A Fractious Embrace: Rethinking Ecclesiastical Encounters with Contemporary Art

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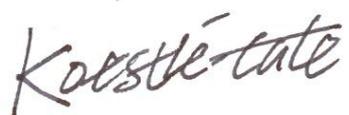
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Dedicated to my mother,
Marjorie Ellen Cate (1940-2009)

Contents

Abstract

This thesis claims that in recent years a vibrant critical exchange between contemporary art and Christianity has been increasingly prompted through an accelerating programme of art installations and commissions for ecclesiastical spaces. Crucially, rather than a 'religious art' reflecting Christian ideology, as in an earlier age might have been expected, current practices frequently initiate interventions that question the values and traditions of the host space, or present objects and events that challenge its visual conventions. I will argue that this exchange offers potential for the mutual enrichment of both art and its sacred contexts, extending the limits of art and its value for the church. Inversely, I will allege that it has the negative potential to create new visual orthodoxies. In the light of these developments, the thesis asks, what are the conditions of possibility for art in ecclesiastical spaces, and how can these conditions be addressed? What viable language or strategies can be formulated to understand and enhance its role within the church? Focusing on concepts drawn from anthropology, comparative religion, art theory and twentieth-century philosophy, what this research attempts to formulate is a series of categories that develop an effective vocabulary with which to address the conditions for art projects now, and prospects for the future. The categories proposed are necessarily contingent, introduced as modes for thought rather than fixed conditions of experience, but with an aim to expand, as well as attempt to understand, the effective place for and experience of contemporary art in churches. The overarching theme is that of an encounter between contemporary artistic practices and media and ecclesiastical spaces, within a context in which art's legitimacy continues to be contested at the same time that it is increasingly invited to take part in the life of the church.

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I

PORCH

The nature of the relationship

I am far from alone in claiming that within the past decade or so the potential for a renewed discourse of art and Christianity has been increasingly prompted through a notable proliferation of artistic projects for ecclesiastical spaces. The Anglican Church, in particular, is awash with proposals attempting to energise the aesthetic possibilities of sacred buildings or anxious to rephrase the language of religious principles in modern artistic terms. At the time of writing, for example, the great dome of St Paul's Cathedral had been colour-washed in midnight blue, backdrop to a series of text projections examining public responses to the question of what gives richness, meaning and purpose to life (figure 1). Rather than a 'religious art' reflecting Christian ideology, recent practice has encouraged interventions that often critique the values of the space that hosts them, and the role of art within them. New forms and media have been introduced, radically departing, formally and conceptually, from more familiar imagery. In their unorthodoxy they challenge convention and urge us to consider anew the role of these great ecclesiastical spaces, their relevance to contemporary society and response to contemporary culture. Furthermore, works such as those produced for, or introduced into, churches and cathedrals in the past decade are dealing far more with other emergent dialogues and faith traditions, rather than reinforcing traditional orthodoxies. Even in their impermanence, they reflect what we could call a postmodern antipathy for fixity; by their relatively brief foray into an ecclesiastical space they express something of the modern desire for constant novelty. We will argue that this exchange creates new connections for art and its sacred context, often through experiential or participatory means, that promise the (all too rarely realised) potential for art's meaningful engagement with religious practice and religious spaces.

In a previous study I explored art installations in some of Britain's major cathedrals, singling out Bill Viola's *The Messenger* (Durham Cathedral, 1996) for particular attention, since this work then and since has been recognised as a benchmark event by those attentive to the critical possibilities for art within the modern church.[1] It was clear that this installation had raised important questions concerning the values that art brings to the values embodied by the church and its sacred spaces, which subsequent projects have continued, and which this new research aims to investigate. Central to the concerns of the thesis is a critical engagement with the nature of the encounter between temporary

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[1] Cate. 2000

art installations and ecclesiastical spaces, or to put it in other terms, between the ephemeral spaces of the aesthetic and experiential within the enduringly hieratic. In this context, the specific focus on contemporary art refers not only to art-making that is current but privileges certain forms of art-making over others. Can methods of art production like installation, performance, video and site-specific work, particularly when treated as temporary, maintain a more significant relationship with ecclesiastical spaces than more traditional or permanent forms? Can the relationships between art and its spatial and sacral context, art and liturgical practice, or art and the worshipping community be extended to produce a viable forum for discourse between the modern church and contemporary art? With such questions in mind the thesis proposes to map a conceptual framework for collaborations between ecclesiastical spaces and art installations, past and present. It is how art can work *within* the institution of the church that concerns us, in an age of apparently dissolving, or at least malleable, institutional boundaries.

Before we unwrap this further, a brief note on the title. The suggestion that art's relationship with religion is fractious is taken from a comment by Simon Morley in his interview with Friedhelm Mennekes, a curator-priest who envisages, indeed encourages, a difficult, agonistic, contentious and necessarily irresolvable tension in the relations between art and religion. Morley succinctly captures Mennekes's view of art's relationship with religion with his comment that they share 'a close though sometimes fractious embrace.'[2] Such inferences act as a reminder of the conflicts common to the history of modern art and sacred spaces within the Christian tradition. Indeed, crucial to current debates is the anxiety that still governs the minds of many worshippers and visitors regarding the incongruity of modern art within churches, with its perceived predilection for transgression and sacrilege. Doing nothing to allay such fears, Mennekes, has gone so far as to describe art and religion as enemies, while another curator-pastor, Rod Pattenden, has spoken of art's inimical tendency to act as a provocateur: 'an unruly and divisive congregation to be included in the life of the church.'[3] It cannot be denied that churches and cathedrals, though capable of offering an unparalleled aesthetic environment for art, also confront art with a space whose religious history suffuses every nook and cranny, chapel and transept. When art enters a cathedral or church it

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[2] Morley. 1998: 53

[3] Conference. *Commissioning Art for Today's Church*. University College, Chichester. 1999; Pattenden. 1999: 256

encounters a canvas already replete with a visual heritage that artist and artwork cannot avoid and cannot afford to ignore. Apart from these hermeneutical challenges, inherent to such contexts, art also finds itself competing with visible or audible distractions far greater than anything it might encounter in a gallery.[4] For this and other reasons we must ask ourselves whether there is any justification to Michael Taylor's assertion that '[i]n our century art and religion pay furtive visits to each other from time to time, but they have never succeeded in cohabiting durably under the same roof.'[5] Durability aside, it is Mennekes's contention that the problems of cohabitation should not deter, arguing that they are, in fact, a positive aspect of the work's relationship with the space, an inevitable aspect of their tenuous and fractious coexistence. For Mennekes it is imperative that a work of art positively and non-passively engage with the ecclesiastical space, even jar or quarrel with it if necessary. His preference is for work that seeks to break the character of the space, to set up a conflict, and thereby a dialogue.

Critics of so combative a stance would no doubt complain that Mennekes is doing a disservice to his role, reaffirming (mis)perceptions that others have tried hard to overturn. Eleanor Heartney, for example, writing in 2000, notes that 'the perception persists that contemporary art is antithetical to religion,' supposing art and religion to be 'enemies,' despite what she believes to be the erroneous basis of this assumption in reality.[6] Her work specifically challenges Catholic denunciations of artists like Andrés Serrano and David Wojnarowicz whose purportedly sacrilegious works are actually rooted in a Catholic corporeal sensibility.[7] A more typically Protestant complaint is that all too often the 'two worlds' of church and art are 'mutually wary, sometimes even hostile, often with little understanding or appreciation for the other,' the hope being that ways may be found to assuage their mutual mistrust.[8] Regrettably, that time may yet be some way off although, surprisingly perhaps, it is more typically the secular art world rather than the church that maintains the greatest resistance. A recently-published debate on the relationship of art and religion exposed many of the continued assumptions and

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[4] Cork. 1987: 145

[5] Taylor in Matisse et al. 1999: 35. Taylor writes as translator of a major text on Matisse's chapel at Vence. Despite his investment in the project he implies that its syncretism of art and religion has not been entirely successful and perhaps could never be.

[6] Heartney in Philbrick et al. 2000: 57-8

[7] As if to prove her point, in 2011 Serrano's *Piss Christ* and Wojnarowicz's *A Fire in my Belly* were the victims of vandalism and censorship wrought on the part of Catholic reactionary groups protesting their display in secular art museums.

[8] Jensen. 2004: ix

refusals of the contemporary art world, which persists in seeing not only an unbridgeable gulf between the worlds of contemporary religion and contemporary art, but expresses little or no desire to see that gulf bridged.[9] Such opinions are frequently exacerbated by an ignorance of religious belief and practice on the part of the art world and a persistent suspicion and derogation of art on the part of the religious establishment. Whatever the consequences of this situation, what is refreshing about the approach taken by the Catholic Mennekes is his determination not to reduce the divide but rather to use it, not in order to segregate art and religion as two spheres that should be held apart, but in order to recognise their specific competences, contrary to an ecclesiastical tradition in which art is simply one or several parts of the whole. In the hands of Mennekes the *Gesamtkunstwerk* that results from his projects retains an intractable quality, as though art and religion really are, as one writer has put it, 'reluctant partners.'[10]

In the catalogue accompanying 1999s *The Shape of the Century* exhibition at Salisbury Cathedral, Andrew Lambirth called for art to find new and wider audiences, especially if art and religion are to initiate any kind of meaningful dialogue today. As such he supports the use of cathedrals and churches as a forum for such art-inspired dialogues, lauding them as 'an unrivalled milieu in which to present art in such a way as to surprise people into creative thought.'[11] Despite a long and rich tradition of religious art, Lambirth regrets that sacred Christian spaces such as Salisbury's splendid cathedral have been little explored as a setting for contemporary art, although he concedes that this is gradually changing.[12] Some years prior to the Salisbury exhibition, Rev. Charles Pickstone, a frequent contributor to debates on art and the church, had preempted Lambirth's idea, talking of the church or cathedral as 'one of the few community buildings of any size where works of art can find a good showing…', going on to describe them as places '…where artists can enter into dialogue with an ancient and objective set of iconographic traditions that stand over and above their personal expressiveness…'.[13] Since that time, Pickstone's and Lambirth's hopes for a greater ecclesiastical engagement with art have become a familiar reality, often underpinned by such celebratory rhetoric. But is there a case for a more cautious attitude to be taken? In

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[9] Elkins and Morgan. 2009

[10] Heller. 2004

[11] Lambirth in Ratuszniak and Webb. 1999: 29

[12] Ibid: 28. Indeed, since 1999 Salisbury has become one of the principal ecclesiastical advocates of contemporary art through its regular programme of installations and a major commission.

[13] Pickstone. 1993: 49

speaking of the works shown in Salisbury Cathedral Lambirth raises the by-now commonplace supposition that every environment has a palpable effect upon the art within its spaces, conditioning the way a work of art is viewed and experienced, while the art has a definite physical or affective impact on its surroundings, and hence on subjective responses to both the art and the space.[14] However, if encountering works of art in a cathedral allows the work to respond to the viewer and the space in entirely different ways to that of a gallery, it is also true to say that this is not without its problems and challenges, not only for the visitor or member of the congregation, but for the art itself. When looking at the results one feels compelled to ask how viable are these projects? Very often art installations do little more than utilise the cathedral as a grand and elaborate exhibition space, which benefits neither the work nor the space (a criticism, incidentally, levelled at *The Shape of the Century*[15]). In this respect, Pickstone's comment is somewhat ingenuous. It is all very well for the modern artist working with forms that are a part of an ecclesiastical tradition, but for the artist with no desire or intention to uphold such a tradition, or working with forms and ideas that fall far outside the visual imaginary of that tradition, such an ideologically-loaded setting as a cathedral can be seen as a threat to the work, an undermining of any possible autonomy of voice that the work might claim. Is it not more the case that most contemporary art is likely to be overwhelmed by such an environment? While ecclesiastical imagery blends in to become simply a part of the whole, work of a specifically non-ecclesiastical nature may become insignificant or simply out of place, perhaps embarrassingly so, because it cannot compete with the space. Art-works in cathedrals are also privy to a whole new audience,

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[14] Lambirth in Ratuszniak and Webb. 1999: 28

[15] In his derogatory review John McEwen felt that many of the pieces made a 'wretched showing…when placed beside the collective achievement of the cathedral itself' (McEwen. 1999: 9). Lost amidst the busyness of the building and the bustle of a cathedral that receives thousands of visitors a week, at its least successful it treated the cathedral as a vast exhibition space for a kind of sculptural miscellany, which did little to enhance the artworks' relation to the primary functions and architecture of the cathedral. This is a fate that has befallen numerous exhibitions in churches or cathedrals over the past twenty years. However honourable their intentions, they turn their ecclesiastical host into a gallery, transforming the building into an elaborate backdrop for whatever is on display. Often within such exhibitions there are single works that establish a deeper and more critically profound relationship with the space, but usually by virtue of their distanced relation to the other works on show; not by isolating themselves from the visual and aural ambience and activity of the space, but by creating a more integral relationship with it. More typically, church spaces are literally turned into exhibition spaces, doing little to encourage a more considered and sophisticated interaction of artwork and space. *Resurrection* in St. Mary's Church, Bury St. Edmunds, is a typical example, if superior in quality, of the problems we have in mind (figure 2). Display panels forming 'white cubes' were used to hang the work, demarcating this as an exhibition, whereas, as Jonathan Evens conjectures in his review, 'if the art were to be integrated into the variety of spaces offered by such a large church would that not enable the art to more readily enhance the ongoing worship life of the church, which otherwise happens around the art instead of with it?' (Evens. 2010: 11)

often one almost entirely uneducated or inexperienced in contemporary work, and frequently hostile, or at least unreceptive, to it. For those with eyes to see, as Sister Wendy Beckett puts it, the experience of art in these contexts can be unexpectedly and immensely enlightening, but for those whose eyes and minds are closed to new possibilities the encounter may provoke only antipathy.[16] For many who regularly use such spaces, primarily as a place for prayer, worship, or fellowship, art that is anything other than the traditional may be seen as an intrusion into, or disruption of, that space. Yet ideally, in Mennekes's view, it is the art that operates in this way that is most successful, for it is this very disruption that can engender a reflective response.[17] In his own curatorial projects Mennekes has sometimes been criticised for, in Simon Morley's words, 'over-determining the way in which the viewer will "read" the work through placing it in such a charged context.'[18] However, Mennekes refutes these criticisms, arguing that it is a positive aspect of the work's relationship with the space. If the ideal of the twentieth century gallery was that it retains a neutral and detached quality, placing all emphasis and attention upon the artwork and not the space, seeing art in this heavily-biased context can cause us to reflect upon the ways in which

> all contexts are ideologically coloured, not least the 'white cube' preferred by the institutional art world, where, it can be argued, the art gallery or museum appropriates aspects of the religious symbolism of Protestantism, but replaces an uncluttered contemplation of the transcendent God by a cool and detached contemplation of the artwork.[19]

The precedents for the joining of such apparently antagonistic forces were principally established by the pioneering efforts of Dean Walter Hussey and Bishop George Bell in this country, and Père Marie-Alain Couturier in France, who sought to re-forge a relationship between the sacred spaces of Western Christianity and modern art, looking for a new visual language relevant to the times. Indeed, Couturier's declared intention was 'to bring to an end…the absurd divorce, which for the past century has separated the church from living art.'[20] However, despite the protest and derision that habitually accompanied the inception of works by artists like Jacob Epstein, Henry Moore and

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[16] Beckett. 1992: 10

[17] Conference. *Commissioning Art for Today's Church*. University College, Chichester. 1999

[18] Morley. 1998: 51

[19] Mennekes, cited in Morley. 1998: 52

[20] Couturier. 1951: 30

Graham Sutherland into British ecclesiastical spaces, in hindsight many appear little different from the religious emblems that have adorned our churches for centuries, using a traditional repertoire of archetypal forms and falling broadly within the paradigm of a long-standing tradition. They have slipped easily into the canon of religious visual art, and with hindsight do much to reinforce prevailing Christian ideologies such that, to our modern eyes, it is difficult to understand what could have motivated the bitter feelings aroused by so many of these works.[21] Through permanence even the most unconventional of works can attain, to a surprising degree, and sometimes surprisingly quickly, a banal familiarity. Even if this fate has not befallen the afore-mentioned commissions, in more recent years a greater emphasis has been placed upon the temporary installation of works. A number of chaplaincies have expressed the view that temporary works can retain a strong voice and a strong presence, which permanency may eventually silence or diminish.

Renewed ecclesiastical encounters with art

Historically art's relationship to religion has, of course, been close, reliant as it was upon the church for its patronage and endorsement, but increasingly within modernity it was felt that they had become almost irredeemably estranged. The earlier iconoclastic policy of the Reformation had initiated a cultural shift away from the visual towards the primacy of the word, whilst the Enlightenment precipitated a divorce of religion's centrality from cultural meaning, discrediting its validity as a means of explaining or describing the world. In the modern age, presaged by Nietzsche's proclamation of the death of God, the church's credibility has been continually buffeted by the vicissitudes of cultural change – its authority challenged, its values undermined – becoming for many an irrelevant anachronism. Against this purported decline, art, it has been said, has found its new spiritual home in the gallery, as Nigel Warburton, among many others, has found:

> It is difficult to go into London's National Gallery or New York's Metropolitan Museum without being aware of the temple-like ambience. Even London's Tate Modern has turned a turbine hall into a cathedral interior. This sets the scene for a quasi-religious genius-worship, where the artist becomes a kind of god, or at least a saint, and the gallery-goer a worshipper.[22]

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[21] 'Insult,' 'disgrace,' 'monstrosity,' 'repugnant,' 'grotesque,' and 'revolting' were typical terms applied to Moore's *Madonna and Child* by its detractors.

[22] Warburton. 2004: 43

Borrowing a phrase from John Berger, Warburton sees a kind of 'bogus religiosity' at work.[23] And yet, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, despite the prevalence of such ersatz spirituality, for many artists the influence of a more authentic or conventional religion retains an undimmed fascination, while for others a sense of religiosity remains unashamedly at the heart of their work. It would seem that we have not become fully emancipated from a sense that some kind of residual spirituality underpins our humanity. Such a diagnosis also seems to be corroborated by the focus of so many contemporary artists upon resurgent ideas of the spiritual, the sublime and the transcendent, as though such enquiry has again become vital to our culture. In recent years it has become increasingly tenable for this search to find renewed contiguity with the established church. Indeed, it is important to recognise the very different climate that exists for art and the church today from that which confronted those earlier practitioners. As the number of projects currently underway makes clear, the question is no longer, why is there a lack of dialogue between art and the church, and what is to be done about it, but rather, what is the nature of the dialogue in which they are presently engaged, and what sort of positive dialogue might we envisage for the future? What are the conditions that would enable possibilities of desirable mutual exchange? Concomitant with such questions has been a greater encouragement towards a different kind of integration of the arts into some of Britain's major churches and cathedrals, with the potential to develop anew an invigorating and enriching critical relationship between not only the art and those spaces, but also with those who visit them. They encourage a re-appraisal of the church's attitude towards the culture of which it is ineluctably a part, and to which it seeks to address itself. To this end we will introduce a lexicon of terms that aims to augment a vocabulary pertinent to an elucidation of this agonistic relation of art and religion. An important aspect of this discussion is that we are talking about religious spaces that are active places of worship, not simply spaces that are a repository for art. It is not the church as exhibition space or gallery that interests us, but the drama of a living religious space in relationship with an art that inhabits it. Furthermore, the emphasis is categorically upon the present day and is in no way intended to provide an overview of modern art in churches, a history already well-served by existing literature.

Our research is motivated by the fact that what Lambirth, in 1999, had perceived as a sign of change, a decade later has become a veritable industry. A shift seems to have occurred in the way that art operates within the context of ecclesiastical spaces, gaining

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[23] Ibid.

ground in the 1990s and increasingly evident today. It would seem that the perceived potential for a renewed discourse of art and Christianity has prompted a series of risk-taking ventures using unconventional means, in a manner that emulates the earlier efforts of Hussey, Bell and Couturier. Commissions and installations no longer appear to be the exception but the rule. Does this thesis hold out the case for an unequivocal validation and expansion of this programme? Does it wholeheartedly welcome the increasingly visible presence of contemporary art within ecclesiastical walls? Surprisingly perhaps, it does not. Indeed, if anything it will argue for fewer works, gauging a critical route between concrete projects and ephemeral experience in an attempt to theorise the nature of that encounter. It will present a series of categories through which this encounter may be thought, subjectively described and concretised in actual projects. Based as it is on a discussion centred around British churches and cathedrals it will tend to concentrate on the Anglican rather than the Roman Catholic church (though not exclusively), since the former has been particularly active in the promotion of its spaces as a forum for the visual arts. Furthermore, in comparison with the churches and cathedrals of the latter, the Church of England has had to confront the legacy of an iconoclastic tradition, which still scars its facades. An absence of imagery where imagery once stood, empty niches and defaced statues, all bear the imprint of an iconoclastic past that is our aesthetic present, the template within which we operate. A word of caution that will be addressed in this thesis is not to be unduly hasty in refilling these spaces. For every effective work of art, experience has shown that others detract rather than add to the experience of the space such that one critic has caustically wondered 'where are the iconoclasts now that we really need them?'[24] Two examples will suffice to explain what we mean. The work that had provoked Greer's ire is a statue of Mary by David Wynne, installed in the Lady Chapel of Ely Cathedral, a once highly decorative chapel that had suffered extensively during the Reformation, emptied of imagery and colour (figure 3). To the modern day visitor the chapel offers the 'austere monochrome' of a bright and uncluttered space.[25] Thus, however much it may reconnect with an earlier aesthetic, Wynne's sculpture seems all the more out of keeping with its contemporary environment, peculiarly insensitive to the quality of the space as it appears today. In 2011 a new reredos and altar were added to the Lady Chapel in part, one suspects, as an attempt to better integrate this controversial piece (figure 4). At the other end of the scale, a project contemporaneous

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[24] Greer. 2007: 28

[25] Ibid.

with Wynne's that similarly reinstated imagery where now-vanished imagery once stood can be seen on the front façade of Norwich Cathedral (figure 5). David Holgate's *Mother Julian and Saint Benedict* has sensitively and evocatively filled niches that have remained empty for some 500 years with two prominent local figures.[26] Care has been taken to provide an artistic solution appropriate to a modern aesthetic sensibility. If, in both cases, the subject matter suits the specifics of the sculptures' locations, the successful execution of form in the one and perceived failure of form in the other ultimately comes down to judging one as well-conceived and well-made and the other as poorly-conceived and ineffective, a cautionary tale for all those eager to introduce contemporary works of art into their ecclesiastical spaces.

Conceptual models: categories as points of orientation

If the concern of this thesis is to rethink the possibilities for ecclesiastical encounters with contemporary art, it begins by asking an apparently Kantian question: what are the conditions of possibility for art in ecclesiastical spaces? And how can these conditions be addressed? More specifically, it asks what kind of theoretical approaches, strategies and language can be invented, adapted or adopted to deal with issues around art in ecclesiastical spaces? This work is motivated by a sense and a concern that, in many cases, though a ubiquitous element of modern church life, art remains somehow peripheral to the liturgical life of the church. Part of that distancing from liturgical practices is, of course, the difficulty of knowing how to include it. Unlike the commissions associated with earlier exemplars like Hussey, Bell and Couturier, whose patronage generally resulted in 'religious art' reflecting Christian ideology, albeit cast in a modern visual language, recent practice is frequently formulated toward an attempt to rethink conventional values of and roles for art in an ecclesiastical space. This is not to deny that a more traditional or conventional role for 'ecclesiastical,' 'sacred' or 'Christian' art is also apparent, although increasingly phrased in the aesthetic language of the contemporary world.

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[26] Similarly successful transcriptions of ancient and modern can be found on the façade of Salisbury Cathedral, where, along with a number of other newly-carved figures, an empty niche has been filled with a statue of Canon Ezra, the Sudanese priest killed in 1991 during the Anya Nya War in Sudan (figure 6). Another notable example is the triad of paintings by Iain McKillop inserted into a reredos vandalised by Cromwell's troops during the English Civil War (figure 7). The paintings manage to blend almost seamlessly into their background, and at the same time reflect the mutilated aesthetic quality of the reredos in their expressionistic style.

Art for the church has often been positioned within a theological, liturgical or ecclesiastical framework (that is, the wider church community and its responsibilities), or has been evaluated according to its effect upon, and addition to, the fabric of the space (its relative position within a differential of church art, fabrics, windows, and so on), that is to say, within an aesthetic framework. Less common are attempts to position art in an ecclesiastical context within a more philosophically-focused framework, in terms that consider the favourable or effective conditions for such art and its reception. What this project proposes is to map a conceptual framework for collaborations between ecclesiastical patrons and contemporary artists, to consider their conditions of possibility based upon a series of categories or modes of thought with which to navigate a path through an often contentious field. These categories or modes of thinking are presented as twelve such possible conditions. Loosely gathered around four principal foci (the space, discourses of the sacred, the work, and the community) they introduce a lexicon of terms with which to address practical, theological, liturgical and artistic issues: event, duration, porosity, ambiguity, hierophany, gaucherie, scrupulosity, leitourgia, liminality, fidelity, communitas, and exception (see appendix 1). What the thesis attempts to formulate with these categories is an effective vocabulary with which to address questions of the conditions for art now, and its prospects for the future, based to some extent upon earlier precedents but principally as an effort to forge new ground. In each case the question is posed as to the conditions of possibility for art that each entails, using as points of orientation the topography carved out by the language of church architecture itself: porch, nave, transept, sanctuary, crossing, chapel, crypt, apse.

At first sight this adherence to a series or system of categories, along with the clearly Kantian tenor of the question posed, appears to reprise a neo-Kantian epistemology. Indeed, this is a deliberate gesture, even down to the choice of a clutch of twelve categories. Yet there is a fundamental difference. The Kantian system offered a series of necessary and eternal a priori categories, operating in the form of judgements. It is important to state at the outset that these categories are not proposed in any kind of definitive way. Unlike Kant, completeness is not our aim. In fact, incompleteness and open-endedness would be more appropriate goals. The categories proposed are contingent and temporary; all are dispensible, open to replacement, revision or rebuttal, making no attempt to create universalising objective principles of practice. Indeed, the line of argument being proposed envisages no permanent future for these categories since they are invoked to suit the conditions obtaining today, and must necessarily alter

as the context of the debate alters. They have arisen as modes or conceptual figures that might be usefully invoked to trouble assumptions within the field, if such exists, of art and religion, and to propose approaches to it. Each has emerged from very different fields, and each has something to say about different aspects of the debate. As such, they offer ways of thinking about the space as a context for art, the ideologies or discourses around the sacred encountered by art in such contexts, the *work* of the work of art and the community or communities that encounter art or that art brings into being, with an aim to rethink the effective place for, and experience of, contemporary art in churches; in other words, a means by which to trouble assumptions and propose creative possibilities for meaningful encounters with art in ecclesiastical contexts. This idea of an 'encounter' with art acts as the guiding motif within which each of these categories operate, in contrast to a more habitual reliance upon 'recognition.' What do we mean by these terms in this particular context?

Encounter versus Recognition

In distinction to Kant's transcendental conditions we are constantly aware of the changing conditions of the context of the question. Our aim is to negotiate what might be seen as a fundamental tension for the church between the desire to impose the securities of recognition, familiarity and tradition and the possibilities offered by unexpected encounters with whatever disrupts thought and experience. Hence for many the necessary rejection of representation in religious art is precisely for the cul-de-sac to thought it effects. More specifically, the contrasting roles of encounter and recognition, as a principle for rethinking the role of art in the church, is a response to Deleuze's conviction that thought is animated by encounter but stifled by recognition. Encounter is the name he gives to an experience that is not limited to the possible, the recognisable or the imaginable.[27] It confronts us with the unexpected, rather than offering us the comfort of familiarity; it forces us to think or to rethink what we expect of art in relation to what we expect of the church. How does the Deleuzian 'object of encounter' fundamentally differ from an 'object of recognition'? A recent application of this idea to art practice explains this well:

> With the latter our knowledge, beliefs and values are reconfirmed. An object of recognition is then precisely a *re*presentation of something always already in

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[27] Deleuze. 1997: 139

place. With such a non-encounter our habitual way of being and acting in the world is reaffirmed and reinforced, and as a consequence no thought takes place. Indeed, we might say that representation precisely stymies thought. With a genuine encounter however the contrary is the case. Our typical ways of being in the world are challenged, our systems of knowledge disrupted. We are forced to thought.[28]

This is then a creative moment, a challenge to habit or expectation with the potential for an experience of something new, a transformation equated with our (frequently disappointed) hopes for art. To what extent, then, can it be said that contemporary art for the contemporary church operates within the realm of encounter rather than recognition? And to what extent is this desirable? Or, to put the question another way, to what extent should a concept of encounter, as opposed to recognition, as described above, determine the conditions of possibility for contemporary art within ecclesiastical spaces? To be blunt, all too frequently recognition and representation take precedence over an encounter with the unexpected. Opposition to modern art in the church, hedged about with prohibitions like 'inappropriate' or even 'sacriligious,' often masks a fundamental demand for the familiar. It is within the context of these concerns that Walter Benjamin proves to be so useful and the reference to Kant becomes clear.

On the Programme for a Coming Philosophy

This enquiry takes its cue from Benjamin's own response to Kant's conceptual schema. In *On the Programme for a Coming Philosophy* (1918) Benjamin considered those aspects of experience disqualified by Kant as legitimate objects of knowledge, notably aesthetic and religious experience 'beyond the limits of reason alone,' and argued for their categorical inclusion within a coming philosophy. Benjamin's concern is precisely to expand the field of legitimate experience beyond what he sees as a limiting reliance on empirical consciousness and rationality at the expense of marginal and marginalised forms of consciousness, which has led in his view to a decay or impoverishment of experience. Nevertheless, despite his criticisms, Benjamin remains true to the spirit of Kant; his is in effect a transcendental argument, but one that accounts for a very different kind of event for knowledge. For Benjamin, Kant cannot be dismissed. He presents *an* understanding of the nature of experience, but not *the* definitive understanding of experience. Thus, the task of a future philosophy, he argues, is to work out which aspects of the Kantian

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[28] O'Sullivan. 2006: 1

schema remain vital to philosophy, which should be reworked, and which rejected. As Philip Quadrio explains:

> Benjamin's critique of Kant is one that acknowledges the power of Kantian thought, but in moving Kantian metaphysics of experience out of the range of empirical consciousness and towards a speculative metaphysics of experience it points to forgotten and discarded possibilities, awakening possibilities for new forms of experience.[29]

Kant's system excluded the kind of knowledge that is fundamental to theology, religious or mystical experience and to certain kinds of art encounters. The challenge of a coming philosophy is to extend the field of possible experience into these occluded realms. Fundamentally, Benjamin's contention is that there are 'many possible surfaces of experience.'[30] Among experience that falls outside the Kantian transcendental object of knowledge but included in Benjamin's schema is the experience of shocked astonishment, the experience of the numinous, the experience of religious epiphany, the unaccountably affective power of art, and of course, the perception-altering possibilities of drugs. According to Kieran Cashell, his is an 'aletheiological discourse' that names or calls into being that which

> inhabits the shadows of experience, with what cannot be captured adequately by, and what transcends the categories of conceptual representation, with everything that exceeds the circumscribed closure of knowledge.[31]

This is where art can be so penetrating. Objects of encounter enlarge the viability of experience that escapes the rigidly policed parameters set forth not only by Kantianism but by whatever mediates the admissibility of art in an eccelesiastical environment. As long ago as 1963 Meyer Schapiro had proposed that the use of modern art in churches

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[29] Quadrio. 2003

[30] Caygill. 1998: 24. Experience is a critical category for Benjamin, perhaps *the* critical category. His criticism of Kant is that one particular surface of experience (the rational and scientific) has been over-valued and made the transcendental ground of all experience. Yet this is only one among an infinite number of bounded surfaces of experience. Benjamin seeks to return philosophy to the vital life of culture, to bring it into a relationship with religion, mysticism, drug-taking, and art, as something other than the restrictive universal aesthetics proposed by Kant or a strictly ethical basis (of practical reason) for religion. We see something comparable to Benjamin's project at work in William James's classic text on religious experience. He too advances a sense of the limitations of rationalism when set against the manifold varieties of experience to which his many examples testify. In *The Varieties of Religious Experience* he attends to precisely those modes of experience, and mysticism in particular, that exceed rational thought, including the rationalism of a dogmatic or systematic theology (see James. 2004: 366-370).

[31] Cashell. 2005

acted as 'a counterinfection' to established practices and thinking, an idea that accords surprisingly well with the Kantian injunction inasmuch that, as Richard Lane argues a propos of Kant, whatever is deemed 'beyond the bounds of all possible experience,' whatever 'is not only unknowable, but should not even be guessed at,' such things must be 'quarantined,' as if a contaminant to thought.[32] Is it not the case that our hope for art is in its potential to break the quarantine that segregates or contains certain experience or, put another way, to act as an immunisation against immunity, instigating a porosity of experience? Thus, as O'Sullivan puts it, art might be 'less involved in knowledge and more involved in experience – in pushing forward the boundaries of what can be experienced,' in order to '[transform], if only for a moment, our sense of ourselves and our experience of the world'[33] Put this way, if we speak of 'different surfaces of experience' in regard to art, if we trust to art to create openings onto a richer field of possibilities, is this an unrealistic raising of expectations or could it be argued that this is the minimum expected of art? So much contemporary ecclesiastical art already deals with many things beyond the aesthetic or theological, encompassing the sociological, political, ritualistic, relational, participative or affective, sometimes operating at the fringes of the experiential. And what of the modern church? Is it not already a surface open to multiple configurations, treated quite literally as a surface in Firrell's 2008 projections onto the dome and façade of St. Paul's Cathedral, but more interestingly a surface for a multiplicity of possibility, as a porous and 'multiply gradated' surface?[34]

To bring it down to more concrete terms, Benjamin's argument is that the Kantian system only managed to give a valid explanation for one of the two problems faced by every great epistemology. The first is 'the certainty of knowledge that is lasting'; the second is 'the integrity of an experience that is ephemeral.' A metaphysical philosophy that counts cannot rest upon 'the timeless validity of knowledge' unless it also accounts for the necessarily temporal nature of experience in which that knowledge is put to work.[35] This is, in effect, the struggle facing the modern church, the source of its continual debate with contemporary culture: the strain between an adherence to timeless verities versus a concession to change and ephemeral experience. Or, to put it another way, the tension between the longevity, stability and familiarity of a venerable tradition

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[32] Schapiro. 1999: 188; Lane. 2005: 106, 107

[33] O'Sullivan. 2006: 52, 50

[34] Benjamin. 1996a: 107

[35] Ibid: 100

and a willingness to question, challenge, invert or remould that tradition; the debate, if you like, between continuity and interruption. If art once upheld the practices and teaching of the church, according to certain established aesthetic and theological principles, it has been increasingly replaced by an art willing to question those principles, to reframe both its form and content according to other media and other agendas, or that seeks a dialogue with the church through the lens of the surrounding culture, often through the more radical opportunities offered by temporary installations. As O'Sullivan suggests, in this encounter between continuity and an art that interrupts it, art reveals its innate tendency to exceed the frameworks established to contain it:

> Rather than mobilising pre-existing reading strategies and interpretive paradigms, capturing art within our already set up temporal frames and systems of reference, we have become attentive to art's own logic of invention and creation.[36]

Indeed, in the struggle between encounter and recognition for some the inescapable imperative of art is that it says something other than whatever already counts as art within the art world and its accepted discourses of artistic production.[37] This is surely no less an incentive for art in an ecclesiastical milieu. Hence the question that exercised Benjamin touches upon that which troubles us. If his desire was to re-pose a doctrine of experience that did not entirely reject, nor entirely embrace, Kant's faculties and categories, but rather sought to select, adopt, rework or reject them, according to their perceived usefulness, ours seeks to similarly validate the legitimacy of experience beyond that which is already known and understood, recognisable and familiar, to produce not so much a new (albeit definitively incomplete) doctrine of categories but a lexicon of terms and strategies with which to consider the conditions of possibility for art in ecclesiastical spaces that exceeds current thinking.

Ethnographies

Each chapter comprises a kind of toolbox of concepts drawn from comparative religion, anthropology, philosophy and art theory. Each offers something of value and purpose in its application to contemporary art in ecclesiastical spaces. One in-depth case study, conducted in 2006, forms the nucleus of these thoughts, raising questions and possibilities relating to each of the conditions explored, supplemented by numerous

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[36] O'Sullivan. 2010: 196

[37] Baumbach. 2005: 165, writing on Alain Badiou's *Fifteen Theses on Contemporary Art.*

other ethnographies of ecclesiastical art. What do we mean by ethnography in the context of this thesis? It is an approach inspired by James Clifford's definition in *The Predicament of Culture* in which ethnography is generalised as 'diverse ways of thinking and writing about culture from a standpoint of participant observation.'[38] Thus it entails a combination of experience and analysis; an elision of pure objectivity but not a negation of interpretative response. Above all it assumes the 'participatory presence' of the writer in the world he or she is attempting to understand.[39] Good art writing, it is suggested, thereby attempts to restore to the object or process being discussed 'the palpability of lived experience.'[40] To that end, discussion of artworks has been limited to those personally experienced, excepting certain outstanding projects that merit discussion, or where the secondary literature is particularly strong.

The space

In considering the impact of contemporary art upon ecclesiastical space and *its* influence upon the art, we initially turn to a triad of theorists, all of whom have developed philosophies of context that consider the complexities of environments in terms of event, duration and porosity. Event is the name given by A. N. Whitehead to the discernment of a specific place through a certain period of time, in which our experience of an environment is shot through with permeability and change. Turning to Henri Bergson we find a comparable observation yet one marked by its loss. He claims that a fundamental awareness of duration has disappeared beneath the constraints of meaning. Bergson's aim is to retrieve that sense of qualitative sensation characterising human experience but so often reduced to quantitative measurement, organised and clarified in order to be understood and communicated. A similar tension is at work in the writings of his near contemporary, Walter Benjamin. In his marvellous description of Naples, Benjamin proposes its defining characteristic to be porosity, discounting notions of solidity or stability in favour of flow, permeability, and impermanence. For Benjamin this offers a means of opening up the experience of spaces to novel expressions of that experience. Within the field of art in churches this tension between stability and flux evokes the very real difficulties encountered in negotiating the practicalities of such projects, and the possibilities they offer for creative uses of the space; difficulties and

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[38] Clifford. 1988: 9

[39] Kwon in Coles. 2000: 76

[40] Elkins and Newman. 2008: 6

possibilities that we could characterise as a tension between the concrete and the experiential. This has tremendous bearing on an experience of art, and on often inadequate attempts to form representations of that experience, a failing endemic to much art writing.

The sacred

Any examination of contemporary forms of non-traditional art within ecclesiastical spaces can hardly avoid extant concerns over the tension between the sacred and profane, since these are the parameters so often established to determine the fields of their legitimate operation, and so frequently employed in any disparagement of modern art in ecclesiastical contexts. Taking as our point of departure Emile Durkheim's dubitable division of the sacred and profane into states of enmity, and the religious comparativist, Mircea Eliade's influential, though today often discredited, studies of religious patterns of belief and practice, we will touch upon questions of holiness and defilement, purity and impurity and, above all, sacred ambiguity. Eliade's concept of *hierophany*, in particular, will offer a potentially invaluable conceptual tool; though cast in a language that we have no wish to resurrect, it may be put to new uses, revealing unexpected modalities of the sacred and sources of sacred encounter. One of the most effective evocations of the sacred for this research is found in the work of the anthropologist Michel Leiris. His cultivation of a sacré gauche has been invaluable in assessing the impact of contemporary art on ecclesiastical spaces. Leiris's effort to narrativise a left-handed sacred in contradistinction to an authorised and authoritative right may be invoked to trouble the role of art within ecclesiastical spaces. Whilst the latter might be seen to embed itself within an artistic and/or religious tradition, the former operates as a sacred always ready to challenge the terms of its legitimacy. A final conceptual figure, linked to this, is Derrida's definition of religion as scruple, a 'religiosity' which he conceives as enforcing an 'irreducible duality' between sacredness and belief. This division allows us to conceptualise a sacred 'uncontaminated' by belief, that is, a sacredness that need not limit itself to the milieu of faith. Yet it is also subject to what Derrida calls the law of autoimmunity, whereby hesitation, doubt and decision operate within an understanding of religion as that which repeatedly returns 'to make a new choice.'[41] It expands upon the value of the provisional,

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[41] Benveniste. 1973: 522

contingent, temporary and ephemeral in any discussion of art's role within the church today.

The work

Many have argued that from an anthropological point of view religion and art are deeply associated, indeed inseparable, as cogredients in the promulgation of ritualised practices and in the quest to confront the imponderables of life.[42] The Greek scholar, Jane Harrison, has noted in particular the historical origins of art in ritual, and accentuates an extant and vital concern for their mutual co-existence. Harrison considers their connection to be not only intimate, but indispensable to our understanding of either, aiming to show that these two wayward strands of human experience are rooted in a common source, and therefore a common association: art *as* ritual. A vital thread of ritual has long been a motif of art, linking contemporary 'relational' practices to a history of performance art, happenings and earlier theatricalities, in what could be seen as an endorsement of Harrison's thesis. But when we turn to art's role within the church, even an art that accentuates a ritualistic dimension, are we in danger of endorsing an unworkable syncretism? This is not a call for art practice within the church to be explicitly ritualistic but rather an awareness that art has a distinctive role to play within the liturgical life of the church. But in order to rekindle the idea of art *as* liturgy, we must expand our notion of what constitutes a liturgical act to include the *work* of the work of art (*leitourgia*), with emphasis placed upon the work of art as exceptional, opposed in each case to formulaic solutions.

The community

An encounter with art as *leitourgia* provokes ways of thinking about the reception of art for the viewer that might be closer to a kind of active 'religious' observance rather than the more conventionally passive role of disinterested observation, and perhaps, if ritual is fundamentally a social rather than individual act, it inaugurates a community rather than an audience for art. But how viable a notion of community is this? In order to address this question we focus on Alain Badiou's inventive use of Saint Paul and the early church through which he develops a model of subjectivity engendered by fidelity to an event.

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[42] Thierry de Duve argued precisely this point in a recent debate on the relationship of art and religion (Elkins and Morgan. 2009).

That event may be religious, political, amorous or aesthetic, but its potential is to produce what Badiou calls the subject of a truth-process. Badiou's philosophy of event presents a theory of encounter as a three-stage process in the production of subjectivities, thereby suggesting an analogous relationship to a figure of subjectivity derived from Victor Turner's anthropological studies of rites of passage: communitas. Building upon an earlier engagement with the theme of liminality, these provisional communities, in a conditional state of impermanence, offer a way of identifying, albeit contingently, potential subjects or communities that coalesce around the work of art.

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Benjamin's 'programme' remained incomplete and unworked, a tantalising glimpse of a future possibility, as indeed it claimed to be. It is not our presumption to pick up where Benjamin left off, but rather to follow his example in valuing other forms of experience, via encounters with the affective power of art, the intensities and extensities actualised in a meeting of events and durations, unexpected evocations of the sacred, the work of the work of art, meaningful communities for art, and so on. To that end, the proposal of a series of categories for thinking, or rethinking, the role of art within the church has proven an invaluable orientation for thought. The modern art championed by Hussey, Bell, Couturier et al altered the discourses around, and possibilities for, the ecclesiastical art of its time; the art of today must continue to do so in its own terms or else it will produce only dead works. One way in which it may do so is to reconsider the language and terms in which that experience is described, understood or advocated, but not of course from within a scholarly void. This thesis positions itself in relation to the work that has gone before (an extensive review of existing literature may be found in appendix 2) but, though indebted to it, approaches the field from a rather different perspective.

In conclusion we will test the idea that contemporary art has become a taken-for-granted element of modern church life. Along with the various Chaplaincies to the arts and artist-in-residence programmes attached to many of Britain's cathedrals,[43] in the past few years several Chapters have produced and adopted official arts policies. Such policies are an explicit sign of the church's commitment to new art generally and clearly calculated to support their respective ongoing arts programmes in particular. Typical of

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[43] Officially, only Durham and Gloucester currently run ongoing year-long artist-in-residence programmes. Truro runs something similar but includes writers as well as artists. It is without question a growing trend, however, with many other cathedrals offering shorter or occasional residencies, among them Chichester, Lincoln, Liverpool, Norwich, Wells, Winchester, and Worcester.

such policies, however, is their attempt to enlarge the possibilities for art within the perceived parameters of their other duties whilst implying the necessity for a policy of containment. This is understandable if problematic. The incumbency of a cathedral brings with it many diverse responsibilities and there can be no insistence upon artistic priorities over all others. As a consequence, although at a theoretical level these policies expand the possibilities for art within ecclesiastical spaces, at a concrete level in many instances they do not reflect an advantageous development for art nor create an environment conducive to artistic experimentation. The conditions for art proposed by this thesis, then, offer an alternative set of terms to the officially sanctioned vocabulary of the arts policy, by which it is hoped a language apposite to an experience of contemporary art in ecclesiastical spaces will emerge.

