE CREATIVITY OF HUMAN ACTION

Phase 7: Human Creativity as Crafting/Co-Creation

JPII says in his *Letter*, “None can sense more deeply than you artists, some echo of the mystery of creation with which God, the sole creator of all things, has wished in some way to associate you.”⁶² This association I regard as co-creation. After defining terms I present a kind of subject-oriented aesthetic where the artist as crafter is under consideration. The concept of phenomenology is an integral approach to this chapter because whether in a moment of active action or passive being, we are having an experience. This chapter continues the theme of the previous one because the ontological nature of imagination contributes to the phenomenological action of creativity. The selection of imagined ideas illustrates our freedom while the actualization of creativity solidifies its concretization. In the midst of the artistic process the artist affects their self and objects around them to create a new ontology. Although humans possess free-will in activity, they are limited, and dependent on God. In the same way they share nature and vision with God, they also share action with God. As JPII reminds us, “the human mirrors the image of God as Creator.”⁶³

Imagination is arguably an action, but it is one hidden in the mind of an artist since it does not actualize tangibly which I consider a condition for activity.⁶⁴ As such, I define creativity as action oriented for it is at its root an activity. An artist’s creativity is often measured not by how much one envisions something intangibly but in how much

⁶² Pope John Paul II, *Letter of His Holiness to Artists*.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ This definition of creative activity is not intended to demote imagination as insignificant by comparison or isolate it as an “unfinished” part of the process. It must be recognized that some artists may choose not to manifest their vision for various reasons. Alternatively, they may not possess the skills or materials needed to complete their vision. Nevertheless, this definition of creativity is meant to contrast imagination by emphasizing that the shift from essence to existence, immaterial to material, is the manner in which external actualization contributes to the objective world.

they configure and construct that vision with materials. Creativity is an act that results in a manifestation in reality; it is the actualizing of an essence into existence.

JPII's concern for subject and object stems from his pronouncement that man is a subjective object whose subjective individuality should not be lost in theological articulation. JPII believes that for the human subject identity is guaranteed through existence and activity.⁶⁵ By activity, he aligns with May the psychologist, in recognizing that interactions with objects affect the human self. Yet with JPII's theology, he wants personal aspects within the subjective person to be encompassed in phenomenology rather than making generalities of the human species.⁶⁶ Otherwise, phenomenology is broad, impersonal, and devoid of originality. It is not enough to consider a person as a being capacitated for action while ignoring the personal nature of being and action. Viladesau is helpful here in offering two dimensions of humans as *imago dei* between, "(1) the permanent 'structural' qualities of human nature that make possible, and (2) the actual reception of God's self revelation and assimilation to God's way of being."⁶⁷ I offer this here to elaborate on JPII's point that while a human being with divine likeness is capacitated, they control how much they actualize that capacity. For this reason, JPII seeks to provide a fuller picture of what it means to be and act human individualistically as this constitutes our worth.⁶⁸ His study of man, "by approaching him through action"⁶⁹ is encapsulated in *The Acting Person*. This is helpful to our discussion because the ontological nature of imagination is related to the phenomenological action of creativity.

⁶⁵ Cardinal Karol Wojtyla, *The Acting Person* (Boston: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979), 224.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 209-217.

⁶⁷ Viladesau, 97.

⁶⁸ Wojtyla, *The Acting Person*, 264.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, xiii, xiv.

In *The Acting Person*, JPII begins with human action in order to understand the relationship between activity and existence. His study represents the impact phenomenology has on ontology and vice versa. Firstly, let us examine phenomenology. By phenomenology, I mean human experience that has active, passive, subjective, and objective qualities. Sometimes we have an experience because we have made something happen with our actions, and the experience is actively subjective. Other times, that experience occurs due to circumstances beyond our control, we are objectified in passivity. This is not to say that experience cannot contain a combination of both. We might say, for example, that the aesthetic encounter occurring in phase five happens to us as passive objects until we initiate an action with phase six or seven, imagination or creativity. JPII defines experience as possessing both subjective and objective quality:

The first element of experience can be defined as a “sense of reality”, placing the accent on reality—on the fact that something exists with an existence that is real and objectively independent of the cognitizing subject and the subject’s cognitizing act, while at the same time existing as the object of the act. Because of this, the structural whole of experience also contains a second element, which can be defined as a “sense of knowing”.⁷⁰

This passage recalls the encountering and the cognition I treated in chapter one as well as providing a suitable foundation to a subject oriented aesthetic.

Since a person is a subject and object, an action affects both aspects of the person. JPII states, “Through the mechanism of the basic ontological structure... this is the reason why the human being, even while he is the agent in acting, still remains its metaphysical subject. He is both the actor and transcendent subject.”⁷¹ For JPII, even in the midst of purposeful action two complementary elements include the initiating active

⁷⁰ Idem., *Person and Community*, 115.

⁷¹ Idem., *The Acting Person*, 75.

capacity that still maintain an observational quality from ones being. He says that “the integration of the person in the action” and the “transcendence of the person in action” creates a dynamic “person-action whole”.⁷²

A connection between ontological existence and activity is also articulated by JP II and is expressed in the phrase *operari sequitur esse*⁷³ (operation follows being). The act of being affects the activity of the person and vice versa, it is a process of disclosure. In other words, we can come to know more about (being) *esse* by way of (action) *operari*. He explains that it is ultimately “the freedom proper to the human person [that] is simultaneously expressed and concretized.”⁷⁴ To put this into the context of artistry, freedom is analogous to our selection in imagination and concretization is analogous to the actualization of crafting something. The artistic process permits expression of ideas while also maintaining personal freedom to choose for the sake of identity communication and solidification.

