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## REDEEMING THE ICONS

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1. *Cyberspace and Its Icons.*

COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY HAS BECOME an integral part of daily life. From online banking and shopping to email and instant messaging, cyberspace is increasingly woven into the fabric of our everyday lives. The mouse, the monitor and keyboard are all a part of the interfacing devices that over time become extensions of our bodies as we “surf” through graphical user interfaces (GUIs) commonly called “windows.” Icons patterned together in a mosaic on our screens through which we are linked to infinite possibilities. We can visit museums, chat with family and friends around the world, not to mention shop to have virtually anything we want shipped to our door. But to what extent does our experience of cyberspace shape us? What happens to notions of infinity and transcendence when they are conflated with cyberspatial matrices? Does cyberspatial disembodiment allow us to transcend ourselves or does it blind us from the lie that transcendence in a box is not real transcendence?

If cyberspatial icons have deteriorated into simulacra<sup>1</sup> of the infinite, then how might redemption of the icons be possible? As a cultural phenomenon, I would like to suggest that cyberspace has a surplus of possibilities that transcend its constructedness, but that the key to unmasking these possibilities comes from theological disciplines rather than technological helpdesks. I believe a first step in redeeming cyberspatial icons can be

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<sup>1</sup> By simulacra I follow Baudrillard’s use of the term, as a surface without depth, or as he says “the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal.” Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994). 1. He goes on to say, “by crossing into a space whose curvature is no longer that of the real, nor that of truth, the era of simulation is inaugurated by a liquidation of all referentials – worse: with their artificial resurrection in the system of signs, a material more malleable than meaning, in that it lends itself to all systems of equivalences, to all binary oppositions, to all combinatory algebra. It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real, that is to say of an operation of deterring every real process via its operational double, a programmatic, metastable, perfectly descriptive machine that offers all the signs of the real and short-circuits all its vicissitudes.” Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 2.

envisioned by delving deeper into the postmetaphysical critiques of conceptual idolatry.<sup>2</sup> Towards this end, the philosophical theologies of Jean-Luc Marion and Martin Heidegger can be helpful in articulating how it is that we can know without apprehending and speak without naming. By recovering the apophatic nature of theology we begin to traverse the distance between us and the God who stands beyond all symbols and signs. Cyberspace can be redeemed when gratitude towards the beauty on our desktops becomes a tangible practice that looks beyond the lights to the true light from which all else emanates.

## 2. Seeing the Lights

*2.1. The Space of Possibles Between Field and Habitus.* One of the challenges that any analysis has to face when interpreting technologies like cyberspace is its inherent dynamism. Like the flashes of light on our screens, cyberspace is constantly morphing into ever new incarnations that are difficult to apprehend as cultural phenomenon. In order to see the lights for what they are our analysis must be tooled to account for change and the motivational forces that drive that change. At the same time, our approach must avoid reducing cultural phenomena to mechanistic systems of dos and don'ts that fail to recognize the limits of any descriptive understanding. It is for these reasons that I have chosen the sociological methodology of Pierre Bourdieu. Rather than myopically focusing on the location of individual subjects in social settings, Bourdieu notes the ways in which subjects take up positions within a social setting. At the same time he resists reductionism. There are three important terms that Bourdieu weaves together when interpreting culture: the field of cultural production, habitus, and the space of possibles.

The first term I would like to highlight is the "field of cultural production." Bourdieu discusses a field as "a separate social universe having its own laws of functioning."<sup>3</sup> It's not just a backdrop for individual subjects to act out their wills. Rather, "in accordance with its particular laws, there accumulates a particular form of capital... where relations of force of a particular type are exerted."<sup>4</sup> A field works according to its own internal logic which makes up the rules for those who will interact within it. Within the field of literary production, for instance, Bourdieu notes the ways in which particular publishing houses develop towards target audiences. A writer will fit within a certain genre or publishing house's field, and as a result interact within it as

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<sup>2</sup> I am using this term in light of postmetaphysical criticism rather which parallels the religious sense but is not limited to it. I will offer a more adequate definition of this term in point 4 below.

<sup>3</sup> Pierre Bourdieu and Randal Johnson, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), 162-63.

<sup>4</sup> Bourdieu and Johnson, 163-64.

if within a game.<sup>5</sup> Fields produce cultural products like literature or art, but in so doing there are latent socialities that develop as well. In a literary field both art and certain cultural practices are being formed simultaneously.

Though a field operates according to its own internal logic, it does not function in an autonomous vacuum. Rather, just as individuals compete within a single field, multiple fields compete for market share in a cultural economy. In this sense they are subject to various competing struggles – “in Parisian terms, between the ‘right bank’ and the ‘left bank.’”<sup>6</sup> There remains a common basis for their relation however, in a broader interactive cultural economy<sup>7</sup> which functions on the basis of certain forms of capital, e.g. economic, cultural, social and symbolic.<sup>8</sup> Competitions that influence and motivate them towards cultural market shares are inherent to the universe of the fields. Thus we have an important facet of cultural dynamics, namely the field of cultural production that influences the behavior of individual subjects. A question that arises at this point is how individuals know what to do in each field. How do they know which positions to take up and in what ways?

To answer these questions Bourdieu develops a second term, habitus, to talk about the way individual subjects relate to a field. Habitus is the logic of a field internalized into the subject.<sup>9</sup> It therefore guides the individual’s particular position-takings in the field of cultural production. Habitus represents the unique ways individual subjects internalize their field of cultural production, which in turn guides the dynamic behavioral praxes they will enact. This accounts for all sorts of ambiguity and surprise as each subject will internalize the field in diverse ways. Furthermore, the habitus is not limited to one field. Rather, individual subjects can have multiple internalizations which further compound the kinds of diverse habitus an individual may develop. For instance, a New York Times journalist who happens to be a watercolor painter may develop a different habitus than another who happens to be a monster truck rally enthusiast. Though habitus is a source of cultural homogeneity as individual subjects do often act in predictable ways according to the rules within their field(s), the ambiguous

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<sup>5</sup> “Similarly, in accordance with the law that one only ever preaches to the converted, a critic can only ‘influence’ his readers in so far as they extend him this power because they are structurally attuned to him in their view of the social world, their tastes and their whole habitus.” Bourdieu and Johnson, 96

<sup>6</sup> Bourdieu and Johnson, 82.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> For a concise definition of these four terms see, Graham Ward, *Cultural Transformation and Religious Practice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), Section 1.

<sup>9</sup> “The least conscious dispositions, such as those constituting the primary class habitus, are themselves constituted through the internalization of an objectively selected system of signs, indices and sanctions, which are nothing but the materialization, within objects, words or conducts, of a particular kind of objective structure. Such dispositions remain the basis upon which all the signs and indices characterizing quite varied situations are selected and interpreted.” Bourdieu and Johnson 133.

relationship of habitus to the field(s) creates a context of possibility rather than fixture and further accounts for dynamism as a result.