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Figure 1 Martin Firrell, *The Question Mark Inside*, St. Paul's Cathedral, 2008

Figure 2 *Resurrection*, St. Mary's Church, Bury St. Edmunds, 2010

Figure 3 David Wynne, *Madonna*, Ely Cathedral, 2000

The Lady Chapel, prior to the installation of the sculpture

Figure 4 Chris Topp & Company, *Reredos and Altar*, Ely Cathedral, 2011

Figure 5 David Holgate, *Mother Julian and Saint Benedict*, Norwich Cathedral, 2000

Figure 6 Jason Battle, *Canon Ezra*, Salisbury Cathedral, 2008

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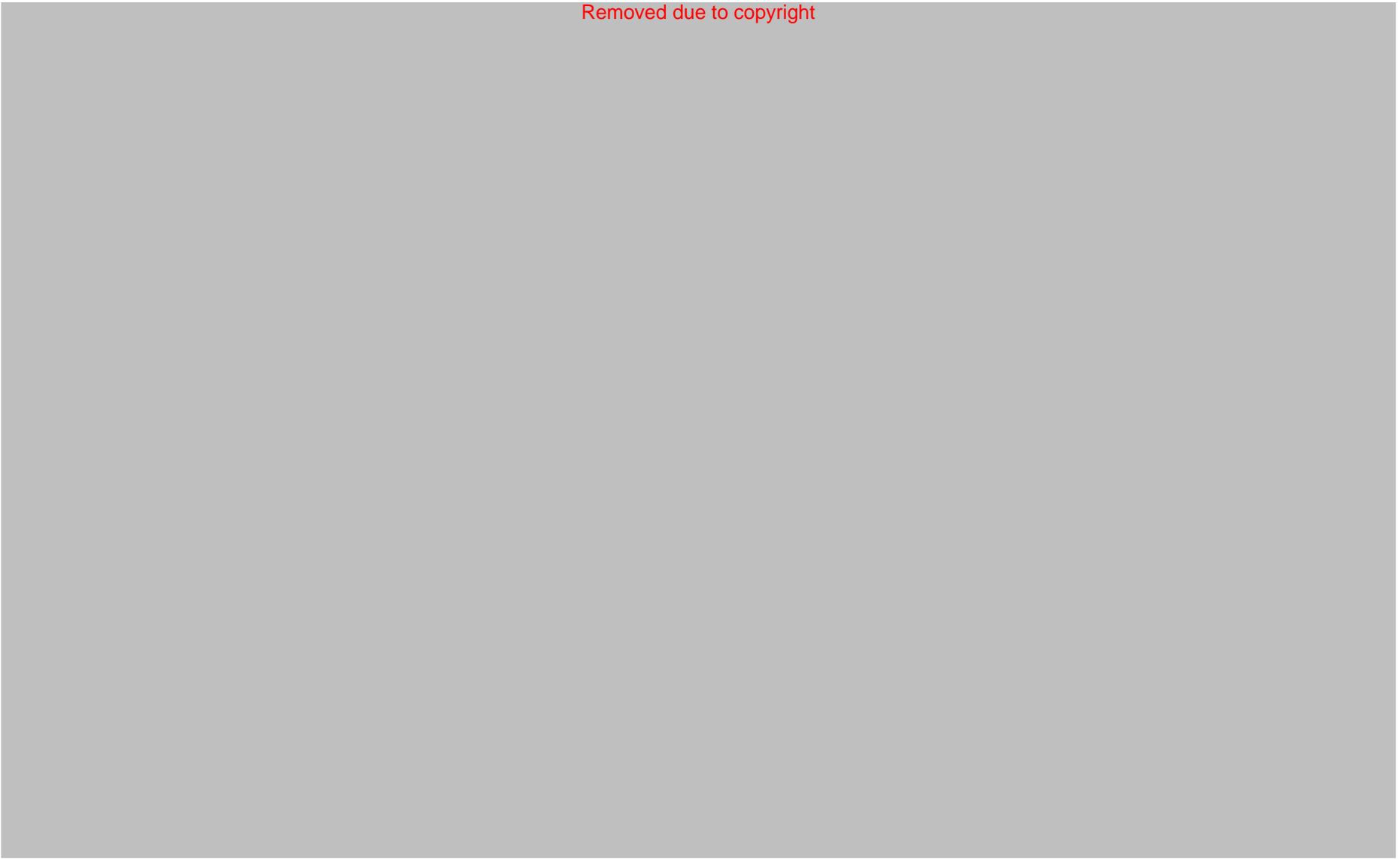
Figure 7 Iain McKillop, *Lady Chapel Altarpiece*, Gloucester Cathedral, 2004

Detail of the *Lady Chapel Altarpiece*

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NAVE

A series of entrances

What does one encounter upon entering one of Britain's great cathedrals? On first stepping across the threshold most people (including those who come to visit as much as those who come to worship) would probably attest to an immediate sense of being somewhere beyond or outside daily life, in a way that seems to be unique to these buildings. Setting aside for the time being the immensity of their history and manifestly religious function, the visitor's first impressions are likely to be primarily sensory; a phenomenal response. One experiences a manifold of sensations elicited by the distinctive atmosphere, the vastness of the chamber, the sonorous acoustics, the change of temperature, and the peculiarly sub-aqueous quality of light. Statues, shrines, tombs, banks of candles, faded, tattered and musty military flags, fabrics and tapestries, dimly-illumined altarpieces, all add to the ambient ensemble. Crossing the threshold not only invokes a passage from the secular world to the sacred (a movement whose potency still resonates despite the increasing secularisation and touristification of these spaces), it marks several palpable shifts: of speed, of duration, of temperature, of spatial awareness, of familiarity, of signification, of understanding, of sound, of light, and so on. Probably the best word to describe this switching of registers is 'reverence,' although to whom or what this is directed is not entirely clear. Perhaps it is the sense of dislocation such spaces produce, as if, in Couturier's words, 'one enters into another world.'[1] The visitor slows to a respectful stroll, his voice lowered while his gaze turns uncharacteristically upwards, lifted from the thin level plain through which he daily navigates. Perhaps he has chanced upon a time when he has the cathedral almost to himself, a not uncommon experience in

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[1] Langdon. 1988: 550. A substantial survey reported by the journal *Faith and Form* adds a more scientific gloss to such experiences. In 2009 *Faith and Form* published the results of two surveys conducted to gauge 'extraordinary architectural experiences,' qualified as '…an encounter with a building or a place that fundamentally alters one's normal state of being… a powerful and lasting shift in one's physical, perceptual, emotional, intellectual, and/or spiritual appreciation of architecture' (Bermudez. 2009). The journal's summary of the conclusions states that the spirituality attributed to sacred buildings is usually limited to the objective conditions of their form and function. These surveys concentrated instead on the spirituality equated with their subjective emotional impact. The buildings included in the survey as the sites of these experiences were predominantly but not exclusively religious in function. However, descriptive signifiers like 'overwhelming,' 'transcendental' or 'spiritual' were applied equally to sacred and secular locations, along with terms like profound, ineffable, intense or vivid. The survey concluded that certain exceptional architectural spaces were able to induce 'a direct and intuitive discernment' on the part of the respondents, for whom typical expressions of their experience overall were a sense of timelessness, peace, pleasure, or fulfillment, but rarely intellectual or analytical responses. The survey reported, among its findings, the following responses: high emotion, an intensified attentiveness to the present, 'eventfulness,' increased awareness, sometimes described as a state of extreme wakefulness, introspection, a desire for silence, the suspension of preconceptions, non-cognitive sensations and bodily reactions (goose bumps, trembling, weeping, chills, and so on).

certain provincial cathedrals usually denied to the larger metropolitan cathedrals, but more often than not he is aware of the proximity of other people. From the hushed sibilance of their voices and the slow but distinct pace of their footsteps his attention is drawn to the uniquely aural qualities of this environment. Perhaps the first impression one has of a cathedral interior is an awareness of its distinct acoustics, even as one marvels at its visual splendours. In such spaces every sound is captured, registered, amplified, and lifted into the general atmosphere. Nothing escapes. At such times one becomes aware of the disparate densities of sound: the resonant thrum and throb of the organ, like a deep foundational pulse, the ethereal shimmer of choristers' voices, the exquisitely hollow tintinnabulation of keys rattled or coins dropped into a candle box, the background hiss beneath an amplified and disembodied voice reading a prayer, a resonance growing with each word echoingly overlaying each successive word; beneath it all, as an aural constant, so prevalent as to seem like the murmuring of the building itself, are the lowered voices of visitors, the rustling of bags and shuffling of feet, a strangely wordless hubbub which entirely permeates the space. Indeed, in a busy site of tourism like St. Paul's it can become a reverberating and cacophonous din, generated by the constant bustle of people flowing through its turnstiles.

Somewhere amidst all of this there is a recently installed piece of contemporary art, invited into the cathedral through the chaplaincy's desire to promote a progressive attitude towards the relationship of the church and the arts. The artwork in question may be monumental, a very present visual presence within the space. It may be quieter, more intimate, and isolated from the main body of the building. It may be a single work or a series of works ranged throughout the building, appearing around every corner. In each case the art is a part of the life of its respective cathedral host, even if, in most cases, temporarily so. Each provides an encounter with art, which some enjoy, some deride, and others ignore. But once it has outlived its tenure, the quotidian life of the cathedral will seep back into the spaces that the work of art has occupied. So we see that on the one hand we have the collective accomplishment of the cathedral: its art, ornamentation and architecture, its daily routines, its spiritual, social and cultural functions, its place within the community, its significance in history; and on the other, an encounter with a permanent or temporary installation of contemporary art. But what exactly is the nature of this encounter? What conditions colour its presence as an aspect of one's experience of the cathedral?

One way we might think of the conditions of possibility for contemporary art in ecclesiastical spaces is as a series of entrances, in order to assess how art effectively enters an ecclesiastical world in which it has played such an aesthetically significant role and at the same time been the source of such doctrinal contention. Must contemporary art make a tentative entrance, cognisant of its potentially incongruous, even discordant, presence in an environment where art tends to be part of the fabric of the building, an unobtrusive element in situ? Or, is it in fact more true to say that the entrance to the cathedral has become a kind of turnstile, a market for all manner of cultural products, the cathedral having become the pay-to-enter tourist site while the galleries and museums have become the free spaces of spiritual consumption? If the past decade or so has taught us anything, it is that contemporary art has found a ready welcome within the church. Indeed, art is entering ecclesiastical spaces at such a rate these days that the doorway can barely admit all those clamouring for admittance. Modern art is no longer the exception to the rule, admitted enthusiastically by some, with reluctance or under protest by others, but along with contemporary art per se in today's culture, has become familiar through its ubiquity. This situation raises many questions, which this thesis will attempt to address, but we begin with the ever-present matter of context. For those who encounter and seek to engage with the work of art within its ecclesiastical setting is it an isolable work of art within a building that they find, or is the observer aware of an entire environment stretching away from the focal point of a work of art? Where does the art experience begin and end? In order to begin to answer these questions we initially turn to a triad of philosophers, more or less contemporaneous with one another, who offer possible responses through their respective concepts of event, duration and porosity.

Event

It is not uncommon these days to think of a work of art in terms of its impact as an experience or event. Let us briefly take as an example an art event that some have argued inaugurated a shift in conventions, opening up the spaces and expectations for ecclesiastical art: Bill Viola's *The Messenger*, in Durham Cathedral (figure 8). There are many ways in which this was an event, not least of which is its decisive personal significance as the catalyst for my subsequent research. As an occurrence within the art-world calendar this was undoubtedly an art event, by virtue of its controversial subject matter and location it became a media event, its unusual use of video projection on a grand-scale within an active ecclesiastical space made it a radical conceptual event, as a

work commissioned by the Durham chaplaincy specifically for the cathedral it could not avoid being an ecclesiastical event, its iconography made it for some a religious event, and of course its witnessed and documented appearance for a certain period in the cathedral made it an art historical event. But what have these events to do with the experience of those who came to see it? What framework can be found to discuss the aesthetic or experiential event produced by *The Messenger*? To answer these questions requires a different understanding of the term 'event' from those addressed above, and for this the philosophy of A. N. Whitehead proves indispensible.

Event is the name given by Whitehead to the discernment of a specific place through a certain period of time, in which our experience of nature is felt 'as a complex of passing events.'[2] In his major philosophical text, *Process and Reality*, he describes the world as a continuum of extensive relations, spatially and temporally, in which events 'relationally extend over each other in a continuous becoming,' which in terms of perception are felt as a kind of 'presentational immediacy,' an experience of the immediate present which encompasses all aspects of that experience.[3] This is what he calls an event, which is itself composed of discrete elements (spatial, temporal, contextual, psychological), or occasions of experience:

> An event is a nexus of actual occasions interrelated in some determinate fashion in some extensive quantum…. One actual occasion is a limiting type of event. The most general sense of the meaning of change is 'the differences between actual occasions in one event.'[4]

Our innate tendency to separate one thing from another for the sake of experiential comprehension is disavowed by Whitehead's insistence on the interrelatedness within and between events. If, in a later chapter, we picture event as intensive, with Whitehead event is extensive, of the present – here it is, it is happening – but a present that extends over time, founded upon the discernment of nature as process.[5] This sense of extension is both spatial and temporal (but minimally so), sense-awareness having no definite boundary limits. There is no suggestion, therefore, that an event is an independent entity.

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[2] Whitehead. 1964: 166

[3] Robinson. 2010a: 116; Whitehead. 1969: 76

[4] Ibid: 98

[5] Although we should add that Whitehead's event is also intensive. Principally it is a movement between a coalescence of actual occasions of experience and the effects that flow across them, acting like a kind of defocusing and refocusing. In *The Fold* Deleuze identifies four conditions to Whitehead's event: extension (properties), intension (intensities), ingression (actual/virtual), and prehension (pure experience or perception) (see Robinson. 2010b: 124).

Rather, it is, in Whitehead's terms, 'an occasion of experience,' a complex of related elements actively involved in our sense-awareness, which includes an awareness of ourselves in this process, as numerous writers waxing eloquently on the cathedral experience attest. As a phenomenology of experience, events combine the bringing together of a plurality of things which are other than ourselves with those aspects of ourselves involved in that event. An event, says Whitehead, is what it is by virtue of 'the unification in itself of a multiplicity of relationships.'[6] But the result, while it can nonetheless be thought of as the unity of those parts, is greater or other than simply a sum of its parts, including all aspects of that event, not only those which are distinctly registered by one's sense-awareness, but also those that remain on the periphery. When we speak of the event of *The Messenger*, therefore, we are speaking of the event of all the above-mentioned elements, including the building itself, that are involved in the experience of that work. This also includes the totality of ourselves as experienced in the bodily event which inevitably forms a part of the whole pattern.

A significant aspect of Whitehead's vision of the world is the way in which our apprehension of reality works. He chooses to speak of 'prehension' rather than apprehension, a term which exceeds the conscious spatial and temporal limitations of apprehending, drawing it closer to something that Bergson calls 'intuition.' If the apprehension of a specific moment or actual occasion of experience remains within the here and now, the prehension of that moment cannot be so restricted temporally, nor is it limited to the particular object of apprehension, nor to cognitive processes in that apprehension. Thus, Whitehead prefers to think of prehension as 'uncognitive apprehension,' meaning it may or may not be cognitive.[7] If an event, as the 'presentational immediacy' of the world, lodges prehension in a here and a now, its realised unity includes far more than we expect of a process of apprehension. Prehension describes the complex whole which forms an act of awareness; it includes memory, context, reference to other occasions, other places and other times. In other words, prehension is a kind of embodied sense-perception. It does not account only for the object of apprehension, but for the one doing the apprehending, and the elements that augment that apprehending. Event is a 'concrescence' or interweaving of such prehensions.[8]

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[6] Whitehead. 1967: 155

[7] Ibid: 69

[8] Whitehead outlines this concrescence in *Process and Reality*: 'Every prehension consists of three

By this thinking we can no longer so casually lift an object out of its context, nor separate the object from our proximity as observers to it. Subjectivity becomes an inextricable element of the event. This latter Whitehead deems the 'percipient event,' which establishes a relation of 'cogredience' with its object, that is, its inseparability from the observed event passing before it, while the totality of this coming together in event he calls 'a duration.'[9] We can be easily fooled into supposing that we find here a conceptual correspondence with Bergson, but in fact duration is a rather unfortunate choice of terms. In Whitehead's hands it ceases to register as an abstract period of time but implies instead a concrescence of prehensions in an event. At most we could say it denotes a duration of minimum temporal extension but maximum spatial extension.

Events are intensities, but thought in terms of extension, as relata or multiple relations, which give definition, if not discrete boundaries, to the event. Indeed, every event extends over other events in a continual process of becoming which, as Yve Lomax says, 'is the factor that makes the chunk of relations happening now…a unique occurrence, an event.'[10] This is the complexity that makes Whitehead's concept of event so fascinating but also so difficult to grasp. Lomax describes this complexity rather well, and in terms, as we will see, that make an astute connection with Benjamin's 'transitive' experience of Naples:

> Overlapping events; events that partially include other events; events that completely include other events; and events that in entering into composition with each other have parts that remain separate from one another. Events extending to become ever larger events and events extending to become ever smaller events. No ideal maximum limit. No ideal minimum limit. On and on the events go. And as they go on they are perpetually moving on, which is to say that all is transitive here.[11]

The concept of event has, of course, had many manifestations within modern philosophy, notably in the work of Jean-François Lyotard, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Giorgio Agamben, Jean-Luc Nancy and Alain Badiou, to which this thesis will have occasion to turn. In each case very different ideas are implied by the same term, although with the Deleuzian event we find something very close to Whitehead's earlier

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factors: (a) the "subject" which is prehending, namely, the actual entity in which that prehension is a concrete element; (b) the "datum" which is prehended; (c) the "subjective form" which is *how* that subject prehends that datum' (Whitehead. 1969: 28).

[9] Lomax. 2005: 86

[10] Ibid: 85

[11] Ibid.

propositions. For Deleuze, event is a means by which one avoids the ontological straitjacketing presented by the Heideggerian question, what is a thing? By thinking in terms of events rather than things a more processual image of the world emerges, very much in keeping with the process philosophy of Whitehead, as well as the intuition of duration explored by Bergson. Taking note of this Deleuzian conception of event, and returning to the specific context of our inquiry, any serious consideration of Whitehead's propositions requires another way of understanding art's relationship to the ecclesiastical space in which it is found. This applies to any space, but our cathedral example provides a particularly rich interplay of elements. Within this interplay we find that not only the art event (in its manifold forms mentioned above), and the subject in his or her relation to that event, but even the building itself is an event. In what sense can a building be an event? According to the historian, Richard Evans, in none at all. A building can never *be* an event, he says, but can only ever be the *site* of an event, an assertion which at first sight would seem to be self-evident.[12] In answer to this proposition let us think about this situation in another way, one that has clearly paved the way for Deleuze's notion of event. It involves a trip with Whitehead to the Thames Embankment, to consider the event of a river, a bridge and a needle, which will reintroduce the related term of duration. In *Science and the Modern World* Whitehead briefly describes the sweep of the Thames estuary and the jarring juxtaposition of the Charing Cross Railway Bridge that cuts its visual flow. It was for want of aesthetic values, he says, that such constructions were allowed to so wantonly deface the urban view.[13] In an earlier book, however, he approached the same view but from a different angle. Rather than focusing upon the lack of aesthetic sensitivity that it displayed, he used it as an example of the way we are aware of such scenes 'as a complex of passing events.'[14] To emphasise his point he adds a third ingredient (or as he calls it, cogredient) to the mixture: Cleopatra's Needle. The relatedness of this latter to the embankment and the bridge Whitehead deems an event.

Now, at first sight it seems odd to speak of either the bridge or the monument as an event, even less as 'passing events' since they are generally thought of as static and unchanging, lacking the element of transitoriness essential to an event. This is an illusion, says Whitehead, which allows a certain foothold in the transitory life of the city, but which fails to understand the nature and character of events. For Whitehead an event

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[12] Evans. 1997: 78-79

[13] Whitehead. 1967: 196

[14] Whitehead. 1964: 166

constitutes a momentary unification of 'a pattern of aspects' and encompasses, therefore, the life-history of that particular pattern. This complex of related factors, which in a cathedral might include all or any of the afore-mentioned elements, as well as the artwork in question, Whitehead terms the 'spatial now' or 'specious present' of the event.[15] Every event has its own 'event-duration,' that which is required for the realisation of its particular pattern of aspects, a duration that is spatialised because it is the field for the realised pattern that constitutes the character of that event. Between the bridge, the embankment and the monument, as well as all the other aspects of that particular moment, a certain duration or durations come together to form the character of that particular event-moment. As a quality of this duration Whitehead writes of the 'endurance of the present duration' of an event, and relates it to the endurance of another architectural figure, the Great Pyramid.[16] There is an apparently unchanging, abiding quality to the Great Pyramid. It endures within what some have called *la longue durée*. But there is also a sense in which its endurance is congruent with the continual process of change, not simply at a slow molecular or macro-temporal level, but as a prehended event:

> We are accustomed to associate an event with a certain melodramatic quality. If a man is run over, that is an event comprised within certain spatio-temporal limits. We are not accustomed to consider the endurance of the Great Pyramid throughout any definite day as an event. But the natural fact which is the Great Pyramid throughout a day, meaning thereby all nature within it, is an event of the same character as the man's accident, meaning thereby all nature with spatio-temporal limitations so as to include the man and the motor during the period when they were in contact.[17]

Following his argument, but bringing his discussion closer to the terms of this thesis, we do not tend to think of the endurance of a cathedral through a given day as an event; it is rather an object in space, within time but also, in a way, timeless. But the existence of that cathedral throughout any given day, and all nature, activity, light, weather, atmospherics, and so on, associated with it is an event of the same character as the event of a visitor walking through its doors. This sense of event that Whitehead draws from his musing upon the life of the Thames embankment and the Great Pyramid is strikingly exemplified by the series of paintings that Monet and Sisley respectively made of Rouen

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[15] Whitehead. 1967: 104

[16] Whitehead. 1964: 74

[17] Ibid.

Cathedral and the church at Moret (figures 9 and 10). Each series seemed to be seeking to express in a limited way the sensation of the event revealing itself to the artist at that particular time. Though impossible to capture in a fixed form each offers nonetheless a sense of the endurance of that present duration. More germane to Whitehead's thought, however, is what Lindsay Jones calls 'the ritual-architectural event.' In his study of the hermeneutics of sacred architecture Jones defends the view that buildings are events (or occasions) rather than, or rather more than, objects. Jones's conviction is that, where architecture is concerned, it must always be the case that

> the locus of meaning resides neither in the building itself (a physical object) nor in the mind of the beholder (a human subject), but rather in the negotiation or the interactive relation that subsumes both building and beholder – in *the ritual-architectural event* in which buildings and human participants alike are involved.[18]

Thus he cites Roman Ingarden's warning against 'the persuasive tendency' to conflate 'a work of architecture' with a 'real building.'[19] The work of architecture is what happens, or takes place, in a real building, in what Ingarden called specific 'occasions of the concretization of the work' and Wolfgang Iser, 'specific "convergences" of buildings and beholders,' and which Jones names 'ritual-architectural events,' emphasising the ritualistic nature of our inhabiting of, and movement through, a place.[20] When Whitehead (who gets no mention in Jones's voluminous text) speaks of 'occasions of experience' we imagine he is speaking of some similar notion of experience.

Fundamental to Whitehead's conception of the world, then, is that it is a process, and thus constantly in the process of becoming actual. An event is, in a sense, a momentary arrest of that process, at least for the purposes of prehending it. A significant aspect of this enquiry into the nature of art sited within ecclesiastical spaces is precisely this play of spatial durations within the event of the art experience. Art so sited inevitably becomes a part of 'the complex of relatedness' that Whitehead associates with event, allowing for a shift in perspective from a discrete artwork and its context to an interrelated event.[21] But how can we possibly make sense of any scene set before us if we allow ourselves to think along Whitehead's lines? How does any kind of ordered perception emerge? One answer is through the interjection of a screen. We will come to

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[18] Jones. 2000a: 41 (emphasis in original)

[19] Ibid: 42

[20] Ibid: 43, 44

[21] Whitehead. 1967: 155

this shortly. Another way of thinking through Whitehead's concept of event, as the discernment of some specific character of experience in a certain place at a certain time, may be gleaned from a specific discursive aspect of contemporary art: the site-specific installation.

Installation Art

In many respects, the motivating factors behind installation art could be interpreted as a means of putting Whitehead's ideas into practice. Installation art begins with the intrinsic relatedness of objects to their environment in the production of a total space, presenting a series of objects that appear to belong together but without necessarily adding up to a satisfyingly complete hermeneutic whole, and refers to a form of art into which the viewer physically enters. Key typological indicators of this model are terms like theatricality, immersion and embodiment, with stress laid upon the experiential or phenomenological. Once on the margins of art production, installation art, sometimes but not always site-specific, has become central to the practices of the art world, notably mirroring a shift in the visibility of contemporary art more generally from periphery to centre. Increasingly museums and galleries have ceased to be exhibition spaces and sought to become total environments to be shaped by the work or works of art, in which, as Siedell puts it, 'an overarching idea is embodied throughout.'[22] More fundamentally, the gallery no longer sees itself as a repository of objects but has become 'a place to experience experience.'[23] Installation works with strategies of defamiliarisation, with new modes of cognition, perception and experience, directed towards a heightened sense of place in reciprocal dialogue with the objects and people who inhabit it. In a Bergsonian sense it signals an attempt to transform compartmentalised experience into something holistic, engaging the viewer on aural, spatial, visual, sensory and ambient levels (see appendix 3 for a fuller explication).

What the art gallery sets out to achieve, the cathedral does as a matter of course. It actuates a total immersive experience, the only difference being that generally speaking it doesn't call it art. No longer the cosmological didacticism of the cathedral as visual theology, but its ineluctable presence and influence upon the work of art, and vice versa,

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[22] Siedell. 2008: 101

[23] Goldberg. *Space as Praxis* (1975), cited in Oliveira et al. 1994: 29. This is not to suggest that the object itself disappears; quite the contrary. But the relationship between the object and the space has changed.

as a single object of encounter, in which the space between things is itself the medium of the work of art. Even accepting that the mythical neutrality of the gallery is no longer assumed, and the prevalence of the installation firmly established as an art practice, a cathedral is singularly environmental in its relation to the art object; whether it is inconspicuously absorbed or deemed conspicuously incongruous, it cannot help but be in some form of situated dialogue with it. Siedell believes that this gives theological substance to effective installations,

> if not in content, in form; that is, a created world in which every object and the space between them is connected to another. Installation art is the embodiment of an analogical worldview. It acknowledges that meaning is contingent and that it is contextual. Installation art regards each object as a part, a fragment, of the larger context.[24]

In *Re-enchantment* Boris Groys proposes that temples and churches are the antecedents of installation art, as an art not about individual objects but 'the sacralisation of a certain space,' that is, the distinction, albeit porous, between designated regions of space, whether secular or sacred.[25] Church art has always been a work of installation, even if it has not registered as art but as a devotional or liturgical object. As such, it points to an experience beyond the aesthetic, sometimes discounting the aesthetic entirely. The object is venerated not for itself, but for what it represents, as part of a larger spiritual investment. Nevertheless, if installation art exploits art's tendency to exceed its frame, to interrogate its borders, it is still constricted by certain accepted limitations. In a gallery or museum boundaries may be set by the parameters of the gallery space itself, or by a sanctioned space within the museum. Within a cathedral even an isolated painting or sculpture becomes a form of installation, *always already* eclipsing its bounds. And yet the rhetoric surrounding art in churches, and the practices of curating, installing and policing of art in churches, seems determined to resist any such idea.

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[24] Siedell. 2008: 101

[25] Elkins and Morgan. 2009: 164. Groys considers installation art to be an interesting medium 'because it has to do with the marking of a void space as an art space: everything that is inside the space automatically becomes art' (ibid.). He goes so far as to imply that installation effectively reverses the loss of aura predicted by Benjamin in an age of reproduction: 'Every object that goes inside the installation becomes an auratic object, an art object' (ibid: 165). Yet for Benjamin the loss of aura accompanies a loss of distance between art object and subject, precisely the strategy employed by the installation artist. If it still makes sense to speak of aura in relation to installation art (within ecclesiastical contexts) then perhaps we need to look elsewhere for an explanation.

Duration

If Whitehead's philosophy of context aims to expand spatial awareness, Henri Bergson's is directed far more to a re-examination of temporal and psychological experience. His principal observation is that the quantification of duration expressed, for instance, through our reliance upon chronological time, is inconsistent with the immediacy and variability of lived experience. It reveals, we could say, an incompatibility of our inner and outer worlds, the reduction of an intuitive, individualised sense of experience to an administered system for living. Duration, as Bergson defines it, slips beyond the constraints of quotidian time as we think we live it; it requires stepping outside the rigidity of our chronologically-determined existence, in favour of an awareness of a flow of time contrary to such seemingly 'natural' laws. An awareness of duration is an attention to other rhythms and speeds, of conscious experience that no longer relates in any absolutely direct way with the passing of time in the ticking of a clock. This is something with which we are already familiar. During those rapidly diminishing hours preceding an imminent deadline, or those interminably extended minutes of clockwatching, awaiting an arrival or commencement of something, at such times this other duration, so often hidden from sight, makes itself known. John Berger expresses this opposition of intensive and extensive temporal experience rather well in his own discussion of time as a process of 'accumulation' and 'dissipation':

> Despite clocks and the regular turning of the earth, time is experienced as passing at different rates. This impression is generally dismissed as subjective, because time, according to the nineteenth-century view, is objective, incontestable, and indifferent… […] Yet perhaps our experience should not be dismissed so quickly. Supposing one accepts the clocks; time does not slow down or accelerate. But time appears to pass at different rates because our experience of its passing involves not a single but two dynamic processes which are opposed to each other: as accumulation and dissipation. The deeper the experience of a moment, the greater the accumulation of experience. This is why the moment is lived as longer. The dissipation of time-flow is checked. The lived durée is not a question of length but of depth or density.[26]

In Berger's description, an accumulation or density of experience has a palpable effect upon the subjectively-felt dissipation of time. But other affects are also apparent. Within and throughout Bergson's own oeuvre his idea of duration undergoes a distinct change, from a sense of being entirely embedded within and specific to consciousness, to a sense

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[26] Berger. 1984: 35

of being immanent to the universe, a shift also evident in Berger's text. He too rehearses the movement from a notion of duration as subjective experience to duration as a law of nature:

> A natural equivalent to the periodic increase of the density of lived time can be found in those days of alternating sun and rain, in the spring or early summer, when plants grow, almost visibly, several millimetres or centimetres a day. These hours of spectacular growth and accumulation are incommensurate with the winter hours when the seed lies inert in the earth.[27]

Whitehead's organic philosophy of process, event and spatial context finds some degree of temporal equivalence in the theories of duration of his contemporary, Bergson. In Bergson the language of event is translated into a view of time as *durée*, meaning that which endures rather than passes. Duration, he says, is 'mutual penetration' or (perhaps rather more mechanistically) 'an interconnexion and organization of elements,' none of which may be entirely distinguished or isolated from the whole of which it forms a part.[28] Bergson uses the image of a melody to describe such mutual relations, which expresses both the lingering of the past in an experience of the present (an essential aspect of duration in which the past endures in the present through the function of memory) and the inseparability of the elements of duration. By enduring, past and present states are no longer set alongside each other, in a 'before' and 'after' but instead form an organic whole,

> as happens when we recall the notes of a tune, melting, so to speak, into one another. Might it not be said that, even if these notes succeed one another, yet we perceive them in one another, and that their totality may be compared to a living being whose parts, although distinct, permeate one another just because they are so closely connected?[29]

As Bergson explains in *Creative Evolution*, our tendency is to discriminate the flow of daily life into bounded fragments, from our time-tabled and clock-watching daily programme to our division of the year into definite seasons. Thus we project time into space and express duration in terms of extensity, a continuous line or chain of discrete instants or states, 'as if [each state] formed a block and were a separate whole.'[30] It does not take

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[27] Ibid.

[28] Bergson. 1910: 101

[29] Ibid: 100

[30] Bergson. 1998: 1

tremendous perspicacity to see that, although a sometimes useful way of organising experience, such isolations of experiential states are unviable. It supplies us with a sufficient way of negotiating daily existence, but cannot account for the temporal discrepancies of actual lived experience. Duration does not stop and start but rather flows without ceasing, albeit at differing velocities and intensities.[31] 'Pure' or 'real' duration is an intensive rather than extensive experience, 'nothing but a succession of qualitative changes, which melt into and permeate one another, without precise outlines, without any tendency to externalise themselves in relation to one another….'[32] It is rather like the difference between a chronologically-determined waking life and a dream-life of interpenetrating and intangible experience. In dreams we no longer measure duration, but feel it, and even in the waking state Bergson feels we should be able to be taught by daily experience to distinguish duration as *quality* rather than succumbing to its symbolic representation as *quantity*.[33] It is to perceive the ticking of the clock not as a succession of notes set out in time, but as in those half-slumbering moments when it achieves the quality of an almost rhythmical phrase, when each discrete sound blends with its neighbours and thereby produces not an awareness of passing time so much as an experience of duration as intensity – a qualitative moment.

Bergson's concept of *durée* is thus a lived time that bears little synchrony with chronological time, although it appears to be simultaneous with it. There are two ways of regarding this *durée* (which we may think of as two aspects of conscious life): beneath homogeneous duration – the reliance on a sense of time's linear flow measured in succeeding moments – we may perceive or distinguish a duration whose heterogeneous moments permeate one another; beneath a perception of life distinguished into discrete states, in terms of sensations and sensory awareness, lies an undefined, indefinite pool of states.[34] For Bergson this fundamental awareness of duration and of the self has disappeared beneath the demands of social life and the constraints of language. As social creatures we have a tendency to solidify impressions in order to express them in language, that is, to limit experience to the means of expression. Thus the fleeting and changeable nature of our impressions becomes fixed and static.[35] The difference

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[31] Ibid: 2

[32] Bergson. 1910: 104, 105

[33] Pearson and Mullarkey. 2002: 71

[34] Bergson. 1910: 128

[35] Pearson and Mullarkey. 2002: 73

between 'fluid inner states' and the 'solidified' form they attain through their exterior representation is symptomatic of the confusion between states of consciousness as truly experienced and states of consciousness as understood or represented, between experience and its expression. Perceptions, sensations, emotions, ideas are in essence confused, ever-changing and inexpressible, beyond language, existing within a qualitative time. But they are projected into a quantitative time, organised and clarified in order to be understood and communicated. In religious terms it is rather like the shift from a mystical view of God that eschews all attempts to render him knowable to a communicating and didactic faith which solidifies the inexpressible into something conceivable and familiar. Don Cupitt has suggested that in many ways Christianity's emphasis upon the presentation of God in the incarnation has overshadowed the mystery of his uncomprehendability, and therefore 'something light and dialectical [has been] turned into something leaden and clumsy.'[36] This is clearly at work throughout the Western history of Christian art, which has served a certain type of faith willing to solidify unknowns. By contrast Islamic and Judaic injunctions forbidding the depiction of deities and histories have perhaps, at least aesthetically, avoided such ossification, this translation of something organic and fluid into something rigid. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that the history of an anti-representational avant-garde, equally rigorous in its injunction against figuration, is so closely aligned with a cultural shift in which the art museum replaced the cathedral as a place of spiritual nourishment. Whether in the museum, gallery or cathedral, Bergson's awareness of the limitations of language has tremendous bearing on an experience of art, and on failed attempts to form representations of that experience, a failing endemic to much art writing, as art critic Matthew Collings habitually complains.[37] It is like allowing one's preconceptions and expectations to form one's experience of a work of art, rather than the actual encounter with the singular event.

Village Bells

A variation on this theme is envisaged by Alain Corbin. In *Village Bells* he contends that clock time is historically an usurpation of ecclesiastical time, measured in peals and

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[36] Cupitt. 1997: 37

[37] See, for example, this characteristic complaint: 'All art writing is maddening,' he bemoans, 'not because it is hard to understand, or fails to communicate to common people but because it's contemptuous of reality' (Collings. 2005: 27).

providing an 'auditory landscape' grafted to the imprecise rhythms of daily life (what Deleuze once described as 'monastic time').[38] In Corbin's study the church is already a defeated space in terms of durational experience through the loss, in a French post-revolutionary landscape, of the centrality of church bells to everyday experience:

> The rural peals of the nineteenth century, which have become for us the sound of another time, were *listened to*, and evaluated according to a system of affects that is now lost to us. They bear witness to a different relation to the world and to the sacred as well as to a different way of being inscribed in time and space, and of experiencing time and space. The reading of the auditory environment would then constitute one of the procedures involved in the construction of identities, both of individuals and of communities.[39]

The auditory landscape of the bells not only marked out an imprecise division of the day along ritualised lines, it also marked out an imprecise territory within the bounds of its audibility. Although Corbin describes these bounds as 'readily perceptible limits' in reality the bells must have delineated a relatively imprecise space and time whose profundity of meaning was felt as intensive rather than extensive by those for whom this sacred time seeped into everyday life. If, as Corbin argues, it anchored them within certain 'well-defined horizons,' it also served to blur the division of the sacred and secular parameters of those horizons.[40] The bells corresponded to 'a sacral recharging of the surrounding space,' thereby smearing the boundaries of sacred and profane, infusing vulgar life with the sacred (where reformers spoke rather of the bells infecting the secular with the sacred).[41] What Corbin describes as a desacralisation of space and time, in the name of a process of national secularisation, witnessed a demotion of the church from the centre to the margins of life. The replacement of the bell tower with the clock tower was viewed with distrust by members of the clergy, for whom the 'implacable regularity' of 'measured time' would inevitably lead to the 'desacralising' of the 'temporal architecture of life.'[42] Thus an act of socio-political expediency was concomitant with a certain impoverishment of sacral experience. Quantitative time had effectively replaced a qualitatively-inflected, affective time.

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[38] Corbin. 1994: xx; Deleuze 1997: 29

[39] Corbin. 1994: xix (emphasis in original)

[40] Ibid: 97

[41] Ibid: 98. In a somewhat neglected essay, *Vom Geheimnis des Glockenturms* (1954), Martin Heidegger attests to a comparable experience, relating the effect that the church bells of his youth had upon his sense of a coherent and meaningful world attuned to the sacred (Heidegger. 1983: 113-6).

[42] Corbin. 1994: 110

Environments

Clearly we are attempting to evoke, through the conceptual figures of duration and event, the conditions of possibility offered by an ecclesiastical encounter with the work of art, as a complex multiplicity of spatial and temporal experience. The danger is always that, even when the work in question is a site-specific installation, the work of art is divorced from its intrinsic relation to the whole, of which it is not simply a part but a continuum. Recontextualising Bergson, we can see that in a cathedral space we experience

> a thousand different elements which dissolve into and permeate one another without any precise outlines, without the least tendency to externalise themselves in relation to one another.[43]

The fact is, however, that we do outline them, mentally categorising and segregating each of these elements. Recognition is thereby prioritised over encounter, producing an externally-projected experience accountable to our habitual knowledge of the world but failing to accord with inner experience. This, for Bergson, is a distortion of experience, transforming a 'confused mass' of sensory information into 'a numerical multiplicity.' If at first an art object takes 'an indefinable colour from its surroundings,' by disembedding it from its context it becomes 'colourless, and ready to accept a name.'[44] When the work of art is itself colour and light, as Dan Flavin's permanent installation for Santa Maria in Chiesa Rossa, Milan (figure 11), is, this problem becomes attenuated by the fact that the very medium of the space is inseparable from the work.[45] For more bounded works it can be much more difficult to appreciate the thrust of Bergson's plea. The life of art lies in the way that its duration develops alongside and permeates the momentary and enduring durations that surround it, in the way it is coloured by its environment. By forcing a perceptual separation of work and space, Bergson's conclusion is that we lose sense of that life and colour.[46] Indeed, it may be that any attempt to isolate the elements of an event results in altering their very nature. To see each of the elements of a particular event as distinct, separate and determinable is to lose sight of its essential nature as a qualitative rather than quantitative multiplicity; a multiplicity of

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[43] Bergson. 1910: 132

[44] Ibid.

[45] This was one of Flavin's last installations before his death in 1996.

[46] Bergson. 1910: 133

interpenetrating and interactive durations. It suits the conventions of social life, of aesthetic appreciation, of categorisations of experience, to separate the passing viewer from the work of art, but it is a false expression of the experience of that moment.

In one sense, of course, it seems obvious to say that all things colour and affect, at least visually, everything else around them, and are themselves similarly affected. But where art is concerned this influence has been habitually derogated, hence the prevalence of the white cube gallery with its claim to offer the work of art a space in which to operate with absolute independence from any kind of background noise, seeking to create an environment that purports to isolate the work of art and honour it with a kind of autonomy of presence. Of course, such an approach to the presentation of art has been contested for some decades now, motivated above all by O'Doherty's critique of the white cube in the pages of *Artforum* in the 1970s, and many artists today deliberately make use of visually 'noisy' environments. There can be few places, however, where the challenge of this approach to art is so evident as an active cathedral space. This spurious isolation for art is entirely undermined when it is introduced into a cathedral, and casts suspicion on the whole notion of the autonomy of the work of art and the neutrality of the gallery space. For Simon Morley, writing on the uses of art within the church, this raises the intractable problem of art being ideologically coloured by its environment, but it is far more than that if we accept Whitehead's economy of event – the exchange inheres in every aspect of the art experience. We might go so far as to say that even when a work of art has gone it endures within that space in some sense, in memory or archival form, or even, for a time, in remnants of its former physical presence. Yet the instinct to mentally separate the artwork from its surroundings remains.

As we stated previously, in *Time and Free Will* Bergson sees duration as an entirely psychological phenomenon, a non-spatial and continuous multiplicity, denying that external things 'endure' because only consciousness allows us to identify changes. External reality, by contrast, is only spatial. Movement or succession, as an experience of time, can only be ascribed to consciousness. Only later does Bergson acknowledge the possibility that duration is immanent to all nature; that things endure in their own way. He argues that duration is key to understanding the creative character of evolution (an idea later echoed by Whitehead) and essential to an awareness of holistic life. In *Bergsonism* Deleuze argues that this dramatic shift in Bergson's thinking opened up a notion of duration as the 'variable essence of things': duration as ontology.[47] But within

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[47] Deleuze. 1991: 48-49

such an ontology can it be said that there are many durations or one single duration in which all things participate?[48] Deleuze believes that *Matter and Memory* is notable in Bergson's oeuvre for affirming a plurality of durations or, as Deleuze stresses, 'a plurality of *rhythms* of durations.'[49] We are vaguely aware, says Bergson, that within nature there are developments and changes far swifter or far slower than our inner states, that there are imperceptibly rapid vibrations and inconceivably laborious progressions within the physical world that do not accord with our own habitual sense of duration, based as it is on the assumption of 'an homogeneous and independent Time':

> In reality there is no one rhythm of duration; it is possible to imagine many different rhythms which, slower or faster, measure the degree of tension or relaxation of different kinds of consciousness and thereby fix their respective places in the scale of being.[50]

Essentially, what we find in Bergson is a duality, but not a polarity, of experience, as a continuum between the one and the many. Duration enables us to isolate certain aspects of a general scene, whilst still remaining aware of the 'whole' of which it forms a part – a duration within a manifold of durations or 'partial views of the whole,' to which our own inner consciousness belongs.[51] The double aspect of Bergson's philosophy, says Deleuze, is precisely this problematic of psychological duration and the movement of duration in things themselves, and requires a renewed assessment of space as something actively relating things and durations. So, rather than 'denaturing' duration, as his earlier work had implied, space is intimately implicated in duration:

> If things endure, or if there is duration in things, the question of space will need to be reassessed on new foundations. For space will no longer simply be a form of exteriority, a sort of screen that denatures duration, an impurity that comes to disturb the pure. A relative that is opposed to the absolute: Space itself will need to be based in things, in relations between things and between durations, to belong itself to the absolute, to have its own 'purity.'[52]

As Deleuze notes, in Bergson's early work nature was imagined as a screen upon which duration is projected as spatialised, disavowing all sense of duration as *durée*. Bergson's

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[48] Ibid.

[49] Ibid: 76 (emphasis in original)

[50] Bergson. 1991: 207

[51] Bergson. 1998: 31

[52] Deleuze. 1991: 49

task was to confound this spatialised view in order to debunk the clichés of time that separate us from intuitive experience. The notion of the screen may also be put to other uses more in keeping with his later conclusions and offering a direct correspondence with Whitehead's ideas. Staying with Deleuze's terms, sometimes a screen intervenes between chaotic multiplicity (the Many) like 'a formless, elastic membrane,' or as he says elsewhere, like 'a sieve stretched over the chaos,' in order to allow something (the One) to issue from that chaos, giving consistency to chaos.[53] This consistency is what Bergson describes as a duration within a manifold of durations, or what we could call the Whiteheadian event, or even, drawing us back to our specific subject, the work of art.

This contrast of a continuity of states and a sense of isolated fragments of experience discloses a remarkable congruence of thought between Bergson and Whitehead. For the latter, whilst each event endures it is also always caught up in the ineffable flux and flow of ceaseless change. For the former, the apparent discontinuity of our psychical life is due to our attention being fixed on a series of separate acts. However, though they appear discontinuous in fact they stand out against the continuity of a background to which they belong and to which they owe the intervals that separate them.[54] Works of art in an environment may impress themselves upon our awareness or perception like 'the beats of the drum which break forth here and there in the symphony.'[55] Yet they are nonetheless a part of the whole which is the entire symphony, which is itself a part of the fluid whole of the setting within which the symphony is experienced. Framed paintings, as windows onto another world, or rather out of the world in which they appear, manage to create a far greater illusion of autonomous existence, their frame a kind of barrier isolating them from the space beyond their borders (although seepage from the outside cannot be entirely prevented). Sculpture sits more surely within its environment while installations can become so integrated that no real separation of work and space is possible, or even desirable. Thus, if our attention is fixated on 'the beats of the drum' it is because they catch our interest, but it would be better to think of them as concentrated elements of the whole, having a stronger presence, or more demanding of attention, rather than as isolated moments. If we give distinct outlines to objects in space, separating them as discrete elements from their background, we cannot isolate them so without also recognising their congruence

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[53] Deleuze. 1993: 76; Deleuze and Guattari. 1994: 43.

[54] Bergson. 1998: 3

[55] Ibid.

(Whitehead) or correspondence (Bergson) with their context. There is, in our apprehension of such things, a constant conflict between immediate experience and a mechanistic instinct, such that this process of unfolding duration tends not to be perceived, except at exceptional moments when our mechanistic sense of the world is temporarily overturned or stalled by immediate experience.

Contemporaneousness

A final concept from Whitehead gathers many of these ideas together. In *Nature and Life,* as a means of describing the process of appropriating a complex array of data (an event) into a unity of organic existence, Whitehead introduces the term 'contemporaneousness.'[56] In nature, he says, we are constantly witness to states of congruity. Life is predicated upon relations and dependencies rather than being isolable into discrete and autonomous units. The essential interrelatedness of the natural world in its self-sufficiency contrasts the administered realm of human culture where the tendency is to erect boundaries and thresholds, to delineate and categorise into autonomous objects or practices. The synchrony of the former as opposed to the organisation of the latter is what Whitehead infers by 'contemporaneousness.' But what happens if we apply this organic vision of nature to the life of culture, specifically the world of art? Contemporary art gains a very different sense if one defines it according to a schema of 'contemporaneousness.' Generally understood as an art contemporaneous with an evolving process of cultural development, an art created by living artists, relevant to and in discourse with its time of production and reception, the definition of art as contemporary attains a new significance as being contemporaneous with an immediate occasion of experience. Such a redefinition sets it beside its internal status as being 'of its age' (in use of technology, means of production, content, etc), and its external status as 'of its time' (according to the culture from which it emerges, its place within a modern discourse, and so on) and becomes more intimately expressed as being essentially 'of the moment' or 'of the event,' as immediate experience. It takes art out of its epoch and places it into its time of experience – the art-event becomes contemporary experience.

In one sense, it could be argued that this is merely another rerun of Barthes' long-debated 'death of the author' scenario by which artistic meaning is entirely invested in its reception, and thus inherently indebted to each individual experience of the work.

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[56] Whitehead. 1934: 58

In another, we could say that this has become a 'given' for art today, so much of which is built upon the necessity for active response and participation from its audience. However, this would be to miss the significance of this term, 'contemporaneousness,' as understood by Whitehead. In evoking Whitehead's use of the term a number of elements become intrinsic to the art experience: (a) the topology of the site ceases to be simply a matter of context, becoming instead place as a conduit for experience, incorporating properties of space and time as an aggregate of events and durations; (b) the temporality at work in the viewer exceeds their own embodied consciousness to include the inherent durations of their surroundings; (c) the event of the work itself may be read as the withness or gathering (of the 'con') of temporal durations, as the energy or manifestation of durations, and as a singularity extracted from a multiplicity of information. Taking all of these factors into account we must concur with Lindsay Jones's proposal, in his study of the hermeneutics of sacred architecture, that '[t]he meaning of a building...must always be a meaning for some specific one at some specific time in some specific place.'[57] This is again why buildings must be perceived as events rather than as objects, since

> If all experiences of architecture are incomplete and impermanent...we must attend not only to the variabilities of different people's experiences, but also to the diverse experiences of individuals at different moments – or in the context of different architectural events – as they move through and around a single architectural configuration.[58]

This diversity of spatial experience leads us to a third contextual condition of possibility for art in ecclesiastical spaces as we turn, finally, to one of Walter Benjamin's literary snapshots or *Denkbilder*, in which the concept of porosity takes precedence.