This exploration of the subject-object interaction upon encounter, affecting the self and objects through action, offers the detail to what May asserts when he concurs of artists, “Their creativity is the most basic manifestation of a man or woman fulfilling his or her own being in the world.”⁷⁵ In crafting actions, an artist also actualizes a part of themselves. JP II applies his theology more specifically to creativity, “The artist not only summons his work into being, but also in some way reveals his own personality by means of it. [For the artist] art offers both a new dimension and an exceptional mode of

⁷² Ibid., 190.

⁷³ Pope John Paul II, *Person and Community*, 223.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 224.

⁷⁵ May, 40.

expression for his spiritual growth.”⁷⁶ In the artistic process, man is called to transform himself and his outside world, as JPII also writes, “Through his ‘artistic creativity’ man appears more than ever ‘in the image of God’, and he accomplishes this task above all in shaping the wondrous ‘material’ of his own humanity and then exercising creative dominion over the universe which surrounds him.”⁷⁷ Moments of creativity change the objects crafted as well as the one doing the crafting.

Up to this point, I have spoken primarily of the human subject in the notion of change where more than just the human subject is changed, so are the objects. As such, more should be said about what I intend theologically when I speak of objects. Aquinas would articulate objective reality as, “there is consequently nothing in any thing that is not caused by God, mediately or immediately.”⁷⁸ That God created the pure objects or the materials that constitute manufactured objects is significant to being that stems from acting. The former Pope says it well when he states, “The one who creates bestows being itself, he brings something out of nothing. The craftsman, by contrast, uses something that already exists, to which he gives form and meaning.”⁷⁹ From this, we discover three things. First and obviously, is that there is a difference in the tasks between beings, the creator verses the craftsman. In the strictest theological sense, to create is reserved for God alone, and humans merely re-arrange, re-order, or craft. Human creativity is ultimately craftsmanship. The second is the dependency humans have on God for their material selection. The third, though more subtle inference, is that the *esse* behind the creative act along with the *esse* of the object influences the *esse* that emerges. The

⁷⁶ Pope John Paul II, *Letter of His Holiness to Artists*.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ SCG, I, ch. 50, ¶ 2.

⁷⁹ Pope John Paul II, *Letter of His Holiness to Artists*.

encounter with objects that led to selection in imagination and its tangible actualization in creativity results in a change in the participating subject and the object it is directed toward. The ontology is significant to both. The same art supplies will not craft the same outcome if two different artists use them, similarly, we cannot craft the same outcome if we utilize different art supplies. “The greatness of a poem or a painting,” writes May, “is not that it portrays the thing observed or experienced, but that it portrays the artist’s or the poet’s vision cued off by his encounter with reality. Hence [it is] unique, original, never to be duplicated.”⁸⁰

This quote from May helps us to further conclude the new ontology that emerges as a result of an artist’s engagement with created reality. If we take seriously, what JP II has said about the artist’s self imbued and revealed in their artwork, then any creative act alters objects to such a degree that it modifies its ontology. If it were not for this inevitable shift in ontology, this impossible task of perfectly replicating that which an artist encounters, they would not feel so haunted according to May. He notes from studying artists, “Anxiety is related to the gap between the ideal vision that the artist is trying to paint and the objective results.”⁸¹ It is as though through creativity, the human is always destined to change their outside world, but never to the fullest extent of the vision they intend. On the other extreme, May explains the disproportionate joy that occurs as creativity takes form, “I propose that this is the experience of this-is-the-way-things-are-meant-to-be. If only for that moment, we participate in the myth of creation.

⁸⁰ May, 79.

⁸¹ Ibid., 83.

Order comes out of disorder, form out of chaos, as it did in the creation of the universe.”⁸²

Leaving off on that statement about creation, finally, I have laid the foundation for establishing co-creation. In the previous chapter we accounted for God being pure being which substantiated humans as being by participation. I articulated the reality of co-nature. I said that God was pure essence and non-actualized essences is the characteristic feature of imagination. Similarly, God as pure knowledge, which we equated with vision, is also participatory as far as an instance of selections in imaginative vision. This articulated the possibility for a sense of co-vision. Since imagination is for the likely sake of actualization in existence, I continue to argue how participation through an act of creativity articulates a sense of co-creation.

As he was crucial in providing structure for God-being and human-being, I return to Aquinas to deliver foundations for God-act and human-act. To Aquinas, “God is pure act.”⁸³ As for human acts, “Each thing acts in so far as it is in act. Therefore, what is not wholly act acts, not with the whole of itself, but with part of itself. But what does not act with the whole of itself is not the first agent, since it does not act through its essence but through participation in some thing.”⁸⁴ By Aquinas’ estimation as with being, humans act only by participating in God.

However, by virtue of shared action or participation, it would be easy to attribute too much emphasis upon God, for what is not wholly God. For this reason, Aquinas is certain to articulate the nature of free-will, “Free choice is said in relation to the things

⁸² Ibid., 122-123.