Thirdly, within each field there is the potential for innovation and change as individuals take up positions in a space of possibles.

This space of possibles, which transcends individual agents, functions as a kind of system of common reference which causes contemporary directors, even when they do not consciously refer to each other, to be objectively situated in relation to the others, to the extent that they are all interrelated as a function of the same system of intellectual coordinates and points of reference.<sup>10</sup>

Though there is a particular space that bounds the possibilities, the possibilities exist nonetheless. This is how it is that fields like art and literature morph and develop. Within any field of cultural production there exists a potential with a particular logic. This is what we uncover when we take up Bourdieu's analysis; we uncover the logic of change and innovation. However, Bourdieu only allows us to uncover part of the logic that drives a field, not all of it. He doesn't offer freedom from our habitus and fields of cultural production, but rather freedom from the delusion that we *don't* have them.<sup>11</sup> This is because even when individual subjects are aware of their position takings and cultural productive force – even when reflecting upon the mystifying fiction of their positions and productions – they never fully escape the logic of their field. This is why Bourdieu uses the term “space of possibles” along side habitus and the field of cultural production to capture the transcendent possibilities beyond individual agents.

2.2. *Limit and Transcendence.* What I believe is important in Bourdieu's methodology is the way in which he offers a means of accounting for dynamic complexity while resisting mechanistic reductionism. A field is not a habitus, and a habitus is not a field. There are individual people who get involved and interact in a multiplicity of ways. If this was not the case, Bourdieu's analysis would produce predictive, mechanistic omniscience, which he recognizes isn't fully possible. Individuals drive the transformation of the field because there exists a space of possibles which cannot be fully understood or controlled. Though understanding the field demystifies its

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<sup>10</sup> Bourdieu and Johnson, 176-77.

<sup>11</sup> “This is why – if I may be permitted a parenthesis and a reflexive look back on what I am trying to do – it is so important, if one is to have a bit of freedom from the constraints of the field, to attempt to explore the limits of the theoretical box in which one is imprisoned. This, in my view, is the principal function of theoretical culture: to provide the means for knowing what one is doing and for freeing oneself from the naiveté associated with the lack of consciousness of one's grounds. To speak today on the literary fact is, whether one knows it or not, whether one wishes it or not, to place oneself or to be placed with respect to a space of possibilities that is the product of a long, partly repetitive, history or, more precisely, a long struggle among theories and theoreticians, writings and writers, readings and readers.” Bourdieu and Johnson, 184.

productions, the possibilities within it foster a surplus re-enchantment. The two main reasons for the re-enchantment are the diversity of fields and the inescapability from the fields. The habitus has to negotiate both its own field and the diversity of fields it is bound to in the broader cultural economy. These two dynamics create a space of possibles that transcends the individual's control. Though one person can recognize the difference they are making via their own contribution to the cultural production within their field, they exist in a symbiotic relationship to the field(s). Social existence always retains an enchanted imaginary of belief. What lies beyond sociality – beyond our control – is the risk we all take as we live in a space of possibles.

The problems we now face in Bourdieu's cultural analysis are neither that we would reduce the fields of cultural production to the positions we take within them nor that we have no means to understand them at all. Bourdieu helps us sharpen our understandings of cultural fields, not exhaust them.<sup>12</sup> The real problem occurs when the logic inherent in a field works against the discovery of its limits and processes. Is it possible that when fields attempt to blind people from illuminating the processes of their production they become totalitarian and functionally idolatrous? What we uncover when we apply Bourdieu's methodology to cultural phenomena like cyberspace is not just its dynamics, but its propensity for confusing the true transcendence beyond itself for the "infinity" contained within its matrices.

### 3. Infinite Immediacy

*3.1. The Cyberspatial Field of Cultural Production.* By making an application of Bourdieu's cultural methodology to cyberspace we can begin to understand it as a field of cultural production which guides certain forms of position-takings according to a cyberspatial habitus. The habitus can be seen in various praxes like the use of the mouse, the keyboard, and graphical user interfaces like "windows." The cyberspatial field of cultural production can be thought about as "an 'information-system,' that is, as a given pattern of access to social information, a given pattern of access to the behavior of other people."<sup>13</sup> The cyber-field offers the possibility of sharing both information and sociality across virtual networks. What kind of field is this though? Where does it fit in the broader cultural economy?

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<sup>12</sup> I recognize the critiques of Bourdieu and social sciences in general as to whether or not this is the case. In Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 60. Certeau accuses Bourdieu of being imprisoned by his own methodology. Though this would pose its own problem, I do not see that Bourdieu would not be open to critique his own methodology as well as acknowledging the usefulness of other critical apparatuses. This is not to overlook Certeau's point, but to note that I am not convinced that his is the final word on the value of Bourdieu's work. See also footnote 69 below where Bourdieu defends himself on this point a bit more.

<sup>13</sup> Joshua Meyrowitz, *No Sense of Place* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 37.

As Zygmunt Bauman has written, "'community' is nowadays another name for paradise lost - but one to which we dearly hope to return, and so we feverishly seek the roads that may bring us there."<sup>14</sup> Western culture seems to be desperately trying to establish communal networks via the cyber-field. The cyber-field is competing for market share by fostering particular social imaginaries that link people together. The better it fosters community and intimacy the more cultural capital it accrues. Communication technologies like cyberspace are now more than ever accelerating towards various means of quenching our thirst for place based community by attempting to replicate the intimacy of face to face interactions. The recent innovations in online chat programs that allow users to simulate the proximity of a face to face conversation by adding video capabilities are just one example. What I want to expand upon is the way in which the cyberspatial field inherently operates according to rules that are governed by attempts to meet a socially imagined need for intimacy in the broader cultural economy of which cyberspace competes for market share. Though cyberspace also produces other things like information and images, the networked nature of the cyberspatial field follows a particular logic that can be mapped in the interfaces that both expert and novice alike use to connect to it. By looking at the interfaces with cyberspace we can get a sense of the rules of the field and the logic of its transformations.

3.2. *Cyber-Habitus*. Cyberspace connects people to people, but it does so by connecting people to itself. The logic it uses to connect us to itself represents the logic of its field and in turn affects the habituses that develop as people interface with it. The sociality of cyberspace is made up of individuals where the truth of their "interaction is never entirely contained in the interaction."<sup>15</sup> Social groups become multilayered. Individual-to-individual interactions are ultimately coordinated according to social imaginaries that link people together, even when they have never physically met. Bourdieu uses the example of a musical score and its production, noting that the score and the performance are never mechanistically related. Rather, we play with a great deal of improvisation according to a social imaginary enacted in the space of possibles between habitus and field.<sup>16</sup> If the way people relate to each other is socially imagined as the field is internalized into a habitus, then those who interact within particular fields will internalize new habituses that in turn drive them towards certain praxes over others. The key to understanding interfaces like the mouse is to analogize their logic with the simplicity of human relationships. What the mouse and graphics on the screen attempt to do is replicate the immediacy of intimacy.