Porosity

As a child in Berlin Walter Benjamin was enchanted by an Imperial Panorama to which he was regularly and irresistibly drawn. Transfixed at his station, as he peered through a little window he observed each changing scene passing before his eyes as, with the ringing of a little bell, 'each picture moved off with a jolt, in order to make way for an empty space and then for the next image.'[59] When many years later he strove to capture an image of Naples in a series of scenes, what resulted was not a panorama of still

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[57] Jones. 2000a: 41

[58] Ibid: 120

[59] Benjamin. 2002: 347

snapshots like his childhood haunt but rather a description of Naples as a tale of durations and flows, of interpenetrating qualities and moments, in which the author himself was caught up, expressing something of the delight of those childhood occasions spent before the panorama's shifting scenes. If the panorama offers an allegory of space and time as 'a sort of screen that denatures duration,' crudely akin to the segregation of experience into isolable fragments interrogated by Bergson, Benjamin's Neapolitan account is conveyed as an experience of porosity. As Gilloch explains, in Benjamin's text porosity

> refers to a lack of clear boundaries between phenomena, a permeation of one thing by another, a merger of, for example, old and new, public and private, sacred and profane…. [Porosity] highlights the notions of dislocation and disorientation within the urban environment. It further suggests the transience and instability of architectural and social forms, the interpenetration of modern and archaic, interior and exterior. Porosity points to the significance of what is hidden; what is concealed is the key to the interpretation of the urban setting. […] Lastly, porosity points to the relationship between architecture and action, and in particular the indeterminate, improvised character of everyday life as dramatic performance.[60]

In Benjamin's hands *Naples* is a tale of passages between places and between what we might call densities of experience, in which porosity is posited as the uniquely defining feature of the spatial, temporal and social organisation of Naples, its organic condition of possibility. It seems to directly describe actual experience, from the staircases that appear and disappear, confusing, or rather blending, inside and outside, to the simple movement between the street exterior and the church interior, to the indistinct separation of domestic and public spaces. Nor is this porosity limited to the spatial but is clearly temporal and social too, achieved, as Caygill notes, through transitivity, transformation, discontinuity and improvisation.[61] Architecture, that most solid and immutable of things, is seen here as a 'theatre' of the always new, the always unforeseen, in the patterns or 'constellations' it forms with the elements of life that flow through it.[62] Orientation is not bound to anything as structured or systematic as door numbers but is instead guided by the chaotic and random distribution of landmarks, often obscure or hidden from sight. No guidebook can aid you here, Benjamin rather mockingly laments, only local knowledge and a sense of orientation itself indebted to the porosity of the city. Unlike

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[60] Gilloch. 1996: 25

[61] Caygill. 1998

[62] Benjamin. 1996b: 416

the orderly striation of the modern metropolis, passage through this city is thus imbued with surprise, uncertainty, adventure, insecurity; reduced to chance encounters and passages across unexpected thresholds. Transition from the dirty and noisy streets to the cool, isolated tranquillity of a 'whitewashed church interior' is achieved with a single step through a dark doorway or past a curtain, the church itself virtually inseparable from its secular neighbours.[63] Not only laterally but vertically, Naples speaks porosity to its very foundations. Adding to the natural spongy porosity of the volcanic rock itself Benjamin speaks of fractures, joints, cavities and vugs: doors in the rock face, cellars, sleeping places and storehouses, taverns in natural grottoes from which 'dim light and thin music' seep out.[64] And even below the sea level this porosity continues into the catacombs beneath the city.

Neither the panoramic nor the panoptic view is inscribed within this Neapolitan experience but rather the partial and permeable, where recognisability and representation cede to unanticipated encounter, experienced as 'a complex of passing events.'[65] Not Benjamin's words, but Whitehead's. As an assemblage of seamlessly interwoven fragments, *Naples* is an attempt to convey the complex event that is the Naples witnessed by Benjamin: event as the discernment of a specific place through a certain period of time, an enduring record, to further utilise Whitehead's vocabulary, of an experience that itself had a certain 'endurance.' What descriptively appears through the screen of the text is a distillation of these differing intensities and durations into a picture of Naples in all its vivacity, diversity and unpredictability read through this one concentrated image of porosity as 'the inexhaustible law of life in this city, reappearing everywhere.'[66] In this assemblage moments endure and thereby permeate other moments; one event lingers into another. Such evocations of permeation discourage the temptation to place one state materially beside another, one object spatially alongside its neighbour, one episode temporally in succession with another, like a series of snapshots in which the ephemeral is frozen and preserved. This is simply an inadequate way of ascribing understanding to actual experience. Above all, it bears little relation to the picture of Naples evoked by Benjamin's account. To evoke Whitehead once again, the event of Naples is what it is

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[63] Ibid.

[64] Ibid: 417

[65] Whitehead. 1964: 166

[66] Benjamin. 1996b: 417

precisely 'by reason of the unification in itself of a multiplicity of relationships.'[67] These relationships arise through the meanderings of Benjamin's observant eye through the streets of Naples, gathered into the textual document that is *Naples*, which acts as a kind of filter for experience; if elements of the actual moment are thereby edited out or diminished, what remains is a denser, rarefied record. This too, according to Deleuze, may be considered an act or event of porosity. In *The Fold* he poses the question, 'What are the conditions that make an event possible?' The answer he gives seems as applicable to the ideas of Whitehead and Bergson as it does to Benjamin's narrative: 'Events are produced in a chaos, in a chaotic multiplicity, but only under the condition that a sort of screen intervenes.'[68] Out of the chaos of sensory experience a certain singularity emerges, through a screen that sifts a multiplicity of 'compossibles' to produce a denser, more concentrated moment of experience.[69] Various names may be applied to this moment: in Deleuze's terminology we may speak of a consistency, albeit impermanent, or an actualisation of virtual possibilities, or a singularisation; with both Whitehead and Bergson in mind we might describe it as a distillation of chaotic multiplicity into a discrete event. It results in a kind of capture or slowing down, an organisation of the 'chaotic multiplicity,' giving it consistency, making it productive. At best, what results may be a moment of encounter; at worst, it may solidify into a form of representation. Perhaps we can make this abstraction more concrete. Another name for this moment is the work of art.

Spatial practices

Before we turn to actual examples a variation on this theme may be gleaned from another city wanderer. In his book on practices of everyday living, in which he describes strategies or 'spatial trajectories' of movement through a city, Michel de Certeau echoes many of the sensations evinced in Benjamin's text. He describes a sense of movement through a city as diversions, deviations, digressions or divagations from the 'proper' or 'normative' meaning of the urban space, creating 'a space of enunciation,' that is, a language of walking that gives voice to a city, or one's experience of that city, in which diverse episodes are threaded into some kind of personal narrative.[70] Whether in New

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[67] Whitehead. 1967: 155

[68] Deleuze. 1993: 76

[69] Ibid.

[70] Certeau. 1984: 98

York or Naples the pedestrian does not merely follow arterial lines of flow but cuts across such stratifications, revealing the (sometimes hidden) capillaries of a city, where immersive participation coincides with partial views, localities and unanticipated encounters. A recognisable urban topography based on maps, guidebooks and distinguished landmarks is abandoned to the marginalised, non-normative and unanticipated meaning produced by the *Wandersmänner*, for whom slipping into the current of the city becomes a veritable 'plunge into real duration.'[71] Translating Benjamin's and Certeau's predominantly exterior experience to the interior we can again see how buildings may be perceived as events rather than as objects. As Jones reminds us, the experience of architecture is 'uniquely dynamic' for the simple reason that it is not something one looks at but rather something one enters and moves around in.[72] The mode of apprehension is necessarily temporal and haptic, and thus, to a great extent, 'partial, fleeting, and idiosyncratic.'[73] Jones's reading of architecture, applied above all to sacred spaces, seems to reflect rather well transit through a cathedral as an experience of porosity if, as Benjamin argues, porosity exists where 'building and action interpenetrate,' becoming 'a theater of new, unforeseen constellations.'[74]

Such temporal and spatial porosity is not always the case. We should not fall into the trap of thinking that Benjamin's exuberant description of Naples is relevant to many another city or place. While porosity may be, for Benjamin, the central principle of Naples, in its sights, sounds and activities, what becomes apparent in his narratives of other cities is the particular idiosyncrasy of their character, where other 'laws of life' prevail. In another of Benjamin's *Denkbilder* a sense of a more bounded religiosity is preserved, more akin perhaps to our expectations of ecclesiastical spaces. Benjamin describes how, in his childhood visits to his grandmother's house in Berlin, he would invariably gravitate towards the loggia of the house, from where the sounds of the street would drowsily penetrate, the workers outside working with a certain Sunday 'insouciance':

> Sunday – which the other rooms, as though worn out, could never quite retain, for it seeped right through them – Sunday was contained by the loggia alone, which looked out onto the courtyard, with its rails for hanging carpets, and out

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[71] Pearson and Mullarkey. 2002: 266

[72] Jones. 2000a: 118

[73] Ibid: 120

[74] Benjamin. 1996b: 416

onto the other loggias; and no vibration of the burden of bells, with which the Church of the Twelve Apostles and St. Matthew's would load it, ever slipped off, but all remained stored up in it till evening.[75]

In this case, while Sunday 'seeped' out of the rest of the house, it permeated the loggia and imbued it with its insistent presence. Porosity is evidently not 'the inexhaustible law of life' here but subject to distinct limits where the sacred and mundane are allotted their proper place, the sacred having only a tenuous hold upon the secular world. Likewise, in translating our discussion from Southern Italy to the English cathedral similar differences become apparent. A cathedral too expresses, or perhaps contains within itself, something of these contradictory densities or compossibles, 'of change in the midst of duration, of time as both flowing and persisting, of recurrence in continuity…' as Mann says of his protagonist's sanitorium experience.[76] Though Mann uses duration here in a manner rather differently to Bergson one can understand the difference being expressed. Cathedrals in the modern world are often pictured as being 'at the still point of the turning world,'[77] which can imply a certain sedentariness as well as a sense of stillness (we could use the word 'awe') appropriate to their architecture, history and atmosphere. What may be missing in such descriptions is that sense of movement in stillness that Whitehead and Bergson both ascribe to duration, of the flowing and persisting of time within the Whiteheadian event. Recognising, or being open to, this play between dense and rarefied intensities can be the cathedral experience *par excellence*. Ecclesiastical spaces both blend and juxtapose past and present, sacred and secular, tradition and innovation, in transformative and transitive ways. This may be where passages between art and church, between the contemporary and historical, between sacred and secular, may be thought, opening up new avenues of experience: through densities, seepage and flow.

In chapter 4 we will consider the centrality of a discourse of sacred and profane that is inevitably ascribed to ecclesiastical spaces, and note that the topological figures often used to describe them emphasise distinct demarcations of sacred space and sacred time. And yet, as Bergson says of our experience of duration, we do not live and move within such strictly segregated environments. Our experience is characterised by temporal discrepancies, by permeations and indistinct edges. Only through a modern need to compartmentalise and organise, perhaps in the face of the bewildering array of

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[75] Benjamin. 2002: 371.

[76] Mann. 1999: 23

[77] Eliot. 1944: 17

external influences, the aural and visual clutter of modern life, do we subject actual experience to filtering mechanisms. Such filtering rarely produces a distillation but rather a dissipation of experience. This is a second way in which a screen intervenes, in the production of a rather different type of consistency, as a denial or closing down of experience into the comfortably familiar and commonplace, the ordinary stuff of life, hardly worth analysis.[78] And yet it is the lack of attention to the ordinary and quotidian that for Whitehead, Bergson and Benjamin results in an impoverishment of experience. Life is subject to constant change. Indeed, it is nothing but change, says Bergson, operating according to differing flows, intensities and concentrations, dissolving apparently discrete, fragmentary states. To think of experience as something imbued with multiplicities of intensity and movement, that life irradiates experience in a way that cannot be easily delineated or defined, is to echo something of Benjamin's use of porosity to describe his impressions of Naples. For to speak of porosity is to discredit any notion of solidity or stability, and rather to think in terms of flow between permeable states.

What, then, of our context? What porosity, what mood, colours our experience of ecclesiastical environments? What densities do we encounter? What seepage occurs between sacred and secular worlds, between the present and the past; what capillaries of flow and exchange? What are the non-porous limits of this movement where no exchange is possible? Such are the questions that art, or certain kinds of art, may seek to address in an ecclesiastical space. What emerges from our divagations, then, is a sense of the ambience and transience of mood, peculiar to each place and moment, not only in the subjective sense of what they provoke in us, but in an attentiveness to the change that underlies permanence. It allows us to describe the singularity, each and every time, of encounters with a work of art, even a work of art that has had many previous incarnations. That acknowledgement of singularity is the bulwark against its descent into clichéd recognisability; it awakens an awareness that the art world and the church all too frequently fail to recognise or respect the favourable conditions for encounter. But when they do the results can be extraordinary.

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[78] In this scenario a screen becomes an expedient means of filtering out experience, where the immediate data of experience are smothered by their codification into recognisably representative language. As a kind of feedback to Deleuze's earlier explication of the screen Deleuze and Guattari describe how the screen that filters experience becomes clogged with conventions and opinions such that the passage of small amounts of productive chaos becomes blocked. The role of the artist is to pierce the screen and thereby allow the chaos to flow (Deleuze and Guattari. 1994: 203). This is no isolated task but requires constant intervention. There is a constant need for dehiscence, for other artists to make other slits, to frame other visions and announce other possibilities (ibid: 204).

Immersive fields

Both Viola's *The Messenger* at Durham (1996) (figure 8) and Gormley's *Field for the British Isles* at Salisbury (1999) (figure 12) and Gloucester (2004), in different ways exemplified the possibilities elicited by the condition of spatial and temporal porosity, even if the former became something of a *cause celèbre* due to the very difficulties provoked by its problematic pervasiveness. Each explored the diffusion of differing densities and durations; each appeared as an irruption of the contemporary in a venerable setting; each exemplified in explicit ways a quality or condition that we are arguing applies implicitly to any and every work of contemporary art in a church or cathedral.

In the case of *Field*, the *longue durée* of the cathedral encountered the ephemeral, indistinct and vulnerable forms of Gormley's clay figures. At Salisbury, and later at Gloucester, it formed a very physical relationship with its sacred surroundings, inviting the illusion that the work was a part of the fabric of the building, as ecclesiastical sculpture so often is (even the colour of the work blended perfectly with the warm greys and browns of the stonework). *Field* both breaks and upholds this tradition. It is true to its sense of enclosure and containment (and thus ideally suited to its setting in the cloisters, literally an enclosed or confined space), but it also invites an imaginative unboundedness on the part of the viewer. It seems pervasive, able to saturate every corner of its environment. Being both contained by, and speculatively spilling out of, its location within the gallery of the cloisters, *Field* straddled the space between a certain density of duration in its containment, and a lighter, more fluid sense of its ability to move beyond its set boundaries as if, given a break in the wall, it would continue to spill out into its surrounding environment. Though in a sense it is site-general, able to inhabit any number of different spaces, it becomes site-specific with each incarnation, moulding itself to the contours of each new environment, such that, as Gormley has said of *Field*, 'placeness' becomes more significant than 'objectness.'[79] Thus it alters our perception of the space, its invasive spread en masse contrasting oddly with the diminutive scale of each individual figure, unnervingly returning the viewer's gaze.

The permeation of place that *Field* physically exemplified in Salisbury and Gloucester was evident in more intangible ways in Durham, where in 1996 Bill Viola showed a video work commissioned especially for the cathedral. What could be more

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[79] Gormley. 1994: 61

porous than a work of light and sound? Yet, here too we were presented with a situation of both porosity and its containment, in a more reactionary sense. By its nature as a medium of light, video suffuses the surrounding darkness, escaping the spatial limitations of its frame, and as a medium of sound its presence seeps into its environment. Thus it engages with both the space and the viewer holistically, operating, as Viola describes it, as an 'immersive field' of light and sound.[80] The cathedral's acoustics were a significant aspect of this immersion. In his review of *The Messenger* at Durham Cathedral Paul Usherwood spoke of 'the mysterious way sound weaves around the vast stony chamber,' which, he suggested, enhances 'its solemn, sacramental character.'[81] Viola would undoubtedly concur with Usherwood's sensitivity to the mutually-conducive relationship of sound and the sacred. Viola's own fascination for ecclesiastical spaces is, he admits, due as much to their aural as to their visual qualities, something he particularly associates with a feeling of the ineffable:

> To the European mind the reverberant characteristics of the interior of the Gothic cathedral are inextricably linked with a deep sense of the sacred and tend to evoke strong associations with both the internal private space of contemplation and the larger realm of the ineffable.[82]

Viola believes that a misguided over-emphasis on the *visual* arts has distracted us from a notion of art as 'a whole-body, physical experience,' in which sound plays a particularly important role, able to go round corners, through walls, and even to penetrate the body.[83] Against the richness and mystery of sound, amplified by 'the enormous resonant stone halls of the medieval cathedrals,' visual stimuli may seem crude by comparison.[84] In his own work, therefore, he maintains that 'the visual is always subservient to the *field*, the total system of perception/cognition at work,' expanding sensory experience to the realm of the whole body.[85] Such a holistic vision seems very much in keeping with our

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[80] Zutter. 1993: 40

[81] Usherwood. 1996: 26

[82] Viola. 1994: 154

[83] Ibid: 263, 241

[84] Ibid: 241

[85] Ibid: 268 (emphasis in original). Viola is not alone in these views. Practitioners like Robert Irwin describe the perceptual experience of installation art as a way of converting seeing into feeling, or rather, seeing *as* feeling, while Bruce Nauman expresses a sense of seeing as hearing, aware of the fact that space is perceived as much through the ears as through the eyes (Bishop. 2005: 57, 69).

argument for the immersive conditions for art in ecclesiastical spaces, as conceived through the categories of event, duration and porosity.

However, in the Durham installation other forces were also at work. Whilst escaping light and unbounded sound played throughout the space of the nave, the work itself was visually constricted by screens that had been erected following the controversy over the nudity of the male figure. This unsatisfactory response to what was effectively a representation of bare life in all its humanity, simplicity and vulnerability was at least preferable to the results of a similar situation over concerns about male nudity that played out at Lincoln Cathedral a few years earlier. In that prior controversy the work in question, Leonard McComb's *Portrait of Young Man Standing* (figure 13), had been removed altogether.[86] At Durham the solution chosen had unforeseen consequences. If the diffusion of the work was inhibited by the screens, thereby disrupting its conception as a work whose presence would permeate the nave, at the same time it encouraged what we could call a shift in degrees of attention and experiential intensities. Once again one's experience of art and cathedral was of a play of densities negotiated by the border limits of a screen, which both filtered out the controversial image yet could not altogether frame in any bounded way the light and sound that emanated from its hidden recesses. The opacity of the screens was constantly compromised by the degree of seepage that slipped through. The area behind the screens, meanwhile, assumed the role of a chapel, a semi-private space within a public one, the intimate touching upon the communal. Though the rest of the cathedral bustled with visitors, noise and activity, within the sanctuary of the screens all was quiet, restrained and contemplative.

What are we to make of the controversy and its unfortunate and unforeseen consequences? Theologian, David Jasper, was deeply involved with the commission. His summation of the incident with the screens reiterates some of the arguments raised in this chapter (and hints at other arguments yet to come). However justifiable the concerns over the moral scandal constituted by the nudity of the figure, Jasper's over-riding sense is that the use of screens meant that the church had effectively 'imposed its authority and limits upon the artist' and moreover upon a work created specifically for that space and within a particular contextual understanding of its role within the space:

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[86] Some twenty years later it has been rehabilitated, included in an extensive exhibition of sculpture at Gloucester Cathedral without appearing to rouse the least objection (figure 14). McComb's golden figure was initially one of the works in an exhibition of contemporary art in Lincoln Cathedral in 1990. Its removal was later described by Andrew Lambirth as a serious case of mishandling on the part of the cathedral authorities, a squeamish lack of nerve tantamount to control or censorship (Ratuszniak and Webb. 1999: 25-6).

> Viola, it seemed to me, had never intended people simply to see and hear *The Messenger* as such. Rather, it was intended to be seen as part of and in the context of the whole cathedral: a messenger or angel (which is the same thing) from beyond time and space, never to be fully understood or its message articulated. That was the point, perhaps – that its message was a mystery, reminding us that not just Viola's installation, but also the cathedral and the gospel for whose proclamation it was built are scandals and stumbling-blocks, as was Christ himself, according to St. Paul.[87]

The moral scandal ought, then, to pale into insignificance beside the theological scandal of the Christian faith. The artistic scandal, meanwhile, stands as a reminder of what is at stake in commissions of this kind. As Jasper asks himself elsewhere, 'what are the consequences for a society and a culture which puts screens around angels? What are we doing?'[88]

The Messenger drew attention to the fact that porosity can be a problematic issue for cathedrals. In such circumstances it becomes a kind of contaminant, a prospect which, as we will see in a later chapter, has significance for conceptions of the sacred and the legitimacy of art. As indicated earlier, some years later *The Messenger* reappeared in St. Paul's Cathedral free of any kind of prohibitive screening (figure 15). It is interesting to note, however, that one of the stipulations of St. Paul's Cathedral's relatively new arts policy states that 'intangible works' based on sound or light, or both, 'must have identifiable boundaries.'[89] One cannot help but wonder how such boundaries will be managed and, more pertinently, why it is felt to be imperative that they should be. What we see in the example of *The Messenger* is a challenge to this prescription of boundedness long before it was officially codified.

Zones

Ecclesiastical architecture, it should not be forgotten, has long utilised the efficacy of the screen in its distribution of what we could call zoned spaces. The church presents a continuum from busy to uncluttered spaces, from areas of intense activity to areas of quiet repose, from open and public to hidden and private spaces. Often the experiential division of spaces is achieved with physical partitions, the iconostasis in orthodox churches, for example, a screen denoting the limits of public participation. Such screens

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[87] Jasper. 2004: 194

[88] Hall and Jasper. 2003: 9

[89] The burgeoning issue of arts policies for cathedrals will be tackled more fully in the conclusion.

do not exclude so much as delineate the congregation from the priesthood, marking the degrees of participation in sacred rites. Nathan Coley explored these ideas a few years ago when invited to produce a work of art for Portsmouth Cathedral (figure 16). He built a free-standing, portable architectural space within the nave, based on the principle of the tabernacle as a moveable sanctuary, using large black panels. The panels could be reconfigured to create temporary spaces, demarcating zonal areas that, in the words of Gavin Wade, 'represent a rupture in the Cathedral's architectonics,' yet without strictly separating inside from outside, remaining sensitive to the existing structure of the nave.[90] It is difficult to gauge the efficacy of Coley's experiments, conducted in the name of art as much as for the sake of the worshipping community, but they have the virtue of drawing our attention to spatial practices germane to both the church and the contemporary art world.

In *The Present Tense of Space* Robert Morris (himself no stranger to ecclesiastical commissions) speaks of 'focused zones of space' in which the spaces for art are prioritised, as distinct from and qualitatively different to any objects they might contain.[91] Morris's attention to the discernment of spatial variance is echoed in the work of Richard Giles on the reordering of liturgical spaces.[92] The cathedral works as a series of partially open structures. One does not move from one room to another but rather from one space into another or, as Giles has argued, from one zone to another, each imbued with differentially charged intensities, and each acting as alternate zones of activity. Cathedrals are particularly alive to this sense of spatial difference, organised as they are around the intersection and differentiation of space. Indeed, what is striking about a cathedral like Durham's or Gloucester's is not so much the dramatic architectural organisation of its material structure but the spaces that structure contains: not only main thoroughfares and places of gathering but also capillaries, junctions, caverns, cul-de-sacs, passages, galleries, arcades, crypts, and balconies. The cathedral's sacred topography operates according to 'nodal points' and 'axes of meaning,' and the pathways that join them.[93] Sitting in the nave one is aware of all these topographies at work, evoked as much by their names as by their particular qualities, as Susan Hill's synoptic description of her experience of cathedrals discloses:

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[90] Ward. 2003: 21

[91] Morris. 1993: 175

[92] Giles. 2004

[93] Crossley. 2009: 165

> Arches. Dim corners. Cool shadows. Space. The nave. The chancel. The side aisles. The transept. The choir. The presbytery. Somewhere below, the chapterhouse. Rood screen. Clerestory. Cloisters. Strange words.[94]

On this theme a notable essay by John Renard utilises architectural perspectives (elevations, plans and sections) to consider the way we experience religious buildings and usefully illustrates many of the palpable variations of movement they enable.[95] Renard also offers a topology of zones to describe the various kinds of activity that typify a religious space. A rich architectural vocabulary of foyers, enclosures, vestibules, courtyards, of entrances and exits, of inner and outer, of open and enclosed spaces adds to the particular zonal possibilities of movement and experience, whether 'linear or cyclic, centripetal or centrifugal, longitudinal or transverse,' whether horizontal or vertical, between gallery and crypt for example:

> Some religious buildings, such as primary places of worship, shrines, or tombs, incorporate a space designed for circumambulation. Some appear, through their use of long aisles or axial naves, to make special provision for a linear processional ritual. Others provide for non-directional movement such as dance or such preliminary non-ritual motion as needed for a congregation to gather, for example, into rows or circles or clusters where they will then perform further ritual gestures in place.[96]

Religious architecture, he states, functions on at least three levels: the communitarian, the didactic, and the experiential. If the first relates to historical context, ritual and a structure that fosters community, and the second the role of a building's explicit symbolism, the third refers to continuums between its formal characteristics and its experiential function: stark and uncluttered spaces that induce a mood of repose and quiet; subsidiary spaces, side-altars and chapels that prompt a feeling of intense activity and high energy; hidden and private spaces cheek-by-jowl with open and public areas; the orthodox use of screens separating or partitioning without enclosing spaces, creating a differentiation of sacred action and congregational participation, suggesting degrees of participation; interiority to exteriority, and so on.[97]

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[94] Hill in Platten and Lewis. 1998: 1

[95] Renard. 1996

[96] Ibid: 112

[97] Ibid: 114, 119

Zones are not only spatial, but temporal too. Clearly a sense of duration prevails since such buildings cannot be experienced 'imagistically,' that is, as a static whole, but only 'behaviourally,' through time, as Morris's concept of 'presentness' attempts to convey (see appendix 3).[98] Such buildings encourage, as Morris puts it, a considerably less passive, more attentive, behavioural response than everyday architectural spaces.[99] The way that a quiet chapel can slow time down, accompanied for some with a moment of prayer or contemplation, must be familiar to many. I once attended an early morning eucharist at Salisbury Cathedral. The unfamiliar environment coupled with an unaccustomed liturgical format, and augmented by the early hour, lent a curiously timeless quality to the occasion. More often than not these private cathedral moments occur outside the normal hours of worship. According to Hill they seem to exist within a perpetual 11 o'clock in the morning, an odd observation that accords a peculiar quality of timelessness to these places.[100]

In *The Practice of Everyday Life* Michel de Certeau draws together these spatial and temporal considerations in his identification of the differences of places and spaces, which surely characterises the porosity of cathedral environments. In a place, he suggests, elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence, each with its own 'proper' and distinct location. 'It implies an indication of stability' and is inherently spatial.[101] A space, on the other hand, is essentially temporal, refuting the limitations of the physical environment:

> A *space* exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables. Thus space is composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it. Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities. […] In short, *space is a practiced place*.[102]

Cathedrals bear witness to the play, in this sense, between place and space. Place is the various elements that form our Whiteheadian event – the river, the bridge, the embankment, Cleopatra's Needle – but space is the durations they occupy, the event that they form. The cathedral in the modern world shares this sense of the porosity of spaces

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[98] Morris. 1993: 194

[99] Ibid: 193

[100] Hill in Platten and Lewis. 1998: 7

[101] Certeau. 1984: 117

[102] Ibid. (emphasis in original)

within places (what Jones calls the ritual-architectural event). One moves through its arcades and galleries, sometimes enclosed, sequestered within the sacralised atmosphere of its interior, sometimes open, crossing the threshold of inside-outside as one moves into the open air galleries of its cloisters. In such a place one is also acutely aware of the past seeping into the present, as Benjamin describes so well when reminiscing on his Berlin childhood. As he observes, straddling changes in concentration between phases (temporal) and places (spatial) may draw us 'unexpectedly into the cool sepulcher of the past,' from where the present becomes but a distant echo.[103] But the ambiguities of the present are equally evident. Above all else one cannot forget that a cathedral borders upon an encounter with the modern world around it; in this play between place and space the porosity of sacred and profane, religious and secular, becomes its defining characteristic, as Mircea Eliade has stressed in his emphasis on the qualitative differences and discontinuities of space.

When art enters such places it carries with it the potential to create a space, in Certeau's terms, but does not necessarily or automatically do so. As urban planning produces a street, an urban place, walkers transform it into a space; as ecclesiastical commissions provide a place for works of art, temporarily or permanently, so that art becomes involved in the creation of that space. Thus Jeff Kelley talks of 'an emerging consciousness of the thresholds at which the sites of art become the arts of place.'[104] The use of the word 'place' in Kelley's terms is comparable to Certeau's use of the word 'space' in his. 'From this point of view,' says Certeau, 'there are as many spaces as there are distinct spatial experiences.'[105] There is the object, Certeau continues, the cathedral building for example, representing the 'law' of a place, and there is some kind of intervention which, when operating within that place, produces spaces.[106] That intervention may be religious, artistic, social or political, but between it and the place 'there are passages back and forth'; there is porosity. Thus inert objects (a sculpture for example), 'emerging from their stability, transform the place where they lay motionless into the foreignness of their own space.'[107] This play of changing relationships, Certeau suggests, can be thought of as the identification of places and actualisation of spaces.

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[103] Benjamin. 2002: 390.

[104] Kelley in Lacy. 1995: 141

[105] Certeau. 1984: 117-118

[106] Ibid: 118

[107] Ibid.

Evident in Benjamin's description of Naples, which builds upon this passageway between topographical location and topological experience, are these flows between places and spatial practices that produce spaces. Places become spaces, spaces places. A certain alchemy is at work.

Take a familiar work of art like Gormley's *Sound II* in the crypt of Winchester Cathedral (figure 17). It has a fixed location that, once temporarily lent to it, has now become its permanent home, its place. But what is the space that it occupies if, as Certeau says, space is a practiced place? The scale and simplicity of the crypt is undoubtedly sympathetic to the stillness and quiet of its meditating form, and dramatically responsive to its conceptual character as a figure intended to be in or near water, subject as it is to the barely perceptible seasonal ebb and flow of the water table that rises to fill the crypt in the winter. More poignantly, its isolated location lends it a solitariness that is compounded by the distance maintained between the work and the public, only able to view it from a fenced-off platform by the crypt's door. This segregation does not diminish but adds to the foreignness of its own secluded space. Another kind of foreignness, interactive rather than isolated, was introduced by Rebecca Horn's temporary piece for St. Paul's Cathedral (figure 18), a disorientating, kinetic cousin to those free-standing horizontal mirrors in cathedrals that offer vertiginous views of the vertical. Reminiscent of Robert Smithson's famous experiments in mirror-travel, conducted in the Yucatan desert in 1969, *Moon Mirror* similarly contrasted the solid materiality of the mirror with the evanescent images that flit across its surface and the spatial displacement caused by its odd congruence with its context. Horn's rather more complex installation set a revolving, tilting mirror disc inside a static mirror, reflecting a third mirror suspended from the roof, above which a projected golden light slowly rotates. Richard Cork describes the effect:

> So viewers gazing down into the floor discover an inverted world. Instead of a well with water at the bottom, they find themselves immersed in a dancing fire and a spiralling constellation of orbs. Segments of Wren's carved columns and vaults curve past, but they seem to be floating in the same cosmos as the other, more abstract forms redolent of planetary systems. Everyone staring at this mesmeric kaleidoscope of reflections ends up feeling strangely weightless and liberated from all the customary gravitational constraints.'[108]

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[108] Cork. 2005: 20

The reflected environment was radically defamiliarised, as the art object itself was dematerialised. In recent years, of course, no-one has put the discomposing possibilities of the mirror to better use than Anish Kapoor. Kapoor's work oscillates between a phenomenological enjoyment of materiality and the uncanny sense of its absence. This interstitial place between fullness and emptiness is physically materialized in the art object. But in its conveyance of emptiness, it is dematerialised. Consequently, Marie-Laure Bernadac has said of Kapoor that 'in his endeavour to sculpt the invisible, it was only logical that [he] has appropriated the mirror's magical functions.'[109] The mirror's depth is illusory, and yet at the same time experientially it is a kind of membraneous 'sievehole,' says Heinrich Heil.[110] This is nowhere more apparent than in Kapoor's signature concave mirrors, their reflective skin the threshold between the material and the unbounded, in which the reflected world appears to float above rather than on the surface. In the church of Sankt Peter Kapoor used such mirrors to good effect, turning inert objects into the means of transmuting a place into a space (figures 19-20). In one of the transepts, for example, he installed a double set of concave mirrors. Rather than an infinitely repeating image these create a rather more unexpected experience. As the viewer shifts between an awareness of the mirrors' physical, material presence, and a sense of their allusion to the immaterial, there is a point, at the central place between the mirrors, where the viewer disappears. By his effective positioning of the mirrors, this tenuous threshold between reflected image and absence of image was revealed in the central point of the transept, equidistant to each of the opposing mirrors. The viewer finds him or herself at a curious threshold, caught within an uneasy negotiation between themselves and the place, the work, and the porous space it creates.

Porosity and polarity

In conclusion, we should perhaps ask why we have placed such accent on porosity? As we have seen it is not just a spatial metaphor but one that describes any numbers of movements between fixed positions, even the dissolution of fixed positions, and draws attention to our more typical reliance upon polarities. Throughout this thesis we will find these adverse conditions of porosity and polarity in an uneasy dissonance with one another. Thus, a porosity of sacred and profane will confront their more familiar resolution as two realms that should be held apart. Likewise with sacred and secular; in

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[109] Bernadac in Musée d'Art Contemporain de Bordeaux. 1998: 121

[110] Heil in Blücher and Danch. 1996: 12

the latter, despite its purported division from the sacred through secularisation, many have argued that the religious continues to inhere, through secularised theological concepts (Schmitt) or a camouflaged religious sensibility (Eliade). What other porosities might we propose? An obvious aspect of cathedral life is the porosity of ancient and modern that permeates its spaces (materially represented by such odd conjunctions as the flat-screen monitors fixed to the columns of Bath Abbey) even as a threshold continues to be mentally upheld separating the modern world outside from the pre-modern world inside. Porosity will appear as the Phyrronian condition that negotiates the territory between polarities of thought. Yet at the same time we will see that faith and belief, and the sacred and the religious, whose porosity might seem assured, will in fact be contested as irreducible dualities. Other variations could be added, but let us end with one final example, especially pertinent to this discussion.

In a brief essay on philosophy and the church, William Desmond adumbrates the contemporary relation of priest and philosopher as enjoying a 'renewed porosity,' in which, contrary to an Enlightenment bar upon their close association, they may be described as 'intimate others, not as dualistic opposites.'[111] Desmond speaks of the priest as a 'consecrated middle,' as 'a between porous on both sides,' between the divine and the earthly, the spiritual and the material. The philosopher too attempts to negotiate that transitive space between the ephemeral and the eternal, as Benjamin so clearly expressed in his desire for a coming philosophy.[112] This porosity, evident in both philosopher and priest, expands to encompass its significant others, by which Desmond means above all, art. Desmond proposes that a willingness on the part of priest and philosopher to endorse a mutually beneficial porosity, in his words to 'be porous to the possibility,' would allow the priest to learn from the philosopher and the philosopher from the priest.[113] Furthermore, each may be engaged in assuring that this porosity remains 'unclogged.' It is, he assures us, an ethical demand, in which fidelity is aligned with 'a certain porosity of being.'[114] The surprise is that, when we turn our attention to art, a rather different situation is apparent, one in which a persistent language of polarities often dominates. From my own observations and associations it is clear to me that within the church, above all the Church of England, an enthusiasm for the possibilities

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[111] Desmond. 2005: 2

[112] Ibid.

[113] Ibid: 4

[114] Ibid: 8

offered by contemporary art outweighs more conservative uncertainties about its efficacy or desirability, overruling those who would seek to maintain a distance between the church and this intransigent other. Nonetheless, within the church entrenched positions remain, manifesting as opposition or resistance, sometimes not without good reason. Even amongst those eager to promote the visual arts within the church distinctly non-porous attitudes can be seen, in the description of art and religion as 'enemies' (Mennekes) or 'reluctant partners' (Heller) or two different cultures (McEvilley). For others their relationship is more symbiotic, yet prescribed within clearly defined boundaries (Maritain, Walker), while for yet others theirs is an inseparable relationship (Couturier). In 2004, Heller wrote:

> Are religion and art two worlds that have a hard time meeting in our society? Recent studies reveal that, in spite of a perceived need for more dialogue between people involved in the arts and those involved in religion, an obvious gap between the two groups continues to exist. And although arts and religious leaders alike expressed the need for, as well as their personal interest in, more cooperation and dialogue, still only relatively little interaction between the two worlds exists. This may be about to change. Significant efforts have been made in recent years to create a dialogue between art and religious institutions, and between the two fields of inquiry.[115]

Exactly this kind of dialogue envisaged by Heller was the focus of an art seminar held at the Art Institute of Chicago in 2007 and documented in *Re-Enchantment* (2009), presented as a debate on the present relation of art and religion. Contrary to Heller's conviction that attitudes are changing, what was striking about the seminar was the degree to which polarity rather than porosity continued to characterise perceptions of the relation between the worlds of art and the church. The art seminar in a sense commissioned itself to discuss what it perceives as a discordant relationship, described as a 'troubled relation' that is 'deeply conflicted.'[116] In the face of this perception, James Elkins presents an image of a spectrum or continuum of art practices touching upon religious themes or motivations, while David Morgan dismisses claims by scholars, theorists and critics of art that such artistic and religious practices should be strictly segregated (a neo-Kantian sentiment that he deplores). In this respect porosity operates against an attendant desire to 'patrol strict boundaries' for which critics of art, teachers of art and historians of art

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[115] Heller. 2004: 8

[116] Elkins and Morgan. 2009: 147, 19

are culpable.[117] And yet a common assessment of those invited to respond to the seminar after the event testifies to a lack of genuine commitment to the seminar's objective. Throughout the debate, art and religion are held to be polar categories, in many respects upholding the opinion still held by many who declare the gulf between art and faith to be unbridgeable in the contemporary period.[118] As one contributor put it,

> Far from being a conversation about contemporary art and religion – or even about the activity of theorising contemporary art and religion – it is instead a conversation that illuminates a chasm between the assembly and the object of study.[119]

Typical of its tenor is a comment from Thierry de Duve who, whilst conceding that the origins of art and religion are inseparable, wonders whether, post-Enlightenment, art and religion can and should be disentangled.[120] Indeed, one contributor felt that '[n]early everything deemed outside the self-professed world of aesthetic modernism and its contemporary critical discourse is excluded, reifying the very assumptions that require dismantling.'[121] Earlier we suggested that the presence of contemporary art within churches and cathedrals created anxiety for some, uncomfortable with art's sacrilegious potential. What the seminar makes clear is the degree to which this concern can be inversed, since it exposes a comparable anxiety within the contemporary art world for any forms of cultural production that operate under the sign of religion.[122] Michael Fried and T. J. Clark, for example, who were both invited to the seminar, declined on the grounds that it would be too 'painful' to participate in a discussion linking religion and art in any positive manner. Thus we see the maintenance not only of a discourse of polarity over porosity but of a concomitant fear of pollution. Such strictly patrolled modernist and/or Enlightenment boundaries within artistic discourse reveals vestiges of a kind of neo-Kantianism that we might suppose to have disappeared, evident in various forms of demarcation and strategies of framing, and against which Benjamin had set his coming philosophy. In an age of intertextuality, interdisciplinarity and rhizomatic thinking, when it comes to the church all the fears of pollution resurface. Whether it's

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[117] Ibid: 158-9, 17

[118] Ibid: 128

[119] Ibid: 223

[120] Ibid: 114-5

[121] Ibid: 273

[122] Ibid: 278

the rise of religious fundamentalism or the stridency of the new atheists, a surprising degree of polar thinking works hard to keep art and culture separate from the church.

In the light of this chapter, then, we must ask what degree of continuum may be detected between artistic and ecclesiastical practices? What degree of porosity constitutes the differentiation of artists, art and spaces for art within the context of our inquiry? How porous are the categories of our discussion? We would suggest, from past examples, that contrary to common opinion they are highly porous. But what limits, if any, should be set to this porosity? Lest we become too 'postmodern' in our thinking, we must not forget that the church itself sets limits to such continuums, to a greater or lesser extent. After all, the church is not just one cultural patron of the arts among many, but a patron with particular demands and responsibilities largely absent for others. Nevertheless, the example of modern and contemporary art produced for, or introduced into, the church so far belies the pessimism of the Chicago symposium's conclusions. Amongst artists whose works can be found in ecclesiastical spaces we find there are those who declare themselves to be specifically Christian or confessional artists, religiously-motivated artists, spiritually-motivated artists, non-believing artists, perhaps atheistic artists, and even artists hostile to the church. Amongst works of art found in the church we can name those that are explicitly Christian, specifically liturgical, implicitly religious, vaguely spiritual or mystical, critical of religion, or apparently lacking any religious aspirations. From high art to popular religious images a substantial continuum may be seen.

Whether the story of contemporary art in the church is a discourse of border disputes moving back and forth or gauze-like and porous, whether it is perceived under the rubric of recognition or encounter, whether we consider it to be Kantian or Benjaminian, an evaluation of its current status is the task of this thesis. A cautionary note might be added at this point. In the catalogue for Art and Sacred Places' *Art2000* project, Friedhelm Mennekes surprisingly confessed to being rather critical of art in churches. In 2000 he said that there were, to his knowledge, around 800 churches actively trying to use art in Germany. But of these, he felt that as few as three or four were doing so effectively.[123] For Mennekes, part of that effectiveness results not from commissions but from 'emptiness' (a very Protestant statement for a Catholic to make, as he himself admits).[124] In other words, from the lack of permanence, from the filling of a

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[123] Art2000. 2001: 23-4

[124] Ibid: 36

church with art but also its emptying out again; an acknowledgement of the effectiveness of the transitory. But more than this, what might be adduced from Mennekes's cautionary words is that far from celebrating the profusion of projects currently underway for ecclesiastical locations, there is also room for hesitancy. We may well ask what lessons have been learned in those ten years since Mennekes made that statement? What is the current state of contemporary art and what are the current conditions for contemporary art within the church?

Could *Naples* be read obliquely as an image of current artistic practices within the church, porous practices that seep out of the gallery and the private collection, that overflow traditional or recognised categories of practice? Benjamin's description of Naples as a city whose nature is one of porosity can be otherwise characterised as a narrative of continuity and interruption, precisely the dichotomy raised by Whitehead's event and Bergson's duration. As we will go on to see, it is also consequential for discourses of the sacred. In all cases another kind of break or discontinuity accompanies genuine encounters: an interruption of habitual patterns of thought on the one hand, and practices on the other. With this in mind let us head toward the sanctuary by way of the north transept of St. Paul's Cathedral where, in 2006, I conducted an in-depth study of an installation by Yoko Ono.