⁸³ SCG, I, ch. 16, ¶ 5.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

that one wills, not of necessity, but of his own accord.”⁸⁵ While God participates in human action, he does not compel it, action is committed by human choice. Phrased another way, Aquinas places humans as masters of their acts who are nevertheless, dependent upon God, “because he has free choice, man is said to be master of his acts. But this supremely befits the first agent, whose act does not depend on another.”⁸⁶ So while the term co-creation may emphasize the divine power of God’s creation ability, this power is nonetheless wielded by humans during acts of crafting, artistic or otherwise.

The experience of power through action that affects our humanity is articulated by May, “A man or woman becomes fully human only by his or her choices and his or her commitment to them. People attain worth and dignity by the multitude of decisions they make from day to day.”⁸⁷ Yet May also calls our attention to limitations. Earlier, we said that human beings have limits and so do human actions. As far as imagination is concerned, limitation is due to the selective nature of imagination. With respect to action, limitation extends to selection, as there are only so many action combinations to select from, but given the actualizing nature of action, limitation also extends to objects with which one interacts with. In the context of artistic creativity, there are only so many materials, colors, and techniques to create with. We recall that creativity is more often than not a re-arranging or re-ordering of only that which God can create. There is much humans will never create because we do not possess the God provided material means. This is dependency at work. May tells us that, “Creativity itself requires limits, for the creative act arises out of the struggle of human beings with and against that which limits

⁸⁵ SCG, I, ch. 88, ¶ 2.

⁸⁶ SCG, I, ch. 88, ¶ 5.

⁸⁷ May, 14.

them.”⁸⁸ Limits are required because they indicate that actualization has taken place, otherwise, we cannot by virtue of the definition call it creativity. May articulates this well, “I can, therefore, understand the rebellion in our day against form and limits as expressed in the cry ‘We have unlimited potentialities.’ But when these movements try to throw form or limits out entirely, they become self-destructive and noncreative.”⁸⁹ That is to say, when nothing is committed to there is no act of true creativity.

In this section, JPI’s phrase *operari sequitur esse* (operation follows being) summarized how the nature of the human subject prompts and dictates their action. The extension of humans sharing divine being in this actualization phase of creativity renders concretization of the being. Due to subject-object interactions causing change, *operari sequitur esse* offers humans a substantial amount of control over their ontology as well as the world around them. Despite human dependency on God for the materials of their artwork and the limitedness of their nature, the co-nature and co-vision experienced in imagination culminates here in actualizing creativity as co-creation.

⁸⁸ May, 113.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 120.

CHAPTER 3: THE BRIDGE TO RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

Previously, I stated that religious experience and artistic creativity need not be separate endeavors. As such, my goal for this chapter is to answer what it is that unites artistic creativity to religious experience in order to validate my claim. I argue that it is the ontological nature of the human person that unites people and I suggest two themes can demonstrate this. Then I offer a few tensions that remain between religion, art, and theology. Lastly, I suggest Yves Klein's artistic journey can illustrate how we might resolve some of this tension by creating a relationship between these subjects.

Thematically, two key concepts from my previous chapters are significant to commonalities amidst human ontological nature: limits and intensity. Limits and intensity are particularly applicable to religious experience as Sandra Schneiders details that term. She attempts to argue in favor of religion as an appropriate context for spirituality.⁹⁰ Her perspective is, "The great religions of the world are much more adequate matrices for spiritual development and practice than personally constructed amalgams of belief and practices."⁹¹ One often claimed rationalization of forsaking religion is the confining nature of its ideological boundaries.⁹² People want to, "grow personally with freedom of spirit and openness to all that is good and useful, whatever its source."⁹³ However, she counters with reasons such as: nebulous beliefs resulting from ungrounded framework, mistakes in truth due to no accountability, lethargy due to

⁹⁰ Sandra M. Schneiders, "Religion vs. Spirituality: A Contemporary Conundrum" in *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality*, Vol 3, Number 2, Fall 2003, 163-185.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

personal non-compliance, and isolation from the benefits of compiled experience, as negative aspects of personal spiritualities devoid of any religious affiliation.⁹⁴

To distinguish how she suspects “spirituality” and “religious” contrast, she defines spirituality as an experience, “a personal lived reality which has both active and passive dimensions,”⁹⁵ it is a “dimension of human being which is actualized as a life project and practice.”⁹⁶ Religion on the other hand involves, “a recognition of the total dependence of the creature on the source or matrix of being and life which gives rise to attitudes and actions and a reliance on the transcendent for help in living and dying.”⁹⁷

As I interpret Schneiders, to consider ones spirituality as religious experience requires limiting ones self to spiritual traditions, institutional formation, and specific communal influence.⁹⁸ We could say that it limits an individual’s imagination and creativity given all that the world has to offer. We recall that May’s point of view I offered in chapters one and two were how limits keep the imagination from causing too much anxiety and limits maintain the true definition of creativity through selection and actualization. May uses the metaphor of a river to describe the cause of limits, he writes, “Limits are as necessary as those provided by the banks of a river, without which the water would be dispersed on the earth and there would be no river—that is, the river is constituted by the tension between flowing water and the banks.”⁹⁹ From this metaphor we observe that limitation is definition and containment, which in the estimation of May is the everyday action of selection. Religion formulates a useful selection that bounds the