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<sup>14</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), 3.

<sup>15</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 81.

<sup>16</sup> Bourdieu critiques any mechanistic correlation between the structural norms and the living out of those norms, See Bourdieu, 84.

The history of interfacing people with cyberspace begins with the advent of the computer in general. In design manuals for computer interfacing, the goal is to replicate the communication patterns of language and gestures.<sup>17</sup> It was recognized early on that if the cyberspatial field was to be internalized as a habitus in the general public then it had to offer the most basic form of interface. As a result, the mouse was developed to mimic human gesturing. The mouse, in tandem with the graphical nature of cyberspace, allowed a person to play an infantile game of charades to relate to the computer – point and click.<sup>18</sup> When we look more closely at the mouse or windows interfaces, what they attempt to do is foster intimacy. Abstract programming languages and powerful computing processors splash Technicolor beauty upon sexy flat panel screens. The mouse becomes an extension of the hand and arm as we mime with a companion who, in a short amount of time, begins to predict where and when we will click next.<sup>19</sup> The logic of interface is a key to understanding the habitus of individual subjects who connect to the cyber-field. How do we know the possibilities of cyberspace – what we can and can't do? We know the rules through interfaces like the mouse and windows. These represent the praxes of cyberspace. Thus the habitus, the internalization of the cyber-field, is directly mediated by the interfaces. It is not that they are identical but that they are so closely related as not to be separated or understood apart from one another.

But a computer is not another person, so how is it that the intimacy of cyberspace gains a competitive edge in the cultural economy of human sociality? If our interfaces with the cyber-field are in fact related to our longings for intimacy, the fact that cyberspace is not an actual person seems to be irrelevant. The computer does not compete with real relationships but rather attempts to offer something different if not better than the real.<sup>20</sup> The advantage of a cyberspatial field over place based forms of relationality is not

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<sup>17</sup> Wilbert O. Galitz, *The Essential Guide to User Interface Design: An Introduction to Gui Design Principles and Techniques* (New York: Wiley Computer Pub., 1997), 7.

<sup>18</sup> Though Xerox was the first to patent and invent this technology, what we now commonly know as the graphical user interface is "windows." In 1985 Microsoft introduced Windows 1.0 which slowly developed into the current versions we now know today, Windows XP etc. Galitz, 8.

<sup>19</sup> In real relationships over long periods of time people get to know our tastes and can even complete our sentences. In Southern California, Yahoo Broadband was running advertisements of an elderly gentleman sitting next to his wife of many years. He relates his experience of logging into Yahoo Broadband's website, filling in his details, and then to his amazement being told he might like Salsa music. The punch line of the advert is "My wife didn't even know I like Salsa music." In virtual relationships with cyberspace the time it takes to get to "know" us is radically compressed to the point where after a few clicks and dialogue boxes filled, cyberspace begins to "auto-complete" our sentences like we're a cute old married couple. After a few clicks in Amazon.com it begins suggesting things we might like, saving us the time of clicking through the site, bringing things we'd most want and like to our fingertips, not to mention our consciousnesses.

<sup>20</sup> This may help explain why the data regarding how the internet is affecting real relationships is mixed. Some studies seem to report that people who use the internet have more real human interaction. See for instance Manuel Castells, *The Internet Galaxy: Reflections on the Internet, Business, and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 131-32.

its immediacy and simplicity, but rather its infinite capacity to meet the needs and whims of those interfacing with it. In fact it allows people to interact with it in ways that go beyond what is possible with human relationships, beyond the constraints of time and space. Upon interfacing with cyberspace we take on part of its infinity, which paradoxically enhances the intimacy. In the cyber-field we can go beyond reality, surpassing it with the hyper-speed of flashing lights recreating ourselves and virtually realizing "the old Gnostic dream of the immaterial 'astral body.'"<sup>21</sup> In becoming flickers on the screen we take on the infinity of space able to travel the world, engage people in multiple conversations simultaneously, all through our socially imagined disembodiment into the hyper-reality of a cyberspatial field of cultural production.

Cybersex represents the chief example of the infinite immediacy attainable in the cyber-field. In "an ideological fantasy... we could reinvent a space in which we could fully indulge in bodily pleasures by getting rid of our actual bodies. In short, this vision is that of a state without lack and obstacles, a state of free floating in the virtual space in which desire none the less survives somehow."<sup>22</sup> What cyberspace attempts to do is link people together in the immediate contexts of its interfaces. Through infantile gesturing and graphical splashes we act out our fantasies. This is made possible however, as we become one of many bodiless subjects relating across the infinity of time and space. "The finite individual is thrown into a situation whose coordinates are not regulated by clear universal rules, so that the individual has gradually to find his way in it."<sup>23</sup> In finding our way we journey in what appears to be limitless cyberspatial clairvoyance, which enhances the intimacy all the more. What we have in cyberspace is a paradox of infinite immediacy. What we interface functions as an infinite beyond in a field of cultural production which transcends the individual. We do not control cyberspace. Rather it shapes in us a unique habitus which influences social imaginations and how we relate to others.

3.3. *Infinity in a Box.* In one sense the infinite of cyberspace always remains beyond the individual subject as an ungraspable amount of data waiting to be explored. We interface with the infinite in a way that is never fully named as such in the field itself. Who can map the entire World Wide Web? It is functionally infinite. But in another sense, cyberspace asks us to follow its logic without ever questioning where it comes from or what it is about. Inherent to its field is a closed circuit matrix of simulacrous icons which fail

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<sup>21</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *On Belief* (London: Routledge, 2001), 33-34.

<sup>22</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (London: Verso, 1997), 132-33. Žižek goes on to discuss more in detail what the desire represents in the Lacanian psychological approach he is famous for. I will not be going down that road in this paper, although desire is an important aspect of the cyberspatial habitus. For more on this see Ward, *Cultural Transformation and Religious Practice*.

<sup>23</sup> Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies*, 132.

to point to anything beyond the matrix they exist within. What we see and experience as the infinite never goes beyond what is captured in the box on our desks and the images on our screens.