Figure 8 Bill Viola, *The Messenger*, Durham Cathedral, 1996

Figure 9 Claude Monet, Rouen Cathedral, c. 1894

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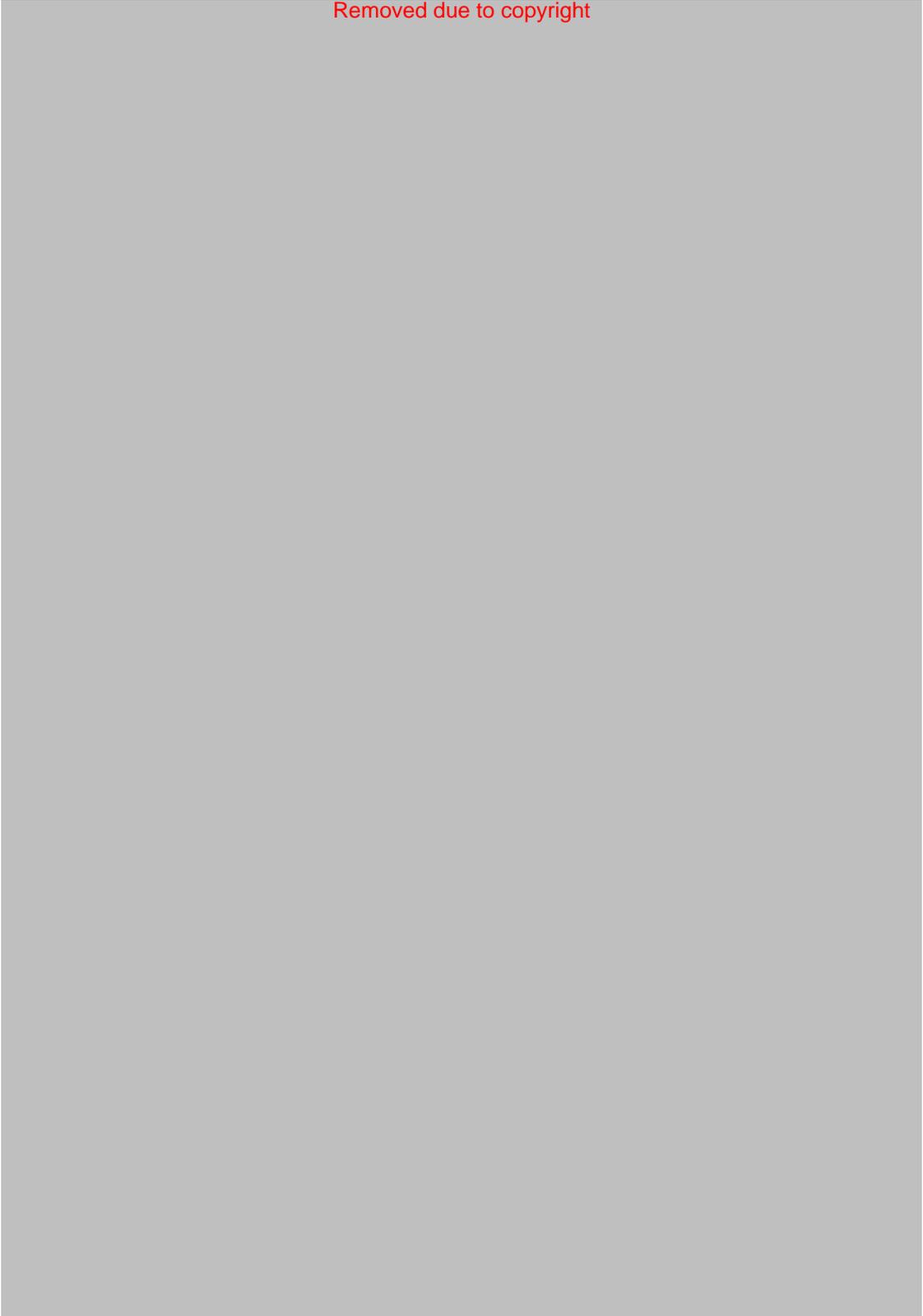
Figure 10 Alfred Sisley, The Church at Moret, 1893-4
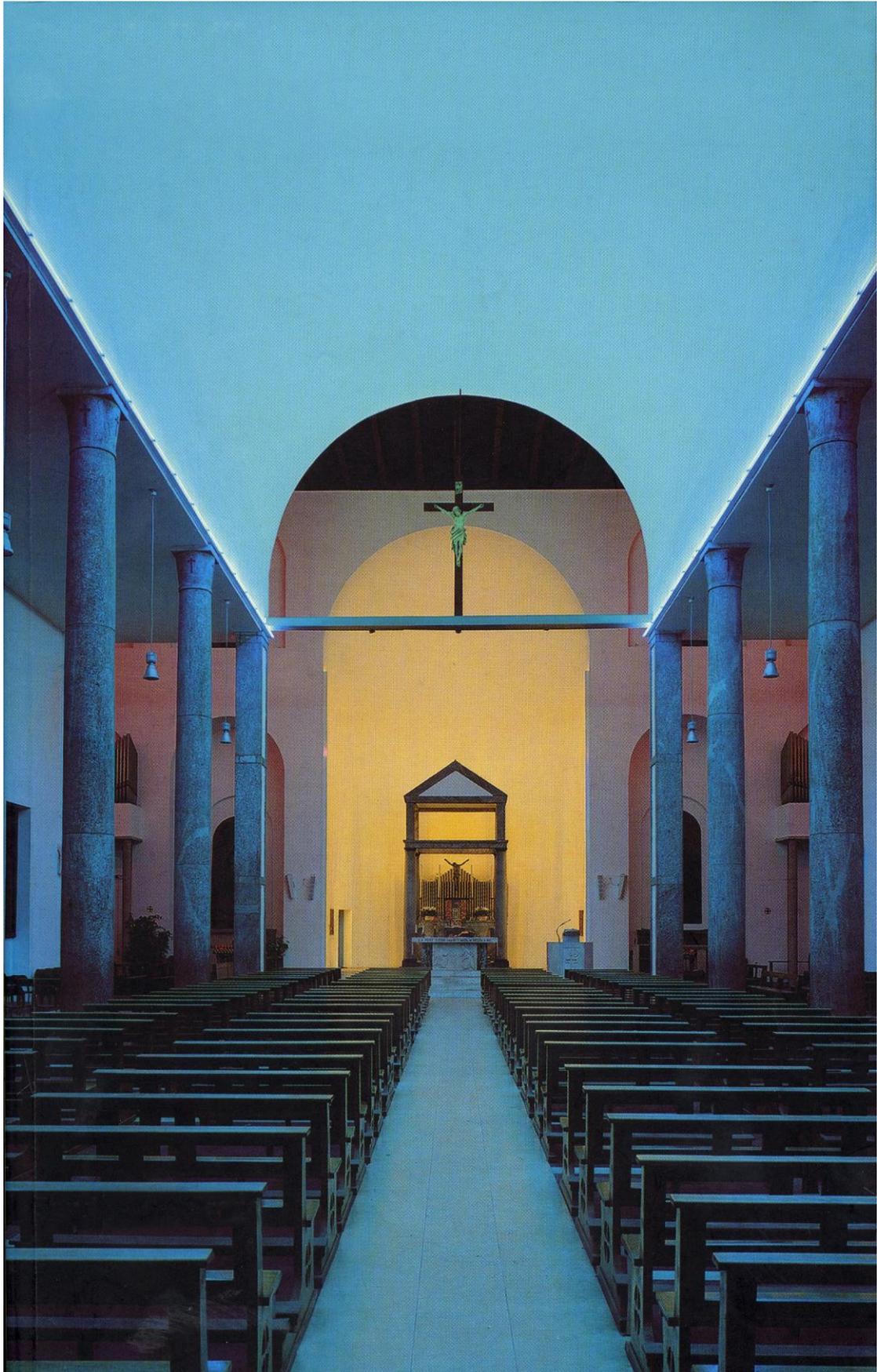
Figure 11 Dan Flavin, *Untitled*, Santa Maria in Chiesa Rossa, Milan, 1997

Figure 12 Antony Gormley, *Field for the British Isles*, Salisbury Cathedral, 1999

Close up of the figures that make up *Field*
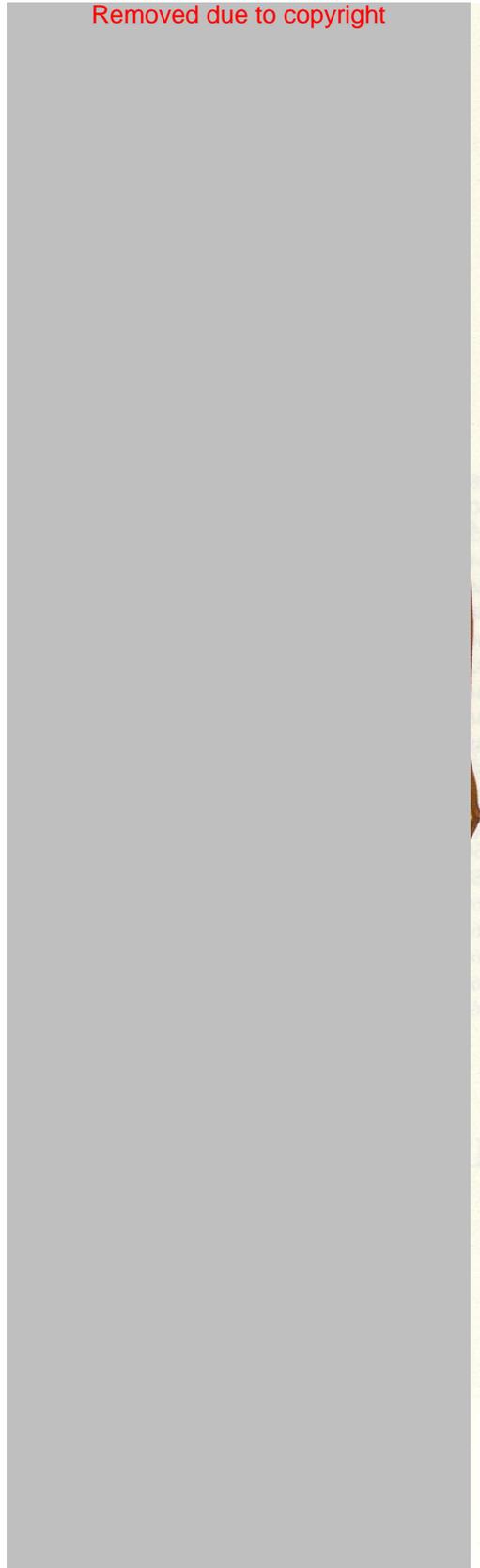
Figure 13 Leonard McComb, *Portrait of Young Man Standing*, 1963-1983

Figure 14 Leonard McComb, *Portrait of Young Man Standing*, as seen in *The Journey*, Lincoln Cathedral, 1990, prior to its removal, and in *Crucible*, Gloucester Cathedral, 2010

Figure 15 Bill Viola, *The Messenger*, St. Paul's Cathedral, 2004

Figure 16 Nathan Coley, *Black Tent*, Portsmouth Cathedral, 2003

Figure 17 Antony Gormley, *Sound II*, Winchester Cathedral, 1993

Figure 18 Rebecca Horn, *Moon Mirror*, St. Paul's Cathedral, 2005

Figure 19 Anish Kapoor, *Turning the World Upside Down,* Sankt Peter, Köln, 1996

Figure 20 Anish Kapoor, *Double Mirrors,* Sankt Peter, Köln, 1996

3

T R A N S E P T

Yoko Ono: Morning Beams for the City of London

St Paul's Cathedral, June 26 - July 15 2006

In the summer of 2006 St. Paul's Cathedral played host to a series of artworks by Yoko Ono, bringing the work of this highly regarded artist into a dramatic space that she considered ideal for their presentation, and exposing it to an audience largely unacquainted with her art.[1] Using white nylon ropes tethered to wooden sleepers *Morning Beams* created a beautifully simple evocation of light filtering through into the cathedral's north transept. At once tangibly material and surprisingly ethereal, these radiant beams 'illuminated' *Cleaning Piece (Riverbed)*, a dry riverbed of stones that snaked its way to the western end of the transept (figure 21). Meanwhile, in the cathedral gardens outside, just beyond the transept's entrance, Ono created a space for personal wishes to be written and tied to the branches of a silver birch tree (figure 22). *Wish Tree* echoed the trees in the temple courtyards of Ono's youth, which, she recalls, 'are always filled with people's wish knots, which looked like white flowers blossoming from afar.'[2] In these interactive works visitors were invited to perform simple acts of self-reflection by taking a stone from the riverbed and placing it upon a designated area indicated by the words 'mound of joy' or 'mound of sorrow' (figure 23), or by writing out a wish and tying it to the tree (figure 24). Accompanying the works, both inside and outside, Ono included bowlfuls of badges for visitors to take away with them, inscribed with the words, 'Imagine Peace' (figure 25).

Wish Tree inspired an exuberant reaction from the public, both cathedral visitors and passers-by, whose wishes ranged from the banally generic to the deeply personal, written in dozens of different languages. *Cleaning Piece* prompted a more sober response and indeed proved more baffling to some. Instructions inviting direct participation in an artwork seemed to many to be a new experience that left them uncertain how to respond, often checking with invigilators that they were allowed to take the stones. Art, after all, is so often of the order of the untouchable, the prohibited or sanctified, enforced by museum guards or invigilators whose presence serves as a reminder that one may look but not touch. Though some responded to the invitation with what seemed a

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[1] Yoko Ono's *Morning Beams for the City of London* was part of the City of London Festival, 26 June – 15 July 2006, sited in the North Transept of St Paul's Cathedral. See appendix 4 for observations and criticisms of this installation.

[2] Yoko Ono. Press Release. *Morning Beams for the City of London*. St. Paul's Cathedral. 2006.

perfunctory automatic action others found in it an opportunity to partake in a ritual action which appeared to touch them deeply through a new, unanticipated, experience of the cathedral.

In order to reflect the participatory mode of this work a methodology of observation was chosen, as a means to gather simple anecdotes, offering witnessed glimpses of visitors' responses to the installation, augmented with as little interpretative distortion as possible. A selection of these observations are woven through the text, sometimes commented upon, sometimes left to stand on their own; the following anecdote is a typical example:

A woman takes a stone. Holding it in her hands she stands erect and still for some time before the mound of joy, eyes closed and clutching the stone to her chest. Her partner interrupts her with a comment and a smile, some casual comment which she brushes off with a murmur, holding onto the state of contemplation or prayer in which she is engaged. Eyes still closed she remains rigidly standing there in silent concentration as he moves away, apparently rebuffed. Finally, she places the stone and walks away.

Yoko Ono's artistic practice is rooted in both the Fluxus movement, in which she played an early pivotal role, and conceptual art; the former with its emphasis on performance, ephemerality and the rejection of traditional patterns of artistic production, and the latter exemplified by the dematerialisation of the art object, that is, the privileging of ideas over objects. An abiding element in her work has been the involvement of an audience, if not always directly, through instructions to action. Very often these instructions are simply prompts to unlock the imagination ('imagine peace'); at other times they invite direct participation.[3] Over time her work has become more object-based yet always with a desire to involve the viewer in the process of its fulfilment. As such her working practice has been described in terms of 'praxis' rather than 'poiesis,' active rather than productive, a form of doing rather than making. Or, to put it another way, praxis is a form of production which is not exhausted by the product itself. Thus she is following in what might be loosely termed a tradition of art inaugurated by Marcel Duchamp's ruling that deems 'no work of art [to be] finished until completed by the spectator.'[4] Even if, in

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[3] Admittedly the participation her works invite is often highly prescriptive – her instructions to action can be very specific in their expectations of the respondent's behaviour towards them.

[4] Duchamp in Ono and Iles. 1997: 19. Perhaps we should qualify this idea of 'completion,' suggestive as it is of a more conclusive result than Duchamp envisaged. Since it is said in respect to each viewer this completion is ongoing. Moreover, each return to the work retains the potential for re-completion. This is completion as paradoxically incomplete; an oxymoronically contingent completion.

Ono's work, we rarely find completion as such but rather an ongoing dialogue between the work and the viewer through the latter's participation in the former, both in shaping its form and in responding to its ritual, not always in anticipated ways.

A man and a woman each carry a stone to the mound of joy. He places his stone but she hands hers to him to lay upon the mound. A Japanese visitor at the mound of joy bends down to touch a stone, letting her hand linger on it awhile, as if to receive something from the stone. She does not place a stone herself.

Thus Ono finds herself still in the vanguard of a contemporary art scene whose closest theoretical expression is Nicolas Bourriaud's interrogation of what he calls relational art practices. Increasingly prevalent from the 1990s onwards, Relational Aesthetics develops questions regarding the role of the audience, emphasising the participation of the public in the creation of art. Typically it asks, what is the nature of an art that solely exists in and for the engaged interaction of a participant rather than the detached contemplation of a spectator? Practitioners of Relational Art take a genuine interest in their audiences, not as participants in a performative sense, nor as intellectually engaged in a conceptual sense, but as directly and socially engaged with the work and with each other. It is thus defined by Bourriaud as

> an art taking as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and *private* symbolic space.[5]

One of the central claims of Relational Art is that it produces social relations through participation, thereby creating a social environment in which people come together to participate in a shared activity. Bourriaud describes this as 'the criterion of co-existence' or 'cohabitation.'[6] It is intrinsically social, and the artists that pursue this way of working show a 'democratic' concern, meaning that rather than conceiving an artwork as an encounter between a viewer and an object, Relational Art initiates intersubjective encounters. Through these encounters, meaning is elaborated *collectively*, rather than in a space for individual consumption or contemplation. This is art, says Bourriaud, as 'a state of encounter,' for which Relational Aesthetics provide a language to describe its forms

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[5] Bourriaud. 2002: 14 (emphasis in original)

[6] Ibid: 56

and conditions.[7] But it is a rather different kind of encounter than that discussed so far. In Relational Art Duchamp's provocative gesture is extended to the generation of the work of art itself. In many cases the work of art *is* the viewer and his or her passing relation with those others also temporarily caught up in the art event. The space for art as object is vacated to admit art as spectator/participant, or to use ethnographic language, as participant-observer. Artworks are then judged based upon the inter-human relations they prompt. Relational art practices epitomise the Duchampian ideal in a highly literal way through sociability, through acts of direct participation between an artwork or an artist and their audience, the micro-community that emerges through 'a momentary grouping of participatory viewers.'[8] In this way, Bourriaud explains, a contemporary work ceases to be simply a space that one moves through, but becomes a time to be lived through.[9] For Bourriaud, and the artistic practices he champions, the role of the viewer becomes so integral that, he predicts, one day a history of art will be written according to the people who pass through it. As a consequence of the centrality of this 'human flow' in the creation of art he considers one of the crucial questions that a work of art should answer to is the following: 'Does this work permit me to enter into dialogue? Could I exist, and how, in the place it defines?'[10] This subjective question is augmented by a larger and more critical issue for art today: can art be employed in ways that generate new relationships with the world rather than simply providing representations of it?[11] Translated into the terms of this thesis, can art operate so as to create conditions of encounter rather than merely conditions of recognisablity? It is in answer to such questions that Ono's installation seems orientated.

A woman takes a stone, places it upon the mound of joy, then cries and hugs an older woman who is with her. Two women place stones on the mound of sorrow. They leave them there for a while as they remain standing thoughtfully, perhaps prayerfully, looking at them. Then they transfer them to the mound of joy.

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[7] Ibid: 18

[8] Ibid: 58

[9] Ibid: 15

[10] Ibid: 109

[11] Ibid: 9

At the risk of conjecture, what might be surmised from these observations? An engagement with the mound of joy produces tears, but are they tears of joy or sorrow? The woman appears to be very sad but, as we know, tears can be quite misleading. It may be that for this woman the ritual did indeed 'permit' her to 'to enter into dialogue' with some process at work in her. She found a way to exist, perhaps briefly but effectively, in the space defined by the work. For the second couple the ritual appeared to proceed in stages. One sensed that a process of catharsis had taken place, as though the stones, as bearers of sorrow, had performed an act of cleansing, which then enabled them to become representatives of joy. Others followed a more instrumental route in the accomplishment of the ritual process.

A woman places a stone while chatting on her mobile phone. Her two teenage sons follow her lead. Ritual practice as multi-tasking.

Over and above the delight many visitors took in the natural simplicity and appropriateness of the installation's form (as *poiesis*), the stories collected here reflect what Bourriaud would define as its true form (as *praxis*), as 'a coherent unit' that ushers in a way of viewing the world and in which the place of the participant is indispensable.[12] In other words, form exists in the encounter, that is, when it introduces human interaction. Nevertheless, this is where we must be cautious in assuming Ono's practice as an example of Relational Art. There is a major difference between Ono's ritualised works and Bourriaud's claims for relational participation. The art that Bourriaud categorises as relational is a catalyst for discursivity. It seeks to initiate encounters between people in which meaning is produced collectively (as compared with a more conventional notion of an individual's private relation to the work of art). Ono's work encourages a serial participation, one after another, rather than collective, although the resulting work is collectively accomplished. *Cleaning Piece* depends upon the responsiveness of an audience who become co-creators of the work through following the invitation to take a stone from the riverbed and place it upon the mound of joy or sorrow. Similarly, *Wish Tree* would remain bare and forlorn without the enthusiastic response from people eager to add their wishes to its branches. Like Bourriaud, then, Ono sees the interaction between her works and the audience as an exchange or

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[12] Ibid: 19

dialogue, creating a kind of 'contract' between artist and audience.[13] As such, however, she makes a distinction between the outwardly-directed 'Happenings' augmented by artists like Allan Kaprow and her own inwardly-directed forms of participatory event. These are less 'a get togetherness' as the former tend to be, but rather 'a dealing with oneself.'[14] This distinction could just as readily be applied to Relational Art. Despite his protestations to the contrary, it has been argued that the art events championed by Bourriaud fail in their collective, 'democratic,' endeavour but often succeed at the level of individual participation. With regard to the event in St. Paul's Cathedral, the curious aspect of *Morning Beams for the City of London* was its mix of collective and private experience. A collective elaboration of meaning (in mounds and wishes) was produced through singular acts. *Cleaning Piece* tended to inspire private and generally individual responses (only occasionally operating as a shared experience) while *Wish Tree* was a more collective endeavour based on the expressing of private desires, and encouraged a more communal 'momentary grouping' of participants. It is this criterion of participation rather than Bourriaud's democratic concerns that are at work in Ono's installation. Indeed, it could be argued that her installation casts a critical eye on Bourriaud's claims for democratic sociability whilst ratifying the centrality of participation. Where it does reflect a relational imperative is in the manner in which it emphasises the crucial collaborative role of the viewer in the production and reception of the work of art, who, as the reader of the work, completes or activates it through some form of ritualized action.

In many respects it is this ritual aspect that is most interesting, over and above an emphasis on discursivity, reliant upon the participative agency of a viewer receptive to the possibilities it offered, thereby instantiating a very different notion of relational encounter. The temporary inclusion of *Morning Beams, Cleaning Piece* and *Wish Tree* in the life of the cathedral could be read, in part, as a recognition of the value of ritual at the level of the emotions and the sensual; that it has a place within a sacred environment alongside liturgical ritual and was generally accorded comparative reverence by those who took part.[15] This was particularly evident with *Cleaning Piece*. Centred around joy and

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[13] Ono and Iles. 1997: 127

[14] Ibid: 12

[15] Rather appropriately Bourriaud asserts that this phenomenon is a sign of sacredness making a comeback, the return of a traditional aura lost to the processes of reproduction. This time, however, it is an aura imbued within an audience rather than the work of art itself (Bourriaud. 2002: 61). This is the 'community effect' of contemporary art, its auratic quality present in the non-reproducibility of the relational moment.

sorrow *Cleaning Piece* gave ritual substance and visual form to these two aspects of human experience in a simple yet effective manner. Nonetheless, I recall one visitor to the installation who was perplexed as to why anybody should want to lay a stone on the mound of sorrow unless they were, as he put it, a depressive. This unquestionably narrow perspective failed to find sacredness in sorrow, somehow requiring all genuine ritual response to eschew the negative and dwell only on the positive. Affirmations of sorrow, though less common than expressions of joy (as one can see from the disparity between the two mounds), reflect what Durkheim called piacular rites or rituals of mourning, which few would deny have their place in the church. Several other responses to the ritual process, by contrast, displayed an ease with the ambiguity represented by the mounds, moving comfortably between the two. More than once I witnessed visitors placing stones on the mound of sorrow, which they then, after a time, transferred to joy (the movement was always in this direction and never the other). Durkheim would describe this action as both a transformation and a transmutation; it is the latter which seems to be at work within the example cited. A gesture towards sorrow becomes, through a ritual process, a paean to joy.

A man places several stones for sorrow and then immediately moves away. Some time later the same man returns to the work, walks around it, takes his time looking at the stones and ropes, and leaves again. A third time he returns. On this occasion he takes the same number of stones as before and places them on the mound of joy. Crouching besides them he lingers awhile in thought, brushes his hands, and walks away.

The brushing of the hands was an oft-repeated gesture that became a ritualised part of the participatory process. It was perhaps simply automatic, cleaning one's hands after handling the dusty stones, but had a symbolic suggestion of completion about it also. One could see it as an integral element of the event, as though one's joys and sorrows were left behind in the ritual 'cleaning' of hands.

A man walks back and forth, between the riverbed and the mound of joy, carrying one stone at a time and placing it upon the mound. Altogether he places five or six stones. At the end of this repeated process he brushes his hands and walks away smiling.

This was not the first time these works had been seen, nor their first occasion within a British cathedral (they were shown in Portsmouth Cathedral in 2004). *Morning Beams* was created for The Museum of Modern Art in Oxford, for an exhibition of Ono's work in 1997 and joined with *Cleaning Piece* which had a much older history, appearing in various forms since the 1960s. Naturally, within a context like St. Paul's, though evocations of natural light prevail, other resonances emerge that might never have occurred within its earlier secular setting. In a cathedral it is not only a vision of the beauty of sunlight that appears but inevitable associations with divinity. The cathedral is, after all, named after a saint who was a convert of a blinding and transforming light (Acts 9:3). The work was also placed within an area of the cathedral that it shared with Holman Hunt's well-known and well-loved image of Christ as *The Light of the World* (figure 26). An obvious conceptual relation arose from this proximity of artworks, just as a formal relation was apparent between *Morning Beams* and a series of paintings by Sergei Chepik, temporarily on display in the nave, all signifying divine presence through beams of light, illuminating scenes of the birth, baptism and death of Christ or, in the final scene of resurrection, radiating outwardly from behind dawn clouds (figure 27). It should be stressed that this was neither intentional nor desired. According to Paul Bayley, who co-ordinated the installation, it was more a question of finding a suitable space for the work than an attempt to formulate certain aesthetic or conceptual relations. But equally resonances drawn from comparisons made cannot be denied their place within the overall reception of the work. Site-specificity demands the 'cohabitation,' as Bourriaud calls it, of a work with its context. It is one of the challenges that any work of art might face within such a setting and broaches issues highly relevant to any discussion of contemporary art in churches, if that art is hoped in any way to be more than a decorative feature of the ecclesiastical space. In such a context emanations of light cannot help but express a religious impulse, over and above their playful mimesis of the natural world. This could be seen as burdening the work with unwanted implications, but equally may enrich it in unforeseen ways. At times this cohabitation produced a surprising interaction of ritual practices from visitors.

A man takes a stone from sorrow. With this stone in one hand he genuflects with the other, kisses the cross around his neck and places the stone on joy, keeping his eyes on Hunt's painting of Christ the whole time. A woman stands for a long time before the mound of joy, eyes closed, stone held to her chest, before placing it. Her female companion lays stones on both sorrow and joy. As she places the second stone upon

joy she is visibly mouthing words, a prayer perhaps, and keeps her eyes similarly fixed upon 'The Light of the World.'

Ono's art is often disarmingly simple and approachable, but offers the possibilities of individual readings and multiple responses. As Michael Bracewell writes, compared with Bourriaud's somewhat spurious claims for a democratic art her work is truly democratic in that it attempts to speak to everyone (but on an individual rather than collective level): 'There are no games, traps or clever tricks in Ono's art. What you see is what there is, and the rest is solely concerned with the viewer's individual experience of the work.'[16] This might seem a surprising evaluation of an artist whose concept-based art is frequently regarded as inscrutable, esoteric or cerebral. In the case of the works in St. Paul's, however, this analysis seems justified. Aesthetically the installation's closest affinities are with one of Bourriaud's chief exemplars of Relational Aesthetics, Félix González-Torres, whose work visually, if not conceptually, shares many of Ono's preoccupations. In his installations piles of wrapped candy and stacks of prints also invite viewer participation, but this time by taking the work away with them, thus apparently threatening to deplete the work to the point of disappearance (figures 28 and 29).[17] As well as the necessity of participation, therefore, praxis is also written into Ono's works through the role of duration as an element of their form. What that duration is, is dependent upon the viewer or participator. As Paul Bayley observed, if every visitor took a stone and placed it on the mound the ritualistic, relational aspect of the work would be over in a few days. Somehow, organically, an effective level of participation is achieved, at various levels of engagement.

A young girl places one stone for sorrow, two for joy. Meanwhile an older woman kneels by sorrow. She does not add a stone but gently shifts and gathers a few of the existing stones and builds a small cairn to sorrow.

Where Ono differs from many of the artists championed by Bourriaud is in the materiality of her recent work, thereby providing a healthy antidote to the downplaying of the work of art as object. Of course, Relational Aesthetics is not necessarily a return to

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[16] Bracewell. 2004

[17] In fact, despite the similarities, whereas in *Cleaning Piece* at some point the stones will have all been transferred to the mounds, the candy stacks and piles of posters are repeatedly replenished in order to maintain a certain volume.

a celebration of immateriality, as is obvious from the example of González-Torres. Objects are often an intrinsic part of the language, but with a resistance to their ossification into precious objects. Emphasis is placed instead upon the use rather than the contemplation of the work, an objective clearly central to Ono's installation. The work produces a relationship with the world (evocations of joy and sorrow, expressed wishes) that is envisaged through an active relationship with the object (stones, slips of paper tied to a tree). Ono's art invites us to imagine, not only peace (to which badges bearing the legend, 'Imagine Peace,' given away at the exhibition, attested) but wishes coming true, the affirmation of joy and ackowledgement of sorrow, using minimal forms to conjure complex and serious events. Her work can be read as a rather naïve and simplistic evocation of emotions and desires or, as witnessed at St Paul's, can release deep-seated feelings, through the simplest natural forms and concepts. All this is achieved through 'an ideal balance between form and its programmed disappearance, between visual beauty and modest gestures, between childlike wonder in front of the image and the complexity of the levels at which it is read.'[18] These words of Bourriaud's, on the work of González-Torres, read like a perfect description of Ono's creation.

A woman places a stone upon joy and blows it a kiss.

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[18] Bourriaud. 2002: 58

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Figure 21 Yoko Ono, *Morning Beams* and *Cleaning Piece (Riverbed)*, St. Paul's Cathedral, 2006

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Figure 22 Yoko Ono, *Wish Tree*, St. Paul's Cathedral, 2006

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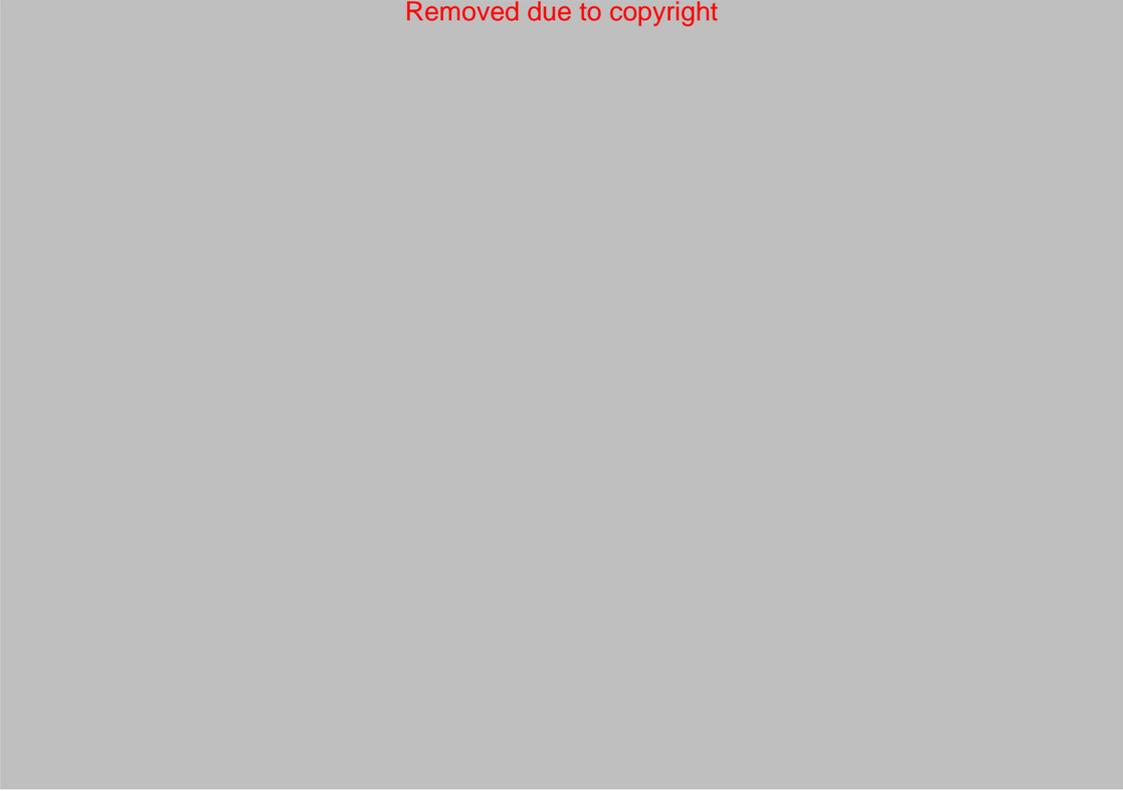
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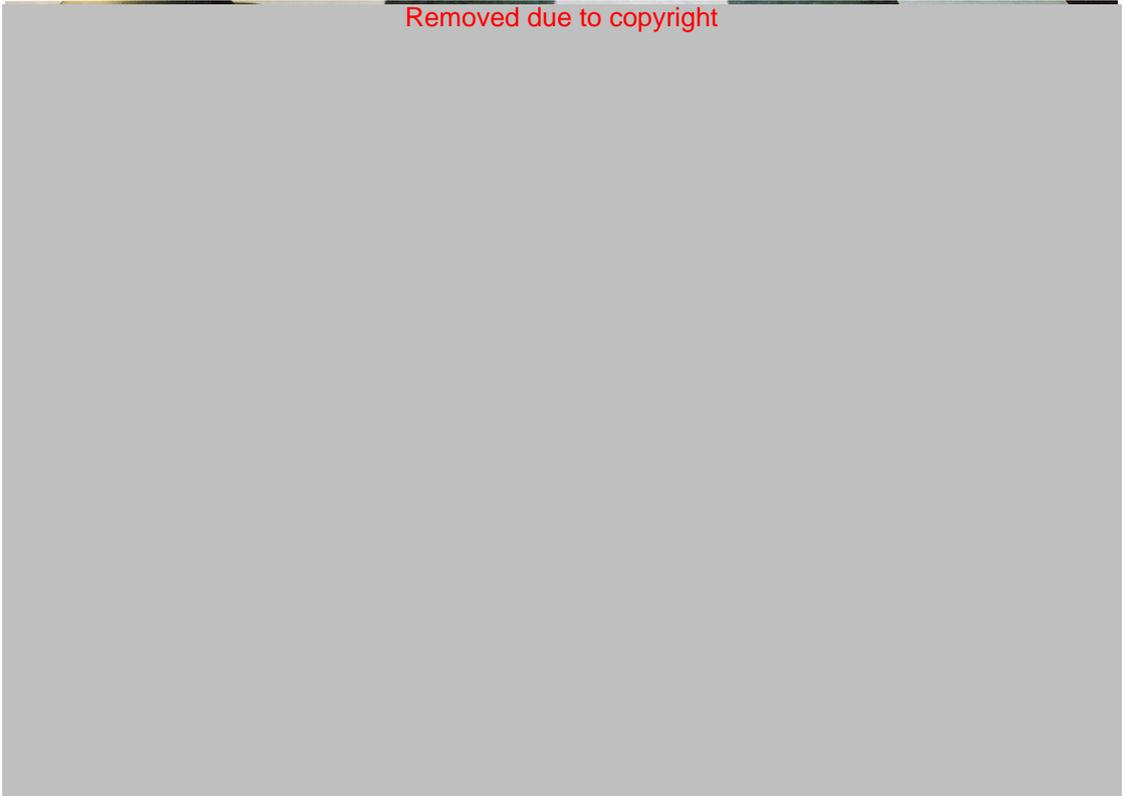
Figure 23 Yoko Ono, *Mound of Joy* and *Mound of Sorrow*, St. Paul's Cathedral, 2006

Figure 24 Public interaction with *Wish Tree*
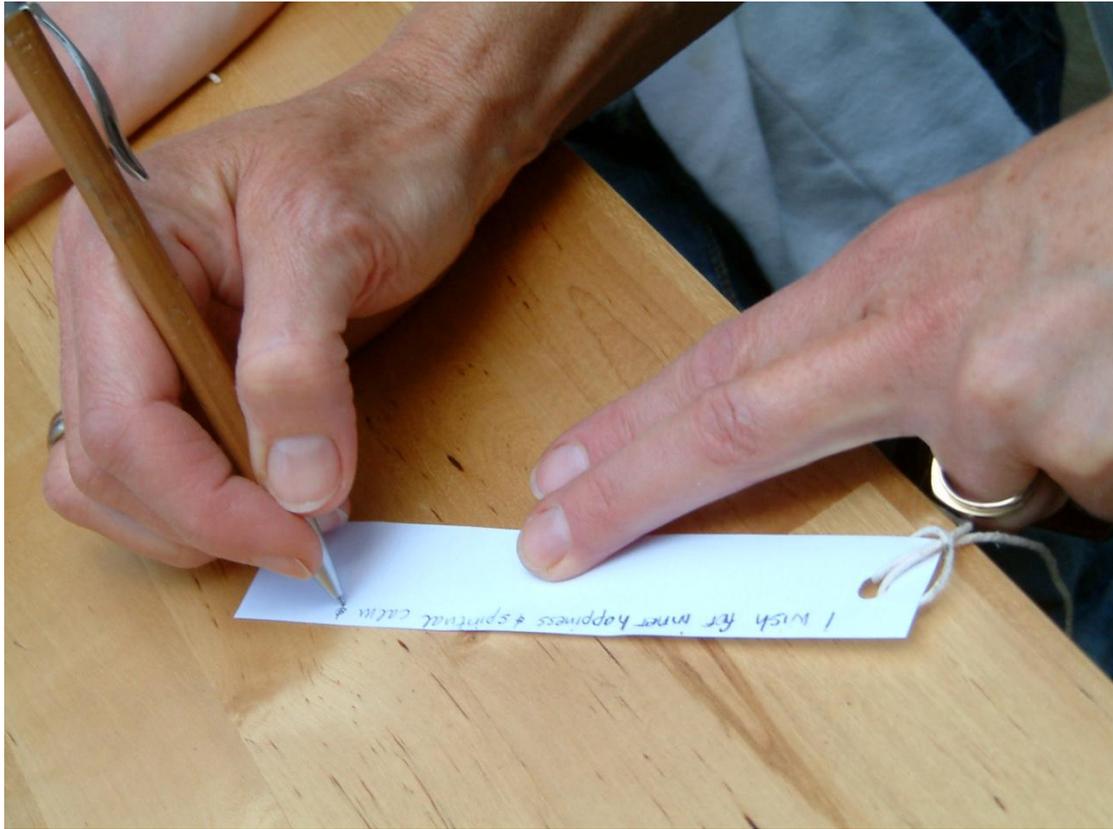
Writing a wish

Wishes hanging from the tree (showing Yoko Ono's own wish in centre)

Figure 25 Yoko Ono, *Imagine Peace*, St. Paul's Cathedral, 2006

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Figure 26 William Holman Hunt, *The Light of the World*, St. Paul's Cathedral, c. 1900
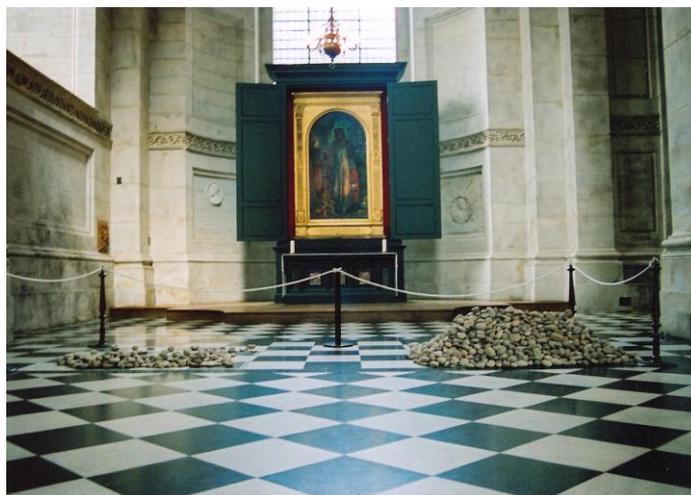
As seen in relation to the mounds of joy and sorrow

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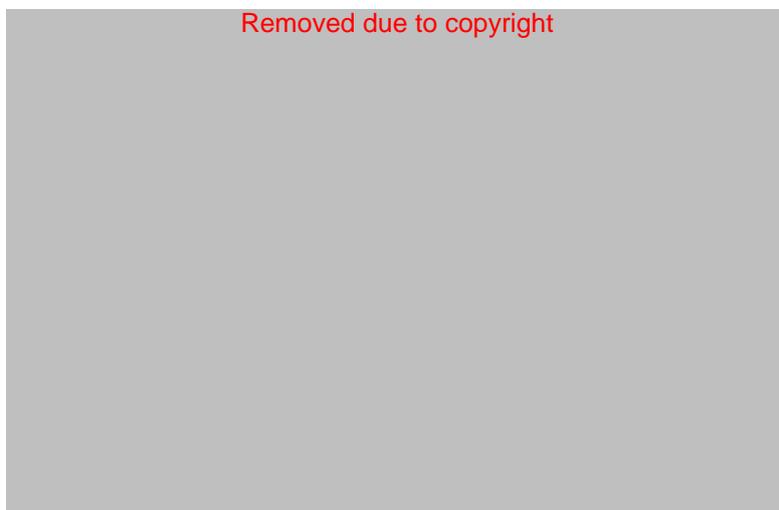
Figure 27 Sergei Chepik, *The Way: The Truth: The Life*, 2005

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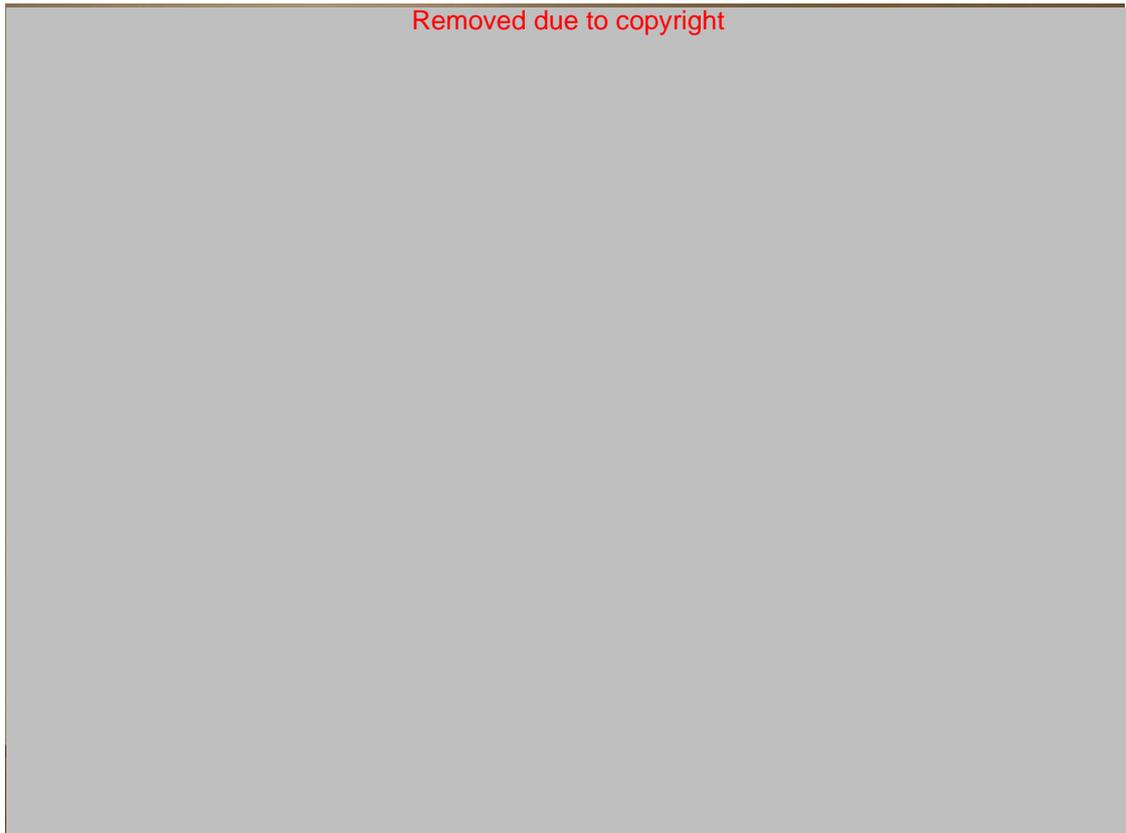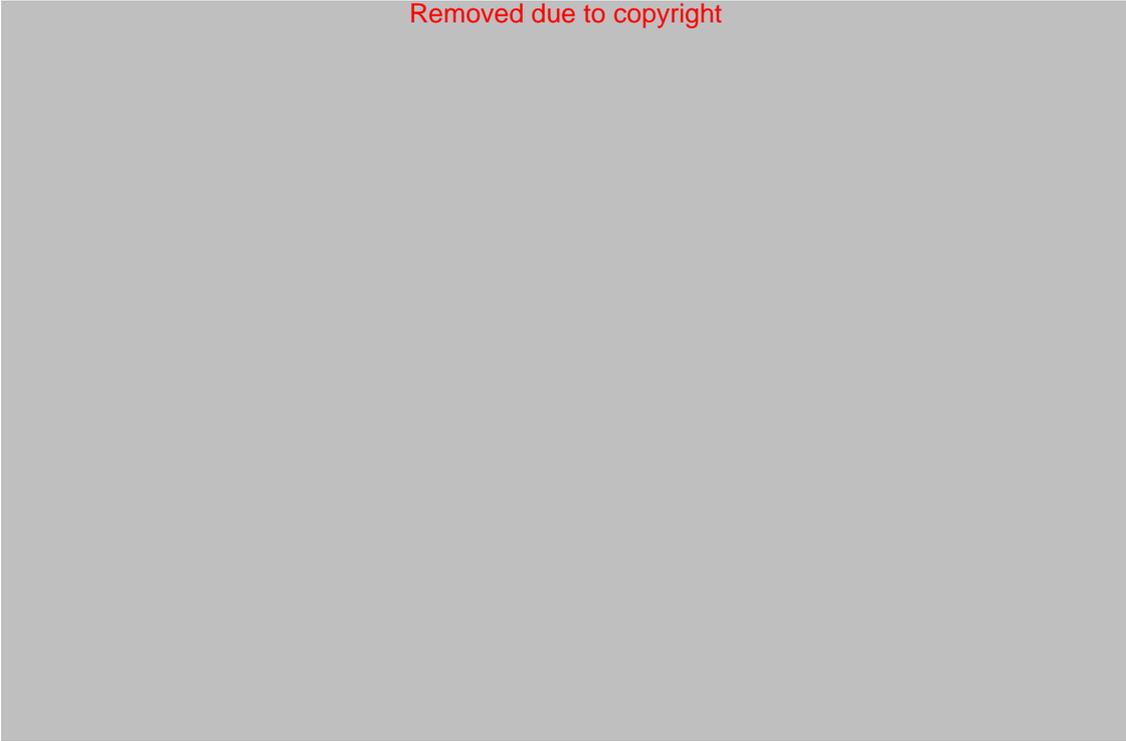
Figure 28 Félix González-Torres, *Untitled (Placebo)*, 1991; *Untitled (Silver Beech),* 1990

Figure 29 Taking a candy or a poster

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SANCTUARY

The sacred and the profane

Any examination of a contemporary, non-traditional art within ecclesiastical spaces, one often lacking any explicit Christian content or recognisably Christian form, and frequently realised in unconventional media, must inevitably hinge upon the play between sanctity and sacrilege, between the worlds of the sacred and profane, since these are the parameters so often invoked to determine the fields of legitimate operation for religion and art. As we will see, these terms, so entrenched in any discourse concerning the role of religion within secular cultures, and so frequently employed in any disparagement of modern art in ecclesiastical contexts, should not be accepted as 'givens' within which to manoeuvre. Invariably presented as universally applicable by early anthropologists of religion, their historical and cultural relevance today may not be so axiomatically construed. The nuances of this disputed history will allow us to reassess the role of religion within anthropological ideas that were once foundational, in order to invoke imaginative possibilities for a rethinking of the sacred and profane as valid categories in the troubled affinity, if consanguinity, of art and religion.

Among the questions that will emerge are those concerning the relation of sacred and profane states, whether between them one imagines a smooth and continuous flow, and thus the value of thinking in terms of transition and merging, à la Bergson, Whitehead and Benjamin, or in distinctive states and dualisms à la Durkheim, Hertz, Eliade et al. Testing the continuities and discontinuities between the two states, we will posit ambivalence as an ever-present factor, creating indeterminate thresholds that vacillate between porosity, polarity, pollution and prohibition. In seeking to answer these questions Emile Durkheim will figure prominently. Though not alone in his summation he, above all, is responsible for a reading of so-called primitive religions that divides the sacred and profane into states of enmity. Subsequently unsupported as an idea by many leading anthropologists, it was nonetheless taken up by the second major figure of this discussion, the religious comparativist, Mircea Eliade, who used it as the basis for his influential, though today largely discredited, studies of religious patterns of belief and practice. Both Durkheim and Eliade were key inaugurators of well-established orthodoxies concerning the sacred and the profane. Yet if both begin with an idea of the sacred and profane as distinct states, both ended up stressing the inherent ambiguities of their mutual relations. From Durkheim we will gain an idea of the sacred in which this ambiguity redirects attention away from a strict polarity of sacred and profane towards an ambiguity within the sacred itself along with a more porous sense of the threshold

between sacred and profane worlds. From Eliade's initial emphasis on polarity we will arrive at a sense of the sacred as modal, emerging from within the so-called profane world itself, and manifested above all in what he calls 'hierophanies.' What begins as a foil to many of the ideas explored throughout this thesis will result in alternative, rather than diametrically opposed, propositions for the conditions of possibility for encounters with contemporary art within ecclesiastical spaces.

A complaint might be made that this study lacks a properly theological perspective, for which a focus on the anthropology of religion is no substitute. There is some justification to this reproach. However, there are significant reasons for our anthropological approach. In part it is because so much of this thesis is concerned with art that originates, as it were, from outside the temple (*pro-fanum*). Bringing what appears to belong outside into the sacred precinct remains problematic unless we redefine or reevaluate the nature of that profanation. Abundant texts exist to appraise art's relevance for theology or its place within a theological aesthetics but, in many respects, current ideas of the sacred and profane begin in anthropology. In the secular art world, for instance, cultural points of reference rather than theological predominate in which the modern church is read as a cultural-historical as opposed to strictly religious site. Far from a dissociation of context and the theories being used to support it, the anthropology of the sacred will prove an efficacious guide in gauging the relation of predominantly secular philosophies and artworks to the church. Finally, if within their own fields the currency of Durkheim's and Eliade's ideas has depreciated over the years, in other respects their persistence retains a hold on the popular imagination to an extent that makes them worth revisiting. Their work continues to raise questions around sacrality still unresolved, still subject to discussion, still producing art and exhibitions. Regardless of their arguable claim to ethnographic truth there can be no doubting the scope of their influence, but is that enough to justify their revival in these pages? That is precisely what this chapter will attempt to discern, beginning with Eliade's conceptual schema before returning to that of his predecessor, Durkheim.