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ May, 115.

imagination and limits its focus to foster creative output. The everyday experience of artists limiting themselves through their creative selections is no less expected in the arena of religious experience. As May's limitation concept has as just illustrated, Schneider's viewpoint has merit; religion perceived as spiritual limitation is not realistic rationale. Indeed May proclaims, "Conflict presupposes limit and the struggle with limits is actually the source of creative productions."¹⁰⁰

The second theme that Schneiders conveys for us is that of a commitment to a religious practice. As May informed us in previous chapters, the commitment of intensity brings us closer to unity. As was the case with limits, intensity is no less required in the practice of artistry than it is in formal religion. Since the rigor of intense committed action absorbs and formulates the self, Schneiders' comparable sentiment of, "only the rootedness of religious commitment in tradition can equip us for the kind of inter-religious participation which will further the unity of the human family,"¹⁰¹ seems reasonable given the same necessary parameters required of artists. In the same way that numerous artistic collaborators must be united with and committed to the same vision for a creative project, the same concentration of engagement toward spiritual matters will unite the human family. By placing in conversation these relevant concepts of May and Schneiders, I have suggested a final step for art as, "a kind of bridge to religious experience."

However, composing "a kind of bridge to religious experience" as a theology of imagination and creativity creates tensions. When attempting to create a dialogue between art and theology artists and theologians, three challenges arise. First, to

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Schneiders, 163-185.

articulate religious experience in theological language could appear to replace religious experience with theology. Second, articulating artistic creativity as religious experience could defeat the familiarity with which art and artistry was meant to accomplish. The third challenge is to explain imagining and crafting as religious experience when religious affiliation is diminishing. We recall JPII's concern in his *Letter* of an atmosphere of religious apathy and hostility. Perhaps in light of this, he remarks, "There is a 'spirituality' of artistic service."¹⁰² According to Sandra M. Schneiders, spirituality currently enjoys a high profile, and people claiming affiliation to that concept are on the rise, while religious affiliation is diminishing.¹⁰³ I will conclude this final construction of a bridge to religious experience by relating and differentiating religious experience with theology and spirituality, and discussing how art participates in these manifestations.

To introduce the tension between theology and religious experience, Viladesau says "If systematic theological language is usually not of the same kind as language of originating religious experience, this is because it performs a special function with regard to the latter: it is a second-order language that distances itself in order to reflect critically on experience."¹⁰⁴ Religious experience expresses itself through theology. In certain instances theology does inspire religious experience. However, theology is not a means in and of itself because theology is first and foremost a reaction to religious experience. Theology is the attempt to articulate religious experience. Ultimately, theology is meant to be lived. Philip Sheldrake says that theology is more than an analytical method, the

¹⁰² Pope John Paul II, *Letter of His Holiness to Artists*.

¹⁰³ Schneiders, 163-185.

¹⁰⁴ Viladesau, 13-14.

spiritual lives of people can test theology's rigor with intensity and honesty.¹⁰⁵ He also provides for us a glimpse of how theology should be accountable to religious experience precisely because its reputation is that it is not:

The emphasis on the experiential in spirituality has tended to reinforce a sense that spirituality is fundamentally detached from "doing theology". Conversely, it suggests that theology is purely theoretical and has nothing to do with life. "Doing theology" theologically is ultimately a form of spiritual practice and this is a different kind of exercise from an outside-in analysis of Christian religion. This is why I suggest that theology in its fullest sense involves a way of life—becoming a theological person.¹⁰⁶

What Sheldrake is formulating is that theology must honestly admit that its language cannot be the only mode of religious expression.¹⁰⁷ In this way, although my prime representative of faith in this thesis is a theologian, by no means are they the only ones who need, participate in, or express religious experience.

As we explored in chapter one, art as an aesthetic is experiential. Art is a source for theology and an alternative expression to theology. Furthermore the Roman Catholic religious experience is grounded in sensible aesthetic experience. What I have argued in this thesis is that due to ontological nature a human artist is like God as an artist. In chapter two, I illustrated how subject-object interaction impacts ontology during the creative process. What artwork is made for aesthetic viewing is both a response to something the artist first beheld in the ontology of creation and a manifestation of the artist's ontology. In this way, a viewer experiences more than one author in a work. This

¹⁰⁵ Philip Sheldrake, "Spirituality and the Integrity of Theology" in *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* Vol 7, Number 1, 2007, 93-98.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

is why I argued that phases five and nine are closely linked. What Viladesau can tell us further is that,

The realm of aesthetic experience may serve as a source for systematic theological reflection in at least two ways. First, it is a locus of explicitly religious (and theological) experience, expression, and discourse; second, it is a locus of secular human experience that is either (a) “implicitly” religious or (b) susceptible to correlation with the sacred.¹⁰⁸

On the other hand, Sheldrake and I disagree with Viladesau’s final statement because secular human experience may be the sacred unrecognized. I share Sheldrake’s sentiment: “Christian theology radically reconfigures human conceptions of the sacred. No part of the material world or of human activity is inherently profane although it may be profaned by sinful human action. The everyday world is an authentic theological locus.”¹⁰⁹

Author of *Imagining God* Garrett Green can suggest positive and negative implications with respect to imagination and its relationship to theology and religion. He suggests that religious individuals have long avoided adopting imagination due to the suspicion that religion uses God as an illusion to control people.¹¹⁰ From a more positive perspective he says, “If imagination is the human ability to perceive and represent likeness, religions employ that ability rendering the world accessible to the imagination in such a way that its ultimate nature, value, and destiny are made manifest.”¹¹¹ In this way religion has imagination at its service. It is therefore integral for Green to draw the conclusion that the fact versus fiction attitude toward imagination is inadequate; just

¹⁰⁸ Viladesau, 15.