The digital machinery 'behind the screen' retreats into total impenetrability, even invisibility. In other words, the user renounces the endeavor to grasp the functioning of the computer, resigning himself to the fact that in his interaction with cyberspace he is thrown into a non-transparent situation analogous to that of his everyday *Lebenswelt*, a situation in which he has to 'find his bearings', to act in the mode of tinkering [*bricolage*] by trial and error, not simply to follow some pre-established general rules — or, to repeat Sherry Turkle's pun, in the postmodernist attitude we 'take things at their interface value'.<sup>24</sup>

Cyberspace attempts to capture the infinite through the intimacy of its interfaces, but the logic of these interfaces is set up to make them seem impenetrable. The cyber-field gives us intimacy in the experience of infinity in such a way that we do not ask about its production — at least not for very long. We are caught up in a cultural production that attempts to keep us from knowing how it is that infinity happens to have found its way onto our desktop in the first place. The infinite collapses into the intimate.

There is an aspect of the cyberspatial field of cultural production which helps point out its blinding nature, namely the way cyberspace is physically produced by software engineers and marketers.<sup>25</sup> They represent a priestly class of the field in that they develop a kind of secret and rare knowledge of the construction of cyberspace that few others understand or know. Software languages like C++ or HTML work alongside the increasingly complex computer hardware to produce cyberspace in a way that is never to be engaged by the lay user. The language produces the surface of lights which veil what lies behind them. New hardware devices, like snazzy mice and flat panel monitors, are developed. How do they work? Only the experts of the field know, and the laity who practice their faith in the benevolence of cyberspatial infinity are left at the mercy of the priests. When our network crashes or a worm burrows into our hard drive there are any number of helpdesks we can call to get the infinity flowing again. Cyber-priests are the gurus who are there not to teach the lay user how it all works, but to give just enough information to allow infinite intimacy to be enacted. Like the field itself, the priests are well enclosed in a protected system of blindness. We are

<sup>24</sup> Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies*, 131 citing Sherry Turkle, *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995).

<sup>25</sup> As we noted above the cyber-field competes with other fields of cultural production that produce various socialities. Though the cyber priests develop a unique habitus as a result of their relationship as producers of the field, the habitus of cyber-priest and laity are shared on many levels. Both priest and laity alike relate to the cyberspatial field via interfaces like the mouse. Both priest and laity have a habitus that is shaped and shapes the cyberspatial field on a common level which does not take away from our analysis above. It is my hope that the integration of the cyber-priest only enhances the argument in its totality.

not given the tools to look beyond the images on our screens to a true transcendence beyond the box; rather we are inculcated into an infinite jest. What happens when the interfaces become impenetrable simulacra, surfaces without depth? What happens when participation in a field of cultural production inherently blinds us from understanding its habitus?

What we need is a conception of the infinite that resists conceptualization – a discussion of transcendence that takes us beyond the box without leaving it totally behind. It's not that we need to understand C++ or Pentium III circuitry. Rather, we need a way to maintain the graphical user interface and network of icons such that we are not blinded into believing that transcendence really does exist in the box on our desks. I am not arguing here that there is no infinite beyond cyberspace, or that a space of possibles within the cyber-field does not transcend the individual as we analyze it as such. Rather, I am arguing that the cyber-field and habitus inherently blind individual subjects in the closed intimacy of point and click. By employing Bourdieu's analysis, we are awakened to the notion that there is always already a transcendent limit experience that needs to be recovered by individual subjects participating in fields of cultural production. Infinity goes beyond the box. This experience of true transcendence is inherently dissuaded by the cyber-field and needs to be redeemed. How might we redeem cyber-field from functional iconolatry of a false infinity? What practical disciplines or attitudes might unmask its simulacra for what it is?

What I would like to explore further is a redemption of the icons. "One should avoid both traps, the simple direct reference to external reality outside cyberspace as well as the opposite attitude of 'there is no external reality. RL [real life] is just another window.'"<sup>26</sup> Is it possible that cyberspace can be redeemed, or is it doomed to producing blind habituses that are never able to look beyond its matrix? Must cyberspace be experienced as blinding lights, or can it become a true icon that points beyond itself? Can we think of the cyber-field without allowing it to fully contain infinity? The following are some theological possibilities that may help sort through this balance between the icons in the cyber-field and the true infinite beyond it.

#### 4. Redeeming the Icon

*4.1. Beyond Infinity.* To begin the work of redeeming the icons, I would like to open up a conversation between post-ontological philosophy and cyberspatial infinity. In the work of Martin Heidegger we find an inquiry into the onto-theological foundations of metaphysics that I believe to be helpful in this regard. At the root of metaphysics was the desire "to put the

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<sup>26</sup> Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies*, 132; citing Slavoj Žižek, *Mapping Ideology* (London: Verso, 1994).

world at our cognitive disposal.”<sup>27</sup> Philosophers since Plato have tended to believe that being was “a property or essence enduringly present in things.”<sup>28</sup> Being itself was rarely questioned as to its foundations as a representational concept. Rather, the grounding of metaphysical philosophy was to be found in a supreme or absolute Being, namely God.

Therefore, the philosopher or, better, the metaphysician names the divine: he fixes it as *idea tou agathou* (Plato), as *noeseos noesis* (Aristotle), as the One (Plotinus). He introduces between the divine, or later the God of Jesus Christ, and naming a simple, banal—and formidable—equals sign; he will speak, like Kant, for example, of the “existence of a moral founder of the world, *that is to say of God.*”<sup>29</sup>

The metaphysical God “can come into philosophy only insofar as philosophy, of its own accord and by its own nature, requires and determines that and how the deity enters into it.”<sup>30</sup> With human beings in the driver’s seat, God becomes the security deposit on metaphysical philosophy. In so doing God also becomes limited to the categories of being.

What Heidegger attempts to do is inquire into the foundations of being itself. “What is overlooked in traditional metaphysics is the background conditions that enable entities to show up as counting or mattering in some specific way in the first place.”<sup>31</sup> Is there a Being of being? Furthermore, what are we naming when we name God? Is this not just the reification of our own self sufficient conceptual representations? Onto-theology can “all too easily lapse into... conceptual idolatry”<sup>32</sup> when it fails to resist a final definitive naming of God. Said another way, “theology becomes onto-theology when Jerusalem sells its soul to Athens by buying in on the latter’s project.”<sup>33</sup> Theology is no more limited to metaphysics than philosophy is. Heidegger’s point is that a postmetaphysical philosophical project is possible. “Because it is ‘the onto-theo-logical constitution of metaphysics’ with which we are dealing, the critique of onto-theology is one way to talk about the task of overcoming metaphysics.”<sup>34</sup> As a result, by talking about theological options that go beyond onto-theology we in turn move beyond metaphysics as well.

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<sup>27</sup> Merold Westphal, *Overcoming onto-Theology: Toward a Postmodern Christian Faith*, 1st ed. ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001). 11

<sup>28</sup> Charles B. Guignon, “Heidegger, Martin,” in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. Robert Audi (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999). 370-71

<sup>29</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), 10; citing, Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgment*, trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), 87.

<sup>30</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 56

<sup>31</sup> Guignon, 370-71.

<sup>32</sup> Westphal, xvii.