Sacred space and time

Eliade begins from the assumption that the sacred and the profane stand for two experiences of the world that are fundamentally opposed, the former offering access to some 'really real' behind the so-called reality of the latter. In an attempt to discern the traces of the sacred he turns to a comparative study of religion, from which he concludes

any religion will reveal a qualitative contrast of the sacred and profane. To explain this distinction he selects an example pertinent to this study: a church in a modern city. In doing so he outlines both a sense of separation that the sacred and profane represent and their place of meeting at a point of threshold, where such continuities and discontinuities gather; in other words, a paradox of non-porous porosity:

> For a believer, the church shares in a different space from the street in which it stands. The door that opens on the interior of the church actually signifies a solution of continuity. The threshold that separates the two spaces also indicates the distance between two modes of being, the profane and the religious. The threshold is the limit, the boundary, the frontier that distinguishes and opposes two worlds – and at the same time the paradoxical place where those worlds communicate, where passage from the profane to the sacred becomes possible.[1]

Here we see a rather different mode of transit between one world and another than we found in Benjamin's musings on Naples. For Eliade, sacred and profane are not only distinguished spatially but existentially, as two modes of being in the world, or situations relating to one's place in the world. They refer, therefore, to both a location and a way of locating oneself, a habitat and a way of inhabiting.[2] The first distinction of sacred and profane made by Eliade is, therefore, between heterogeneous and homogeneous space, inhabited respectively by *homo religiosus* and so-called modern man. His influential study, *The Sacred and the Profane*, begins by claiming that, for the latter space is essentially homogenous, whereas for the former space is characterised by interruptions and breaks in which qualitative differences become apparent.[3] This qualitative difference of non-homogeneous space he regards as a primary religious experience, requiring a religious sensibility that can distinguish between the sacred on the one hand, and non-sacred or profane on the other.

Sacred time too has distinct and differing qualities. Paralleling spatial experience, it is neither homogeneous nor continuous. Instead, it contrasts the ordinary temporal duration of profane time with a ritualised time, as Corbin describes in his study of village bells. By means of rites, one can pass from this ordinary duration to a sacred time, one

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[1] Eliade. 1959: 25

[2] Ibid: 14. Eliade argues that for *homo religiosus* a sacred space both constitutes a world and provides an orientation within the world. The sacred always signifies what he names an 'axis mundi.' This is not a spatial orientation within the world so much as a cognitive or existential category, not dissimilar to Fredric Jameson's notion of cognitive mapping. The loss of one's cognitive map within postmodernity, as lamented by Jameson, parallels the loss of a sacred orientation, or 'axis mundi,' within secular culture.

[3] Ibid: 20

disengaged from the time of the world. This break with homogeneous time that the sacred instigates has clear resonances with Bergson's distinction of a homogeneous, mechanistic time of mathematical measurement and the flow of experienced time, which constitutes the basis of his philosophy of duration. Thus we might see the movement between sacred and profane time as a shift between differing modes of duration. For Eliade, it is distinguishable by the refusal of *homo religiosus* to live solely in what we might call 'the historical present,' that is, to be constrained by the regular passage of quotidian time. 'Religious man,' he suggests, lives in two kinds of time, sacred time and profane time, the former being the most important. Sacred time is construed with ritual, with an effort to step outside habitual patterns and daily routines, at the same time that, as Eliade contends, it makes ordinary time possible.[4] Thus, he claims, a sense of duration beyond the temporal rhythms of daily existence forms the basis of a religious understanding of the world.

Eliade concedes that 'non-religious man' is not entirely inured to a sense of sacred time. He recognises that his experience of time also manifests discontinuities and heterogeneities. For example, he makes the distinction between the general monotony of the working week and what he terms 'festal time,' and also notes that other non-religious occasions afford differing senses of duration:

> He too lives in varying temporal rhythms and is aware of times of different intensities; when he is listening to the kind of music that he likes or, being in love, waits for or meets his sweetheart, he obviously experiences a different temporal rhythm from that which he experiences when he is working or bored.[5]

Such intensities constitute a different sensation or quality of time, but Eliade denies that they fall within the bracket of the sacred. He insists that there is an essential difference between the two experiences. They represent a difference of degree but not of kind, whereas those whom he calls 'religious' experience periods of time that are sacred, that is, distinct in kind from whatever precedes or follows them, having an entirely different structure and origin. The sanctified time they experience, most typically brought into the present via religious ritual, is a liturgical time, inaccessible to the non-religious. For 'religious man,'

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[4] Ibid: 89

[5] Ibid: 71

profane temporal duration can be periodically arrested; for certain rituals have the power to interrupt it by periods of a sacred time that is nonhistorical (in the sense that it does not belong to the historical present). Just as a church constitutes a break in plane in the profane space of a modern city, the service celebrated inside it marks a break in profane temporal duration. It is no longer today's historical time that is present – the time that is experienced, for instance, in the adjacent streets – but the time in which the historical existence of Jesus Christ occurred, the time sanctified by his preaching, by his passion, death, and resurrection.[6]

Such an idealised (clearly Kierkegaardian) view of religious experience may, I suspect, be relatively rare, and his reference to the divine unusual. His approach tends to be seen in phenomenological rather than ontological or transcendent terms. Nonetheless, it is obvious that Eliade's strict determination of the sacred relies upon its substantive value as, in each case, revealing some religious quality standing, in Whitehead's words, 'beyond, behind and within, the passing flux of immediate things.'[7] If we are reluctant to subscribe to so metaphysical a view, Eliade's terms leave us without any really satisfactory definitions of religious and non-religious in modern terms. In this instance he does not stray far from the rather limited distinctions of Christian and non-Christian, explicit in his reference to liturgical time and the historicity of Christ.

Religious and non-religious

Eliade makes a clear distinction of experiences of space and time for those whom he labels 'religious man' as opposed to 'non-religious man,' by which he means to differentiate between so-called primitive peoples whose whole world, it is assumed, is inscribed within religious parameters, and a modern subject of a secular culture in which clearly-defined boundaries separate church and state, the church and the street, even if, as Eliade intimates, the threshold that separates them neither prohibits nor precludes passage between the two. If the anthropological scope of his work exposes the intolerable terminological prejudices of his age, nonetheless the difference of religious and non-religious in contemporary terms is in itself a helpful, if unresolved, distinction to be drawn when considering the impact of art encounters within ecclesiastical spaces: in contemporary Western terms what does it mean to be religious or non-religious, and how do these terms enable us to designate something as sacred and something else profane? If, for Eliade, writing in the late 1950s, they mark a clearly religious division, does that

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[6] Ibid: 71-2

[7] Whitehead. 1967: 191

division seem less assured today? For example, is a sense of the sacred necessarily determined by whether or not one considers oneself to be religious or non-religious? Is the sacred experienced as something that falls so far outside quotidian secular existence that it bears no relation to it, or can it be felt psychologically in the everyday things of life, as Michel Leiris has proposed? In the next chapter we will see that his sense of sacred *gaucherie* draws near to an Eliadean awareness of temporal and spatial differences in one's experience of life, even if Leiris might not consider that experience to be religious as such.

The important thing to note is Eliade's conflation of the religious and the sacred, and the non-religious and the profane. It is this categorisation of experience that will be questioned, particularly in its import for the use of believing or non-believing artists. Although it might be true to say that, by and large, only those professing to be Christians partake of the sacraments, this is not necessarily the case for those who partake of the church as a sacramental space or sacred moment. Thus an experience of sacred space and sacred time may not be so easily ascribed to the 'religious,' in Eliade's strict sense.[8] One of the issues this study must acknowledge as a fundamental uncertainty is how to differentiate between religious and non-religious experience in the modern world as it relates to the sacred. If we protest that so-called non-religious man is also aware of temporal discrepancies, of experiencing real duration, then the question must be asked, are these experiences something to which the name of the sacred can or should be applied? In the next chapter we will investigate one particular response to this question through Derrida's diremption of belief and sacredness. Derrida obviates the reliance upon a distinctly formulated dualism of religious and non-religious by discerning a difference between experience rooted in belief and experience inspired by a sense of sacredness or, as David Jones, the poet, essayist and artist, would say, a sense of man as intrinsically sacramental. As sacredness is divorced from conventional patterns of belief so it may re-emerge, perhaps in unusual moments of epiphany, but more commonly in what we could call a sacramental attitude towards life, in the sense that Jones conveys.[9] But Eliade himself provides a response to this impasse, albeit with the caveat that it merely simulates sacrality. He concedes that even the most de-sacrilised existence, the most non-religious of profane worlds, 'never succeeds in completely doing away with religious behaviour.' Traces are still preserved 'of a religious valorisation of the world,' even if 'no *true*

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[8] Or we may need a broader definition of the term 'religious,' as Tillich, for instance, attempted with his well-known formulation of 'ultimate concern.'

[9] Jones. 1973

orientation' is possible.[10] Though fragmented and dispersed, dissociated from specifically religious environments, the sacred finds other footholds in the profane world:

> There are, for example, privileged places, qualitatively different from all others – a man's birthplace, or the scenes of his first love, or certain places in the first foreign city he visited in youth. Even for the most frankly nonreligious man, all these places still retain an exceptional, a unique quality; they are the 'holy places' of his private universe, as if it were in such spots that he had received the revelation of a reality *other* than that in which he participates through his ordinary daily life.[11]

Eliade appears to concede the persistence of a kind of secular holiness, a residue of mankind's inherent tendency to religious belief, albeit a remnant that survives in camouflaged form. Others would no doubt restrain from ascribing to these 'holy places' any such quasi-religious motivation. All the same, Benjamin's loggia certainly seems to evoke something of this sense of sacrality within the everyday, as do, as we will see, Leiris's reminiscences of childhood. Likewise, as Lévi-Strauss notes, in his brief digression on the contrast of sacred and profane in *Tristes Tropiques*, even the non-believer feels compelled to adopt a respectful attitude on entering a place of worship.[12] Thus, on the one hand the sacred, as a qualitatively distinct locus, inheres in profane life, while on the other the secularised life still registers a difference between profane and sacred worlds, and expresses a sense of reverence in a manner quite different, though not unrelated, to the deference of attitude displayed within art galleries or museums, so often rather tiresomely described as our modern cathedrals, especially by those eager to invest art with a spiritual sustenance no longer thought to be offered by the church.

Nevertheless, the question of the sacred *as* religious cannot be entirely avoided. Contra Durkheim and Freud, for whom the sacred is possible as a manifestation of a religious motivation, but only within sociological or psychological frameworks, Eliade makes the important point that religious phenomena must also be considered 'on their own plane of reference,' that is, *as* religious, otherwise specific aspects of the sacred are wilfully ignored.[13] Eliade's concern is that if religious phenomena are reduced to non-religious factors they lose their sense as religious:

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[10] Eliade. 1959: 23 (emphasis in original)

[11] Ibid: 24 (emphasis in original)

[12] Lévi-Strauss. 1976: 300

[13] Allen. 1972: 173

> Unlike earlier investigators who superimposed their own normative standards upon their data, Eliade wants to deal faithfully with his phenomena as phenomena, to see just what his data reveal. What his data reveal is that certain people have had experiences which they have considered religious. Thus, the phenomenologist must first of all respect the original intentionality expressed by his data; he must attempt to understand such phenomena as something religious.[14]

This cautions the secularist against dismissing religious experience as purely psychologically or socially-induced, but also against the religious believer's rejection of experiences claimed to be religious or sacred by those whose framework of thinking falls outside the parameters of conventional religious worldviews. Likewise, if a transcendent dimension can no longer be assumed as a given, neither should it be dismissed as an anachronism. Clearly for many of those actively involved in commissioning or inviting art into ecclesiastical spaces, and those who regularly attend or use these spaces, this transcendent dimension is intrinsic to their understanding of the sacred, even if it is not necessarily so for many of the artists approached nor for many of those who will experience the works in their ecclesiastical context. Our argument makes no claims either way. Nevertheless, by the standards of Eliade's criteria, art introduced into ecclesiastical spaces cannot avoid being considered in its relation to the religious and the sacred, and judged accordingly. At the same time, we argue that the conditions of possibility for an experience of art will be seriously hampered if they are reduced to any conventional expectations of sacrality. But before we go any further with this let us backtrack to the inauguration of this opposition of sacred and profane, generally credited to Emile Durkheim.

Sacred and profane polarity

Eliade's division of the world into heterogeneous and homogeneous, religious and non-religious forces, is clearly indebted to an unnamed but evident source: Durkheim's discourse of sacred and profane polarity. His spacing of the sacred as something set alongside, but wholly different to, the profane (spatially, temporally and psychologically), is again premised on their absolute heterogeneity. Nothing is so 'profoundly differentiated' or 'radically opposed,' says Durkheim, as these two categories of experience, whose antagonism is exacerbated by their profound resistance to any form of

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[14] Ibid: 173-4

mingling or contact.[15] Like Eliade he owes this schema, in part, to the perceived schism of the church and secular society, leading to the recognition of a cultural divorce of religious and non-religious life, which both assume as a given. If this marks a division of sacred and profane worlds, however, it does so only within the context of a sacred that no longer possesses any meaningful religious purchase other than the symbolic.

Within anthropological accounts Durkheim notes certain prevailing themes from which his picture of a sacred and profane polarity emerges: the profane must not touch the sacred; the sacred must not touch the profane. One is endangered; the other is polluted. The irrefragable separation of sacred and profane that Durkheim's thesis demands – he speaks of a 'barrier' that sets the sacred apart from the profane, signified we could say by the slash in the syntagm 'sacred/profane' – is not only for the protection of the sacred, to keep it free from sacrilege, but is also for the protection of whatever it threatens by contagion or defilement. Whenever something is established as sacred there immediately arise concerns not only of pollution from the profane world but of the contaminating nature of the sacred itself. In order to conceptualise this counter-intuitive notion of a sacred that defiles, Durkheim introduces a secondary distinction: a sacred pure as opposed to a sacred impure, or an auspicious and inauspicious sacred. These distinctions are not of the same order of the prohibited contact between sacred and profane, but arise from, as Durkheim says, 'disparity and incompatibility among sacred things,'[16] a disparity evident in the etymology of the sacred, notably its Latin derivation from *sacer* and *sanctus* (see appendix 5). The sacred may be experienced as dangerous, as cursed as well as blessed, a source of fear as well as reverence.[17] Eliade's later research concurs with this ascription:

> The ambivalence of the sacred is not only in the psychological order (in that it attracts or repels), but also in the order of values; the sacred is at once 'sacred' and 'defiled.'[18]

As Durkheim points out, a holy rite (sacred pure) and a dead body (sacred impure) both fall within the auspices of the sacred. Yet each provokes contrary feelings, the former respect and veneration, the latter disgust and horror. It is equally the case that, as he also

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[15] Durkheim. 1995: 37

[16] Ibid: 306

[17] Robinson. 1993: 33

[18] Eliade. 1958: 14

proposes, there can be a certain horror in religious respect (the awfulness of awe), especially if it is an intense experience, while fear or horror is not without a reverential aspect. After all, the visual focus for a Christian churchgoer is a horrific scene of torture and execution, as crucifixions like Grünewald's altarpiece so viscerally shows, and palpable physical agony, as Mel Gibson's, *The Passion of the Christ*, exploited to full cinematic revulsion.

Danger, defilement and pollution

Alongside an opposition of the sacred and profane, then, there exists an ambiguity of religious forces within the sacred itself, contrasting holy, benevolent or positive attributes with impure, negative ones. Between the two there is total enmity, each forbidden to the other through contact, proximity or association. In fact, says Durkheim, '[a]ny contact between them is considered the worst of profanations.'[19] Yet both fall under the auspices of 'religious forces' and hence the sacred. Though opposed, these two aspects are like two sides of the same coin, inextricably linked through a kind of sacred kinship, especially in their relationship to the profane, which is as prohibitive for one as for the other. The profane world can no more interact with impure sacred forces than it can with holy things. And yet at the same time the barrier or threshold holding these worlds apart proves not to be the impermeable screen it has purported to be. If it is the case that something impure (a corpse for example) can be transformed into something holy (the protecting spirit of one's ancestor), it is equally the case that the sacred and profane cannot be so securely segregated. However necessary the distance between them, it is not absolute; if contact is forbidden, it is not actually impossible, but cannot be achieved without consequences and requires an administered process of transition.

Durkheim's approach to the phenomenon of religious belief and practice is to insist on a complete segregation of the sacred realm from the profane, of secular from religious behaviour, due to the sacred's 'extraordinary contagiousness,' its contradictory tendency 'to spread into the same profane world that it otherwise excludes.'[20] Its contagiousness helps us understand the strict prohibitions demanded of the sacred in its division from the profane, since neither can draw near, or flow into the other, without each 'belying their nature.'[21] Rules of separation are the distinguishing marks of the

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[19] Durkheim. 1995: 413

[20] Ibid: 322

[21] Ibid.

sacred, he insists; it needs to be 'continually hedged in with prohibitions' lest it lose its 'distinctive and necessary character.'[22] Inversely, the profane being or object cannot violate the prohibitions that keep it safely distant from the sacred without thereby being polluted by it, becoming subject to a force that is naturally hostile to it. Sacred inviolability is, therefore, accompanied by a corresponding sacred pollution, hence the indispensability of measures designed to keep them apart. Sacredness, says Durkheim, is not only dangerously infectious, hence in need of protective and inhibitive sanctions, it is also transient, highly volatile, susceptible to the slightest disturbance:

> While repelling the profane world, the sacred world tends at the same time to flow into the profane world whenever the latter world comes near it. That is why they must be kept at a distance from each other and why, in some sense, a void must be opened between them. [...] Even the most superficial or indirect contact is enough for it to spread from one object to another. […] By virtue of [its] exceptional volatility, the slightest contact, the least proximity of a profane being … is enough to draw the religious forces outside their domain.[23]

Durkheim's prior use of the same fluid vocabulary that Benjamin later chooses to describe his experience of Naples is not insignificant. Porosity seems to be a ubiquitous characteristic of the sacred, even when it gathers around itself a *temenos* of apparent impermeability; when it erects, in Durkheim's words, a barrier, or when separation is enforced by a void. But can such precautions be of any effect if each of these two apparently heterogeneous states so readily pollutes the other? Earlier in his text Durkheim had conceded as much regarding attempts to confine religious and secular to distinct spheres:

> Of course, it is virtually impossible for religion ever to reach the point of being concentrated hermetically in the spatial and temporal milieux that are assigned to it; a little of it inevitably filters out.[24]

Inversely, the profane or secular world seeps into sacred spaces through the transitional space of the threshold. What we must keep in mind is that Durkheim's is a fundamentally secular interpretation of sacred forces. Rather than having transcendent origins sacredness begins in the mind and one's experience of the world.[25] Its contagion, therefore, lies in its

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[22] Douglas. 1991: 22

[23] Durkheim. 1995: 322, 324

[24] Durkheim. 1995: 313

[25] Ibid: 328

embeddedness in the world, having no higher, external authority to assure its integrity. The significance of this, admittedly biased, perspective is that objects, occasions and people

> take on religious significance that is not intrinsic to them but is conferred on them from outside. Hence contagion is not a kind of secondary process by which sacredness propagates, once acquired, but is instead the very process by which sacredness is acquired.[26]

By contagion the natural difference of things is no bar to their acquisition of sacredness, for it depends on nothing inherent to them, only on the possibility of contact, proximity and association. Each is capable of inducing this transference of sacrality, which draws out the inessential character of the sacred, as something that is, as it were, added to the real, *but taking no space.*[27] If it takes no space, nevertheless it has a transformative effect. Rites of consecration are evidence of this transferable quality of contagiousness, through formalised and public ritual. The font or altar that, in the craftsman's workshop or artist's studio, is a worked object becomes in situ a part of the sacred furniture of the church, formalised as such by a ceremony of consecration. If we adhere to this view that sacred forces do not have a place of their own, that they 'take no space,' then their mobility becomes more explicable.

The porosity of the sacred is a counter-intuitive concept in the context of the church considering the degree to which we traditionally see the sacred as integral, self-contained, localised and fixed, rather than diffuse and evanescent. The uses of contemporary art have been instrumental in challenging this view. If the sacred is an epiphenomenon of social and cultural forces engineered towards the organic solidarity of so-called primitive communities, and a bulwark against the threat of anomie for modern societies, as Durkheim's thesis implies, then the fluidity of the sacred makes sense, organised as it is around contingency rather than necessity. If, however, the sacred is of divine rather than human origin then its volatility must be viewed in a different light. In either case, this has serious implications for the uses of unconventional forms of art within the church. One of the questions raised by the former proposition is how much

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[26] Ibid.

[27] Fields, in Durkheim. 1995: xlv. This formula, from Fields's introduction to *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, highlights the socio-cultural character of sacredness, as Durkheim represents it, seeing in its origins a human, typically collective, application rather than a natural or divinely ordained essence. As such, it is inherently impermanent, and must be continually reassigned to the venerated object, time or place, if it is to retain its sacred potency. Thus, says Fields, when we say that something is accorded a quality of sacredness it is as if something is super-added to the real.

the secular world should play a part in the aesthetic environment of the church. As an element of the civic landscape, most notably in times of crisis, commemoration and celebration, this perspective would suggest a high degree of flow between sacred and secular milieux. Alternately, proponents of the second proposition frequently take a defensive stance of safeguarding the sacred against the unwelcome and contaminating influence of the secular. Objections to modern artworks in churches often take the form of arguments against the pollution of the sacred environment by something profane, blasphemous or sacrilegious, often veiled beneath the more common criticism of 'inappropriateness.' The theologian, Mark C. Taylor, also makes this point in the introduction to *Disfiguring*, his study of artistic experience as religious experience:

> Art, we are repeatedly told, is not only corrupt but also corrupting. Many representatives of the religious and political right assume that it is their God-given mission to purge the polis of this catastrophic disease.[28]

For those who defend the place of contemporary art in opposition to such reactive attitudes, art is seen as an important agent in traversing carefully protected borders, spiritually and aesthetically, and thus a progressive force in the church.[29] For those who oppose it, art is frequently regarded as a polluting agent. At its most radical, for those suspicious of its contaminating influence art works against what might be perceived as the good health of the ecclesiastical body while others welcome it as a counter-infection to a moribund status quo.[30] This question of contamination also reflects upon the work of art itself. One of the difficulties for works of art in this respect is that they are inevitably hermeneutically over-coded, simply by their presence in an ecclesiastical context. This is precisely the issue that Simon Morley raises with Mennekes, in inviting art into such 'charged' contexts.[31] The fear that the work becomes laden with unintended

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[28] Taylor. 1992: 2

[29] Wolfgang Huber makes precisely this point in his forward to the publication documenting Gabriela Nasfeter's *Lichtpyramide* project (Richter. 2003: 8).

[30] Several years ago a controversial project was acrimoniously debated along precisely these lines. A renowned artist, Johannes Schreiter, had been commissioned to produce a series of windows for Heidelberg's *Heiliggeistkirche*. His proposed designs were initially approved, but then succumbed to dissenting voices, which succeeded in quashing the project. The chief objection to his unconventional designs was their use of contemporary references to medical charts, stock market reports, scientific formulae, traffic signs, and other elements of modern life. Critics decried them as 'morally debased, irreligious and even blasphemous,' and questioned their propriety as 'appropriate or authentic religious imagery,' yet Schreiter's advocates hailed them as 'an international landmark in the history of glass design, and one of the most original twentieth-century theological statements' (Mulder. 2005: 126). We will return to this project in the conclusion.

[31] Morley. 1998: 51

meaning is precisely the danger (or challenge) of sacred contagion faced by artworks in churches. Closely aligned with this threat of defilement is, in part, the sense of being out of place, of not belonging. In other words, something may not be necessarily sacred or profane *in itself*, but only according to where it is experienced. This may well be one reason why there can be such a conflict between unconventional works of art and ecclesiastical spaces. An artwork may be deemed entirely appropriate and unproblematic when seen in a gallery yet inappropriate for a cathedral.[32] More confusing still is the idea that the same work of art may live a double life within the same kind of context, regarded as sacrilegious in one cathedral and sanctioned in another, or why one kind of ritual, sacred in one place, can be considered profane, or incongruous, in another.[33] For this reason new and unexpected art forms and content in churches walk a fine line between sacrilege and sanctity, the fear of pollution mustering opposition to anything that threatens 'to confuse or contradict cherished classifications.'[34] This supposition from Mary Douglas assumes that a desire for conceptual stability is likely to downplay or reject any persistent ambiguity or discordance. We operate with a kind of 'filtering mechanism,' she says, a definitively permeable yet constrictive screen which censors, prohibiting all but the familiar and recognisable.[35] Works of art and the sacred often enable us to go behind the explicit structures of normal experience, to bypass this filtering mechanism, through encounters with the seemingly inarticulate experience of the unfamiliar (what Deleuze would describe as breaking the hold of dogmatic images of thought upon our imagination). If, then, in its institutionalised forms the sacred belongs to the familiar; in other forms it inheres in the unfamiliar. Within ethnological studies, for example, the sacred is very often associated with the novel, the unfamiliar and the strange – anything which falls outside the conventional or traditional. But in other respects the sacred is seen as a state of wholeness, of unity and order, as many writers, Douglas among them, include among its characteristics, in which case it is whatever fails to fit expected patterns

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[32] Adversely, an argument is sometimes made against religious icons or altarpieces in galleries, their secular context seen as an undermining of their sacred purpose. One of the peculiarities of the modern art museum is its display of displaced and deracinated religious objects whose status as devotional objects is put into question by their non-sacramental display as works of art.

[33] As an example of the former, both Viola's *The Messenger* and McComb's *Portrait of Young Man Standing* have lived this kind of double life, controversial in one cathedral, entirely unproblematic in another. As an example of the latter, Ono's ritualised artwork, unproblematic in a gallery, may confound expectations when encountered in a cathedral, begging the question where or how it fits within its sacred milieu.

[34] Douglas. 1991: 37

[35] Ibid: 38

– the obscure, unclassifiable and disordered – that endangers and pollutes. In either case, it is not the relation of two bounded states that is in question but rather how to accommodate or negotiate their innate permeability. In numerous enthnographic studies an indeterminate middle ground is posited. Variously described as a marginal, threshold, liminal or transitional state, it provides a means of passage between apparently antithetical positions. This does not defuse the threat of contamination. Indeed, the anthropologist Arnold van Gennep saw that danger lies in transitional states *precisely because* they are neither one thing nor another. This indeterminacy, along with the unpredictable and unstable process of movement between states, highlights the essential role of rites of passage, which act as the means by which order is reinstituted in place of disorder.

New Religion

One of the ways, then, that the ambiguity of the sacred so prevalent in early twentieth-century anthropology may be reworked or rethought for contemporary ecclesiastical conditions for art is through this notion of contagion. The character and conditions of the sacred as contaminant offer manifold possibilities for thought. Whilst acknowledging, for example, the very great differences of art and religion, as the priest/curator Friedhelm Mennekes does, as equally valid yet different ways of talking about the world, ways which should not be confused, there is nonetheless between the two a flow that cannot be easily dammed. For many involved in art projects it is a way of saying that the Christian world cannot and should not be isolated from the non-Christian, that the artist professing no faith or an alternative faith can speak to the Christian faithful. In other words, we need to free ourselves from the limited sense of the sacred that has, since Durkheim's time, if not before, governed our thinking, especially in the modernising drive to divorce culture from the influence of religion.

What happens, then, when the boundaries between sacred and profane are so blurred as to appear unworkable? When the sacred becomes a vehicle for vulgarity, obscenity, provocation or cynicism, can or should the borders between sacred and profane be reinforced? This question was raised by a senior member of the Cathedrals Fabric Commission for England, the body responsible for safeguarding the integrity of ecclesiastical spaces, regarding Mark Quinn's contribution to *Crucible*, the ambitious

exhibition of sculpture shown in Gloucester Cathedral in 2010.[36] Despite a number of possible contenders for controversy Quinn's sculpture was singled out not because of its form but above all because of its title. *Waiting for Godot* was a patinated bronze cast of an adult skeleton kneeling in prayer before an altar (figure 30). This in itself legitimately presented any number of possible readings, and for those in the know established a striking conceptual link with *Angel*, Quinn's bronze cast of a foetal infant at prayer, exhibited in Winchester Cathedral as part of the exhibition, *Light*, in 2007 (figure 31). What caused offence was the knowing cynicism of the title, which, it was claimed, seemed to mock the pretensions of the church. For their harshest critics works like these highlight an urgent need to preserve some kind of protective sacred enclosure against malign polluting agents.

Few modern artists have presented such rich possibilities for debate over sacred contagion as Damien Hirst: when he deliberately conflates religiosity with market values (*For the love of God*); when he uses Christian iconography in a blatant attempt to add religious gravitas to the power of images to shock (*Beyond Belief*); or when he attaches religious significance to pharmacology and installs it within a church space under the banner, *New Religion*. The religious iconography associated with Hirst falls within the ambit of an ambiguous sacred with the power to 'repel and attract in equal measure,' as the press release for his White Cube exhibition, *Beyond Belief*, attests.[37] Indebted to an art discourse that, from the turn of the turbulent twentieth century, has rebelled against an art aesthetic of beauty, and turned towards one of ugliness, shock, disjuncture, brokenness, and entropy, Hirst's provocative oeuvre operates within, not outside, a sacrality defined by dialectical ambiguity. In 2006 an installation by Damien Hirst in All Hallows Church, London Wall, marked the inauguration of 'Wallspace,' an exhibition space within a functioning church established as a forum for explorations of art and spirituality, describing itself as a spiritual home for visual art (figure 32). As such, there was something prescient in the choice of Hirst – an artist-provocateur whose work exemplifies an equivocal seductive appeal and distasteful repulsion – for its inaugural exhibition. In *New Religion* pharmaceuticals have become the modern emblems of faith, suggesting a commercialised repackaging of religion's allegedly narcotic powers, or our reliance upon chemical stimuli, or the panacea promised by science (the notion of 'miracle drugs' is given a new twist), or the body as an amalgam of chemical and electrical stimuli.

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[36] Private conversation with Nicholas Bury, then Dean of Gloucester.

[37] Press Release. *Damien Hirst: Beyond Belief*. White Cube. 2007

In Hirst's 'new religion' capsules replace disciples and stations of the cross, a cedar crucifix is inlaid with gem-like pills, the eucharist wafer has become a paracetamol tablet, in an altar-like reliquary a child's silver skull rests beside a silver cast of a heart pierced with scalpels, razors and catheters, medical photographs allegorise the wounds of Christ, while, in an alternate spin on life and death, nuclear armaments capabilities take the place of the last supper.

Perhaps the worst to be said of Hirst's installation is its lack of subtlety, its portentousness, and its drift towards religious kitsch. One reviewer concluded that 'ladling on the glitter and the symbolism like this is in thoroughly bad taste,' but then added, 'but so are the statues in Catholic churches that show the Madonna nursing a bleeding heart pierced with knives.'[38] The ecclesiastical setting prompts another to ask whether Hirst's contemporary religious iconography stands or falls in the presence of the real thing.[39] Justin Thacker of the Evangelical Alliance was among those sceptical of Hirst's conflation of science and religion as panaceas. Although he conceded that 'both pharmaceuticals and Christianity provide relief from physical or emotional pain' he believed the two were hardly comparable and warned that some Christians would be 'affronted' by the 'crass theology' on offer.[40] The question always put to Hirst's work of this kind, one only exacerbated by its appearance in a church, is whether powerful images and objects of faith are being manipulated for sensational effect? This was certainly the concern of an Anglican spokesman responding to the exhibition in All Hallows.[41] Is he exploiting religion for controversy's sake or posing genuine questions? Is his work an act of shameless effrontery or a searching interrogation of modern faith? Is he a religious artist or is his work, as one critic put it, merely 'Christian-themed'?[42] For Director Meryl Doney the purpose of Wallspace was precisely to bring such difficult ambiguities into the church, not to shy away from them. In the press release for the exhibition she defended her choice of Hirst based upon the presupposition of non-neutrality represented by an environment for art like Wallspace, declaring her belief that there is 'a vigorous and open conversation to be had with this provocative and serious work.'[43] From this perspective

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[38] So London. 2007

[39] Hackworth. 2007

[40] Hodgson. 2007

[41] Ibid.

[42] Jones. 2007

[43] Press Release. *Damien Hirst New Religion*. Wallspace. 2007

the motivations for Hirst's religiosity are of far less importance than the provocation to thought that his work fosters, along with the possibility that it offers, at least for some, of a contemporary language with which to appraise the place of religion and the sacred in today's world.

Hierophany

The ambiguities of the sacred discussed in this chapter need not refer too directly to whatever it is we normally mean by 'the religious' or 'the sacred,' with all the ontological and substantive problems this brings, but may be read analogically, as a means of expanding artistic possibilities. It allows us to proffer other modalities of sacred experience. One of those modalities, conditions or categories of the sacred returns us to the work of Eliade. Central to Eliade's thought is the idea that the sacred is manifested through disruptions in the individual's subjective experience of homogeneous space and time. He names these disruptions 'hierophanies.' Etymologically hierophany expresses the idea 'that something sacred shows itself to us.'[44] More specifically and crucially, it is whatever shows itself as sacred *within* the profane world, often couched in highly dramatic language:

> 'The sacred' periodically breaks through or 'irupts' into the earthly, 'profane' realm, leaving in its wake exceptionally charged places or 'hierophanies,' that is, 'manifestations of the sacred.'[45]

In every case, Eliade stresses, 'the sacred expresses itself through something *other than itself*…but never wholly or directly.'[46] This something 'other than itself' is what Eliade infers by hierophany. Furthermore, Eliade indicates that this showing of the sacred operates both historically and ahistorically. As the former, it reveals some attitude or idea that mankind has about the sacred, and is therefore embedded in a particular historical moment. This, we might say, is close to Durkheim's idea of a socially-inscribed sacred. As the latter, it reveals a modality of the sacred, representing one part of a sacred whole, and therefore ahistorical. With this latter definition it is obvious that Eliade envisages a plenary sacred of which we catch glimpses, building upon an always incomplete picture.

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[44] Eliade. 1959: 11. A showing or manifestation (*phainein*: to show) of the priestly or holy (hieratic, from the Greek *hieros*, meaning sacred).

[45] Jones. 2000b: 34

[46] Ibid: 26 (my emphasis)

Actual hierophanies seem to indicate a virtual space giving birth to occasional incarnations or discrete moments. In this sense Whitehead's description of the essential character of religion appears to capture precisely the sense of the sacred to which Eliade's discussion of hierophany alludes:

> Religion is the vision of something which stands beyond, behind, and within, the passing flux of immediate things; something which is real, and yet waiting to be realised; something which is a remote possibility, and yet the greatest of present facts; something that gives meaning to all that passes, and yet eludes apprehension; something whose possession is the final good, and yet is beyond all reach; something which is the ultimate ideal, and the hopeless quest.[47]

Replace 'religion' with 'hierophany' in this paragraph and we seem to be presented with an adequate analogy for Eliade's thought. In fact, despite the similarities, there is an important difference. Whitehead's description infers a transcendent reality that Eliade denies, restricting incarnations of the sacred to human dimensions, despite his repeated references to 'sacred reality.' Eliade's project seems closer to Caillois's description of religion, which presents itself as the sum of mankind's relationship with the sacred. Through a study of the various manifestations of religious life a picture of the sacred as such will emerge:

> We couldn't stress more forcefully the points at which the experience of the sacred animates all the various manifestations of the religious way of life. The latter is, in effect, the sum total of man's relationships with the sacred.[48]

Eliade's aim, via the comparative method, is for a 'total hermeneutics,' his project presupposing the sacred as an objective reality or, in his words, the 'really real,' in a manner that seems to take more inspiration from the philosophy of Heidegger than from anthropology. However, in his insistence that every hierophany, as 'parts of a whole,' supposes a 'coherent system,' that is, that presuppose an integrity of belief or practice, Eliade speaks in ambitious terms of discovering 'all the different modalities of the sacred' within a particular religious culture, through an examination of its many rites and myths.[49] Thus, Eliade strikes an awkward balance between a Kantian metaphysics (apprehension of appearance and the inscrutability of the thing-in-itself), a Heideggerian unconcealment or clearing (*Lichtung* as *temenos*), and a Durkheimian model of the sacred as socially and

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[47] Whitehead. 1967: 191-2

[48] Caillois. 2001: 20

[49] Eliade. 1958: 8, 9

psychologically produced. Nonetheless, we should be wary of ascribing to Eliade's sacred a conventional concept of deity or something like Rudolf Otto's numinous. In contrast both to Otto and Durkheim, Eliade consistently states that religious feeling is essentially the 'human apprehension of the sacred,' as 'an element in the structure of (human) consciousness.'[50] Rather than something socially constructed to make sense of the world, therefore, the sacred is immanent to human experience. As Randall Studstill puts it, in a study of Eliade as phenomenologist:

> The expression 'modes of the sacred' does not refer to the various forms of a divine reality. Rather, modes of the sacred reflect the different ways the sacred is constituted in the mind of the believer. […] The hierophany is both a representation of the modes of the sacred and an expression of 'religious significance' in the mind of 'the believer.'[51]

If, therefore, the temptation is to ascribe an ontological foundation to Eliade's approach (which Studstill, for instance, refutes), it can only be in the light of his insistence on its objective reality, as a universal category of human thought, above and beyond its social and historical implications, not as a theological or onto-theological entity. It is this that constitutes the intriguing designation of the 'really real' and revives suspicions of a latent theological agenda to Eliade's work. Transcendent or not, at the very least it confirms the sacred as real inasmuch as it produces real effects, and exceptionally real in that these effects constitute the most highly venerated aspects of cultural life in the societies of Eliade's investigations.

Within the context of our research the prospect of a transcendent sacred reality cannot, of course, be discounted without doing an injustice to the religious beliefs of many of those with a vested interest in the promotion of contemporary art for the church, but equally we would be wary of following either Caillois or Studstill in their apparent restrictions of sacrality to the religious realm even if, in Caillois's ideas, an excess of the sacred beyond its strictly religious incarnations may be supposed. Where we should also be careful in our use of hierophany is the temptation to conflate it with an idea of epiphany, which it *can* be, but Eliade uses it more generally too, as a set of religious values inscribed in certain rites, myths or symbols relevant to a particular time and context. Hierophanies are, in effect, chosen rather than naturally or divinely ordained as such (although the notion of choice here is a tricky one). That Eliade does not choose

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[50] Bennett. 1996: 99; Eliade, cited in Studstill. 2000: 183

[51] Ibid: 182

to focus on this historical aspect but favours phenomenological or, to stick with his terms, morphological analysis of hierophanies, as modalities of the sacred, indicates the more broadly religious and universal scope of his project.

Modalities of the sacred

In considering the diversity of religious experience, alongside the tenuousness of available evidence, Eliade asks himself whether we are right to speak of different 'modalities of the sacred'?[52] Is the sacred one thing of which there are numerous manifestations (an ontological approach), or are there many expressions of religious belief that each in their own way offer access to experiences which we categorise as sacred (a historical, social and phenomenological approach)? What are its conditions of possibility? The fact that a hierophany is always an event, historical, contingent and particular to some specific situation, does not lessen its potential value in Eliade's view as belonging to some more generalised genera of experience, of having a universal quality.[53] It is obvious that Eliade imagines a definition of the sacred might be found which escapes the confines of one culture and historical moment, and seeps into others. It is this drive towards the universal, alongside the pretension to building a complete picture of sacred modalities, which denotes Eliade's disputed legacy.

On the other hand, specific occasions of the sacred, things considered sacred at one time or in one place, need not necessarily be considered so at other times or in other places, defying in a way a more general definition. One way to understand this difference is to compare what Eliade calls 'indistinct' religious experience with 'direct' religious experience. We should not underestimate the religious value of what may seem to the observer to be purely physiological acts since 'a real religious experience, indistinct in form, results from this effort man makes to enter the real, the sacred, by way of the most fundamental physiological acts transformed into ceremonies.'[54] Such ideas are retained explicitly in a modern believer's saying of grace before a meal, or implicitly in the rite of passage represented by the loss of one's virginity. They also deliver the possibility of a wider understanding of what may be sanctified. Durkheim, among others, proposed a larger category of the sacred than that set by the limits of religion, and indeed, as a fervent atheist, was anxious to assert a place for the sacred outside a transcendent purview.

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[52] Eliade. 1958: 7

[53] Ibid: 3

[54] Ibid: 32

Eliade, in his own way, also broke with strictly religious contexts in speaking of hierophanies that afforded experiences of something 'sacred,' but retained the sacred as an *a priori* category irreducible to man's social life. One of the contributors to *The Blackwell Companion to Sociology of Religion*, Nicholas Demerath, suggests that we might see this as a difference of 'explicit religion' and 'implicit religion,' or alternatively an explicit and implicit sacred:

> For [Eliade] conventional religion by no means exhausted sacred possibilities. If religion was explicitly sacred, other forms qualified implicitly. […] As Rousseau, Durkheim and Weber would also have agreed, sacred meanings may emanate from the political, the familial, and the quotidian. The quality of sacredness is not inherent in a thing or idea; rather, sacredness is imputed from within a social context.[55]

Here we again find an emphasis on specific social contexts, which Eliade's universal aspirations appear to exceed. Still, what this broader sense of sacrality reveals is that secularisation has not eliminated all putative religious sentiment, behaviour or experience. As has been frequently observed, a sense of the sacred has not declined with the waning of religion. It lingers on and seeps into other aspects of life, where once it held sway over the common life of a more overtly religious age. Indeed, several scholars have argued that the thesis of secularisation has been overplayed and oversimplified, Demerath and Richard Fenn among them. They see no loss of sacralisation in the wake of an apparent hegemony of secularising forces, but rather a diffusion of the sacred, as it 'escape[s] the confines of institutionalised religion.'[56] The everyday world, it is argued, is alive with expressions of what one writer has dubbed the 'ordinarily sacred.'[57] Rather than considering the sacred to be a central aspect of religious experience Demerath inverts our expectations, seeing religion as *but one form* of the sacred, and considers that the sacred is one important dimension of something broader still: culture.[58] This broader definition of

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[55] Demerath, in Fenn. 2001: 217. William James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience* is another avenue of focus on modalities of the sacred. He too makes the distinction between explicit and implicit forms of religion, differentiating institutional from personal religion and giving preference, if anything, to the latter over the former. The far more recent work of David Morgan and James Elkins has also cautioned us against elevating high art over more popular expressions, especially where religious experience is concerned. The crudest of icons may express hierophanic qualities for some that a great work of art may lack. A ritualistic act like the placing of a stone may be similarly effective.

[56] Ibid: 369

[57] Sexson. 1982

[58] Demerath, in Fenn. 2001: 218

the secular sacred, we would argue, is a long way from what Eliade means when speaking of hierophany, but is in closer accord with Durkheim's understanding of the term.

Eliade contends that his thesis of indirect or implicit and direct or explicit religious experience is supported by an example that often causes difficulties for the anthropologist in the field: the contrast of priestly religion and more popular religious forms as expressed by the people. One cannot hierarchise religious experience by elevating priestly over popular religious practice since each contributes equally to a culture's understanding of its own sense of the sacred. The priesthood of a particular society, he suggests, will often express a purer form of hierophany to that of the people's more adulterated version, yet both are worthy of study, each offering a particular slant on an understanding or expression of the sacred within the differing strata of a population. Both are equally valid modalities of a sacred whole, the meaning given by the masses standing for as authentic a modality of the sacred as that of its ordained initiates.[59] Thus it makes sense to speak of the sacred bearing different modalities. Nor are these modalities contradictory, says Eliade, but must be thought of as complementary, as 'parts of a whole.' An elite or priestly sacred is balanced by vulgar or popular expressions of the sacred, the latter no less valid, no less 'real,' than the former. This is an example, we might say, of nuances within the broad parameters of a particular religious culture. But it serves to illustrate that manifestations of the sacred are legion, rarely if ever confined to orthodox positions. This builds into a picture of the sacred that may serve as a more general point of orientation: the sacred as multiply gradated, as an expression of indefinable experience, as an actualisation of virtual realms, and so on. David Jones, in his essay on art and sacrament, offers an explanation for the diversity of sacred forms by comparing the Sacraments of the church (which he writes with a capital 'S') with the sacramental nature of man (with a lower-case 's'). Mankind, he argues, is sacramental through and through, almost every pattern of behaviour constrained in some way by ritual and representation (sacrament and sign, he suggests, are interchangeable terms).[60] This distinction of the varieties of sacred experience is vital to a study such as this in pondering the justification for certain artistic endeavours within ecclesiastical settings. Although we should remain wary of being overly prescriptive in determining what may or may not be a manifestation of the sacred, might we not legitimately descry potential hierophanies that are not of the priesthood, nor the people, but rather of the work of art? We have already

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[59] Eliade. 1958: 7

[60] Jones. 1973.

encountered this possibility in the example of Ono's installation for St. Paul's Cathedral, which offered a form of ritualised participation. Alongside the authorised expression of the sacred administered through the ritual practice of the sacrament there was, side-by-side, a lay understanding of the sacred, spontaneous and less formalised, albeit one officially sanctioned. Perhaps we should resist conflating the ritual behaviour generated by the installation with an expression of the sacred, but from observations of the ritual process it was clear that something along the lines of Jones's more generalised application of the sacramental frequently occurred. What is of particular note, in the light of the distinction we are making here, is that during the entire time of my observation of the work, not once did I see a participating priest, nor were the two ritual practices (the Sacraments and the artistic-sacramental) in any way allowed to mingle; the official liturgy and more informal work of art were kept isolated within their own respective spheres.

The worship of stones

At some point we must tackle the disparity between the disputed validity of Eliade's theories and the efficacy of their application. Why persist in affirming a concept of hierophanies if so much of Eliade's legacy is perceived to be questionable? One answer is provided by Eliade scholar, Randall Studstill, who makes a distinction between methodology and interpretation:

> Some of Eliade's conclusions regarding the meaning of specific religious phenomena have been shown to be completely erroneous. If a methodology can lead to such gross misunderstanding can it possibly be valid? My own sense is that it can, because the problem does not lie in the phenomenological method per se, but in Eliade's failure to adequately contextualise the phenomena historically and exercise a sufficient degree of caution and hermeneutical suspicion. That Eliade arrived at erroneous conclusions does not significantly problematise the theory behind his approach.[61]

That theory allows us to affirm the opportunities a category of hierophanies provides for rethinking the use of cultural objects in an entirely different context (that is, beyond the parameters of classical anthropology). Eliade's ideas permit the validation of alternative modes of experience within or alongside orthodox ecclesiastical liturgies and religious expressions. One of the examples Eliade uses to illustrate his point is highly pertinent in this regard: the worship of stones. In a culture that worships stones, not all stones are

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[61] Studstill. 2000: 192

venerated. Those that are, are so because of some peculiarity of their shape or size, or (and for our purposes this is particularly relevant) because they are 'bound up with some ritual.'[62] Nor are the stones themselves worshipped – they are venerated because they reveal a modality of the sacred, a quality 'super-added' to their natural status as stones (to borrow a phrase from Durkheim). Now, the question we would ask is this: how does this reflect upon a work like *Cleaning Piece* whether it appears in a cathedral or in its various incarnations in gallery spaces (figure 33)? As a bed of stones, arranged as part of a larger installation, *Cleaning Piece* may be nominally thought of as an art object, regardless of its inclusion within a sacred or secular context. When the stones are selected, singled-out, and placed upon the mounds, the work of art as ritual begins, fulfilling or completing its objective purpose. Indeed, the process could be said to have already begun prior to this stage. It lies not only in choosing a stone and placing it upon a mound, but begins at an earlier point, at the moment when the viewer decides to become a participant. Whether the stone then becomes a hierophanic object or remains merely a mundane object is down to the individual personal response to the invitation. It is not simply *that* one does it, but *how* one does it. But do the stones, whether in a sacred or secular location, become, in Eliade's terms, hierophanies or bearers of something that we might justifiably call sacred? In its cathedral setting the temptation is to automatically confer upon the work of art some sacred expectation, and yet its appearance in secular spaces is typically accompanied by reference to the meditative or cathartic potential of its ritual process.[63] Once set upon the *Mound of Joy* or *Mound of Sorrow* the stones attain a gravitas absent while they were part of a dry riverbed of stones. They have something about them that is more, something super-added, while remaining essentially the same. This something extra could be described as a hierophanic value, in a narrow, strictly religious sense, or in a broader sacramental sense. Not that every act of selection and placement necessarily produced what we are here choosing to call a hierophany. In St. Paul's Cathedral many times a participant's action seemed to be merely perfunctory, following instructions

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[62] Eliade. 1958: 13

[63] The following instructions accompany each of its incarnations:

> Make a numbered list of sadness in your life.
> Pile up stones corresponding to those numbers.
> Add a stone, each time there is sadness.
> Burn the list, and appreciate the mount of stones for its beauty.
> Make a numbered list of happiness in your life.
> Pile up stones corresponding to those numbers.
> Add a stone, each time there is happiness.
> Compare the mount of stones to the one of sadness.

without necessarily participating, thereby adhering to the law of the work but not its spirit. There were, however, enough instances to show that for some people something extraordinary happened when they participated in the ritual offered by the installation. Even if we are reluctant to construe this as a sacred experience, at the very least something out-of-the-ordinary had taken place. Between the natural simplicity of the object and its evocative conversion into a vessel of sorrows and joys the mundane had become a vehicle for the ritual displacement of feelings. Or, getting a little more religious, between the act of selection and the act of placing a threshold between profane and sacred worlds was crossed, in the empty space between *Cleaning Piece* and the mounds.