¹⁰⁹ Sheldrake, 95.

¹¹⁰ Garrett Green, *Imagining God: Theology and the Religious Imagination* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1989), 24.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 80.

because imagination is imaginative, does not mean it is imaginary.¹¹² How Green applies this to theology is to say, “The long doctrinal tradition of interpreting the *imago dei* can be reformulated, without doing violence to its meaning, as a theology of the human imagination.”¹¹³ Evidently, Green encourages theologians to consider fostering the relationship between theologians and artists united in the name of imagination in order to formulate practical theology as he aptly observes, “All too often the practical tasks of the church have either been ignored by systematic theology or artificially tacked onto as an afterthought.”¹¹⁴

To create a “bridge to religious experience”, this chapter built upon the first two, to say that the ontological nature of humans unite them together. Therefore religious experience and artistic creativity share at least two common themes: limitation and intensity. Contrary to the individualistic and often eclectic nature of “spirituality” religion creates boundaries and limits imagination so a person can be more creative. Intense religious commitment when practiced by many unites the human family through a common vision. Although theology attempts to articulate religious experiences it should be lived and practical. Art is a source for theology but it is also an alternative expression of it, a theology spoken without words. This being the case, imagination can serve religion because our *imago dei* makes a theology of imagination and creativity possible. In the following chapter I suggest French Artist Yves Klein exemplifies my case. He was a devout Roman Catholic who had a vibrant spirituality that is easily excavated for theological concepts that articulate religious experience that can unite conversation between the theologian and the artist.

¹¹² Ibid., 25.

¹¹³ Ibid., 104.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 149.

CHAPTER 4: IMAGINATION & CREATIVITY IN THE ARTISTIC EXPERIENCE OF YVES KLEIN

Until this point, I have written generally about theological elements that contribute to the artistic process of Imagination and Creativity. I aspire with this chapter to present the artistic experience of French artist Yves Klein as a case study that demonstrates this thesis. In a sense, Klein was an artist/theologian who embodied the dialogue JPII promotes in his *Letter* between artists and theologians. The life of Yves Klein represents art as a bridge to religious experience.

Klein believed there was, “the excessively spiritual region of artistic creation.”¹¹⁵ Yet more than a spiritual artist he was a devoutly religious person who sought to articulate in his artistry his experience of divinity. His opinions about “the void” and “space” often served as metaphors for God, “You do not understand, the more dimension, the more divine, the more nothingness, the more divine, but inconceivably, we refuse, foolish as we are, to see and contemplate it and to make use of it because it burns reason.”¹¹⁶ He was an active member of the Knights of the Order of Saint Sebastian.¹¹⁷ He also frequently wrote prayers to St. Rita of Cascia.¹¹⁸ On one occasion he expressed his religious fervor by leaving upon her altar a small box of plexi glass filled with blue and pink dry pigments and gold leafing, inside a hand written note asked humbly for her to pray for him.¹¹⁹

While he was not always so publically candid about religion with formally religious language, he admitted that the more he painted the more he understood that he

¹¹⁵ Yves Klein, “Truth Becomes Reality” in *Overcoming the Problematics of Art: The Writings of Yves Klein* ed. and trans by Klaus Ottmann (Putnam: Spring Publications, 2007), 185. [hereafter *YKW*].

¹¹⁶ Yves Klein, “Some False Foundations” in *YKW*, 8.

¹¹⁷ Kerry Brougher, “Involuntary Painting” in *Yves Klein: With the Void, Full Powers* ed. by Kerry Brougher (Washington D.C.: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden/Walker Center, 2010), 299.

¹¹⁸ Yves Klein, “Prayers to St. Rita” in *YKW*, 180-181.

¹¹⁹ Brougher, 217.

was, “a true Christian.”¹²⁰ He said that with artistic creation, “I am returning to Eden. I am certain of it.”¹²¹ He once compared breaking his isolation from inside his studio by the act of inviting models to create with him to Heb 9:8-9 and Matt 27:51 when he said, “I wanted to tear away the veil from the temple of the studio.”¹²² In another instance he said poignantly, “Like Christ, the painter says Mass by painting and gives the body of his soul as nourishment to others; he brings about, on a miniature scale, the miracle of the Holy Communion in each painting.”¹²³ Aside from these instances however, much of his career was spent doing his artistry as theology. He had strong and hopeful convictions in a “Blue Revolution”. By this peaceful revolution, France would become beautiful, and holy because everyone would follow the will of God to bring about the greatest culture the world had ever seen.¹²⁴

In phase five, the aesthetic of the created world, humans encounter existing things in the world that act as catalysts to spark the creative process of imagination. This was indeed the case with Klein. In April 1947, at the age of twenty, Klein was laying on the beach in Nice, looking up at the blue sky. This moment is cited by Kerry Brougher as providing the inspiration that would initiate his fifteen-year artistic journey.¹²⁵ As is the case for many artists, the ontological essence of nature inspires creative action in a moment of aesthetic voyeurism. In 1961, published in the magazine ZERO, a photograph taken by Klein entitled *The Sky Above Nice*, seems to document this inaugural

¹²⁰ Yves Klein, “Truth Becomes Reality” in *YKW*, 186.