<sup>33</sup> Westphal, 18.

<sup>34</sup> Westphal, 11; citing *Identity and Difference*, 42.

At first glance, the cyber-field may appear to have more in common with the Romantic ideal that “religion’s essence is neither thinking nor acting, but intuition and feeling”<sup>35</sup> than with the postmetaphysics of Heidegger. It was in the space of this intuition that Friedrich Schleiermacher theologized religious experience as “the sensibility and taste for the infinite.”<sup>36</sup> With Schleiermacher we have an emphasis on feeling, intuition, and a highly subjective understanding of religious experience which we name, after experiencing it, as God.<sup>37</sup> In Schleiermacher’s understanding, God is named after the infinite experience, and the individual is left as the intuitive recipient of the pre-rational divine. Schleiermacher concludes his fifth speech in *On Religion* with an exhortation to worship “the God that is within you.”<sup>38</sup> However, it is at this point that we can see the affinity with cyberspace. In many ways, Schleiermacher’s exhortation fits the quest for intimacy in a cyberspatial field where the infinite comes in an interfacing box. “The infinity of the virtual has taken the place of the infinity of the divine, turning the external expansion of the future into the internal and dematerialized spatial expansion of the present.”<sup>39</sup>

The importance of post-ontological philosophy and theology for our discussion above comes to the fore as we note the way the infinite is enclosed in a network of cyberspatial icons. Like metaphysics, cyberspace encloses itself and falls under the same line of questioning as Heidegger posed about the Being of being - of the God beyond the box. “This is the ultimate in the secularization of the divine, for here is a God who sees and knows all things, existing in pure activity and realized presence, in perpetuity.”<sup>40</sup> Cyberspace attempts to maintain the postmetaphysical death of God but, in so doing, resurrects him as interfaces. As in Jean-Luc Marion’s critique of Nietzsche, “The ‘God’ who dies remains still too close, metaphysically, for his death not to be idolatrous, and for the new face that succeeds him not to reestablish another, still metaphysical idol.”<sup>41</sup> The idolatrous onto-theological conceptualization of the metaphysical God is replaced by the equally

<sup>35</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 22.

<sup>36</sup> Schleiermacher, 23.

<sup>37</sup> But even in Schleiermacher there is a sense in which the infinite essence is “distinguished from a Supreme Being.” Graham Ward, *True Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 84-85. Schleiermacher’s admirable quest to orient religion around the sublime mystical experience of the subject does transcend the individual, but never leaves the realm of his or her experience. It is important to note that Schleiermacher worked hard to keep his sublime intuitions of the ineffable from becoming confused with Romantic ideals. “The systematic account of Christian doctrine as it merges as the expression of religious intuition... stands as a counterweight to the Romantic rhetoric of sublime excess and death as the fulfillment of love as desire.” That being the case, Karl Barth still chose to blame Schleiermacher for the “alliance between the religious and the mystical experience of self-annihilation, from the subjective point of view.” *True Religion*, 97.

<sup>38</sup> Schleiermacher, 124.

<sup>39</sup> Sean Cubitt, *Digital Aesthetics* (London: SAGE, 1998), 84

<sup>40</sup> Graham Ward, *The Postmodern God: A Theological Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), xvi.

<sup>41</sup> *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*. 75

idoltrous interface practices that most effectively connect the individual to the infinite. The habitus that develops in both cases is one where the infinite is ultimately understood in the finite subjectivities of the conceptual fields of philosophy and cyberspace respectively.

4.2. *Idols and Icons*. In the philosophical theology of Jean-Luc Marion we find an attempt to redeem onto-theological idolatry into the infinite distance of the icon.<sup>42</sup> Marion is particularly appropriate as he directly engages both the cyberspatial language of icons and the postmetaphysical concerns which open up the possibility of an alternative attitude towards conceptualizing transcendence. Marion asks what is worshipped in an idol in order to contrast it with an icon. "The idol does not resemble us, but it resembles the divinity that we experience, and it gathers it in a god in order that we might see it. The idol does not deceive; it apprehends the divinity. It apprehends the divinity, and, even when it terrorizes, it reassures by identifying the divinity in the face of a god."<sup>43</sup> The idol gives us what we expect. We fashion an explication in terms, in gold and wood within biblical scripture, in images and, as I am arguing based on our above description of cyberspace, in technology. What leads cyberspace into idolatry is not its infinite nature but the way its interfaces attempt to contain the infinite. "The inversion of the attribution of attributes (a reversed exchange of properties) presupposes that the latter are taken in the same way for both the god and the worshiper. Such a univocity presupposes in its turn that no distance keeps the idol outside of my reach."<sup>44</sup> In the cyber-field the attribution of infinity is so caught up in the habitus of intimacy that it is completely contained within the interfaces which the user controls. The distance that could exist beyond the interfaces conflates into idolatry when users are kept from escaping the logic of point and click to begin to examine the habitus and field they are caught up within.

However, idolatry is redeemable by the recovery of distance between the individual subject and the object of its desire. "To the idol, by counterpoint,

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<sup>42</sup> In this section I am largely relying on the work of Jean-Luc Marion. I recognize the potential problems with his attempts to overcome onto-theology. My point here is not to defend Marion, but to find an articulation of idolatry within the context of technology. Marion's reliance upon Heidegger makes him particularly helpful in this regard. For a brief description of the challenges to Marion's work see Thomas A. Carlson, "Postmetaphysical Theology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003). "The degree to which Marion succeeds in articulating a 'postmetaphysical' or 'extrametaphysical' theology depends directly on the degree to which the Dionysian model of language that he develops does actually yield such a theology of absence, or more specifically the degree to which 'the name' in such theology is or can be given 'as having no name, as not giving essence, as having nothing but this absence to make manifest.' On this question, the most notable challenge to Marion has been raised by Jacques Derrida (to whom Marion is actually responding in his essay 'In the Name'). The disagreements between Marion and Derrida here are complex" 69.

<sup>43</sup> *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*, 6.

<sup>44</sup> *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*, 7.

answers the icon.”<sup>45</sup>

The icon conceals and reveals that upon which it rests: the separation in it between the divine and its face. Visibility of the invisible, a visibility where the invisible gives itself to be seen as such, the icon reinforces the one through the other. The separation that joins them in their very irreducibility finally constitutes the ground of the icon.<sup>46</sup>

What we find in the icon is a pointer to the invisible/ineffable that lies beyond it. The icon is made possible by the way it represents a distance between the worshipped and the worshipper, or God and us. “The destruction of onto-theology’s conceptual idols, then, as carried out by the ‘death of God’ itself, would clear a space for the ‘icon,’ that is, a space for the ‘negative theophany’ in which we are freed to encounter the visibility of the invisible, which would demand a thought and language of the unconditional that itself eludes thought and language.”<sup>47</sup> The death of God, far from being a problematic affront to theology, represents a helpful corrective, opening up the ways in which God is beyond conceptualizations and representations. God is not bound to metaphysics any more than he is to any other philosophical system. He stands as the infinite ineffable beyond concept and representation.