In any validation of alternative expressions of the sacred all church-based art faces an obvious barrier, as Eliade himself warned. To the Western mind, orientated around Christianity with its Judaic roots, its traditions, history, art and architecture inscribed by Christian iconography and ritual, these inevitably become the guiding motifs for any sense of a religious sacred, while other 'alien hierophanies' may not be recognised as such, either dismissed as incongruous aberrations, or unwelcome incursions of the non-Christian or secular world into the sacred.[64] An occasional criticism of Ono's installation, particularly from those who aligned themselves with the evangelical movement, was its perceived incongruity within the cathedral, not only as a modern work of art, but as a work inspired by a Buddhist sensibility (thus outside of the tradition in a dual sense). What such criticisms fail to perceive or refuse to accept is the possibility of manifold modalities of the sacred. Eliade assures us we must get used to the idea of seeing hierophanies everywhere.[65] Notwithstanding the particular context of Eliade's work, his analyses present us with an idea of the sacred as capable of inhering within anything without being inherent to it. We are so accustomed to a certain rigidity of the sacred, to its definite limited situatedness, that its appearance elsewhere comes as something of a shock. All too often such sacred potentiality is regrettably lost within a modern Western context where religious and secular spaces are apparently so clearly defined. Our tendency is to compartmentalise, which signals a disengagement of our 'organic life' from a sense of life lived 'as a sacrament.'[66] However, this sense of the sacramental (with a small 's') can be reawakened by unexpected events or unfamiliar

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[64] Eliade. 1958: 10-11

[65] Ibid: 11

[66] Ibid: 31

encounters such as those provoked by art. In 1999 Wallinger's *Ecce Homo* provoked such an encounter in Trafalgar Square, unsettling and even disorientating the tourist location with the presence of a Christ for the third millennium on the fourth plinth (figure 34). Aside from the prominence this gave to an ostensibly religious image, its location seemed highly appropriate for other reasons. Graham Howes has made the significant observation that *Ecce Homo* appeared outside rather than inside the National Gallery, confounding the received wisdom that it is inside the art museum that today's 'spiritual transformation and restoration' (not Howes's words but Sir Kenneth Clark's) may be found.[67]

Choosing hierophanies

As modalities of the sacred one common factor to hierophanies, according to Eliade, is 'choice,' which marks the sacred out as something conferred *upon* something rather than inherent *to* it. The sacred is 'singled out':

> A thing becomes sacred in so far as it embodies (that is, reveals) something other than itself. [...] What matters is that a hierophany implies a *choice*, a clear-cut separation of this thing which manifests the sacred from everything else around it.[68]

The thing chosen attains 'a new "dimension" of sacredness' at the moment that it ceases to be merely profane.[69] Yet this implies a paradoxical relation between the thing and the sacred. On the one hand, it is said to disclose something other than itself; on the other, that this something else is conferred upon it. Eliade chooses to regard this conundrum as an aspect of the sacred's dialectical nature, which we will turn to shortly. But in refocusing Eliade's thesis onto the contemporary work of art the element of choice involved in every hierophany obliges us to ask how that choice is made? Is it a choice made by the artist, the institution, the audience or, in some indefinable way, the object itself? Does that choice precede or proceed from an implication of sacredness? Doesn't the notion of a sacred that submits itself to the vagaries of choice, rather than imposing itself, undermine its very incipience? In the context of our inquiry, this issue of choice could be seen to parallel George Dickie's quasi-religious assertion, in *Art and the Aesthetic*,

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[67] Conference. *Contemplations of the Spiritual in Contemporary Art.* Liverpool Anglican Cathedral. 2010

[68] Eliade. 1958: 13

[69] Ibid.

that any man-made object can become an artwork through a kind of 'baptism.'[70] However, we should be wary of such comparisons. It would be a gross misreading of Eliade to assume that, by simply being included, being chosen, as a work to be permanently or temporarily sited in a church, within what has already long been designated a sacred space, art automatically becomes hierophanic. The application of hierophanic potential to the art object, that is, the work of art in dialogue with or embodying some aspect of the sacred, does not begin and end with its permanent or temporary appearance in the ecclesiastical space. Such an interpretation would seem to diminish the status of hierophanies to something conferred by default. However outmoded or unsubstantiated an idea it may be, hierophany offers a means of acknowledging a legitimacy for diverse phenomena, objects or events as potential vehicles for sacred expression and sacred experience, and may even be a way of disregarding the purported but inefficacious sacred potential of numerous artworks carelessly installed in churches and cathedrals. For the work of art brought into or produced for a cathedral environment there remains an element of indefinability or uncertainty; it might resist all efforts at coercion into being considered sacramental, or alternately it might attain an imputation of sacredness despite itself. Furthermore, Eliade notes that hierophanies very often signify something 'dangerous, forbidden or defiled.'[71] We are reminded of the previously-posed notion of contagion, which would seem to undermine any possibility of choice. Indeed, we are tempted to aver that we cannot speak of choice and contagion in the same breath. Contagion is intimately associated with states of infection or immunity; choice suggests agency, the bestowal or withholding of sacrality. Keeping these contradictions in mind, we must assume that the question of choosing the sacred in ecclesiastically-situated art is a complex one.

The question of choice, then, is rather more arbitrary, impermanent or elusive a factor, relating more to art's affective qualities than to its deliberate placement. It is not, in other words, a cognitive decision as such, but rather an active and creative response to certain conditions. Context alone cannot be enough; reception, whether communal or individual, must play the greater part. Following Eliade's schema, the work of artists undoubtedly contributes to manifestations of the sacred, either consciously or unconsciously, but retrospectively, as it were, after the event. Furthermore, Eliade argues that, once chosen, hierophanies are not static nor should they be sedentary, although

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[70] Coleman. 1998: 8

[71] Eliade. 1958: 24

often becoming an accepted element of a particular religion, and thus, to a certain degree, permanent. Nonetheless, their formal function develops over time. Although a sacred stone, say, remains sacred 'in virtue of the primordial hierophany by which it was *chosen,*' its sacred value 'changes according to the religious theory in which that hierophany happens to fit at a given time.' [72] In a negative sense, this means that something may continue to be venerated as sacred, even though its sacrality is now due to tradition rather than, as perhaps it once was, to revelation. In a positive sense, something's election as sacred may become clearer in the fullness of time. The implications of this thinking for the work of art are patently obvious. Eliade argues that the history of religion is to a great extent a history of devaluations and revaluations in the process of expressing the sacred, not only with such radical changes as the impact of Christianity upon Judaic belief and the Greco-Roman world, but in more minor and subtle evolutions – within, for instance, the church's attempt to reconcile itself with a secularised culture.[73] Hierophanies accepted in previous stages or other, closely-related, faiths, or other denominations within the same faith, lose their religious value in the light of changing, alternative or contradictory ideas, perhaps becoming heretical, blasphemous, idolatrous or simply antiquated. Hierophany always remains a limited concept in any case. If it is an expression of the sacred it is never the full expression, or indeed anything more than a glimpse of sacredness. This is what Eliade constantly refers to as 'the dialectic of the sacred.'[74]

The dialectic of the sacred

In order to define the relationship of sacred and profane through the figure of hierophany Eliade turns to dialectics. One of the difficulties surrounding the question of sacrality is its purported opposition to the profane, a fundamental assumption that begins with Durkheim and is reiterated by many others. Despite the serious doubts cast on the efficacy of this distinction by several prominent anthropologists, Eliade vigorously maintains this dichotomy as 'the invariable par excellence in the religious life of man.'[75] However, if Eliade retained it, he also transfigured it. In a dialectic of the sacred and profane no synthesis is possible if each is ontologically opposed, unable to coexist.

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[72] Ibid: 25 (emphasis in original)

[73] Ibid.

[74] Ibid: 26

[75] Eliade in Allen. 1972: 176

Eliade's dialectical manoeuvre is to propose the manifestation of the sacred *in* the profane, whereby an object becomes sacred yet remains a part of the profane world. By this logic, profanity or secularity are no bar to sacrality. If sacred and profane are therefore locked into a dialectical relationship, what is thereby synthesised in this dialectic is hierophany, as a manifestation of the sacred from within the profane. The paradox of the appearance of something we call sacred in something putatively profane is given material form in hierophanies, which illuminate the mystery why an object or event may be sacred at one time and profane at another. What every hierophany reveals, and he is very insistent on this point, is 'the coexistence of contradictory essences,' among which he lists sacred and profane, being and non-being, absolute and relative, eternal and temporal, spirit and matter, and so on, finishing with a familiar dialectical move for the Christian: Christ's incarnation. For a comparative science of religions this puts a highly monotheistic gloss on the subject:

> One might even say that all hierophanies are simply prefigurations of the miracle of the Incarnation, that every hierophany is an abortive attempt to reveal the mystery of the coming together of God and man.[76]

Even accounting for the fact that the postmodernists among us might baulk at Eliade's essentialising terms, several commentators have pointed out that there are a number of difficulties with this dialectical move, not least of which is the inference that theirs is a pseudo-polarity, where only one of the terms has a value. By this reasoning the profane cannot be said to have a positive force, but is negatively understood as absence or lack of the sacred.[77] This oversimplified interpretation is a distortion of Eliade's view that the sacred and profane coexist within a paradoxical relationship since an object can be both sacralised and remain just the same as it is. Hierophanies only appear at all within this paradox of their contradictory incarnation. This is not to give to religion a transcendent reality as such – the question of the divine is not really being posed here – but rather to recognise that the sacred always infers a transcending of the profane, but dialectically, from within the profane. Even if we dismiss any reliance upon dialectics as such, what we can take from this is the possibility of sacrality emerging from within the profane or secular world rather than strictly available only to a religious milieu, instating the sacred as an inherently ambivalent category.

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[76] Eliade. 1958: 29

[77] Durham. 2007; Allen. 1972: 181

Hierophany offers us both direct and indirect, explicit and implicit, access to rethinking the conditions for ecclesiastical encounters with contemporary art. The obvious marker of the work of art as hierophany within narrow, orthodox limits is the icon (although a counter-argument could be made that the icon acts as a pointer to rather than manifestation of the sacred). But even if it is felt that the explicit possibility of hierophanies is a notion as unviable as Eliade's cosmology is generally thought to be, it remains an indirect means of refocusing our ideas of sacrality. If, according to Eliade, just about anything is capable of expressing the sacred, and if that sacred almost always manifests itself through the profane (an implicit sacred alongside its more explicit religious expressions), then at least two conclusions might be drawn. Firstly, that an insistence on the strict demarcation of the sacred from the profane seems not only inadmissible but unviable. This is certainly the opinion of anthropologists like Evans-Pritchard for whom no such strict division is empirically evident. And secondly, works of art, whether religiously motivated or not, can become hierophanic. At the risk of delimiting the field of possibilities, what forms may this take? In a short essay written in 1964, called *Sur la permanence du sacré dans l'art contemporain,* Eliade considers the status of the sacred within the modern art of his time, in terms that will prove indispensable to our argument:

> This is not to say that the 'sacred' has completely disappeared in modern art. But it has become *unrecognisable*; it is camouflaged in forms, purposes and meanings which are apparently 'profane.' The sacred is not *obvious*, as it was for example in the art of the Middle Ages. One does not recognise it *immediately* and *easily*, because it is no longer expressed in a conventional religious language.[78]

For Eliade such implicit sacredness is a mark of an unconscious residue, a remainder after explicit declarations of faith have disappeared. But it is also rooted in the Nietzschean thesis of the 'death of God' which, Eliade says, 'signifies above all the impossibility of expressing a religious experience in traditional religious language.'[79] The sacred, he suggests, has not disappeared within post-Nietzschean modernity, but has become unrecognisable, expressed in unconventional and non-traditional forms.[80] On the one

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[78] Eliade. 1986: 82 (emphasis in original). Published in English as *The Sacred and the Modern Artist* (1965).

[79] Ibid: 81

[80] An issue of the art journal *Frieze*, published in 2010 and focusing on religion and spirituality, remarks upon the duality evident in contemporary art in which explicitly religious art is shunned yet descriptive terms such as spiritual, meditative, transcendent or sublime are frequently employed (Fox. 2010: 15). Such descriptors have been perceived as forms of camouflage by which religious qualities

hand, the sacred is no longer required to be explicitly religious; on the other, religious language itself is subject to re-evaluation in terms apposite to the times. In either case a non-religious or non-traditional sacred is mooted. Therefore, whether or not one accepts the death of God thesis as naming some fundamental truth, one of the issues for art is whether something 'apparently "profane"' may in fact embody some aspect of the sacred. This might imply that a clear separation of sacred and profane is untenable, as if to say that the profane is inflected with, and a vehicle for, the sacred, just as the sacred inheres in the profane. What Eliade appears to be saying, however, is that something seemingly profane may in truth be another facet of the sacred in unfamiliar guise. Whichever way one reads his statement, Eliade's endorsement of non-traditional artistic means aimed towards sacred ends is clearly significant for the numerous ecclesiastical projects under discussion here, even if many of the artists involved might not see their motivations as sacrally inclined. How might this sacred express itself? There are three principle forms in Eliade's essay.[81] Firstly, artistic motifs drawn from an exploration of the foundational world of the unconscious. Secondly, abstraction as the abandonment of figurative representation and a fascination for the formless and inexpressible. Thirdly, the use of elementary forms as a manifestation of the sacred through substance itself. Artists like Brancusi work with precisely this kind of rediscovery of an archaic sacred motivation. Thus we could name a pre-symbolic or primal sacred, an abstract sacred, and an archetypal or archaic sacred. A fourth figure, commonly associated with contemporary visual expressions of the sacred, is the generic notion of 'spirituality,' often perceived as a manifestation of an immanent sacrality. Sister Wendy Beckett seems to have something like this in mind when she writes of works of art that would seem to fit Eliade's notion of hierophanies in which 'our humanity responds to something greater than itself yet intimately part of us.'[82] Admittedly, it is easy to glibly speak of the spiritual, a term that, through its ubiquity, has become virtually meaningless. But Beckett suggests that, pushed a little further, it too acts as a marker of the sacred:

> When spirituality goes even a step further, attains a certain silent weight, a concentration of inexplicable meaning, then we may perhaps use for it the description of sacred.[83]

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are consciously smuggled into secular art or unconsciously subsist in disguised form (Elkins and Morgan. 2009).

[81] Eliade. 1986: 83-4

[82] Beckett. 1992: 14

[83] Ibid: 24

Each of these forms of the sacred draw us further away from a strict adherence to a language couched in religious experience without denying its validity. Notwithstanding the ecclesiastical context of our study, we would be left with limited possibilities if all expressions of the sacred were bound to overtly religious sources. Where would this leave a good number of the works of art under discussion? To what extent is this conflation of the sacred and the religious an absolute prerequisite? Our argument is that in the history of modern and contemporary art in the church it has not been, and in the future need not be.

Non-believing artists

A concrete example of the issues raised by Eliade's division of religious and non-religious in experiences of the sacred is its impact upon the choice of artists selected to produce work for the church. A typical scenario of ecclesiastical commissions nowadays is that artists are selected who openly profess no form of Christian belief (as true today as in Couturier and Hussey's time; the shortlist for Chichester Cathedral's new commission is typical for the absence of confessional artists). This is deemed no bar to their ability to produce work appropriate to a sacred environment. Just as an ecclesiastical commission and an artist's atheism are not automatically seen as mutually exclusive, so religious belief and faith in some kind of sacred reality are not automatically conflated. Even if, within the church, the notion of a 'sacred reality' almost always infers divine reality, the use of non-believing artists expresses a belief in the possibility inherent in sacred ambiguity, in the sense that other modalities of the sacred are available through non-sacred means. Père Marie-Alain Couturier is usually called upon as the principal defendant of employing non-believing artists for the church, a risky agenda realised above all in the commission of works for the church at Assy. Piety, he felt, was no replacement for artistic vision, and among those chosen for Assy were confirmed atheists like Richier, Communists such as Léger, Lurçat and Braque, and Jews such as Chagall and Lipchitz.[84] This lack of concern for the religious persuasion of the chosen artists extended even to employing some who had been openly hostile towards the Catholic Church.[85] More important to Couturier was that each had an outstanding record of individual work.

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[84] Langdon. 1988: 547

[85] This was also true of Dan Flavin's commission for a church in Milan. His public antipathy for the church may have initially dissuaded his involvement but was deemed no bar to his appointment.

Since then, priest and curator Friedhelm Mennekes has taken a more extreme position, professing an uncompromising refusal to invite 'confessional' artists into his church: 'Mostly I don't like, and I don't trust,' he rather shockingly declared at the 1999 conference, *Commissioning Art for Today's Church*.[86] This tendency is taken to extremes by theorists like Thierry de Duve who claims that 'the only convincing religious work in modernism was done by non-believers,' a narrow assessment that denigrates the achievements of artists like Rouault.[87] Not everyone agrees with this line of thought of course. Roger Homan has reversed Couturier's argument, stipulating that sacred or religious art *must* demonstrate sacramental values before being considered for its aesthetic or affective qualities. Homan seems to imply that art is only ever a material means to a sacramental end. Thus, the quality of the artist is of less importance than their religiously-motivated purpose.[88] Even if we decry this extreme, a more incisive criticism of Couturier's attitude comes from the art historian Meyer Schapiro, who raised the legitimate objection that the lack of a personally-felt religious sensitivity on the part of the artists at Assy meant that

> [t]hey followed their own sense of what was appropriate and produced a whole that has impressed visitors as no more than a museum, an episode in modern art rather than as a church building that owes its unity to a single governing thought, to a program of decoration rooted in a living tradition of consistent religious thinking and art.[89]

Although we can understand the concerns behind Couturier's and Mennekes's disavowal of believing artists, and at the same time see the truth in Schapiro's criticisms, we would distance ourselves from the position of those like Homan who insist on the confessional artist. Yet there is surely something dogmatic, a refusal of sorts, about an assessment like de Duve's. His argument is exemplary of an evident unwillingness within the art world to accept that for some artists a transcendent dimension is implicit to their worldview.[90]

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[86] Mennekes. *Commissioning Art for Today's Church*. University College, Chichester. 1999.

[87] Elkins and Morgan. 2009: 173

[88] Homan. 2006.

[89] Schapiro. 1999: 186

[90] Incidently, this particular issue is not confined to the church. Between 2004 and 2006 a secular event fomented discontent over the lack of believing artists invited to participate in the exhibition, *100 Artists See God*, first shown at the ICA, London and then in four venues in the United States. On this occasion, what was seen as a distinct failing by many viewers was dismissed as being beside the point as far as the curators were concerned (see Forum. 2007).

Nevertheless what this extant debate underscores is an issue which might well be situated within an Eliadean dialectic of sacred and profane on the level of artistic intention.

Turning to artistic production, a number of prominent ecclesiastical rows over works of art expose another side to this question of what may or may not qualify as sacred. Charges of ugliness, inappropriateness, and worse, raised against certain works, expose a blindness to other potential modalities of the sacred, and to the possibility that hierophanies may come from unlikely and unexpected sources. This potential for the work of art as a locus for diverse realities and diverse encounters with the 'really real,' alongside its vilification as entirely irreligious, was played out in a particularly interesting case, which only recently came to my attention. This was the *Crisis, Catharsis and Contemplation* exhibition in St. Patrick's Cathedral, Melbourne, in 2006. From the slides that I have seen, and through discussions with the curator, David Rastas, and others connected with the project, it appeared to have been a well-conceived, well-curated and sensitively handled event. And yet it occasioned an extraordinary outburst of vitriol, including a to-and-fro of critical attack and praise in the press, the former pursued with a punitive fervour that echoed the controversy around Assy some half a century earlier. The curator was spat upon, received death threats, was placed on an email list for pro-lifers (entirely unrelated to the exhibition but provoking further email abuse), and at least one of the works was attacked and destroyed beyond repair (figure 35). Indeed the young curator was so shaken by the affair that he left Australia for a time and no longer feels he would be able to attend St. Patrick's Cathedral in the future. The exhibition had been due to travel to Sydney Cathedral but due to the media scandal surrounding its Melbourne appearance the second show was cancelled. Critically, the event had the support of Rosemary Crumlin, among others, a highly respected figure within the field of art and religion, not only in Australia, but internationally. She assured me that there was nothing in the show that merited the degree of backlash it received. She believes it was simply the presence of unconventional art and contemporary media that sparked the controversy.

From Richier to Richter

From modern-day Melbourne let's return to the *cause celèbre* at the centre of Couturier's project at Assy: Germaine Richier's *Christ d'Assy*. Dismissed as 'a scandalous and anti-Christian thing,' *Christ d'Assy* was excoriated as a profane assault upon the very character

of sacred art and as exemplary of the vulgarity of modern art (figure 36).[91] Whatever values were wrapped up in Richier's crucifix they were deemed antithetical to the church's priorities, which valued the recognisable symbols of a past tradition, of conformity and unity, over the diversity and unfamiliarity of modernism, aligned not only with a decadent contemporary world, but with what were perceived as Protestant ideals along Tillichian lines.[92] As Orenduff explains, '[it] pitted the Church's interpretation of appropriate religious images against Couturier's new and deeper understanding of art and religion.'[93] Ironically, however, the outraged 'faithful' protesting against the works at Assy (and above all Richier's crucifix) did not come from among the ranks of the congregation itself, almost all of whom, after their initial confrontation with the unfamiliarity of the works, had come to accept them and, during the controversy and the uncertain future of Assy, to defend them against the conservative backlash.[94] In the end Couturier successfully fought the removal of the crucifix from the church but was obliged to relocate it to a less conspicuous position. Nearly sixty years later accusations of ugliness are still a cause for concern for some. As recently as 2008 a similar scandal was provoked over the removal of another crucifix, a 10ft resin sculpture by Edward Bainbridge Copnall, from its ecclesiastical setting on the grounds of being 'unsuitable' due to its 'horrifying' scariness (figure 37). In this instance the sculpture that had adorned the front façade of St. John's Church in Horsham for over forty years was rehoused in Horsham Museum. One further example of a problematic crucifix is currently at St. Asaph Cathedral, North Wales, and was previously at Shrewsbury Abbey (figure 38). Michelle Coxon's image of the crucified Christ is made from found materials, producing the image of a decaying corpse 'which some people have found life-affirming, and others see as grotesque.'[95] Its detractors have described it as 'obscene,' 'blasphemous' and 'unfit to be displayed in a place of worship,' deemed problematic both for its nudity and its evocation of putrefaction. Furthermore, this x-rated sculpture is considered 'unsuitable for children,' a criticism also applied to Copnall's sculpture as a pretext for its removal.[96]

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[91] Rubin. 1961: 163

[92] Orenduff. 2008: 151

[93] Ibid: 136

[94] Rubin. 1961: 52

[95] Radio 4. *Thought for the Day*. 09/10/09

[96] Ironically, this particular criticism echoed one which had been made against Graham Sutherland's crucifixion for St. Matthew's Church, Northampton, some sixty years earlier (figure 39). The most common complaint Hussey received regarding Sutherland's painting was that it would frighten the

Neither of the three crucifixes have lacked defenders, with supportive arguments offered on aesthetic as well as theological grounds. One might also suppose, in the wake of Mel Gibson's brutal portrayal of the crucifixion, that such images of horror would be granted a greater degree of justification nowadays. Of course, access to filmic versions can at least be officially controlled by an 18 certificate, a form of screening unavailable to a cathedral. As discussed previously, one cathedral that did attempt a form of screening was Durham, reacting to the controversy provoked by Viola's *The Messenger*, again over the tricky issue of male nudity, in answer to which a literal screen was implemented. In each of these examples critics question the propriety of nudity, the spiritual value of ugliness, or the appropriateness of indecency of any kind, finding nothing but profanity where others have found sacrality. We could argue that these problematic works have been viewed by their defenders through an Eliadean lens, refocusing their apparent profanity, obscenity or blasphemy such that hierophany appears. For apologists for these and other such works Eliade's contention that there are many modalities of the sacred would appear to be true.

If the implied profanity of *The Messenger*, couched in terms of indecency, was a problem of embodiment, presenting an all too literal representation of naked humanity (figure 40), a more recent example of a problematic ecclesiastical commission has been criticised as a problem of abstraction. This time, whereas Viola's work had the official support of the clergy but caught the scandal-mongering attention of the media, and hence the police, the stained-glass window produced by Gerhard Richter for Cologne Cathedral aroused the ire of its Archbishop, Cardinal Meisner (figure 41). Richter's pixellated window composed of thousands of randomly-selected squares of colour, though defended by the cathedral's chaplaincy, was decried by Meisner in unequivocal terms: firstly, for the crime of heterodoxy, its abstraction perceived as being more appropriate to an Islamic or Judaic site, hence failing to reflect the Christian faith; secondly, for the crime of degeneracy, as evidenced in the separation of *cultus* (the veneration of God) and culture (symbolised in this instance by Richter's windows). Meisner literally spoke of 'die Kultur entartet,' thus resurrecting the spectre of the *entartete Kunst* derided in the Nazi's infamous 1937 exhibition. Meisner appears to be a prominent but isolated critic of Richter's window, whose comments we could simply dismiss as a retrogressive reaction to abstraction, or perhaps to the wider prominence of

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children. But as he mordantly observed, 'in point of fact this was not so, but it does for quite other reasons, frighten their parents' (Hussey. 1985: 63).

modern and contemporary art within the church, especially in Germany where, if the journal *Kunst und Kirche* is anything to go by, there are an extraordinary number of projects in hand. On the other hand, it could equally be argued that, outside the worlds of contemporary art and cathedral chaplaincies, his concerns might well be shared by many (a recent article on the dispute, if not exactly defending Meisner, does at least condone his reservations[97]). The significant aspect of Meisner's criticism is his perception of the work's unsuitability for a Christian place of worship, as if abstraction, or perhaps more incisively, Richter's particular brand of abstraction, fails to convey a sacrality apposite to a Catholic cathedral. Meisner claims it is the computer-generated randomness of the abstraction, rather than its non-figurative quality, that undermines the work.[98] Yet for many others, some of whom feature in this thesis, chance is attributed to the sacred, seen as one of its many modalities; the throw of the dice offers access to a sacred inaccessible to more calibrated decisions. In his defence of Richter's window in the pages of *Artforum*, Benjamin Buchloh frames Richter's colour grids within a tradition of 'diagrammatic abstraction' yet adds that this schematic approach, already disrupted by its odd configuration within the gothic tracery of the ribbed frame, is subject to a counterforce of 'aleatory chromatic constellations.'[99] By contrast, Meisner's reading of the work as a form of decorative rather than diagrammatic abstraction somewhat misleadingly links Richter's window to Islamic imagery, which in fact relies upon geometric pattern, repeating motifs and ornate text, and not the aleatory as such. A closer religious tradition is the negation of figuration, doubtless in contradistinction to the overwhelming figuration of Catholic interiors but not entirely alien to it. The Jesuit Mennekes defends Richter's window as a form of iconoclasm, which as Mia Mochizuki recently argued, in a superlative lecture at The Courtauld Institute of Art, not only implies the breaking of images but operates as a form of applied visual criticism of material manifestations of belief.[100] As a kenotic method it denotes, she averred, a rejection of aesthetics turned anaesthetic. Whether or not this degree of reflexivity informed Richter's aesthetic choices, for Mennekes it is not so much the apparently chaotic order of the grid of Richter's window that arrests his attention, that is, its disputed content, but rather its capacity as a screen or 'membrane,' for diffused light

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[97] Zecchi. 2009.

[98] Stained glass windows for ecclesiastical commissions by artists like John Piper, Egon Eiermann, Alfred Manessier or Gabriel Loire are sufficient testimony to the suitability of abstraction itself.

[99] Buchloh in Larner et al. 2008: 67

[100] Mia Mochizuki. *The Abject Image*. The Courtauld Institute of Art. 19/11/10.

naturally, but also for the distillation of affects or, otherwise put, the transformation of the material into the spiritual, for which glass is a peculiarly effective conduit.[101] At the very least Richter's diagrammatic abstraction avoids the interpretative limitations of figuration; at best it initiates any number of cognitive, emotive, aesthetic or indeed, religious responses.

Ironically, despite Buchloh's approbation, some of his comments disclose his own rather blinkered views. He wonders, for example, to what extent the art object should be decontextualised, noting with disapproval that at its inauguration the window could not be separated from the event.[102] It is not clear exactly what he means by this, but the impression given is that he feels it should be treated in its own rights as a work of art, differentiated from its context. For an artwork of this kind this is a rather extraordinary proposition. As ever, Mennekes may be relied upon for a contrary position, stressing its inexorable contextualisation, and describing the window approvingly as a *Fremdkörper*, a foreign body, within the gothic space.[103] It is this willingness to welcome the foreign contagion into the church that is so distinct in Mennekes's brand of curating and support for ecclesiastical art (though indubitably an attitude gaining ground in Britain[104]), where Buchloh adopts an apologetic tone more typical of the art world: the fear that the sacred context threatens to pollute the object of art with an unwarranted religiosity. When Buchloh intimates that Richter flies 'dangerously close to a *retour à l'origine* in religious rituals and sanctity that very few artists would dare to approach,' it is interesting to note how threatened he is by that prospect, even to the extent of wondering whether it signifies for Richter a departure from, even opposition to, an Enlightenment-directed project of cultural modernism and secularisation.[105] Buchloh's commentary is almost entirely cast in negative terms:

> Thus, the final question to be posed is whether these turns to tradition [Buchloh refers to new windows by Lüpertz and Polke as well as Richter] are just personal aberrations, opportunistic deliveries, or whether these manifest denials of the Enlightenment project of the artistic critique of colour constitute in fact an actual desire for a return to the folds of the spiritual, the religious, and the transcendental as immutable conditions of experience that have to be remobilised

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[101] Mennekes. 2008: 55

[102] Buchloh. 2007: 306

[103] Mennekes. 2008: 55

[104] See Paul Bayley's recent report on the state of ecclesiastical commissions in Britain (Moffatt and Daly. 2010: 9-20).

[105] Buchloh. 2007: 308

in the present with more urgency than at any other time during the past fifty years of art production.[106]

Buchloh's suspicion of the remobilisation of the spiritual, religious or transcendental as 'immutable conditions of experience' reflects an attitude typical of the current artistic climate in which contemporary art about religion, or art which flirts with notions of the spiritual or transcendent, are perfectly acceptable where sincere religious art is not. If, as Buchloh asserts, Richter's window 'proved that the "merely decorative" is a rather invested, coded, and embattled field indeed,'[107] Mennekes goes so far as to contend

> Das aber ist das Entscheidende in der Geschichte der christlichen Tradition: Das Bild ist immer umstritten, und der Streit um das Bild bleibt die eigentliche Konstante.[108]

> Yet this is the decisive thing in the history of the Christian tradition: The image is always disputed, and the dispute regarding the image remains the real constant factor [my translation].

An interesting and perhaps unexpected conclusion to this particular dispute may be drawn from Rosalind Krauss. In a seminal essay from 1979 she raised the alluring possibility that the grid, as it has appeared within the history of modernism, has served artists as a means of bridging the widening gap between the sacred and the secular. Even though the grid is in one sense highly materialistic, a mapping of surface, it is a materialism that has acted as a conduit to the universal, or the spiritual, as if a slice of some sublime eternity.[109] Agnes Martin is an obvious point of reference. This ambivalence of the grid appears, then, as another of Eliade's camouflaged forms of the sacred. Even though Krauss would admit to no transcendent reality behind the surface, and even if we disagree with her assertion of an 'absolute rift' separating sacred and secular, there is clearly something pertinent to the example of Richter's window in this idea:

> Given the absolute rift that had opened between the sacred and the secular, the modern artist was obviously faced with the necessity to choose between one mode of expression and the other. The curious testimony offered by the grid is that at this juncture he tried to decide for both. In the increasingly de-sacralised

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[106] Ibid.

[107] Ibid: 306

[108] Mennekes. 2008: 54

[109] Krauss. 1979: 52

space of the nineteenth century, art had become the refuge for religious emotion; it became, as it has remained, a secular form of belief. Although this condition could be discussed openly in the late nineteenth century, it is something that is inadmissible in the twentieth, so that by now we find it indescribably embarrassing to mention *art* and *spirit* in the same sentence.[110]

Although many of those involved with ecclesiastical art today, whether Christian believers or not, would almost certainly disagree with Krauss on this last point, it remains a fact that many within the art world do have a problem with bringing 'art' and 'spirit' into the same room, or discussing them on equal terms. As recently as 2007 art historians Michael Fried and T. J. Clark declined to participate in a forum on art and religion on more or less the grounds that Krauss describes. Though unlikely to assuage such disinclination, theologian John D. Caputo offers some conciliatory advice which attempts, fruitlessly perhaps, to reconcile these differences (where he speaks of an event in general terms we will specify an event of art):

> The challenge to non-religious thinkers…is not to dismiss or close off the [art] event that takes place in the name of God, not to preclude the possibility that the names held dear in non-religion can be translated into the name of God. The challenge to the religious thinker…is not to dismiss or close off the expression or realisation of the [art] event under other names than God and in other places and times, not to preclude that the name of God is translatable into other names.[111]

A 2009 exhibition built around the theme of materialist spirituality in contemporary art was motivated by a comparable desire, accentuating a viable syncretism of 'sacred' impulses and 'profane' artistic practices.[112] Of particular interest to us is the correlation it made between sacred and spiritual, on the one hand, and profane and material on the other. In this schema, the spiritual is not held up as a foil to the material, nor vice versa. Rather, where art and the sacred cross paths the latter assumes the mantle of a spirituality informed by art's materiality (even taking into account a dematerialised art shorn of the art object as such). In this view of art, the text explains, 'the *material* holds pride of place as the seat of spiritual experience.'[113] How so? In this conjoining of sacred and profane art is not so much a matter of materials or objects, but rather a matter of materialisation. For the instigators of this exhibition any experience of the spiritual is always already

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[110] Ibid: 54

[111] Caputo. 2007a: 78

[112] *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: Five Reflections on Materialist Spirituality in Contemporary Art.* Antwerp Museum of Modern Art. 2009

[113] Dieter Roelstraete in Antwerp Museum of Modern Art et al: 27 (emphasis in original)

rooted in material culture, rather than the transcendent as such, this materialisation operating as a kind of transfiguration of the profane. For our purposes, the materialisation effected by the art object appositely describes the disclosure of the sacred by material means, a sacred manifestation potentially available to any aspect of material culture. In this respect the void separating sacred and profane that Durkheim is anxious to retain becomes indispensable to the conditions for art, which bridges this chasm, or rather, situates itself within it.

Or, turning once more to the image of that Deleuzian screen discussed in chapter 2, as productive modalities of the sacred hierophanies are the media by which the sacred is manifested, while ordinary elements of the profane world are the stuff of which such media are made. The singularity of the sacred condition is manifested through a multiplicity of possibilities, given consistency through a screen that filters it out from the background chaos. Rephrasing Deleuze, we can say that the hierophanic sacred emerges from within 'a chaotic multiplicity,' that is, profane life, 'but only under the condition that a sort of screen intervenes.'[114] According to this definition, then, a hierophany produces a distilled moment of the sacred, emerging as if through a screen thrown over chaos, eliciting a productive convocation of event, place and meaning. Out of the chaos of phenomenological experience a certain singularity emerges, a denser, more concentrated moment. In our Deleuzian reading, chaos is not tamed as such but rather channelled into a productive moment, which we could name the work of art.

The hierophanic event

The picture that emerges of hierophany offers a potentially invaluable conceptual tool. Although cast in a language that we have no wish to resurrect, it may be put to new uses, revealing unexpected sources of the sacred. Both as a broadening of sacred territory and as a challenge to convention, hierophany adds to our lexicon of terms and concepts, even if our faith in Eliade's own conception of it is stretched beyond anything to which we would comfortably accede. In the following chapters other analogous correspondences to the notion of hierophany will be explored, as the particular colour of one's own sense of the sacred, for example, becoming other ways of describing the varieties of 'sacred' experience as a particular configuration of experience upon a particular surface at a particular time. In chapter 7 the role of choice is abandoned in the name of the pure

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[114] Deleuze. 1993: 76

contingent event. Here another kind of hierophany obtains, one in which choice reappears in the form of decision: whether or not one maintains fidelity to a moment or object of truth. Prior to that, choice is reconfigured in a fundamental understanding of religion itself in which deliberative choice is aligned with serial episodes of rethinking, reworking, and rechoosing. A final word from art critic, Thomas McEvilley, supplies an added note of legitimacy to our retention of Eliade's unfashionable term. In *Art and Otherness* he describes a 'hierophant' as an exhibitor of sacred things.[115] If we are chary of the tired cliché of the artist as priest, we might go so far as to propose the offices of the artist as hierophant in McEvilley's sense. This shift from hieratic vocation to hierophant subtly deflects attention from the one who shows onto ways of showing.

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[115] McEvilley. 1992: 75

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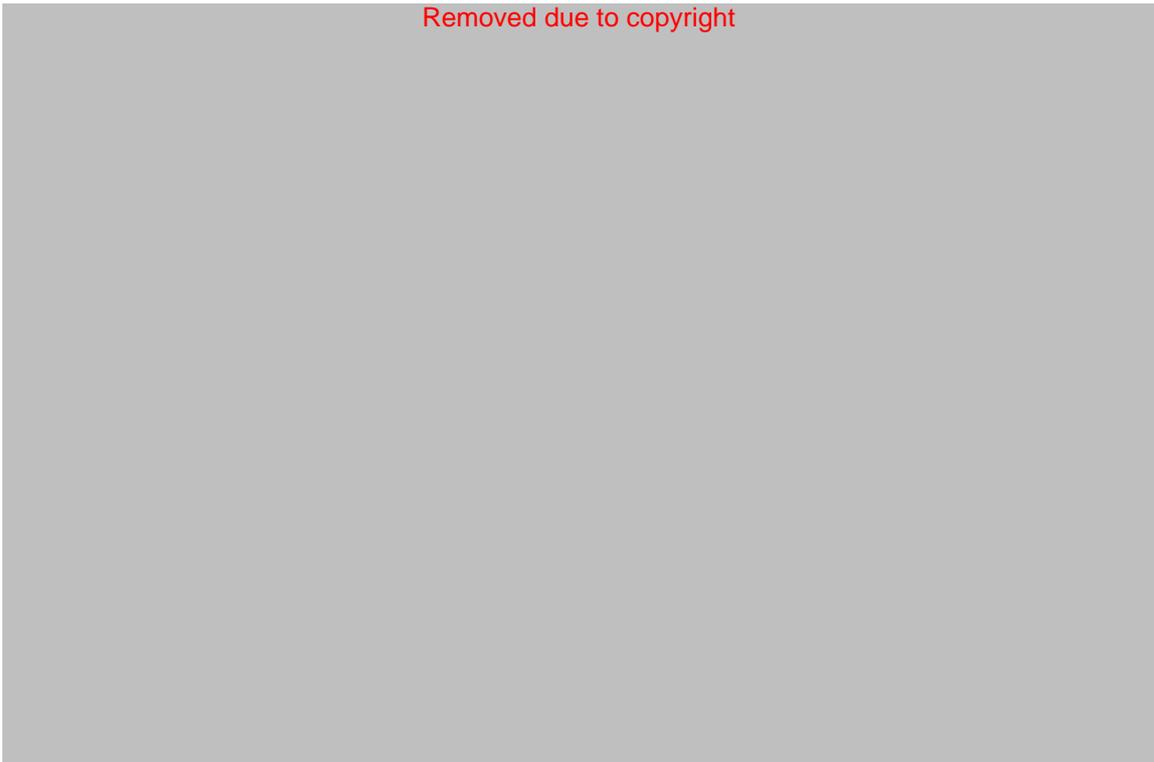
Figure 30 Marc Quinn, *Waiting for Godot* (2006), in *Crucible*, Gloucester Cathedral, 2010

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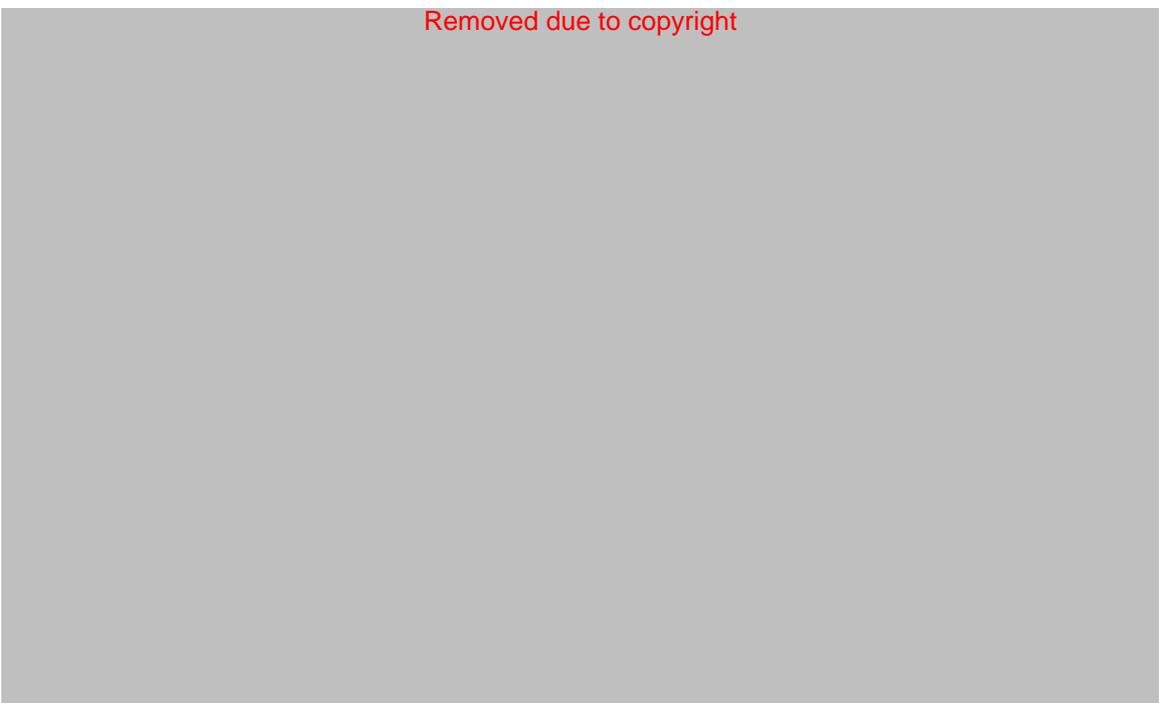
Figure 31 Marc Quinn, *Angel* (2006), in *Light*, Winchester Cathedral, 2007
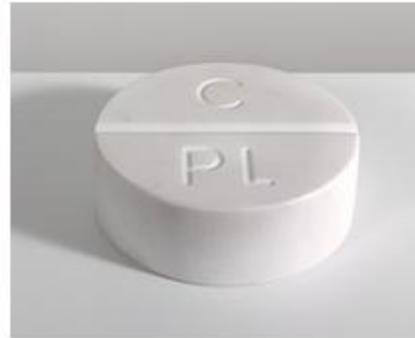
Figure 32 Damien Hirst, *New Religion*, Wallspace, All Hallows Church, London, 2007

Clockwise: Wallspace interior; *The Fate of Man*; *The Eucharist*; altar with *The Fate of Man*, *The Eucharist*, *The Crucifix*, *The Sacred Heart*.