¹²¹ Yves Klein, “The Monochrome Adventure”, 169.

¹²² Brougher, 276.

¹²³ Brougher, 275

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 273.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

moment.¹²⁶ He is quoted by his friend at the time, Arman, as having said, “the blue sky is my first artwork.”¹²⁷

His artistic talent would far exceed photography, his larger scheme would consume the duration of his career, and it began primarily with a purposeful use of color. He would detail his intentions in a book he published called *The Monochrome Adventure (Monochrome)*. A monochrome is an artwork in a single color, though perhaps utilizing various shades of that color. The color Klein would select and affiliate with was blue. He would call his own particular shade, a vibrant ultramarine, International Klein Blue (IKB).¹²⁸ Klein says of his work, “I painted monochrome surfaces to see, with my own eyes to SEE, what was visible in the absolute.”¹²⁹ I interpret Klein’s use of “the absolute” to indicate the ontological reality of which I have written. Klein aptly observed that color is not a human creation, it is an ontological existence to be pondered and utilized, “Color ‘is’. It is a presence already in itself that can be charged by the artist with a particular life, bringing its presence within reach of the human sensibility.”¹³⁰ Klein was purposeful and forward in his thinking, beyond his own experience as artist, he was concerned with phase nine, the aesthetics of his own artwork, and he allowed that to influence and dictate his work.

What led him to the artistic attempt, “where color becomes full and pure sensibility”¹³¹ was the belief that humans could in fact sensibly perceive the essence of color’s immateriality. Klein believed, “Nature is more than just physical and material, far

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Yves Klein, “Truth Becomes Reality” in *YKW*, 189.

¹²⁹ Yves Klein, “Overcoming the Problematics of Art” in *YKW*, 45.

¹³⁰ Yves Klein, “The Monochrome Adventure” in *YKW*, 160.

¹³¹ Ibid., 144.

from it, far from it! If nature, in artistic creations, was only what we perceived by our five senses, we would be rather wretched creatures on earth and in the universe.”¹³² Given Klein’s disposition that there was more to be seen in nature, as exemplified in his presentations of mere color, he envisioned a new potential for the art of painting, “Painting no longer appeared to me to be functionally related to the eye.”¹³³ Having already given up on lines and forms to convey essence because, “paintings, of whatever kind, abstract or representational, have the effect of the bars on a prison window,”¹³⁴ Klein would attempt to rely on color alone so as to assert that, “there exists a sensuous and colored matter that is intangible it is no longer a question of seeing color but rather of ‘perceiving’ it.”¹³⁵

His artistic endeavor that illustrates his attempt to depict this absolute, ontological, and immaterial essence was as follows: in two separate gallery exhibits, he created ten and eleven paintings of ultramarine monochrome, almost identical in format, size, proportion, tone, and value and on the second occasion priced them very differently.¹³⁶ Klein details in *Monochrome* the negative outcome of his first attempt: “Unfortunately, this occasion made apparent that many spectators were slaves to their manner of seeing.”¹³⁷ His second attempt was better received when people purchased these paintings that appeared the same but which Klein insisted had different essences that demanded differing prices. He mused, “This demonstrated, on the one hand, the pictorial quality of each painting was perceptible by something other than the material and

¹³² Yves Klein, “How and Why in 1957,” *Overcoming the Problematics of Art and Writings*, 388, quoted in Denys Riout, *Yves Klein Expressing the Immaterial* (Paris: Éditions Dilecta, 2010), 47.

¹³³ Yves Klein, “Chelsea Hotel Manifesto” in *YKW*, 198.

¹³⁴ Yves Klein, “Overcoming the Problematics of Art” in *YKW*, 46.

¹³⁵ Yves Klein, “My Position in the Battle Between Line and Color” in *YKW*, 20-21.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 19-20.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.

physical appearance and, on the other, that those who made their choice recognized that state to which I refer as ‘Pictorial Sensibility’.”¹³⁸

This unique art by Yves Klein demonstrated among other things, the place between imagination and creativity. These paintings were intentionally crafted short of the full actualization of creativity. As Klein exhibited in nearly identical objects what I liken to Aquinas’ essence, the differing essences were never fully brought to existence tangibly. In other words, rather than create objects that invited people in through that medium; it was as though Klein invited people into his phase of imagination, where essence had been conceived, but not fully actualized. This is perhaps what motivates Brougher to comment on Klein, “Painting was a means for transporting Klein himself into the air and beyond. The many flights he made convinced him that art could change the world; upon his occasional returns to earth, he brought with him new concepts for nothing less than the ‘total freedom of mind and body’.”¹³⁹ I suggest this “air and beyond” is the realm of imaginative concepts or essence. Klein seemed aware of this state between essence and actualization, imagination and creativity, and therefore employed it. He notes the time it took for his color revelation to come to fruition, recalling painting with color as a nineteen-year-old, “I would not consider at the time these attempts as having pictorial potential until one year later when the archetype of a new state of things is ready, that it has ripened, that it can be brought forth into the world.”¹⁴⁰

This leads to the legitimate question and answer presented to us by Brougher:

¹³⁸ Yves Klein, “The Monochrome Adventure” in *YKW*, 145.