What we are confronted with is a silence from which to begin navigating the distance that separates ourselves from God.<sup>48</sup> “Distance does not allow itself to be represented, even in its rigorous definition, unless its representation allows itself to be introduced into the asymmetry of distance.”<sup>49</sup> The asymmetry of distance is negotiated in the space where the negative chips away at any notion or conceptualization of God. We begin with our various conceptualizations, and we begin the process of vetting out those that are improperly assigned. “In denying of God that which obviously cannot be affirmed of him (the names drawn from the sensible, which are infinitely removed and unsuitable), it eliminates the first idolatry... At a certain point... apophasis rediscovers the intelligible names that kataphasis affirmed. From then on, apophasis no longer only frees discourse from the obvious improprieties; it also eliminates the highest conceptions as

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<sup>45</sup> *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*, 8.

<sup>46</sup> *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*, 8.

<sup>47</sup> *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*, xviii.

<sup>48</sup> “Perhaps it would be necessary first to keep silent: ‘Whoever has any experience of theology taken in its developed completion, whether it be the theology of Christian faith or, just as well, that of philosophy, prefers today to keep silent, as soon as he approaches the domain of the thought of God.’ But in order to keep silent, it is not enough no longer to be able to say anything, nor even no longer to speak at all. To keep silent is first to reach the site where the speech that states and discourses is no longer acceptable,” *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*, 17; citing Martin Heidegger, *Identität Und Differenz* (Pfullingen: G. Neske, 1957), 45.

<sup>49</sup> *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*, 200.

impertinent.”<sup>50</sup> The asymmetry of distance is found in the way it maintains both an apophatic rejection of definitively naming God and a resulting kataphatic reaffirmation with the implicit relegation of the primacy of those names. Paradoxically “distance, as distance, underlines separation only in order to save its intimacy.”<sup>51</sup> In this way distance “reveals that a relation, other than possession, can be established with that which, then, finally becomes other: an other that offers itself, and therefore is not to be touched, nor tasted, nor possessed, because in it there opens ‘a distance more precious than taction, a non-possession more precious than possession a hunger that is not nourished by bread but by hunger itself.’”<sup>52</sup> In light of the infinite nature of God and cyberspace in general, the infinite becomes relatable only through distance where the apophatic and kataphatic are related asymmetrically. “We do not comprehend infinity because it is infinity that comprehends us. Liberated from any human decision, from any categorical predication and from any reduction, there is then the Ab-solute, absolved through our defeats from any dissolution.”<sup>53</sup> We find God only when we distance ourselves from the names and boxes we have created to contain him.

How does the kataphatic nature of our relationship to the icon take shape though? Does apophasis lead to an impenetrable nihilistic abyss? Following Denys (or Dionysius) the Areopagite, Marion develops the relationship between *aitia* and *aitiata*. *Aitia* is the Greek word for cause, which Marion understands as the Requisite for all things. The *Aitiata* is the Greek for caused, and Marion develops from this idea that of the requestant, or that which requests from the cause of its causation.<sup>54</sup> The overall relationship between Requisite and requestant however, forms the basis for distance. The *aitia*

announces itself as the operative concept within the critique of all idols of the divine, including the conceptual: representing nothing, it signifies the very operation through which the mind exposes itself to the unthinkable as unthinkable, advancing without any mask toward the unthinkable that longer conceals its (in)visibility; not only does it not proceed idolatrously, but it proceeds to the disqualification of idols, in order to find in that very disqualification the beyond of any disqualification. It passes beyond disqualification because it receives the unthinkable as the Requisite of a Goodness that is itself hyperbolic and therefore unthinkable.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>50</sup> *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*, 146.

<sup>51</sup> *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*, 200.

<sup>52</sup> *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*, 217-218; citing, Emmanuel Levinas, *Totalite Et Infini* (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1971), 275.

<sup>53</sup> *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*, 150.

<sup>54</sup> “Hence, what we have just translated here exactly, but all the less correctly, as ‘cause’ must perhaps be understood as that which all those beings request (*aitiao*, *aitiaomai*) who for their part fundamentally receive themselves therefrom as requestants (*ta aitiata*).” *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*, 160.

<sup>55</sup> *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*, 162.

We approach the Requisite in an apophatic posture that radically critiques conceptual idolatries in an attempt to traverse the distance that separates us from it. The Requisite becomes Goodness and love which makes our goodness possible. "The distance of the unthinkable, which mobilizes the 'cause of Goodness,' therefore provokes to participation. But, since it revokes immediate assimilation, distance must remain."<sup>56</sup> We receive the gift of Goodness and in receiving it carry it forward in an infinite traverse of distance. "God gives Himself to be known insofar as He gives Himself – according to the horizon of the gift itself. The gift constitutes at once the mode and the body of his revelation."<sup>57</sup> The negative experience of vanity "indicates that even that which is finds itself disqualified as if it were not," and positive dogmatics attempts "a pure and simple description of two emblematic figures of the gift... the Eucharist and the confession of faith."<sup>58</sup> It is the asymmetrical nature of distance that creates this tension which allows the rejection of all conceptual idolatries of the divine, while at the same time receiving the Requisite gift as a requestant. "In other words, among the divine names, none exhausts Gød or offers the grasp or hold of a comprehension of him. The divine names have strictly no other function than to manifest this impossibility."<sup>59</sup> "Distance implies an irreducible gap."<sup>60</sup> As requestants we come to God through distance seeking his causative goodness and love. As gifts we carry them forward in gratitude giving them back to God. God makes our love and goodness possible and we recognize this as we offer love and goodness back to God.

The Requisite as gift is the condition for which all other giving and being itself is made possible. The way we enter into this dialectic between the asymmetries of distance is through prayer and praise – as requestants. Goodness does not constitute the proper name of the Requisite any more than goodness, love or being does, "but that in the apprehension of goodness the dimension is cleared where the very possibility of a categorical statement concerning God ceases to be valid, and where the reversal of denomination into praise becomes inevitable. *To praise* the Requisite *as* such, hence *as* goodness, amounts to opening distance."<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, "by prayer, one must not understand first or above all the subjective act of a sensitive heart,

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<sup>56</sup> *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*, 158.

<sup>57</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *God without Being: Hors-Texte, Religion and Postmodernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), xxiv.

<sup>58</sup> *God without Being: Hors-Texte*, xxiv.

<sup>59</sup> *God without Being: Hors-Texte*, 106.