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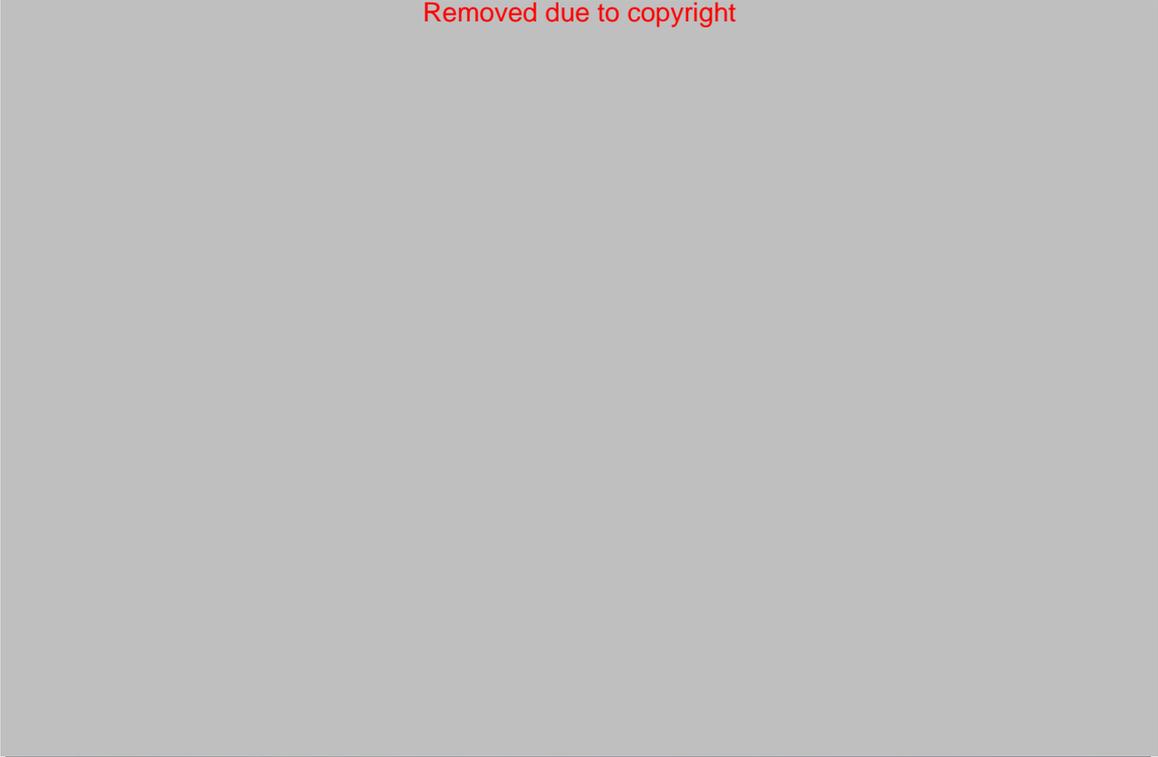
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Figure 33 Yoko Ono, *Morning Beams* and *Cleaning Piece/Riverbed*, Migrosmuseum für Gegenwartskunst, Zurich, 1996 (*Wish Tree* in background)

Figure 34 Mark Wallinger, *Ecce Homo*, Trafalgar Square, London, 1999
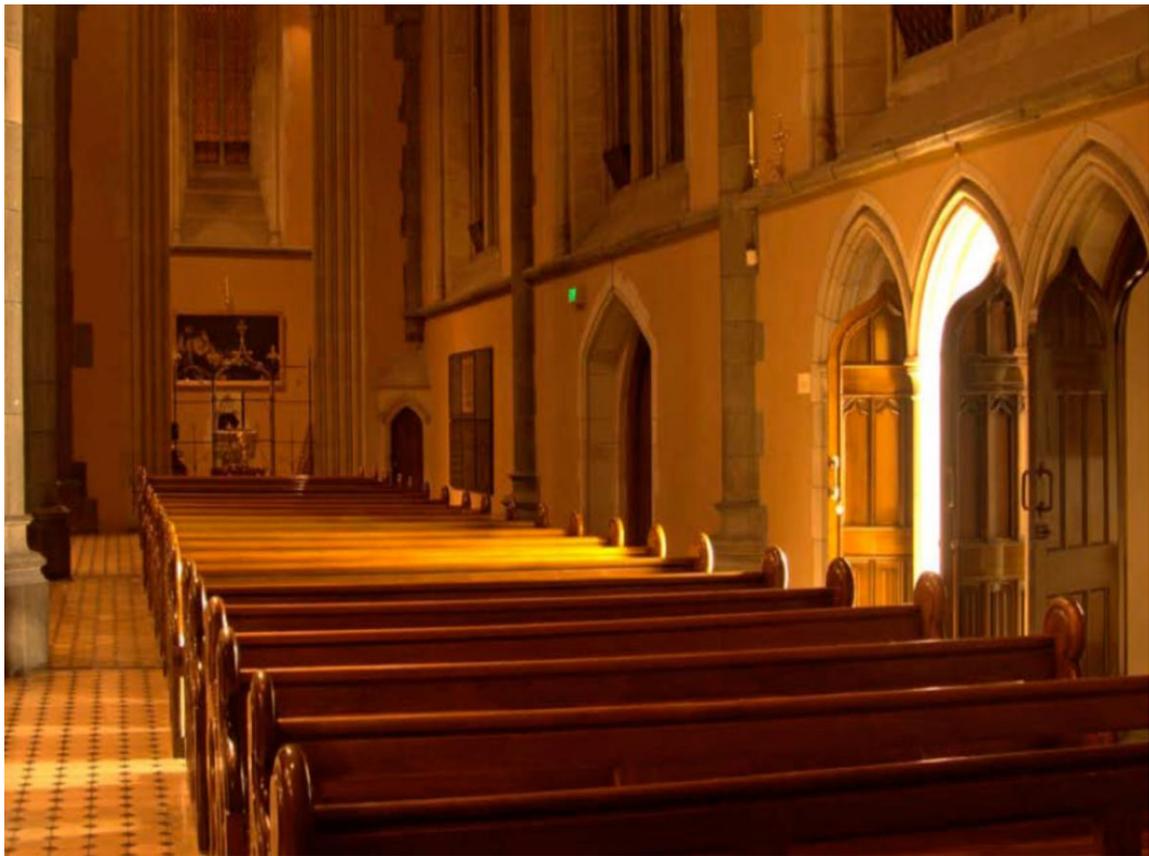
Figure 35 Angela di Fronzo, *Persona Christi*, St. Patrick's Cathedral, Melbourne, 2006

This site-specific piece, set within a confessional, flooded the nave with intense white light emanating through a translucent screen. It was destroyed by a member of the public in the early days of the exhibition.

Figure 36 Germaine Richier, *Christ d'Assy*, Notre Dame de Toute Grâce, Assy, 1950 (right: original maquette)

Figure 37 Edward Bainbridge Copnall, *Jesus on the Cross*, St. John's Church, Horsham, 1964

Jesus on the Cross reinstalled in Horsham Museum
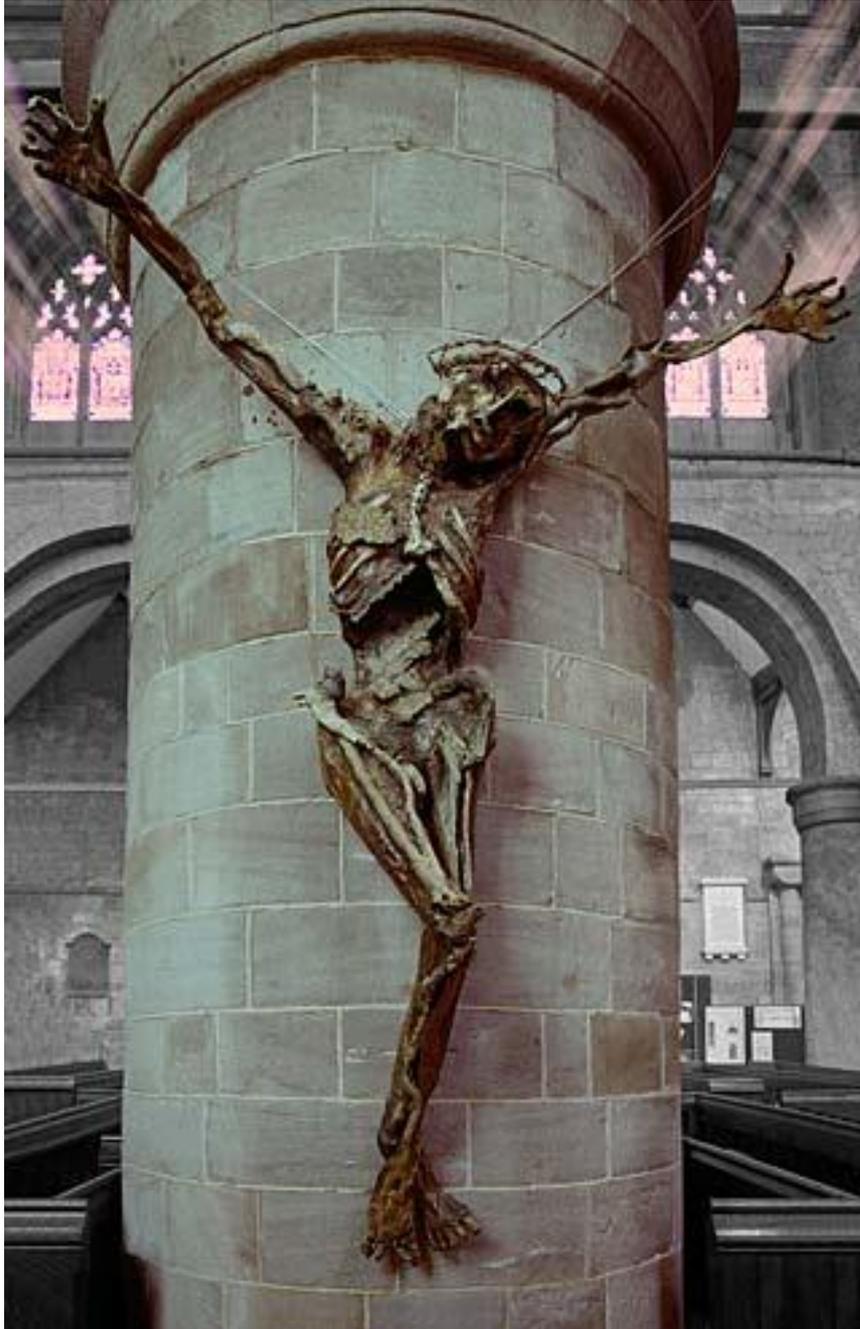
Figure 38 Michelle Coxon, *Naked Christ*, Shrewsbury Abbey, 2001

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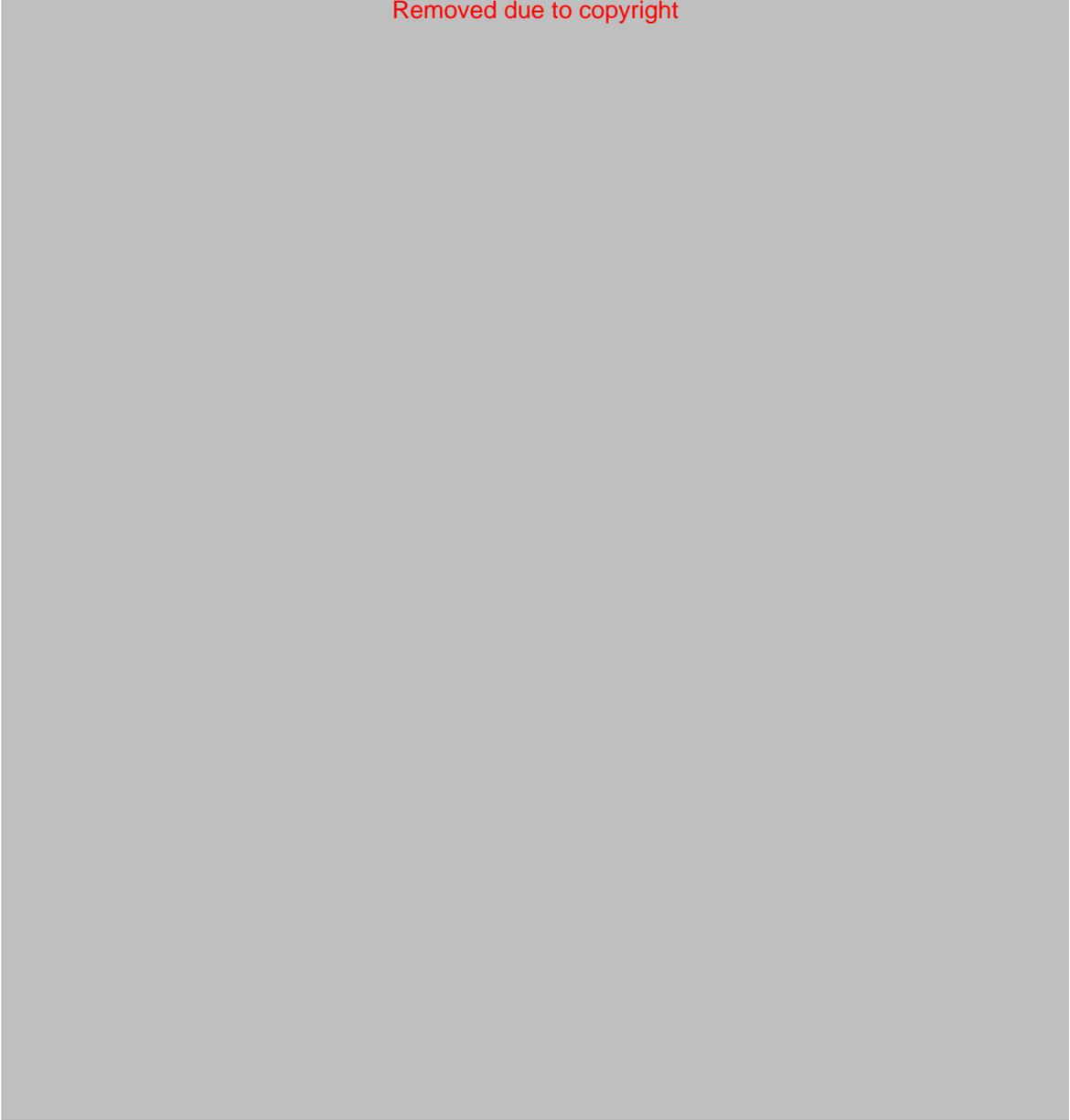
Figure 39 Graham Sutherland, *The Crucifixion*, St. Matthew's Church, Northampton, 1946

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Figure 40 Bill Viola, *The Messenger*, Durham Cathedral, 1996

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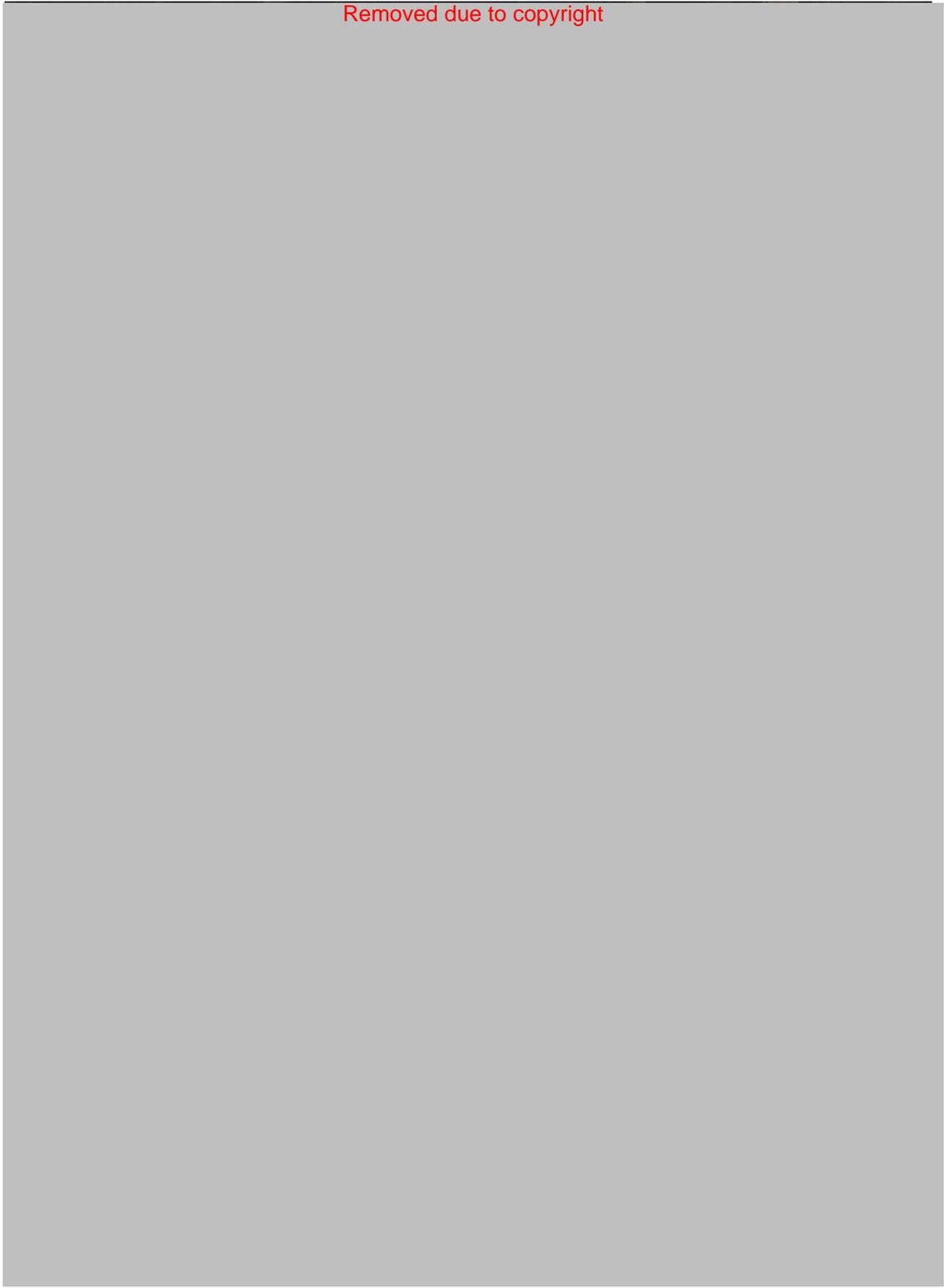
Figure 41 Gerhard Richter, *Domfenster*, Cologne Cathedral, 2007

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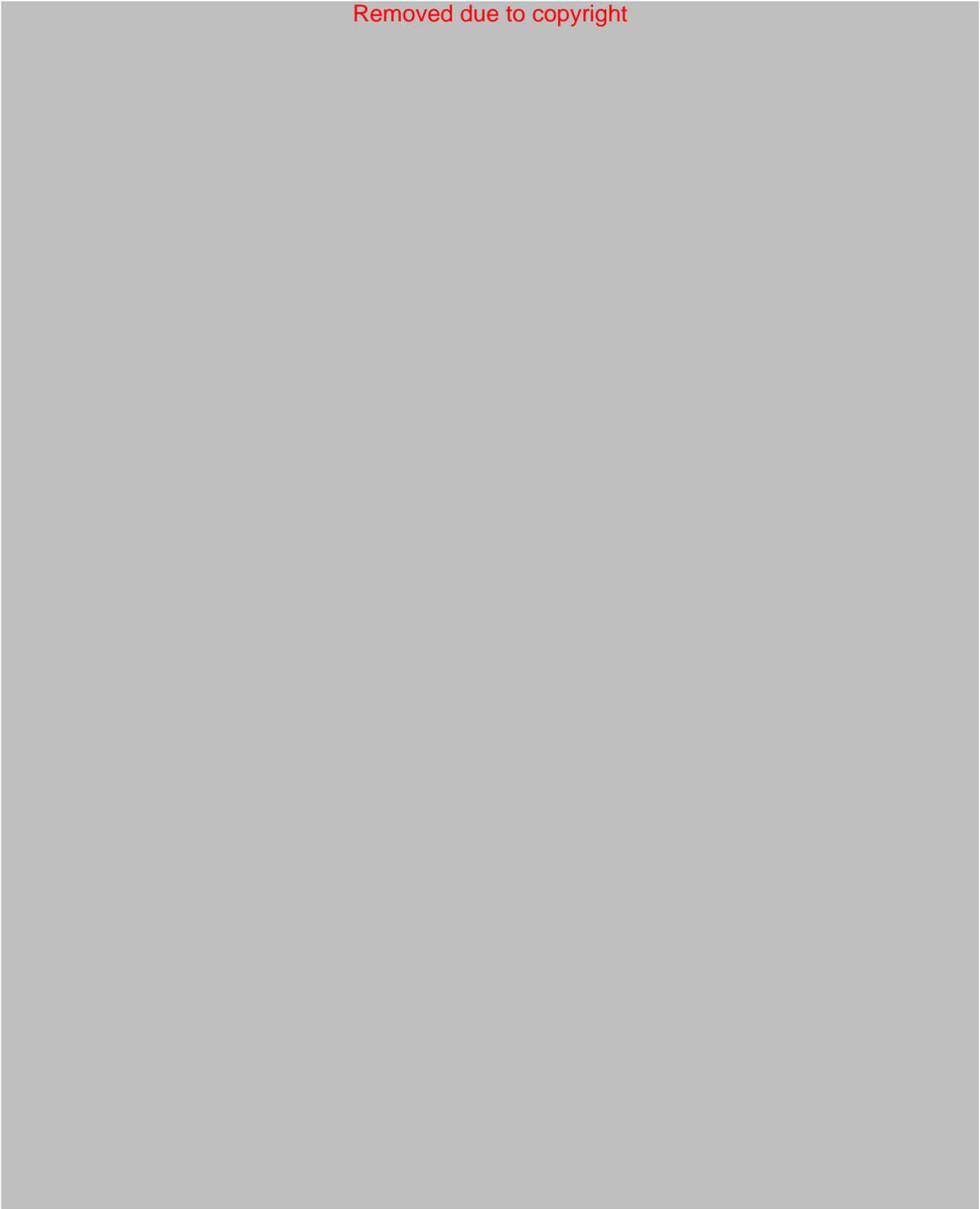
Detail of the window

5

CROSSING

A left-handed approach to the sacred

In *The Predicament of Culture* James Clifford notes that throughout the various modes of Michel Leiris's career, as surrealist, art critic, autobiographer and anthropologist, he has 'cultivated a kind of methodical clumsiness, a permanent inability to fit,' motivated in part by personal biography, in part by scientific curiosity, and in part by a certain aesthetic sensibility in keeping with his Surrealist leanings.[1] Most notoriously, in his anthropological text, *L'Afrique fantôme*, Leiris questioned ethnographic projects for their scientific distinctions of 'subjective' and 'objective' practices, querying why his own reactions, dreams, emotions, bodily functions, and so on, should not also be included as aspects of the data generated by the fieldwork, earning him a reputation as an ethnographic heretic. To that end, Leiris's methodological *gaucherie* nurtured, as Clifford puts it, 'a *gauche*, or left-handed, sense of the sacred,' in an attempt to find a language in which to speak of the sacred as experienced subjectively and as observed ethnographically, heedless of the consequential accusations that his efforts lacked scientific rigour.[2] Or perhaps, rather than a language, Leiris's unorthodoxy was a kind of stumbling towards the formulation of a vocabulary *within* language, an effort to produce, as Hollier has said of Leiris in the context of the later *Collège de Sociologie* project, 'un lexique du sacré.'[3] It is just such a lexicon, extending to the role of art within ecclesiastical spaces today, that this thesis seeks to develop.

But what can be meant by such an odd term as the left-handed sacred? How can that which is sacred be awkward, gauche, ill-fitting, out of place, even sinister (a sense lost to English but present in Latin and retained in the Italian *sinistra*)? To find an answer we must go to the generation of anthropologists who came before Leiris and his colleagues, notably one of Durkheim's most gifted pupils, Robert Hertz, whose promising career was cut short by his death in the 1914-18 war. Hertz's essay from 1909, 'The Pre-eminence of the Right Hand,' is subtitled 'a study in religious polarity.' It takes the traditional conventions of rectitude, law, shrewdness, grace and resourcefulness associated with the right hand and embodied in the symbolic authority ascribed to it, and compares it with a sinister, forbidden and excluded left, producing, as the subtitle suggests, a socio-anthropological text which sees religious factors as central to an understanding of a right/left polarity of meaning (see appendix 6 for a précis of his text).

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[1] Clifford. 1988: 142

[2] Ibid. (emphasis in original)

[3] Hollier, cited in Gallaire. 2004

This polarity of right and left is translated by Leiris, among others, into a sacred duality, which has since become a familiar trope within anthropology, a variant of Durkheim's differentiation of a pure from an impure sacred.[4] Implicit in *L'Afrique fantôme*, and more explicitly explored in his autobiographical works, Leiris evokes a left-handed sacred as the improper, forbidden or awkward pole to its more acceptable other, as a means to narrate the images of his childhood, or to make sense of the forces at work in the bullfight, or simply in his reticence towards conclusively defining experience, whether scientific, aesthetic or subjective. Something of this reticence is implied in Derrida's definition, in 'Faith and Knowledge,' of a sacred that abstains from any necessary adherence to an act of belief. Religion, says Derrida, marks the convergence of two experiences that are generally held to be equally religious, the experience of belief and the experience of sacredness. These two are habitually bound together and yet he proposes that they signify an 'irreducible duality' that is almost never acknowledged.[5] Against a notion of religion as affirmation of belief, then, we will see that Derrida renders religion as 'scruple,' adding a second figure to our lexicon of terms. Sacred as scruple finds an advocate in Leiris, whose oeuvre persistently arrogates, in the face of scholarly expectations, contracted obligations or literary conventions, a resistance to definitions and definitive conclusions, to assumed parities, and a disrespect for the rules of the game (the title of his series of autobiographies).

Characteristics of right and left

As Hertz notes in his study, the historical-cultural predominance of right-handedness comparative to left-handedness, and their respective positive and negative associations, has been understood as an opposition of strength and weakness, of dexterity and gaucherie, and has consequently privileged the one and denigrated the other, as is immediately evident when one examines their respective etymologies and uses in language. While a single stable term is commonly found for 'right' amongst the Indo-European languages, 'left' appears in several distinct forms, and seems altogether more unstable. One of Hertz's sources suggests, for example, that the left was often spoken of

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[4] For a prodigious review of ethnographic accounts inspired by Hertz's research see Rodney Needham's collection of essays by various anthropologists with a particular investment in this field (Needham. 1973). In example after example we see anthropologists stepping forward to cite Hertz as the theoretical progenitor of observed facts, lending further support to a right/left dualism.

[5] Derrida. 2001: 70

allusively, not directly, with various synonyms employed in substitution, as though it could only be approached tangentially, as something inherently distasteful or distrusted:

> The multiplicity and instability of terms for the left, and their evasive and arbitrary character, may be explained by the sentiments of disquiet and aversion felt by the community with respect to the left side.[6]

'Left' emerges as sinister and suspect, as its Latin root, 'sinister,' shows, only to be approached with caution. 'Right,' however, related to the Latin *dexter*, on or of the right, expresses only positive qualities: adroitness, dexterity and rectitude. It evokes qualities of uprightness, moral integrity and law, for which the left represents the contrary. And when not expressing something sinister, to be feared or despised, the left is ridiculed as clumsy or awkward (*gauche*), ill-fitting or out of place. Even the term that serves to alleviate this bias in favour of an equality of use, 'ambidextrous,' displays a prejudice for the right by suggesting that one is gifted with two right hands. This positive bias is reflected negatively in its lesser-known antonym, 'ambisinistrous,' which means 'clumsy on both sides.' Examples of a prejudicial treatment abound. In Matthew 6:3, for example, a well-known text that serves to inspire humility and secrecy in the generosity of giving, such that one's left hand does not know what one's right hand is doing, it is the right hand that does the giving, which must be kept secret from the indiscreet and suspect left, 'hidden in the folds of the garment' for, as Hertz's cautionary description implies, it is a corrupting agent, empowered with all the attributes of an impure sacred:

> The power of the left hand is always somewhat occult and illegitimate; it inspires terror and repulsion. Its movements are suspect; we should like it to remain quiet and discreet, hidden in the folds of the garment, so that its corruptive influence will not spread.[7]

When Leiris, therefore, is described as cultivating a left-handed sense of the sacred, we can begin to see where this left-handedness has originated and where it is taking him. In his work it is this very gaucherie that opens an entrance to the sacred, representing a mode of thinking excluded from or unthought in the right. His notions of the sacred, drawing upon a sacred world identified with the profane, act as a foil to Hertz's argument. What Hertz dismisses to the lowly sphere of the profane as impure (though crucially a 'sacred' impure), Leiris reinstates to the exalted place of the sacred (though

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[6] Hertz. 1960: 99

[7] Ibid: 105

perhaps more accurately an unexalted sacred), thereby undoing this commonly-accepted distinction. We could extend this argument, as some have recently done, to question the secular's exclusion from the sacred sphere, since it too might in certain circumstances be revalorised as embodying an impure or left-handed sacred rather than strictly profane character.

Phantom Africa

It is in Africa that a droit/gauche distinction first emerges in Leiris's writings, and it is from this formative period in his thinking that we particularly owe the category of the sacré gauche that informs this thesis. Leiris's understanding of a sacred bifurcation of right and left first reveals itself through the ideological struggle that is fought out within his ethnographic experience as archivist-secretary for the 1931-1933 Dakar-Dijbouti expedition under Marcel Griaule. This was a struggle recounted and played out in *L'Afrique fantôme*, the journal that resulted. From the very beginning Leiris's vision of Africa is marked by a polarity of interests, shifting from high thoughts of intellectual endeavour to practical concerns for self-preservation, from scientific scrutiny to self-examination, from a detached observation of others to the observance (in a quasi-religious sense) of his own practices and responses. Early into the mission Leiris recognises that the subject of the journal will be 'the ethnography of the ethnographer,' and that it is a sacred rather than scientific impulse that motivates him, even if that sacred as yet remains undefined. Leiris defends a rigorous subjectivity, the right to record the course of a dream or a bowel movement, along with observations of the locale, events of the mission and scientific inquiries. Indeed, it is only with this realisation of subjectivity's centrality, even in the most objective of ethnographies, that the ethnographic work can truly begin. This 'exhaustive programme of auto-ethnography,' or 'writing the self,' as Hand calls it,[8] that is as introspective as it is objectively scientific, more so in fact, and which values above all the irruption of the unscientific and unquantifiable sacred, offers us a portrait of a left-handed ethnography. The right hand of ethnocentric observation, colonial partiality, analytical detachment and scientific rigour loses, in Leiris's text, its traditional place of pre-eminence when confronted with an Africa that redefines all his expectations. In a sense it initiates another kind of refocusing, one which from a certain conventional viewpoint constitutes failure. Indeed, his friend

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[8] Hand. 2002: 55

and colleague, Jean Jamin, says that *L'Afrique fantôme* could be considered as a kind of 'epistemological gaffe,' one that respected neither the conventions of anthropology nor those of conventional narratives.[9] From the very beginning, says Jamin, Leiris put 'les pieds dans le plat'; his 'two left feet,' with which he 'stumbled' through Africa produced, through a series of clumsy wrong-footed 'faux pas,' a serious 'sprain' (*entorse*) to a 'savoir-vivre ethnographique,' that is, to recognised ethnographic methodologies.[10] From Jamin's text alone these string of terms are applied to Leiris: *trébuchement* (stumbling), *malhabile* (clumsy gesture), *maladresse* (awkwardness), *faux pas* (misstep, social blunder), *gauchissements* (misperceptions), *gaffeur* (blunderer) and *maladroit* (clumsy, awkward), as well as *hésitante*, *scrupuleux*, and *Décepteur* (Trickster). Echoing Jamin's assessment, Michèle Richman aptly describes his text as an affectionate 'portrait of the artist as young clod.'[11] In part this stumbling, serial gaucherie can be attributed to Leiris's awareness of the clumsy blundering of Western ethnography itself. Is not ethnography in its attempt to build bridges of knowledge between other cultures vulnerable to distortions, to misreadings, to errors of knowledge, to sense-making based on preconceptions and misperceptions, or, as Durkheim's sacred and profane dichotomy was criticised of doing, to finding structure where there is none? Its very clumsiness signals the severe limitations of ethnography in the pursuit of knowledge. Yet, such objections aside, what makes Leiris's account so fascinating is that, as Richman argues (and she is not alone in this view), *L'Afrique fantôme* offered at the very least 'a brutally honest testimony of the encounter between Europeans and colonized peoples,' even if, as was Griaule's complaint, its value as a piece of ethnographic field research was flawed.[12] Whatever the pros and cons of this

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[9] Jamin. 1981: 102

[10] Ibid: 103

[11] Richman. 2002: 157

[12] Ibid: 155. It is interesting to note the polarities of criticism one finds in reviews of *L'Afrique fantôme*, particularly between its time of publication and its present-day reception. One recent critic described it as 'possibly the single triumph of a surrealist-inspired ethnography' (Hand. 1995: 174), while another describes it as 'un ouvrage essentiel' within anthropology (Corpet. 1992: 38). An earlier review written in response to the second edition produced by *Gallimard* in 1981 presents a very different opinion. The reviewer wonders why the publisher bothered to reprint this 'rather tedious book' (Willis. 1982: 798). It soon becomes clear, however, that this particular reviewer has missed the point, viewing Leiris's digressions and subjective introspection as a distraction from the ethnographic content, not realising that they are in fact the principal figures of the ethnography itself. Another reviewer, writing at the time of *L'Afrique fantôme*'s first publication in 1934, unwittingly reveals the gap between expectations of Leiris's ethnographic work and the work itself. He concludes his favourable review of Leiris's 'accounts of [his] travels' whilst anticipating the forthcoming 'scientific results of the expedition,' on which 'this present volume will serve as an interesting commentary,' failing to understand that he already holds them in his hand! (Migeod. 1934: 317). One final review from this same post-publication period is particularly telling. Written by Evans-Pritchard this 30-word review summarises the work as being of 'little scientific value,' although it concedes that there are 'a few

argument, Leiris himself admits the futility of his role as ethnographer in this respect, rapidly becoming aware of the incommensurable gap between the object of ethnographic observation and the ethnographer's ability to translate that observation into ethnographic knowledge. Even in those rare moments of genuine 'participant-observation,' when he finds himself included in the rituals of the tribe, Leiris is aware of little more than his estrangement from the events unfolding around him, culturally, linguistically and personally: 'je me suis senti terriblement étranger' ('I feel myself to be terribly alien'). In another entry this curse of alienation is compounded by the distance he feels between subjective experience and objective knowledge: 'Je désespère de pouvoir jamais pénétrer à fond quoi que ce soit' ('I despair of ever being able to penetrate to an understanding of anything in any depth).[13] This is the spectrality that haunts this phantom Africa. Leiris had anticipated an immersive baptism into the spirit of Africa, conjured for him by Roussel's *Impressions of Africa*. Instead he discovers the semblance but not the body, nor the spirit, of that imagined land, which all but evades him. One could say that throughout his account, alongside the ghosts of his own past, Leiris is haunted by that other Africa, that expected 'true spirit' of black Africa, appearing in flashes of apparently 'genuine' encounters, but all too quickly dissipated in the general apathy of disillusionment, leaving only a phantom, elusive, inaccessible and remote. As Leiris remarks in a moment of frustration, it is not abstract knowledge but real experience that motivates him, and yet the split between his situation and his desire remains an impassable gulf:

> J'aimerais mieux être possédé qu'étudier les possédés, connaître charnellement une "zarine" que connaître scientifiquement ses tenants et aboutissants.[14]

> I'd rather be possessed than study possessed people, have carnal knowledge of a 'zarine,' rather than scientifically know all about her.

But as his autobiographies express so well, in the struggle between actual experience and desire it is frequently desire that remains unsatisfied. Yet it is perhaps this conflict of interests that produces such remarkable writing and generates this tension between left and right. In the face of such obstacles the only honest response seems to be to resist the right-handed objective authority of the mission, and embrace instead the subjective left,

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interesting photographs' (Evans-Pritchard. 1935: 62). As one of the leading anthropologists of the twentieth century, Evans-Pritchard's all but dismissal of Leiris's work exemplifies the fascinating relation between its perceived failure then and considered value now.

[13] Leiris. 1981: 347, 105 (my translations)

[14] Ibid: 324

whilst recognising that the desire for immersion can never be satisfactorily fulfilled; there is always a return of ethnography, of observation and writing. Elsewhere, Leiris characterises this tension as an inability to fit into either camp, a not unfamiliar, one might say characteristic, not-fitting-in that had led him to Africa in the first place.[15] This disjointed sense of being out of place is essential to the particular character or, as he puts it, 'colour' of his experience of the sacred, one which as a sacré gauche invokes a kind of stumbling, ambisinistrous gait that carries him falteringly through his African (mis)adventure. Leiris even describes this awkwardness of character and step as his destiny, presenting his gaucherie as a kind of fatedness, as Richman's description of Leiris as a 'young clod' suggests. Nevertheless, in Jamin's text it also seems clear that in the African field and later on home ground Leiris's gaucherie *was* deliberately cultivated, as Clifford suspected, to put wrong what is by convention right, to disarticulate or put out of joint ('placer de travers ce qu'il est convenu de tenir droit').[16] Though he appears fascinated by the rules of the game he is at the same time driven by the compulsion to break them, to impose his own idiosyncratic rules upon his life and work, from his earliest affronts to conventions of anthropology (through his inclusion of scatology, dreams and eroticism), to his deliberate mispronunciations, distortions and idiomatic definitions, and motivated by what Marcel Moré describes as 'le dérèglement des sens' ('the upsetting of sense').[17] As such, his ethnography condones its infraction of the ethnographic rules and perhaps even approves of the failure to fulfil his contracted role, judging by his unapologetic response to the furious reaction of Marcel Griaule to the publication of *L'Afrique fantôme*. But if he disregarded one set of rules it was in preference for another. As Guy Poitry puts it in an issue of *Magazine Littéraire* devoted to Leiris, 'il s'agit plutôt, à l'inverse, du respect de la règle, mais d'une autre règle' ('it was a matter, rather, of the reverse, of the respect for the rule, but another rule').[18]

In an interview given shortly before his death Leiris acknowledged that his affinity with surrealism, and later desire to visit Africa, had been motivated by a rebellion against Western civilisation, an opposition to an orthodox (right-handed) symbolic rationalism, or as he put it, 'a hatred of ways of thinking and ways of being which were

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[15] Leiris. 1991: 119

[16] Jamin. 1981: 113 (my translation)

[17] Moré. 1981: 194 (my translation)

[18] Poitry. 1992: 29 (my translation)

accepted as a matter of course in our own society.'[19] Traditional anthropology, for example, had been constructed upon an assumption of the distinction between savage and civilised, a Western-orientated and hierarchical distinction that surrealism had claimed to oppose. In validating the irrational and exotic, therefore, surrealism appeared to elevate the 'left-handed' elements of experience and yet, as Sally Price contends, as rebellions go even surrealism seems to have been an unusually 'civilised' one, as if this left-handedness were still operating within the limitations of the right.[20] Leiris's response, as an attempt to escape the coordinates that orientated his place in the world, was to resort to what one writer has called his 'barbarisms.'[21] However, if he had hoped to identify with the African 'savage' he had been swiftly disillusioned of this hope; if he had sought to lose himself in the utterly exotic he had found the threads binding him to 'civilisation' resisted severance; if he had desired to press through the screens separating him from 'real life,' that contact with 'authentic Africa' had eluded him; if he had imagined he could break out of the intellectual straitjacket of his culture he had discovered the implacability of that enculturation. Instead what prevailed in his African experience and carried over into (we might even say contaminated) his later writings was a conscious registering of a personal code or law, which we have been calling gauche but might equally be termed barbaric. This was a law which could not be confused with that of any established social body, and moreover one that was instituted as an assault upon civilisation's codes, whether literary, ethnographic or ethical, but from within rather than without (autoimmunely, as we will say later). This barbarian left-handedness exercised from within the cultural conventions of the right, this wilful 'inability to fit,' is his challenge to such codes and becomes the guiding motif of his literary career, evident in the idiosyncratic form as well as the idiomatic content of his writing:

> In the end, the barbarian's effort of comprehension – or that of the author of barbarisms – is exercised in a super-coding which respects the givens of the code considered but restitutes them in its own terms. This explains, in the texts of Michel Leiris, the incessant play of verbal *destructions*, of truncations, of homophonic chains inside which one can read the words of vehicular language,

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[19] Leiris in Price and Jamin. 1988: 161

[20] Ibid: 162. Perhaps Bataille's breakaway group, which took Leiris with it, came closer to the surrealist vision. The figure of the *Acéphale* favoured by Bataille evoked this attempt to decapitate the symbolic site of reason. The loss of the head, in a subversive echo of revolutionary solutions to bourgeois hierarchical problems, is figured in Leiris as a privileging of gaucherie through the symbolic amputation of the right hand.

[21] Thomas. 1975

appearing in the form of constellations and different regroupings… opening up a new, multiple universe of signification.[22]

In an effort to instate other constellations of meaning not only does he break the golden rules of ethnography but of syntax too, forcing a left-handed route through what might be conceived as a right-handed field. All of which is done, says Jamin, not without a conscious awareness of the pitfalls that await the writer/ethnographer through such provocations to the academy of literature or science. His scruples of truth to himself do not, however, permit him the security of retreat into more acceptably conventional forms. In all cases, Jamin concludes, this *maladresse* is a necessity, the indirect path to an opening, possessing even what Jamin surprisingly calls a civilising virtue whilst upsetting the order of things and wounding language.[23] Just as the clumsiness of childhood, forgiven as natural in a child, in an adult may be dismissed as obtuse, his deliberately awkward approach to writing, acceptable in autobiographical reminiscences as personal quirks of style, provoke consternation and disparagement when surfacing in official documents like the archive of a scientific-anthropological mission. If, as Jamin suggests, Leiris's methodological 'gaffes' in Africa were due in part to youth and inexperience, in his later autobiographies this clumsiness was employed as a deliberate offence to conventional thought and method in his efforts to apply the rules of ethnography to a purpose for which they were never intended: an ethnography of the ethnographer himself.[24]

A quotidian sacred

This theme is most evident in Leiris's purely autobiographical writings where, as he admits in the first volume of *Rules of the Game*, those things ordinarily considered sacred have become associated for him with a sense of redundancy or excessive solemnity. In an attempt to reclaim relevance for the sacred in modern society, or better said, in his own experience, he seeks it in the ordinary and quotidian; specifically in those things that would usually be considered outside the realm of the sacred. At the same time, and here we see much of the ambiguity inherent to Leiris's oeuvre, he holds sacred experience to

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[22] Ibid: 33 (emphasis in original)

[23] Jamin. 1981: 111

[24] Ibid: 108

be 'separate from the ordinary world,' of a different order to it.[25] It is different from, yet found within, the experiences of ordinary life, or as he says elsewhere, the sacred *par excellence* appears when one is perfectly oneself and at the same time perfectly outside of oneself, a possibility very much in keeping with his hopes for that phantasmic Africa though rarely, if ever, truly realised. This play between inside and outside clearly has resonances with conventional notions of the sacred, as the inside to the profane's outside (*pro-fanum*, 'before the temple'). Even translated into a droit/gauche polarity this notion holds. Hertz speaks of the right as the *inside*, a finite space of 'assured well-being and peace,' while the left is always outside, an infinite, inherently hostile space, threatened with 'the perpetual menace of evil.'[26] This tension is evident within definitions of the sacred itself, split between a blessed *sanctus* as sanctuary and an accursed and outcast *sacer* (see appendix 5). In Leiris, however, this polarity is troubled.

Perhaps it was the sense of failure associated with his African quest that led him in his subsequent work to seek the sacred in the familiar world of past reminiscence and everyday life. This was, in part, an aspect of the sociological project with which he was involved from 1937, which applied concepts common to ethnography to modern urban society. Within the *Collège de Sociologie*, co-founded by Leiris, along with Bataille, Caillois and others, 'le sacré' became a guiding theme, evident in the work of all three founder members. Following Durkheim it had become the key concept of the French ethnographic school, but where Durkheim had posited a dichotomous relationship of sacred and profane, and of a pure and impure sacred distanced from the profane world, Leiris, Caillois and Bataille introduced a distinction inspired by Hertz, 'between a "sacré droit" corresponding to an aspiration for purity, and a "sacré gauche" reflecting the way sacred experience is often rooted in fear and awe, as Otto had suggested, and congruent with disgust, horror and transgression.'[27] Bataille, of course, was particularly fixated upon a sacré gauche as transgression, taboo and limit experience, yet despite Leiris's willingness to explore his own limits and taboos, particularly within his autobiographies, his path followed a different tangent to that of his fellow members of the *Collège*, dissuaded in part, as he himself admits, by sheer laziness from the extremes of expenditure demanded by Bataille as much as from his own principled standpoint. Instead of a 'sacralization of everyday life' his interest in a right/left polarity expressed

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[25] Leiris, cited in Sheringham. 2006: 108

[26] Hertz. 1960: 102

[27] Sheringham. 2006: 109

itself in a 'quotidianization of the sacred,' or 'banalisation' (as Jamin put it) hence his oft-cited lecture, 'The Sacred in Everyday Life.'[28] This text of Leiris's, acting as a hinge between his literary career and his ethnography, explicitly introduced that which had been implicit in his writings since *L'Afrique fantôme*, namely a left-handed account of the sacred. In this paper the autobiographical lessons of that earlier experience is translated into a modern Western purview; in effect ethnography is turned on its head. An orientation to the symbolic right typical of Western anthropology (signified by an 'etic' bias that privileges the observer's point of view), from early missionaries to even some of the sincerest exponents of participant-observation like Griaule, is, in Leiris's writing, subordinated to a left-handed discourse which brings to bear on Western modes of thinking what Leiris and the other principal members of the *Collège de Sociologie* called a 'sacred sociology.' For Leiris this sacred sociology as a quest for the sacred took him outside the bounds of a conventional sacred topography, incommensurate with the mundane world yet at the same time operating from within it:

> What, for me, is the sacred? To be more exact: what does my sacred consist of? What objects, places, or occasions awake in me that mixture of fear and attachment, that ambiguous attitude caused by the approach of something simultaneously attractive and dangerous, prestigious and outcast – that combination of respect, desire, and terror that we take as the psychological sign of the sacred? [29]

This text dismantles any notion of a sliding scale of sacral values, which is precisely *not* what he wants to say. Instead, sacred puissance appears in the unlikeliest of places:

> It is not a question of defining my scale of values – with whatever is of gravest importance to me, most sacred in the ordinary sense of the word, at its summit. Rather, it is a matter of searching through some of the humblest things, taken from everyday life and located outside of what today makes up the officially sacred (religion, fatherland, morals).[30]

This relocation or, better said, refocusing of the sacred at the level of the everyday reflects Leiris's obsession with what one could call a subjective sacred – Leiris concludes his essay with the hope that by such a means one might discern the 'colour' of one's personal sacred – which distinguishes between sacred and profane experience in terms of

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[28] Ibid: 111

[29] Leiris. 1988: 24

[30] Ibid.

the ordinarily (impure) and officially (pure) sacred. But its incipient relevance really lies in its privileging of a left- over a right-handed sacred and all that it represents.

For the young Leiris this begins with a language of polarities, but is later conceptualised as a perception of transition between apparent polar extremes. There were, for example, the sacred poles of the house, the left-hand pole exemplified by the illicit secrecy of the bathroom, contrasting with the right-hand pole of the parental bedroom, representative of the official sacred of 'established authority, sanctuary of the clock and the grandparents' portraits.'[31] For Leiris and his brother the bathroom was a subterranean cave, a hideaway for forbidden conjurations: 'There, opposite the right-hand sacred of parental majesty, the sinister magic of a left-hand sacred took shape.'[32] This was a sacred whose left-handedness refused to satisfy a desire for identification or classification within an ethnographic schema, remaining heterogeneous and ambiguous. The right-handed sanctity of the clock or the portraits took definite and permanent form; the left-handedness of the bathroom, however, lay in its secret, only vaguely-comprehended interdictions.[33] This is a sacred closely associated with taboo, with forbidden objects of appeal like his father's revolver, with dangerous zones such as the racetrack, and even words and phrases with a magical significance. These resonant aspects of his childhood conjured a sacredness complicated by the ambiguity associated with it, described by Leiris as

> that ambiguous attitude tied to the approach of something both attractive and dangerous, prestigious and rejected, that mixture of respect, desire, and terror that can be taken as the psychological mark of the sacred.[34]

This 'domestic sacred,' forbidden, set apart, transgressive, ambiguous and secretive, appropriates the domain of sacrality from the hegemony of the church and secular authority and revalorizes it as subjective, quotidian and non-cultic (non-ecclesiastical). It is, in a sense, profane life offering up its own intimate ties to sacredness; a sacredness, *pace* Derrida, without obligations to belief, in this case in either religious powers or secular authorities, but realized, rather, as a desire to obtain 'une connaissance de soi

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[31] Ibid: 25

[32] Ibid: 26

[33] We see a similar rhetoric at work in Genet's evocation of the bathroom as refuge, reassuringly unclean and erotically odorous, transforming his incarcerated present into a reverie of his childhood past, negotiated through an impure and scatological sacred. For Genet the bathroom represents a transgressive yet redemptive space, a sacred, even religious, space (Genet. 1963: 98-99).

[34] Leiris in Clifford. 1988: 142

aussi précise et intense que possible' ('a knowledge of the self as intense and precise as possible').[35] But a knowledge achieved through disavowal of the conventional avenues that lead to understanding.