¹³⁹ Brougher, 20.

¹⁴⁰ Yves Klein, “Overcoming the Problematics of Art” in *YKW*, 45-46.

Was Klein a painter or not? Klein was indeed a painter, [he] did not choose to be a painter; rather, he painted because he needed to create an earthly element for us to behold in the hope that these poor substitutes for the immaterial sensibility, these conventional objects, would under the right circumstances, transport us beyond their material states. The only way to accomplish Klein's mission was to be a painter.¹⁴¹

I agree with Brougher's assessment that Klein wanted to be both more and less than a painter:

His desire was to reinvent art as a positive activity with a renewed social and spiritual underpinning. He was in a tug of war between art's past and future, between being a producer of objects in order to establish that he was indeed an artist and being a kind of artist-sorcerer with an act requiring no props. To be considered an artist, one had to paint; but to dematerialize art, to make it part of a grand adventure that redefined the very reason for art's existence, one had not to paint.¹⁴²

Klein articulates this paradox for himself, and like JPII, seems to identify himself as a "craftsman":

So I am in search of the real value of the painting, the one that makes two paintings that are absolutely identical in all visible and legible effects, such as lines, colors, drawing, forms, size, thickness of paint, and technique in general, but the one is painted by a "painter" and the other by a skilled "technician", a "craftsman" despite the fact that both are officially recognized as "painters" by the public. This invisible real value means that one of these objects is a "painting" and the other is not.¹⁴³

Klein saw his job as artist as more than putting paint on canvas, it was to convey an invisible essence, an ontological reality. While a "painter" applies paint to a canvas, a true "craftsman" in performing the same action achieves the ability to convey ontology in the art. In this manner Klein re-defines more than the artist as a kind of theologian, he illustrates a painting as possessing an ontological essence.

¹⁴¹ Brougher, 40.

¹⁴² Ibid., 19-20.

¹⁴³ Yves Klein, "The Monochrome Adventure" in *YKW*, 146-147.

I have argued in chapter one that the essence contained in an artwork, such as a painting, includes the original ontology of the materials and any subsequent ontology instilled from the contributing artist(s). There is evidence to support that Klein held a similar belief. He speaks of the artist's ability to place their being in a work, "The essential of a painting is that 'something,' that etheric glue, that intermediary product which the artist exudes with all his creative being and which he has the power to place, to inlay, to impregnate in the pictorial manner of the painting."¹⁴⁴ He also states more bluntly his view of the inevitable outcome, "Painters should resemble their paintings, which end up becoming stand-ins for them."¹⁴⁵ Furthermore, within his vision of what painting truly is and how it will transpire in the future, color acts as an equalizer to aid in the true manifestation of the subjective ontology of the artist, "I believe that in the future one will paint canvases in only one single color at a time and with nothing other than the color. Contrary to what is believed, there will be a good deal of variety, and certain painters will never manage to produce beautiful colors, whereas others will produce paintings that are ravishing and profound."¹⁴⁶ This passage from Klein implies beyond a doubt his conviction that a painting not only contains the essence of an artist but also their subjectivity contributes to its beauty and profundity.

While he may not suggest directly, I suspect that implied in his thoughts and words was a kind of co-creation in collaboration with objects and perhaps even divine being, "So I paint the pictorial moment that is born of an illumination by impregnation in

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 157.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 148.

¹⁴⁶ Yves Klein, "Paris Journal, December 1954" (Yves Klein Archives) quoted in Klaus Ottmann, *Yves Klein by Himself: His Life and Thought* (Paris: Éditions Dilecta, 2010), 379-381.

life itself.”¹⁴⁷ I suspect Klein is here also implying that what was required was a kind of co-vision necessary to accomplish his work. He also wrote, “I am for both an extreme individualism and for a total depersonalization, which may seem paradoxical but, in the final analysis, is not so if one tries hard to think in terms of sensibility means ‘life itself’.”¹⁴⁸ I interpret Klein to mean that an artwork can both assert and contain the subjectivity of an artist while likewise maintaining the objectivity of the original object transformed. His proposal of the extremes of each, individualism and depersonalization, may aid us in ultimately realizing the balance necessary between the two, because one without the other seems incorrect. He proclaimed, “true painters paint their presence and the sole fact that they exist as such is their great and unique work. And there, truly, one returns to, or rather, there one attains the masterpiece, constantly: himself.”¹⁴⁹

In one respect, Klein wanted to give others the same experience he had of color, but in order to do so he needed to attempt to re-enact phase four in phase 8. He would need to eliminate as much as possible phases 5 to 8 from the process so as to have phases 4 and 9 match as much as possible. While I would argue that this is nearly impossible, it is foundational in understanding how I draw the parallel between Klein’s receptivity and his audience receptivity. Denys Riout observes in those who experienced Klein’s work, “This—real—presence can have an effect on the art lover provided that he show himself to be receptive enough to give it a chance to express itself.”¹⁵⁰ Klein was keenly aware that what he observed in color is what he attempted to convey to his audience if only they remained receptive. In response to the “Monochrome Propositions” exhibit at that time,

¹⁴⁷ Yves Klein, “The Monochrome Adventure” in *YKW*, 168.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 141

¹⁴⁹ Brougher, 272.