<sup>60</sup> "A giving offers the only accessible trace of He who gives...In the distance only *agape* can put every thing on earth, in heaven, and in hell, in giving, because *agape* alone, by definition is not known, is not – but gives (itself). At the heart of *agape*, following its flux as one follows a current that is too violent to go back up, too profound for one to know its source or valley, everything flows along the giving, and, by the wake traced in the water, but without grasping anything of it, everything indicates the direction and meaning of distance." *God without Being: Hors-Texte*, 105-06.

<sup>61</sup> *God without Being: Hors-Texte*, 76.

but the concrete and locatable figure that signals the traverse of distance."<sup>62</sup> What we do in prayer and praise is traverse distance and in so doing resist the temptation to ontologically name God. "Distance neither asks nor tolerates that one fill it but that one traverse it, in an infinite praise that feeds on the impossibility or, better, the impropriety of the category... The first praise, the name of goodness, therefore does *not* offer any 'most proper name' and decidedly abolishes every conceptual idol of 'God' in favor of the luminous darkness where God manifests (and not masks) himself, in short, where he gives himself to be envisaged by us."<sup>63</sup> In this way what comes from God can only be received as a gift from him as requestants.

4.3. *Technological Requestant.* Part of why cyberspace may have fallen prey to the idolatry of its own web is due to its technological nature. How we understand technology is caught up with the instrumental criteria we judge it by. "Moderns tend to understand a cause as 'that which produces an effect,' whereas our predecessors, at least since Aristotle, have understood a cause as 'that to which something is indebted.'"<sup>64</sup> We see technology as a cause, which is not a necessary way of understanding technology. This picks back up on the language above of a Requisite and requestant. What is the cause of technology and in what ways do we interact with this cause? Is the cause of technology simply understood as an effect? Or do we understand it as requestants in gratitude for its production? "The fact that technological devices 'reveal' themselves to us means that the question concerning technology is not merely a question of instruments and means. It is fundamentally a question of truth and knowing. As Heidegger says, 'Technology comes to presence in the realm where revealing and unconcealment take place, where *aletheia*, truth, happens.'"<sup>65</sup> Technology has the potential then to be a source of truth and beauty that points us beyond itself. Our interaction with it does not have to be purely mechanistic expectancy of a technological "'standing-reserve' [that]... exists only to make its effects radically available."<sup>66</sup>

What we call technology was for the ancients a poetic "bringing-forth into presencing" of beauty. The chalice reveals itself in that it gathers within itself the four causes to which it is indebted. Likewise, the woodstove "brings-forth" the context and conditions of its existence, revealing itself poetically as more than a mere instrument. It points beyond itself to the context in which it participates. The electric furnace, on the other hand, reveals itself as *Bestand*, as part of the "standing-reserve." It exists only to make its effects

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<sup>62</sup> *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*, 160.

<sup>63</sup> *God without Being: Hors-Texte*, 76.

<sup>64</sup> Glenn McCullough, "Heidegger, Augustine, and Poiesis: Renewing the Technological Mind," *Theology Today* 59, no. 1 (2002), 23; citing Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977).

<sup>65</sup> McCullough; citing "The Question Concerning Technology," 13

<sup>66</sup> McCullough, 25.

radically available. It stands ready to produce heat whenever the human will demands it.<sup>67</sup>

Is it possible to see cyberspace in the posture of a requestant? Is it possible to create distance between the icons of its interfaces and the infinite space of possibles beyond them? What is needed is not only a recognition of the need for distance but a sense in which we recognize the potential technologies have for bringing beauty into the world. "Once there was a time when the bringing-forth of the true into the beautiful was called *technē*, and the *poiēsis* of the fine arts also was called *technē*. This revealing was considered pious."<sup>68</sup> If we are to recover this sense of beauty in technology while resisting idolatry we will need to reassess the redemptive possibilities for the icon in cyberspace. Is there a way to participate in cyberspace in a spirit of prayer and praise?

## 5. Conclusion

*5.1. Cyber-Habitus and Distance.* Although most of Bourdieu's use of the term habitus is purely descriptive, there are examples of him using the term to suggest various ways of shaping habitus. In an essay in *Habitus: A Sense of Place*,<sup>69</sup> "he commends the concept's utility in considering the generative potential of individuals to bring about change in relation to housing and living conditions in social and geographic space."<sup>70</sup> This begs the question of whether or not prior uses of habitus may inform Bourdieu's use of this term. For instance, following Aristotle's lead, St. Thomas Aquinas uses the term in his *Summa Theologiae* in developing both what habitus is and what it does. For Thomas, "a disposition [habitus]<sup>71</sup> to good is not the same disposition as a disposition to evil. But a capacity for good and a capacity for evil are one and the same capacity. And so, if capacities are to be realized in a way which

<sup>67</sup> McCullough, 24-25.

<sup>68</sup> "The Question Concerning Technology," 34.

<sup>69</sup> "The habitus is not a fate, not a destiny. I must insist on this, as I have done many times before, against the interpretation which was proposed and imposed by some of the first reviews of my work and then constantly repeated by most of the English-speaking commentators... The model of the circle, the vicious cycle of structure producing habitus which reproduces structure *ad infinitum* is a product of commentators." Jean Hillier and Emma Rooksby, *Habitus: A Sense of Place* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2002), 29-30.

<sup>70</sup> Michael Bounds, "Habitus: A Sense of Place (Book Review)," *Journal of Sociology* 39, no. 2 (2003).

<sup>71</sup> Disposition is the English translation from the Latin term *habitus*. Thomas used this term following up on Aristotle's use of the Greek term *hexis* (ε`ξις). Part of Thomas's discussion of dispositions is devoted to clarifying the use of this term as there is some confusion of its association with two of Aristotle's ten categories of "irreducible types of thing which might be predicated of an individual." The overlap is with the categories of "quality" and "having on" which uses the same Greek word for both. "The Latin word *habitus* is ambiguous in the same way." St Thomas Aquinas, *Dispositions for Human Acts (Ia2ae. 49-54)*, ed. Anthony Kenny, trans. Anthony Kenny, vol. 22, *Summa Theologiae* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964), 111.

is good, dispositions are necessary."<sup>72</sup> All humans have a capacity for good and evil, but good and evil dispositions are not the same. Thus there is an impetus in Thomist thought for developing good habituses over against bad ones. Thomas's use of habitus may prove an important continuation of the discussion of how habituses can be shaped and shape the fields they find themselves within.<sup>73</sup> The shaping of habitus however, takes place in the space between habitus and the field. Though this space of possibles usually takes on a benign descriptive tone in Bourdieu, at times he notes that it is also the space where positive change can be directed. It is in this same space that St. Thomas Aquinas developed the possibility for the formation of virtue.