¹⁵⁰ Klaus Ottmann, *Yves Klein by Himself: His Life and Thought* (Paris: Éditions Dilecta, 2010), 35.

Bernadette Allain comments on the receptivity inherent in Klein's work, "But, more importantly and dangerously, each color summons you. There comes a moment when it beckons you, and you stop. Its world is calling you; and if you are receptive to it, it imposes itself on you."¹⁵¹ It can be argued I think that given the natural and pure nature of color, this receptivity of color applies to phases five and nine where color was observed by Klein in the created world and then later in his created art.

Up until this point, the main theme I have been working with is ontology. We likened what humans do in the aesthetic of the creative world with Rollo May's notion of encounter. His second concept for the creative process is intensity. As Klein can indicate for us, since intensity arises in an act of seeing, it can occur in both phases five and nine. To May, intensity in the creative process speaks to the depth and commitment with which an artist (or viewer) is willing to go. I propose that it was Klein's intensity in his moment of aesthetic beholding of the ontology of the created world, which allowed him to see in color what no other artist had seen with such simple clarity. As Klein is trying to re-enact his own viewership this same intensity is then asked of the viewer. In speaking of Klein's exhibit, his friend and artistic supporter Restany is quoted as saying, "The artist here requests of the spectator this intense and fundamental moment of truth."¹⁵² Klein spoke for himself through Allain as having said, "I appeal to the observer placed in front of my works to be willing to abstract the monochrome canvas from everything that effectively surrounds it. In that way he can be immersed in the color, and

¹⁵¹ Bernadette Allain, "Monochrome Propositions by the Artist Yves Klein," *Colors* 18 (December 1956), 25-27, quoted in Klaus Ottmann, *Yves Klein by Himself: His Life and Thought* (Paris: Éditions Dilecta, 2010), 401.

¹⁵² Pierre Restany, *Yves Klein* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1982), 23-24, quoted in Kerry Brougher, "Involuntary Painting" in *Yves Klein: With the Void, Full Powers* ed. by Kerry Brougher (Washington D.C.: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden/Walker Center, 2010), 25-26.

the color immerses itself in him, and, perhaps, he can enter into the world of color. To clarify, the intensity of the contemplation of color in itself is superior to any observation or even mere contemplation of a simple color relation.”¹⁵³ Brougher’s present day comment notes this as well, “The irony of Klein’s use of the monochrome is that rather than requiring less of the viewer, it requires more. The monochrome invites the viewer to first concentrate on his or her optical perceptions to a heightened degree not necessitated by representational painting.”¹⁵⁴

More than conscious of what his actions were, Klein was conscious that he was acting, “Through the act of painting the walls white, I desire, by this act, not only to purify the setting, but also, and above all, by this action and gesture, momentarily to make it into my space for work and creation.”¹⁵⁵ According to Nicolas Bourriaud, Klein was a philosopher of action, “a creator of exemplary actions, more so than a manufacturer of objects or images.”¹⁵⁶

This chapter has aimed to demonstrate that the artistic work and rhetoric of Yves Klein demonstrates some of the theological themes addressed in this thesis, namely ontology. Klein showed us the moment of encounter as being important to his inspiration, the ontological nature of color and paintings. As an artist, he was also a theologian. He was a self-proclaimed “craftsman” who worked in the in-between of imagination and creativity, essence and existence. He demonstrated intensity in the midst of subject-object interaction for the sake of co-creation.

¹⁵³ Allain, quoted in Ottmann, 405-407.

¹⁵⁴ Brougher, 39.

¹⁵⁵ Yves Klein, “Overcoming the Problematics of Art” in *YKW*, 51.

¹⁵⁶ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Life Forms: Modern Art and Self-Invention* (Paris: Éditions Denoël, 1999), 112 quoted in Klaus Ottmann, *Yves Klein by Himself: His Life and Thought* (Paris: Éditions Dilecta, 2010), 221.

CONCLUSION

JPII had a vision for a renewed dialogue between artists and theologians. If the experiences of each could contribute their perception of reality they could blend their experiences into a practical framework. To the question: Can the human acts of imagination and creativity be a legitimate bridge to religious experience? The answer is yes. Through ontology and phenomenology humans are capacitated to act in the *imago dei*. By utilizing this *imago dei* people can bring essences into existence in the acts of imagination and creativity. The process of encounter, selection as limitation, actualization, and intensity in the vision allows someone to traverse the bridge to religious experience during the acts of imagination and creativity. Participation in co-nature, co-vision, and collaborative action, allows humans to enjoy co-creation with God.

This artistic process is challenging to articulate in a theological context because it must remain authentic and honest to both the artist and the theologian. Art is a source for theology but it is also a different expression of it. Yves Klein embodied a conversation between artist and theologian, between spiritual and religious. Primarily, the ontological essence of color figured centrally into his career. His hope of the “Blue Revolution” was not too unlike that of Sandra Schneider’s, where intense religious commitment practiced by many unites the human family in a common vision.

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