The question is, how would we shape the cyber-habitus? What changes would need to be enacted in the cyber-field? Could other fields contribute to the informing of the cyber-habitus? The beauty of the cyberspatial field of cultural production is that like all fields it is malleable. The space of possibles transcends the individual subjects within the field, opening us up to a hope that the field can be transformed. I believe redemption of the icon is a starting position to take up within the cyber-field's space of possibles. When the icon becomes a traversing of infinite distance rather than infinite intimacy it resists blinding idolatry. What we currently find in the icons of the cyber-field is the logic of idolatry where distance is subsumed by the immediacy of point and click. It fits within the broader logic of the technological field, which sees each cause as the source of some effect. In the case of cyberspace, the effect is an experience of intimacy. But there are ruptures in cyberspace. I would like to suggest that the various hackers, worms, viruses and network crashes do us a service in this regard. We are awakened to the blinding processes of the simulacra, and this disruption creates the distance necessary for the redemption of the icon. Cyberspace is a created representation of the infinite. If the power ever does go out, what we thought was infinite will collapse into a vacuous void. When cyberspace crashes we are reminded of the lie of metaphysics – that our conceptions and images can contain the infinite. When this lie is exposed for what it is, we are confronted with the bondage cyberspace puts us in – “the paradox of an infinity far more suffocating than any actual confinement.”<sup>74</sup>

Limits can be pushed against, but they also provide the context for goodness and virtue. In *Love's Knowledge*, Martha Nussbaum urges us to

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<sup>72</sup> Aquinas, 23.

<sup>73</sup> “Actions of an appetitive faculty are produced when the appetitive powers are acted upon by the cognitive powers presenting them with their objects; and again the intellectual powers, when they reason to conclusions, are under the active influence of some self-evident proposition. And so, actions of this kind can produce dispositions in agents: not dispositions of their first active element, but dispositions of that element which acts only when it is acted upon. Whatever is acted upon by something else is affected by the action of the agent; and so, after repeated action, a certain quality is produced in the passive potentiality which is acted upon, and it is this quality which is called a disposition.” Aquinas, 59.

<sup>74</sup> Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies*, 154.

reject as incoherent the aspiration to leave behind altogether the constitutive conditions of our humanity, to seek for a life that is really the life of another sort of being - as if it were a higher and better life for us. It asks us to bound our aspirations by recalling that there are some very general conditions of human existence that are also necessary conditions for the values that we know, love, and appropriately pursue... What is recommended is a delicate and always flexible balancing act between the claims of excellence, which lead us to push outward, and the necessity of the human context, which pushes us back in.<sup>75</sup>

What are here described as limits can also be called distance. In traversing distance we enter the apophatic-kataphatic dialectic that strives against all constraints towards the infinite darkness, but out of the darkness exudes the givenness of our life, the necessary conditions which give us a sense of being. The givenness of life supplies us with the language of prayer and praise. We as the caused requestants pray to and praise the Requisite as goodness and love. The Requisite in this sense is the source of all virtue and the beginning of the creation of an iconic habitus that resists idolatry. By introducing distance we introduce our limitations and, as a result, virtue. When we participate in fields that promote the traversing of distance - recognizing our position within them as requestants of a Requisite beyond the field itself - we begin the long process of shaping habituses in iconographic ways. When we integrate the practice of distance in the cyber-field, it ruptures the logic of infinite intimacy. It works against the expectation of technological standing-reserve. The apophatic aspect of distance shatters all idols by piercing through the simulacra to the other side of the asymmetry (*kataphasis*) which renews in us the sense of gratitude towards the Requisite. Technology in this sense has the potential to point beyond itself as it presences beauty.

By traversing the distance between icons and what lies beyond them we start the apophatic journey toward a true infinite in the expectation of a future wholly dependent upon the Requisite. It is in this sense that "the practices of human dependency cultivate personal and social values and virtues"<sup>76</sup> in the cyberspatial field of cultural production. Idolatry is resisted in the experience of the infinite properly located in the asymmetry of distance. The icon ultimately finds its redemption not in infinite intimacy but in infinite distance, an infinity that cuts back to the Requisite to whom we respond in prayer and praise. In the physical body of Jesus Christ, Christian theologians have seen a prototypical example of the icon that points beyond itself to the invisible Father. The image of Christ may prove a helpful example for the redemption of the iconic<sup>77</sup> mosaics in cyberspace. "Theodore the Studite

<sup>75</sup> Martha Craven Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 379-81.

<sup>76</sup> Graham Ward, "Between Virtue and Virtuality," *Theology Today* 59, no. 1 (2002), 65.

<sup>77</sup> I am using this term in a much more general way than Paul Ricoeur in Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-Disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977). Cf. 188ff where he develops the notion of the "iconic" from

explains even more clearly: 'The representation of Christ,' he says, 'is not in the likeness of a corruptible man, which is disapproved of by the apostles, but as he himself had said earlier, it is in the likeness of the incorruptible man, but incorruptible precisely because he is not simply a man, but God who became man.'"<sup>78</sup> Christ's body becomes the prototype for the iconic representations of him and for the representation of all else as well. Christian icons are images that "reveal a transfigured universe to man," and point to "the world which will be fully revealed only at the second coming of the Lord."<sup>79</sup> The redemption of the cyberspatial icons may in fact lead us back to a primary icon such as Jesus Christ. As the incarnated perfect human image of God, he gives us both the justification for all images, and the prototype for the resistance of idolatry. In Christ we have the paradoxical infinite distance between God and humanity as an example for all other icons to follow. By introducing a Christological distance into the space of possibles in the cyber-field we may yet introduce the final redemption of the icon. "And now bless and sanctify us, O Lord who lovest mankind, by the brightness of thy most pure image."<sup>80</sup>

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Paul Henle's work. What Ricoeur is trying to do is sort through the various ways metaphor is related to Henle's notion of the iconic nature of language. Although I do not have the space for it here, there may be other fruitful possibilities for further developing postmetaphysical resistances to idolatry by exploring this analysis in Ricoeur's thought, especially in light of Ricoeur's well-known "willingness to expose and to abolish idols." Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 344. See also Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy; an Essay on Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 54

<sup>78</sup> Leonid Ouspensky, "The Meaning and Content of the Icon," in *Eastern Orthodox Theology: A Contemporary Reader*, ed. Daniel B. Clendenin (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 43; citing Theodore the Studite, *Adversus Iconomachos*, 7:1 (PG 99.488).

<sup>79</sup> Ouspensky, 63

<sup>80</sup> Falling to the ground on the holy mountain, the greatest of the apostles prostrated themselves upon seeing the Lord reveal the dawn of divine brightness, and now we prostrate ourselves before the Holy Face, which shines forth brighter than the sun. . . . Having illuminated the human image which had grown dark, O Creator, thou didst reveal it on Mount Tabor to Peter and to the Sons of Thunder; and now bless and sanctify us, O Lord who lovest mankind, by the brightness of thy most pure image. Ouspensky 44; citing Second and Third Stichera, tone 4.

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