Leiris's scruples

It is here that we encounter this 'autre règle' as the governing principle of Leiris's life, and it is here that we hit upon the source of his idiosyncratic style. 'What's most inexplicable about *L'Afrique fantôme*,' says Clifford, returning to Leiris's African journal,

> is not its awkwardness, its dada ideas of data, its refusals, even its boredom. Nor is it the persistent disappointment that the journal enacts. [...] What remains inexplicable is the strange, childlike innocence, emerging somehow, each time, *after* experience. It's incredible that Leiris keeps on writing, and that we keep on reading, dipping in and out of these pages. Yet every day, the journal's scrupulous entries appear, long, short, elaborate, terse, each promising that *something* will somehow happen, and that soon we'll see what the relentless series is leading to. We never do. No moment of truth: *L'Afrique fantôme* is only a pen starting up each day.[36]

Here Clifford makes casual reference to Leiris's 'scupulousness,' as one who diligently takes care to keep on writing, who persists in his daily entries, but as an act of reticence, reluctant to draw conclusions or authoritative judgements. There is no moment of truth, 'only a pen starting up each day.' It is this scruple of Leiris's that is key to an appreciation of his text, and which characterises his left-handed approach to ethnography, and left-handed view of the sacred. Leiris's scruples, we might say, were orientated towards hesitation, to keeping an open door to experience, and in Africa to noting without judgement or reserve the activities of each day (including those activities of the mission that were ethically dubious, and those daily activities usually left unrecorded). Time and again this adjective 'scrupulous' is employed to describe his attitude as an ethnographer, a writer, a biographer, or a confessor. Leiris, says Jamin, performed his work as *sécretaire-archiviste* of the mission as a 'scrupulous and attentive' ethnographer, while as an autobiographer Jamin speaks of Leiris's 'hesitant meticulousness' that accompanies the unfolding of the scenes of his childhood, describing a lingering series of parentheses, interpolated clauses, and repetitions that delay the unravelling of the event, as if a scrupulous, faltering reluctance is necessary to avoid approaching too hastily, clumsily or

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[35] Leiris in Hand. 2002: 65

[36] Clifford. 1984: 293-4

precipitously the fleeting fragility of a remembered moment.[37] Using similar language, Michèle Richman, in her treatment of Leiris's African experience, describes how, in his role as official secretary,

> Leiris kept a diary where, with scrupulous 'documentary' detachment, he recounted the pillaging exploits of the French hunters and gatherers for ethnographically significant objects and information.[38]

Where Griaule's ethnographic scruples no doubt called for a sensitive editing, the necessity of drawing a discreet veil over certain episodes, particularly those tantamount to theft, Leiris candidly brought these occult moments into the light of day. This was the 'brutally honest testimony' presented by *L'Afrique fantôme*. In the face of the hieratic and the respect due to it, Leiris's own culpability in the unscrupulous actions of Griaule and company are balanced by a scrupulously honest confession within the pages of his published archive of those events. These scruples, we might say, illuminated a conflict of authority and anti-authority, participation and observation, a conflict equally at work in Griaule's ethnographic methods but unacknowledged as such. Throughout the journal Leiris confesses his unqualified status as ethnographer, hence the stress upon its subjective rather than objective point of view (though as a subjective 'truth' it is one offered as scrupulously candid). Its left-handedness is in part a response to this perceived lack of authoritative voice, a scruple against pronouncing judgements beyond the parameters of his expertise. Leiris even suggests that this is a book in the margins, a personal and intimate journal masquerading as an ethnographic account, a book of scruples offered with scrupulous provisos. He declares an unwillingness, distaste even, for speaking of anything of which he has no knowledge, and that he has no object of knowledge other than himself. Furthermore, his scruples extend even to weighing up the justifications for the journal's publication.[39]

This curious evocation of scruples at first glance appears antithetical to what we have been referring to as Leiris's gaucherie. As we will see, it is in their unexpected interweaving that the reason for Leiris's particular fascination for this thesis will emerge. In part what these repeated references to his scrupulousness tell us is comparable to what we will see Thomas McEvilley values in questions of aesthetic judgement, that

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[37] Jamin. 1981: 102, 110

[38] Richman. 2002: 155

[39] Leiris. 1981: 215

throughout his testimony Leiris neither affirmed nor denied. By his own admission within him there seemed always to be at work a conflict of scruples: those that demanded an integrity of experience and honesty of response, and those recalled by his Catholic upbringing and enforced by his natural timidity. Though he enthusiastically professes the necessity of the former, more frequently his scruples are marked by a hesitation enforced by the latter and closer to fear. In Africa, wanting nothing other than to be immersed in events, Leiris is plagued with a disengagement that he frequently laments. It is not his detachment or participation in the events of the mission, however, that interests us as the mark of his scrupulousness so much as this struggle between the desire for disclosure and resistance to passing judgement. If this hesitation sometimes precluded genuine experience it is also a mark of his scrupulousness that he faithfully committed to paper his personal failings along with the events of the mission. Throughout, his unwillingness, inability or perhaps, better said, resistance to drawing conclusions is what makes *L'Afrique fantôme* so problematic as an ethnographic document and so refreshing as a reflection upon experience.

Doubting Thomas

These twin conceptual figures of gaucherie and scrupulosity are given further nuance through a phrase from art critic Thomas McEvilley. Writing on the value of doubt in artistic judgement, McEvilley describes it on the one hand as a suspension (*epochè*) of judgement, in the sense of a Phyrronian scepticism whereby one habitually defers as impossible all certainty of knowledge, and on the other as a reluctance to ascribe certainty or closure to thought or judgement. McEvilley defines this latter position as 'an inner balance in which the mind *neither affirms nor denies.*' [40] Within the context of art criticism it might seem that the critic is hereby refusing to nail his colours to the door, though anyone who knows anything of McEvilley will know that he does not shy from expressing his own particular bias. What McEvilley is sensitive to is the resistance of the artwork itself to any definitive judgements. To this thought we might justifiably apply the term 'scruple.' How so? What does this somewhat innocuous term tell us? We have already seen that scruple may be a possessive, 'to have scruples,' and an attribute, 'to be scrupulous,' but it may also be taken more unfamiliarly, as a verb: 'to scruple.' Although less commonly used today, this more archaic sense is given prominence in Dr Johnson's

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[40] McEvilley. 1999: 5 (my emphasis)

dictionary and defined as 'to hesitate or doubt.' This term, applied to McEvilley's respect for doubting Thomas's, presents us with an apparent reluctance to settle upon any one notion, value or standard in the name of open-endedness toward difference and change; a resistance to settling, perhaps to orthodoxy and convention, to fitting into pre-existing determinations and preordained roles; a willingness to remain open to other possibilities. It could be taken as a reluctance typical of a postmodern antipathy for definite fixed positions in favour of perpetual contingency, but incompatible, one would think, with any programme of artistic inclusion within churches and cathedrals, let alone with McEvilley's own critical position, where choices must be made and positions taken. What place may we find for scruples that desist from affirming or denying? And for what are such scruples valued? Could it be for the sake of another mode of thought regarding religion?

Religiosity

In one of Derrida's most explicit texts on religion he asks what it actually means to speak of religion. There is a danger, he warns, of believing that one already knows what is meant by that term, yet it may be that the entire question of religion (and he is particularly thinking about a perceived return of the religious in contemporary politics) must be framed within an acceptance of the lack of definitional certainties. In truth it lacks any '*one* and *identifiable*' understanding; agreement on a 'trustworthy' definition of religion is, therefore, bound to remain elusive, perhaps necessarily so:

> There has not always been…nor is there always and everywhere, nor will there always and everywhere…be *something*, a thing that is *one* and *identifiable*, identical with itself, which, whether religious or irreligious, all agree to call 'religion.'[41]

We have already encountered this difficulty in both the distinction of sacred and profane and in the difficulties involved in separating religious, Christian, liturgical, sacred and spiritual when discussing art within ecclesiastical spaces. One must, therefore, be scrupulous regarding any attempts to define, and thus delimit, religion. Clearly the limitations of space do not allow us to pursue so substantial a matter as the definition of religion. From Derrida's text, however, a number of threads may be drawn pertaining to the question of definitions and their particular relevance to our theme: firstly, the distinction of belief and the sacred; secondly, the significance of *relegere* rather than *religare*

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[41] Derrida. 2001: 73 (emphasis in original)

as the root form of religion; and thirdly, the value of scrupulosity, religiosity and autoimmunity as conditions of possibility for experience. Each will play its part in delineating a space for art within the church.

Religion, says Derrida, is a meeting place for two experiences generally held to be equally religious: the experience of belief and the experience of sacredness. These two are habitually brought together yet, he insists, they bear an unacknowledged but 'irreducible duality':

> These two veins (or two strata or two sources) of the religious should be distinguished from one another. They can doubtless be associated with each other…but they should never be confused or reduced to one another as is almost always done.[42]

Derrida's stance in this respect is one that seeks to separate experiences of what we loosely define as sacred with those that might be more readily construed with acts of belief. He suggests that 'in principle' it is possible to sanctify or maintain a sense of the sacrosanct without necessarily invoking belief in the transcendent.[43] These two streams of the religious may 'mingle their waters,' or 'contaminate each other,' without ever being considered equivalents. But can one even begin to delimit the religious? Derrida is aware that it is problematic:

> One would have to be certain that one can distinguish all the predicates of the religious (and, as we shall see, this is not easy; there are at least *two* families, two strata of sources that overlap, mingle, contaminate each other without ever merging; and just in case things are still two simple, one of the two is precisely the drive to remain unscathed, on the part of that which is allergic to contamination, *save by itself, auto-immunely*).[44]

We will return to this notion of the unscathed and the autoimmune later, in its relation to a paradoxically 'irreducible duality' that mingles but does not merge, that is allergic to contamination and yet contaminates itself. Before that we will see that Derrida makes an interesting semantic move in response to the question of definition. Derrida proposes to sidestep the difficulties provoked by the word 'religion' by introducing a 'universal' term: 'religiosity.' If one wishes to avoid any sense of the 'properly religious,' as being too problematic, one can perhaps, he proffers, 'open up the possibility of the religious' with a

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[42] Ibid: 70

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid: 63 (emphasis in original)

term like 'religiosity' without unduly limiting its circle of reference.[45] Within its orbit this includes whatever is not necessarily, in itself, properly religious as such, yet remains open to the possibility of the religious without ever limiting or restraining it. At first sight it is difficult to know what Derrida hopes to achieve with this term. To be 'religiose' and to exhibit 'religiosity,' according to usual definitions, is to be excessively religious in accordance with a particular creed or set of practices, even to the point of being pathologically zealous,[46] yet Derrida appears to be using 'religiosity' in a very different, possibly opposing sense, as something that does not need to attach itself to a formal religion to be religious. What evidence does he give for this assertion? In order to unravel the significance of this term it is helpful to turn to Benveniste's archaeology of Indo-European languages from which we will find Derrida extracts an understanding of religiosity as intrinsically scrupulous.

Benveniste's conclusions concerning the origins of 'religion' register a lack of any single defining term within Indo-European languages. Indeed, he states that it made little sense within 'primitive' societies to denote something as distinct as religion, when everything was somehow imbued with 'divine forces,' until the time that it could be clearly delimited within a distinct domain; when one could know 'what belonged to it and what was foreign to it.'[47] In other words, there could be nothing recognised as distinctly religious until there was something else deemed contrary to, or outside of, religion. Turning to the Greeks and the Romans Benveniste isolates two terms which could pass as equivalents for our word 'religion': *threskeia* and *religio*. *Threskeia*, he explains, denotes the complex of cultic beliefs and practices, but with an emphasis upon the latter. It evokes a notion of 'observance' or 'attentiveness to a rite' or 'faithful to a rule.'[48] The Latin *religio* has a more significant history, says Benveniste, retaining a constant presence throughout Western languages against all other possible substitutes. Yet it has divided scholarship from the classical period to the present day, modern opinion remaining equally divided concerning its origins. Though Benveniste unequivocably plumps for

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[45] Ibid: 86

[46] At its most excessive religiosity can become a form of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, a medically-recognised religious pathology more usually known as 'scrupulosity.' In this medical context scrupulosity manifests itself as an obsessive concern with one's personal sins, particularly those sinful acts or thoughts that would usually be considered venial. According to one source the term derives from the Latin *scrupulus*, a sharp stone, implying a stabbing pain on the conscience. Since most definitions of 'scruple' include a reference to a small sharp stone this derivation for scrupulosity seems trustworthy.

[47] Benveniste. 1973: 517

[48] Ibid: 518

relegere as its true source, drawn from Cicero, others are as committed to *religare*, which originates with Lactantius and Tertullian, and is habitually assumed to be indisputably correct.[49] For our purposes, notwithstanding the many arguments in favour of *religare*, Benveniste's conviction that the Latin *religio* derives from *relegere* leads him to assert a number of useful conclusions. From its root meaning, 'to collect again, to take up again for a new choice, to return to a previous synthesis in order to recompose it,' Benveniste infers *religio* as 'religious scruple,' meaning 'a subjective attitude, an act of reflexion bound up with some fear of a religious kind.'[50] The German Catholic theologian, Ernst Feil, in his study of religion from classical antiquity to the present, lends support to this notion, arguing that the core meaning of religion in antiquity was 'careful, scrupulous observation, full of awe.'[51] In Feil's case, however, he attributes both scruple *and* observance as the core meaning of religion. *Relegere* thus infers a re-collection, 'to take again for a new choice, to reconsider a previous approach,' or to 'take up again a choice already made, to revise the decision which results from it,' and this, says Benveniste, is the proper sense of *religio*.[52] With its derivative, *religiosus*, it becomes more associated with scrupulousness in matters of cultic rite. Whatever is *religiosum*, say the Classical scholars, is remote and set apart from us; whatever act is *religiosus* is not permitted to be done, lest it be seen as an act against the gods. Familiar themes of taboo and sanctity, explored in an earlier chapter, thus begin to appear. Where one definition of *religio* allows for 'careful, scrupulous observation' another precludes or cautions against ritual action. Somewhere within this dichotomy lies the formula of neither affirming nor denying, which we are arguing will be decisive in our discussion of contemporary ecclesiastical art.

Benveniste goes on to argue that *religio* has had secular as well as religious beginnings. In numerous examples *religio* as a secular term appears repeatedly as *scrupulus*, hence the expression *religio est* meaning 'to have a scruple,' in the sense of mental discomfort or conscience.[53] Benveniste describes it thus, insisting upon its attachment to Cicero's *legere*: 'religio is a hesitation, a misgiving which holds back, a scruple which

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[49] Benveniste views the latter, meaning 'to tie or bind' as a false friend invented by the Christians, who sought to establish a 'bond of piety' between God and man, establishing an unhistorical link between religion and obligation, between the believer and God (ibid: 519). Where an earlier pagan ideal advises hesitation and reluctance before the gods, a later Christian one demands a pious obligation to God, characterising not only a different concept of religion but a different concept of God.

[50] Benveniste. 1973: 516

[51] Feil in Jones. 2005: 7702

[52] Benveniste. 1973: 522

[53] Ibid: 519, 520. From *scrupule*, small sharp stone, hence analogous to a cause of mental discomfort.

prevents and not a sentiment which impels to action or incites to ritual practice.'[54] Following Benveniste, Derrida similarly associates the Latin root of religion, *religio*, with scruple, which helps to make sense of his later adoption of the term 'religiosity' as a way out of the impasse presented by definitions of religion.[55] He speaks of a hyphenated 'religio-sity,' a scrupulous religion that avoids the introduction of anything alien in order to keep itself 'intact, safe, *unscathed*.'[56] And here we encounter a second critical term in Derrida's text. Scruple allows what is sacred to remain sacred as unscathed, 'safe and sound,' intact, and uncontaminated by belief, which adds to this chain other terms like modesty, restraint, inhibition. Like Heidegger's *heilig* it gathers within itself a sense of immunity. Derrida concludes that we need to consider two enigmatic motifs: '*presence* unscathed by the present' and '*believing* unscathed by belief.'[57] If the first is a return to the operation of *différance*, which McEvilley suggests is an attempt to produce similarly scrupulous acts of judgement as his own,[58] the second attempts to preserve two sources of religion, belief and sacredness, as irreducible to each other, to prevent them from becoming 'inundated by the other.' It is through reticence, restraint, a kind of scrupulous hesitation; whatever is not necessarily, in itself, properly religious as such, yet remains open to the possibility of the religious without ever limiting or restraining it. This is where the religious bond (as religiosity) persists, says Derrida, in being scrupulous, respectful, modest, reticent, inhibited. Indeed, a reticent undecidability becomes the '*very resource of the religious*.'[59] Scruple is therefore associated, even congruent, with undecidability, which again seems indebted to McEvilley's formula for a suspended judgement that neither affirms nor denies. But as we have already emphasised in McEvilley's case, such a formula precludes neither judgements nor decision-making, and in both cases the validity of the verb, 'to scruple,' comes to the fore. In fact, McEvilley introduces the idea of that which 'neither affirms nor denies' not as a prohibition, but as an incitement to suspend judgement – an affirmative 'yes' to hesitation. If, as Terada contends in her evaluation of Derrida's text, scruple denotes a 'preservative impulse,' it also entails a creative impulse.[60]

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[54] Ibid: 521

[55] Derrida. 2001: 60

[56] Ibid: 61 (emphasis in original)

[57] Ibid. (emphasis in original)

[58] McEvilley. 1999: 6

[59] Derrida. 2001: 99 (emphasis in original)

[60] Terada. 2007: 238

Autoimmunity and the unscathed

One of the important distinctions that Derrida makes, in questioning the nature of religion today, is that between faith and knowledge. We could say that the temptation, in a context of religious belief, is to elevate faith into the gap vacated by knowledge. But Derrida stresses instead the role of the sacred and a scrupulous religiosity in place of the certainties of knowledge. At first glance that seems, more or less, like the same thing, but as we have seen it is not. As already noted, Derrida assures us that when we speak of sacredness we are not necessarily speaking of something religious.[61] Conversely, when we speak of religion (as *religio*) this need not necessarily exclude those who profess no religious faith. In affirming the one we do not necessarily deny the other; in denying the one we do not necessarily affirm the other. The question of the irreducibility of the sacred to belief concerns the separation of faith and sacrality, or paradoxically having faith in the possibility of their separation or differentiation, as two sources of religion that test the limits of its definitions.[62] The object of critique in 'Faith and Knowledge' is principally that of the return of the religious in contemporary life, particularly in politics, and the tensions between faith and science as objects of knowledge. Attempts to immunise or indemnify the one against the other are shown by Derrida to be intractably subject to what he terms autoimmunity.

Derrida considers the question of the 'unscathed' to be the very matter of religion. If the sacred is unscathed, safe and sound, from what is it protected or immune? The secular? The profane? Itself? We get a clue in Derrida's use of the term 'sacrosanct,' which brings together the two Latin strands of the sacred identified by Benveniste: *sacer* and *sanctus* (see appendix 5). Sacrosanct enables a mingling of these two sources of the sacred without ever expecting *sacer* and *sanctus* to mean the same thing. *Sacer* cannot stand by itself but is always implicated in *sanctus*, and vice versa, yet each represents diametrically opposed versions of sacredness. *Sanctus* is the sacred as blessed, as redemptive, as distinguished from the ordinary, as purity, as prayers and offerings, as holiness, participation or sovereignty. *Sanctus* indicates the place of inner sanctuary, of safety and immunity. *Sacer*, by contrast, is the sacred as exclusion, as prohibition, as outcast and cursed, outside the holy sacred community; if worthy of awe, then also inviting disgust and fear. Their juxtaposition in 'sacrosanct' is indicative of their related

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[61] Derrida. 2001: 48

[62] Ibid: 69

differences. In their paradoxical and inadmissable conjoining they reveal what Derrida refers to as autoimmunity, which, we will argue, is intrinsic to an understanding of the sacred in a comparable sense offered by scruple and sacré gauche, and voiced in McEvilley's dictum.

As a place of sanctuary the sacred has, by virtue of its sacredness, been a place of immunity, from law, from prosecution, from profanation by the forces outside its walls, from sacrilege, and so on. In what sense does it fail to protect itself against itself, against its own immunity, via this autoimmunity of the unscathed?[63] Can we translate this concern into an autoimmunity of the sacred from itself as ineluctably separated from the secular? Must the sacred be distanced from itself or, better said, from a traditional or conventional understanding of itself, in order to re-associate with the world? Does its immunisation from the world through its dichotomous relation with its other or others threaten an immunisation from itself? Though Derrida's focus is still the political scene and its wars of religion the thought may be turned towards other agendas. How does it fit, for example, within a schema that valorises a left-handed scrupulosity? Instinctively one feels that the sacred as unscathed (*indemné*) refers to the indemnity of the right from pollution by the contaminating left, that is, a sacred pure from a sacred impure, mirrored in the more familiar preservation of the sacred from the profane or secular. Within anthropological accounts, for example, a sacred impure (say, menstruation or a dead body) always threatens to become a corrupting influence upon a sacred pure, hence the prohibitory rites it engenders. As we saw in the previous chapter there is in Durkheim's writing an imperative to retain a distance or gap between the sacred and profane, whilst at the same time an acknowledgement that the latter constantly threatens to pollute the former. The necessity of distance is counter-balanced by an inexorable proximity and thus non-immunity. There is another way to read the sacred as unscathed, however, and that is to reverse the flow of the corrupting agent. A left-handed, impure sacred, also requires immunity, preserved from an orthodox and dogmatic right that threatens to stifle, stratify or rigidify it. This is, indeed, our argument, that a preponderance for a scrupulous sacré gauche over a dominant sacré droit allows a certain understanding of the sacred to remain protected from its own tendency for indemnity or self-protection. This can be seen, as Derrida says, as a respectful 'abstention before what remains sacred mystery, and what ought to remain intact or inaccessible,' but may equally, in its restraint,

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[63] Ibid: 80

find new openings to that which remains unscathed.[64] It keeps passageways of communication open, not closed. Autoimmunity forces the religious community to undo its self-integrity as intact – it keeps the autoimmune community alive by being open to something other than itself, not only towards whatever remains outside that community, but towards itself as disengaged from that exterior whilst implicated, in contact or coinciding with it.[65]

We can go no further without coming to a decision, albeit a necessarily provisional one, as to the meaning of autoimmunity. It is not difficult to see the value that immunity has for a discussion of the sacred, but why autoimmunity? Why this term that appears with greater frequency in Derrida's work from 'Faith and Knowledge' onwards? As a biological phenomenon it offers an apt metaphor for those associations of contamination and infection with which we have been working throughout this thesis. In medical terms autoimmunity is a pathology of the body's defence system in which the body literally attacks itself, turning in quasi-suicidal fashion against its own self-protection. Or, to put it another way, it is a form of protection against its own self-protection. The principle of autoimmunity is what Derrida elsewhere describes as 'a law of impurity or a principle of contamination.'[66] As we have already seen, such a principle is an invaluable aid to rethinking the uses of contemporary art within ecclesiastical spaces today, but it also reflects the difficulties presented by such art practices for the art world more generally. In a lecture delivered at a conference debating the relationship of contemporary art and spirituality James Elkins commented upon their supposed immiscibility, noting in particular the art world's 'allergic' reaction to religious ideas and discourses.[67] Whether or not we fully accept his diagnosis (a number of those present felt that Elkins had overstated the problem) the biological metaphor is apt, returning us to that all-important notion of contamination.

For Derrida autoimmunity offers an opportunity to rethink the way that every 'sovereign' identity is open to a process that can at one and the same time threaten to destroy it while giving it its only chance of ongoing meaningful survival. Politically, this necessitates a challenge to every community that seeks to maintain integrity of identity in the face of the proximity of the other. Autoimmunity disables whatever protection a

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[64] Ibid: 86

[65] Ibid: 87

[66] Derrida and Ronell. 1980: 57

[67] Conference. *Contemplations of the Spiritual in Contemporary Art.* Liverpool Anglican Cathedral. 2010.

body or an institution has against the 'other,' whatever that other may be. Thus it operates on the premise of a self-imposed exposure to vulnerability. In the sacred realm this is no aberrant pathology but, as we saw in our study of the sacred and profane, intrinsic to its very mode of operating. Against the maintenance of an irreducibility of sacredness and belief, or sacred and profane, autoimmunity asserts the very reticence of these terms or experiences to remain irreducible.[68] As democracy (in Derrida's *Spectres of Marx*) and sovereignty and the nation-state (in *Rogues*) are subject to autoimmune processes, so too autoimmunity names a process 'that is inevitably and irreducibly at work more or less everywhere, at the heart of every sovereign identity.'[69] As such autoimmunity does not set itself up in opposition to, or the opposite of, immunity, but operates within and out of immunity. Derrida's insistence on an 'irreducible duality' of belief and sacredness (their mutual immunity), to discourage their simplistic and automatic conflation, is therefore also subject to the logic of autoimmunity which troubles all such categorical distinctions.

Undecidability

Amongst the many forms of autoimmunity named by Derrida it is, above all, the necessary condition for an event to happen. Why? Because an event worthy of the name 'must touch an exposed vulnerability, one without absolute immunity, without indemnity,' where it is unforeseeable, incalculable.[70] When we speak of autoimmune processes, therefore, it not so much an internal contradiction which is inferred, but rather an undecidability, described in *Rogues* as 'an internal-external, nondialectisable antinomy that risks paralysing and thus calls for the event of the interruptive decision.'[71] Autoimmunity implies doing violence to itself, it is the undecidable lurking in every decision, it is the necessity, even unavoidability, of contingency, it is the incalculable in every calculus, without which no true decision can be made. As such it is not just characteristic of Derrida's oeuvre but is, as Alex Düttmann has persuasively argued, intrinsic to it. As Düttmann describes it, undecidability is the very essence (if we dare use so bold a term) of reticence.[72] It is one of the means by which Derrida attempts to

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[68] Terada. 2007: 244

[69] Naas. 2006: 18

[70] Derrida. 2005: 152

[71] Ibid: 35

[72] Lecture. Goldsmiths College. 2008

trouble dualisms or polarities, or rather to show that they are always already troubled, and therefore indebted to the law of autoimmunity.[73] But it is also operative in questions of judgement, not least aesthetic judgement, and here we see how McEvilley's phrase operates within this logic. The only decision that counts, says Derrida, is that which acknowledges the undecidable within it. A decision can never be absolutely sure of itself, but should retain an element of uncertainty or risk, otherwise it is merely the enactment of a programme or a law. It is, as Derrida writes elsewhere, the 'perhaps' that gives rise to possibility:

> Without autoimmunity, with absolute immunity, nothing would ever happen or arrive; we would no longer wait, await, or expect, no longer expect one another, or expect any event.[74]

Two words are thus closely associated with the logic of autoimmunity: event and risk, this latter both the potential for the event not to happen and the uncertain consequences of its happening. We will return to these terms in later chapters. But let us be clear, whether it is *religio* as scruple, a left-handed sacred, or McEvilley's 'creed' that is under discussion it is not a question of indecision nor a failure of judgement, nor an insuperable hesitation. It is, rather, an acknowledgement of the undecidable in every decision made; not impotence but autoimmunity. Although judgements are made they can be remade. Judgements are themselves subject to judgement. Rather than judgement as an application of determinate rules, the law of undecidability, says Weber, 'does not result in anything that can still be called a "judgement".… It does not pronounce a "verdict" but instead engages in a "decision," a term that Derrida borrows from Kierkegaard…'[75] Critics of such a position will, of course, dismiss this as a failure of judgement or decisiveness. But for Derrida it is a recognition that each act necessarily changes the parameters of the debate or context in which it acts. An important qualification is made in *Politics of Friendship* where the undecidable is rendered in distinctly temporal terms, as a suspended indecision that allows time for reflection. Despite the 'madness' of the leap, as Derrida describes it, any decision worthy of the name is not impulsive. Although the leap is made based not upon absolute certainties but upon uncertain outcomes, it is grounded in reflective, scrupulous thought. Furthermore, any

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[73] Reynolds. 2010

[74] Derrida. 2005: 152

[75] Weber. 2008: 126-7

moment of stabilisation, of an assured judgement or decision, must always remain open to what remains to be reflected or deliberated upon.[76] There always remains a 'perhaps.' In every moment of decision the 'perhaps' must be suspended, otherwise there would be neither event nor decision, but the 'perhaps' is not forgotten, continuing to contaminate the decisive event with its openness to possibility:[77]

> The crucial experience of the *perhaps* imposed by the undecidable – that is to say, the condition of decision – is not a moment to be exceeded, forgotten, or suppressed. It continues to constitute the decision as such; it can never again be separated from it; it produces it *qua* decision *in and through* the undecidable; there is no other decision than this one: decision is the matter and form of the undecidable. An undecidable that persists and repeats itself through the decision *made* so as to safeguard its decisional essence or virtue as such.[78]

Here it is worth recalling David Stancliffe's commentary on the liturgical reordering of Portsmouth Cathedral when he was provost there. According to his own testimony it necessitated a decision full of uncertainties, in order to make possible what had seemed impossible or unthinkable, that is, the drastic restructuring of the liturgical space.[79] Yet, he affirmed, twelve years of careful reflection preceded the 'madness' of the decision, while the current use of the space remains open to the 'perhaps,' from which a number of significant art installations have benefited.

A chain of terms are thus emerging with which to characterise a left-handed sacred. As we will contend these all play a part in an evaluation of the place for contemporary art within the church. It is important to note that this is by no means conceived as a postmodern stance that desires only open-endedness, and in which no choices are actually made. I hope to show that it is a purposeful project with practical applications. But let us remain with this question of *religio* or scruple as a 'return to a previous synthesis in order to recompose it,' which, we will argue, is essential to, but lamentably neglected in, most studies of art and religion.

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[76] Derrida. 1997: 15

[77] Ibid: 67

[78] Ibid: 219 (emphasis in original)

[79] Conference. *Finding God in Holy Places*. St. Chad's. Durham. 2010

The act

With each new work introduced into the church, whether temporarily or permanently, a change necessarily occurs. In the short history of more recent developments in the church's avowed commitment to contemporary art it is generally agreed that an advancement in the nature of their relation has marked the changes since the mid-1990s. But with each new act the field of enquiry shifts, the coordinates of the debate change. What better example of this shift is there than the two cathedral showings of Viola's *The Messenger*, first in 1996, then in 2004? Whilst the first has been hailed as a benchmark work it made its debut amidst instant controversy, while the second appeared without a murmur. For many this was a sign of the legitimisation and validation of contemporary art within the church, of an expanded field in which both art and the church were winners. But could it not also be seen as the field of theological debate and artistic practice expanding to accommodate these changes, in a sense neutralising, restabilising or minimising their impact. In this respect *The Messenger* is informative in ways unanticipated by its otherwise exemplary status. Arguably, its debut in Durham Cathedral in 1996 provoked, developed and expanded the field of debate, and genuinely contributed to discussions critical to the church's relationship to art (and vice versa), in ways that its later incarnation in St. Paul's did not. It could be argued that its repeat appearance, though undoubtedly exposing a whole new audience to a powerful work, and though unquestionably a strikingly affective presence within the nave of St. Paul's, highlighted an extant problem for art in ecclesiastical spaces. If it marked a return to a work that had made a significant contribution to the debates surrounding art and religion, equally it could be argued that it returned in order to repeat, in order to benefit from an earlier moment which it no longer shared.

In this respect its first appearance, but not its second, displayed many of the hallmarks that signify what Žižek calls 'an Act.' As Žižek observes, in a quite different discussion, every act changes the context in which it acts. In other words, every act changes the coordinates of what is perceived as possible. An act, argues Žižek, is always situated in a specific socio-symbolic context, a concrete set of conditions. This does not mean, however, that it is fully determined by its context:

> An Act always involves a radical risk, what Derrida, following Kierkegaard, called the *madness* of a decision: it is a step into the open, with no guarantee about the

final outcome – why? Because an Act retroactively changes the very co-ordinates into which it intervenes.[80]

It is this consequence that is the insight motivating Derrida's notion of the undecidable intrinsic to every act of decision-making. Yet here too we see enacted a most unlikely encounter between Kierkegaard and Lenin. Žižek's faith in the act can be read alongside a second Žižekian maxim, the necessity to repeatedly begin again from the beginning, from a kind of zero-point. As a form of reappraisal or reflexive practice, it is opposed to the common-sense notion that one simply builds upon the experiences of the past, whether successes or failures. Instead, 'one should begin *from the beginning*, not from the place that one succeeded in reaching in the previous effort.'[81] What would be the zero-point in a debate on art's role within the church? Does it infer a continual return to the earliest arguments advocating or disavowing a place for art in the church? Not at all. It means rather to recognise that at each stage the relation of art practices to ecclesiastical practices should be re-evaluated and revised, in order to avoid falling into the complacency of unreflectively building one event upon another. In the points of contention between contemporary art and sacred environments the standard rhetoric prides itself on how far we have come, how much attitudes have changed. But if we pay heed to Žižek's cautionary words, then a different picture emerges. Each new installation need not be assumed to be a progressive step along the path to a fuller relationship between art and religion, but rather acknowledged as a point of reflection, of re-evaluation, emblematic of a reflexive rather than dialectical modernity. Complacency by contrast will produce only repetition, diminishment, even mediocrity within the field, a criticism frequently levelled at much art thoughtlessly introduced into churches (dismissed by Mennekes, with a Žižekian flourish, as 'art without art'[82]). Žižek takes his

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[80] Žižek. 2002a: 152 (emphasis in original)

[81] Žižek. 2009: 45 (emphasis in original). It is worth recalling here an important document in the British history of modern art and the church: Basil Spence's *Phoenix at Coventry* (1962). In a telling section early in his account of the building of Coventry Cathedral Spence adumbrates the issues faced by any radically new work. It turns upon precisely this contention between building upon what already exists and starting afresh from a kind of zero-point. Rather than choosing one or the other approach, Spence proposes both possibilities simultaneously. For Spence the duty of the architect is 'not to copy, but to think afresh' yet without undermining the value of what already exists (Spence. 1962: 8). Spence's surprising claim is that it is those who seek to conserve and preserve who are the true opponents of tradition, rather than those who seek to utilise the contemporary (ibid: 10). This counter-intuitive thinking adds support to those eager to work in the vernacular of their time while remaining sensitive to the conditions of the existing context, something which has since been said of Richter's window for Cologne Cathedral (see Bennigsen et al. 2009: 164).

[82] Roers et al. 2009: 28

cue from Lenin but, unlikely as it may seem, we may take ours from the roots of religion itself. We see this idea in Benveniste's definition of religion as *relegere*, 'to collect again, to take up again for a new choice, to return to a previous synthesis in order to recompose it.'[83] Even if we are reluctant to endorse Benveniste's implied dialectic in his definition for *relegere*, we can nonetheless see the value of the reflexive response it encourages.

Is it not this movement within the act that is at work in the contrasting receptions met by *The Messenger* in a space of just under a decade? *The Messenger* was justifiably described as a groundbreaking work. But in a very real sense this literally implies the building of new foundations, hence the establishment of new structures which, in time, may need to be reworked or dismantled entirely. If, then, we hold to George Pattison's summation that '[e]very new work is a venture into the unknown,' as he approvingly says was true of *The Messenger's* first appearance, this maxim should remind us that there are, or should be, 'no universally accepted prescriptions and no guaranteed successes.'[84] Nor should art simply trade on past successes (although it is hoped that lessons might be learned from past mistakes). This is not a dismissal of what has gone before, but rather an effort to avert mere repetition of the past and circumvent the complacency that comes from assuming a certain level of achievement may be taken for granted, by taking heed of the Žižekian imperative to begin from the beginning.

The excluded left hand in art

The economy of right and left broached by this chapter exhibits an evident propensity for what Stuart Hall has called (in an entirely different context and with an entirely different object in mind) a 'great moving right show.'[85] Translating Hall's political evaluation of party politics into an ecclesiastical art context we could say this 'great moving right show' is a way of describing how the entrance of an avant-garde aesthetic, coming as it were out of left field, finds itself drifting inexorably to the right. Culturally we may say this is a move towards structure, towards the expected, the recognisable, the well-understood, the authority and security of the canon, of tradition, of 'what we know.' How does this work? Once again Leiris is instructive. Symbolically the clearest and most magnificently explicit expression of this movement from left to right in Leiris's work is in his description of the spectacle of the bullfight, in which a symbolic (right-handed) order

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[83] Benveniste. 1973: 522

[84] Pattison. 1998: 184

[85] Hall. 2003

must be ultimately re-established after the temporary sway of a (left-handed) chaos. Leiris portrays it as a sacred tragedy played out at the margins of the dangerous and unpredictable left, yet drawing towards the conclusive triumph of a right-handed restoration of order.[86] The power of the left is maintained within the tension that marks the undecidability of the drama, only relinquishing its power to the right at the sacrificial finale. In another more subjective context this movement from left to right is effectively depicted in Leiris's delight at the misuses of language, especially through the mistakes of childhood, particularly evident in mispronounced and misheard words, where idiomatic speech is eventually turned towards the proper authorised use of the French language. Leiris's childhood vocabulary is captured and restored, subdued to the rules of correct usage whereby a sacred left associated with childhood ultimately succumbs to the symbolic, right-handed sacred authority of adulthood.[87] Such momentary stumblings of meaning, Jamin claims, constitute for Leiris the realm of the sacred par excellence.[88] Yet, in these fundamental, even founding, moments where words become transformed, then corrected, and finally tamed, in the moment of discovery meaning remains poised within an as-yet irresolute state, 'close to a sacred, or at least marvellous, world,' says Jamin, 'but one in which it yet remains uncertain whether it is left or right, a world in suspension.'[89]

This effort to narrativise a left-handed sacred that resists ultimate definitions and permanency in contradistinction to a more authorised and authoritative right may be invoked to trouble the role of art within ecclesiastical spaces. Without unduly straining the metaphor we could say that throughout the history of modern art in churches one has tended to see a transmutation from left to right, the former representative of an initial violent disruption to traditional patterns and expectations, the latter understood as a right-handed orthodoxy of all that is tradition-directed, or validated as appropriate, legitimate or conventional. The left-handed sacred, the sacred of the gauche, the sinister, the atypical, inappropriate and non-conformist, has necessarily been an excluded sacred.

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[86] The uncontrollable and unpredictable power of the left, says Leiris, is inexorably, by ritual process, brought under the authority and order of the right, through the office of the matador, who stands between order and disorder, disaster and triumph, timelessness and continuity: 'To attend a corrida, then, is to find oneself…in the presence of an impeccably structured ritual: a sophisticated treatment of the left side of things, ever more expressly delineated, which is to say, defined and developed, in such a way that it can suddenly annul itself and cede all at once to the right' (Leiris. 1993: 38). The matador takes onto himself the entire 'left' aspect of the drama before the kill is made and order is restored, even to the point of making left-handed passes, demanded by the crowd and considerably more dangerous to make: 'La Izquierda! La Izquierda!'

[87] Jamin. 1981: 111

[88] Ibid: 115

[89] Ibid: 111 (my translation)

The right-handed sacred, the sacred of the academy, of the religious institution, of religion in its acceptable social, theological and aesthetic form, has been privileged. This is as true of modern art in the church as it is of more conventional ecclesiastical styles. Despite the initial, often hostile, resistance to their artistic styles, works by Epstein, Moore, Piper, Chagall and Sutherland, to name a few prominent creators of permanent pieces in British cathedrals, have assimilated relatively easily into a right-handed orthodoxy. Even if those classic Modernists entered from the left, through time they became habituated to the right. In time their uncompromising incongruity gave way to their legitimation, their inclusion in the canon of ecclesiastical art. They have been fully accepted into the academy of the right-handed sacred, disciplined and moulded into an acceptable and recognised tradition. What one tends to forget is how hated these works were at the time. Moore's *Madonna and Child* (figure 42) only retained its place through the obstinate persistence of Walter Hussey, who had commissioned the work, in the face of truly vituperative opposition. For some it could be said this opposition was couched in a rhetoric of inappropriateness, a mark of Modernist sculpture's awkward tendency not to fit; for others, and this is particularly the case with Epstein's work (figure 43), it was dismissed as obtusely difficult or challenging. Yet in hindsight many appear little different from the religious emblems that have adorned our churches for centuries, using a traditional repertoire of archetypal forms. Although this has not necessarily been the fate of these cited examples, through permanence even the most unconventional of works can attain, to a surprising degree, and sometimes surprisingly quickly, a banal familiarity.

In many respects, this lateral movement from left to right, accompanied by a temporal movement from a work's initial novelty to its established presence, is not to be lamented. When Basil Spence argues for the necessary unity of modern art and architecture it is its permanence and integrity that he has in mind. A church such as St. Matthew's, which houses *Madonna and Child* alongside Sutherland's *Crucifixion*, is a fine example of such unity. Yet significantly, as Spence himself confesses, such unity is only won at the price of risk.[90] Suffice to say, if contemporary art for the church constantly finds itself inscribed within a right/left discourse, if rarely couched in these terms, more typically it raises the question of the church's tendency to be risk-averse rather than risk-taking. This is an issue that we will discuss in the conclusion. What we would highlight here, however, regarding risk, is something notably absent from Spence's text: the value

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[90] Spence. 1962, p. 52

of the temporary. There is an argument to be made for the pattern more frequently seen today of temporary works that, in the brevity of their appearance and unconventionality of their form, are given no opportunity to ossify into a sacred tradition that we are here calling right-handed. To be temporary is to be safely ephemeral; easily dismissed perhaps, but this can work to art's advantage in such contexts. A persistent inability to fit, which has acted as a guiding motif for Leiris's work and writing, in artistic terms could be translated into a disinclination for permanence. This could be a valid description of, and principle for, many temporary works shown in churches, whose antipathy for fixity, resistance to tradition, and contextual awkwardness we are here describing as left-handed.[91] Perhaps today and in recent years we are witnessing more and more the prominence of that excluded other of sacrality, abandoning the apparently doctrinal asymmetricality of the sacred which privileges one sacred sensibility over another. On the other hand, even where openings are made for art a corresponding response on behalf of the church is not always evident. A work of art may be tolerated for the period of its installation yet denied any closer integration with its ecclesiastical context, or if appreciated in itself, a discreet veil may be drawn between its function and that of the surrounding religious milieu (evident in Ono's installation for St. Paul's Cathedral in which a distance between the respective ritual processes of artwork and church was carefully preserved).

In this respect, an installation by James Lee Byars, in Sankt Peter, Köln, is held up as exemplary of what can be possible (figure 45). Although it took place some 15 years ago this work remains an instructive point of reference. Byars took advantage of a period in Lent when all imagery and adornments in Sankt Peter are effaced with white coverings, leaving the space as visually uncluttered as it can possibly be. The work

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[91] The fourth plinth in Trafalgar Square operates in many respects according to this logic of the provisional, in contradistinction to the lifeless and permanent statuary accompanying it, sometimes producing incisive works like Wallinger's *Ecce Homo*, sometimes not. Nevertheless, temporary works are not always immune to the pressures exerted by a right-handed order. Let me illustrate this point with an almost trivial example in which the transgressive power of the left was ceded to the right by apparently innocuous means, by a kind of soft symbolic violence which captured and tamed a work of potency and vitality in a manner that would be unthinkable in an art gallery or museum. In late 2010 a large-scale installation by Ana Maria Pacheco occupied the church of St. John's at Waterloo, London (figure 44). *Shadows of the Wanderer* was a substantial sculptural ensemble of figures based upon Virgil's tale of Aeneas and Anchises. The magical realism of her figures, augmented by the sophisticated theatricality of their setting, lend her works an enigmatic presence wherever they appear, no less so in the church of St. John's. On my second viewing, however, in late December, I was astonished to find that each of the principal figures had been draped or haloed with tinsel, transforming the work into a kind of grandiose Christmas decoration. When confronted, the invigilators of the work could see no problem with this seasonal intervention. Yet to my mind, this unwarranted and no doubt unsanctioned addition was nothing less than a submission to right-handed order.

consisted of four pillars and a ring made of white marble, brightly lit by a 2000 watt bulb. The ring was set in the middle of the central aisle, with the pillars forming a square around it, which in turn echoed the rectangle formed by the central columns of the church. Each pillar had two letters carved at the top, which represented a different aspect of the questioning spirit of the work. During Mass the white-clad priest and his two acolytes interacted with the work in an orchestrated synthesis of performance and worship. Byars's installation aimed to promote a positive environment of enquiry, and self-discovery, as the ritual of the liturgy was transformed into a quest for questions. Rather than the traditional liturgy which is a creed of affirmation, 'I believe in…', Byars valued the question-mark, to see man as continually striving for understanding, liturgy encouraging a doctrine of enquiry, and the value of doubt. In discussing the Byars collaboration, the incumbent of Sankt Peter, Father Friedhelm Mennekes's words encapsulate the value of seeking compelling questions rather than ultimate resolutions:

> Doubt, scepticism and attacks on faith are no longer seen as negative virtues, but are seized on as the necessary contours of faith itself, as its brother, so that it is not only in preaching and liturgy that questions are important, but they are elevated into a whole spirituality of the question.[92]

In Mennekes's view *The White Mass* gave birth to a remarkable experience that compromised the integrity of neither art nor liturgy, while 'touching a profound level of spirituality.'[93] Throughout Lent Mass was celebrated in a concentrated way, reduced to the bare essentials. It encouraged a great deal of attentiveness, and afterwards stimulated conversation about both belief and art. Mennekes recounts that 'this experience lives on for the parish to this day as the benchmark and challenge for an appropriate form of liturgical celebration,'[94] and a mark, perhaps, of something we have been calling, after Benveniste's definition of *relegere*, taking up again for a new choice, a return to a previous synthesis in order to recompose it, which, we are arguing, is central to an arts agenda for ecclesiastical spaces.

In curatorial practise and theoretical intent, Mennekes has confessed that his primary aim for the Kunst-Station is for art to actively engage with both the space and its inherent ideologies, even for a conflict to occur. In the case of the installation by James Lee Byars it resulted in a direct disruption and critique of the liturgy. In an interview for

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[92] Mennekes. 1999: 270

[93] Ibid: 267

[94] Ibid: 269

Art News Mennekes defended this policy on the grounds that 'art and religion deal with similar problems, and the more they fight with each other, the more they communicate with each other. What could be better?'[95] Nevertheless, the demands made by Byars pushed Mennekes's apostasy to a point beyond which, at first, he felt unable to go. The installation was predicated upon a direct restructuring of the priestly liturgical rite, requiring that the artwork replace the altar, to which, Mennekes confesses, his instinctive response was to refuse, and yet Byars's participation in the project absolutely demanded it. Mennekes thus conceded, considering his objections to be another example of an ingrained adherence to a dogmatic order, one that must be conceded in order to move forward. By his own admission, this was not a decision arrived at lightly, but I would argue that it was emblematic of a willingness to return to the terms of a decision, to take up again for a new choice through a recurrent process of reevaluation or, as we will later assert, to take each case as it comes, that is, to respond to each individual event's singular needs. For a curator/priest like Canon Walker of Winchester Cathedral such an artistic intervention as this is completely unacceptable, for he sees the altar as integral to the liturgy, as he argued in a public discussion with Mennekes.[96] But for Mennekes this event presented itself as an opportunity to reappraise an understanding of, and response to, ideas of meaningful worship within the sacred space of Sankt Peter. Besides which, far from being a negative disruption, Byars's installation aimed to promote a positive environment of enquiry, and self-discovery, as the ritual of the liturgy was transformed into a quest for questions:

> Liturgy is normally thought of as something profoundly affirmative: the solid foundation on which Christians build their faith in the reality of God. A collaboration between the American conceptual artist, James Lee Byars, and the German Jesuit priest, Father Friedhelm Mennekes leads rather to the idea of a liturgie als frage – liturgy as question.[97]

Byars persistently revisited the utility of the question, which became for him a guiding motif throughout his career. McEvilley, a great admirer and friend of Byars, described his artistic project as a 'grasping at indefinitenesses' which 'settled restlessly and shiftingly on one particular formulation of the indefinite that he called "Question".'[98] This was a

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[95] Mennekes, cited in Goodrow. 1992: 44

[96] Conference. *Commissioning Art for Today's Church*. University College, Chichester. 1999

[97] Editorial introduction to Mennekes. 1999: 266

[98] McEvilley. 1999: 262

Question that needed no correlative Answer, and was in fact a rejection of Answer. Here we find, in the same volume that introduced McEvilley's notion of a response 'that neither affirms nor denies,' an assertion from McEvilley that, a propos of Byars, 'reality is always open, that it is in fact incapable of closure.'[99] In an earlier encounter between Mennekes and Byars, this time in England, the former's official response to the latter's work of art as Question returns us again to the valorisation of a questioning spirit, as well as acknowledging the constructive possibilities for both a priest and a curator that such a questioning attitude provokes. Mennekes's view that 'new questions break old answers open again,' is effectively a return to decision in the terms we have been outlining.[100]

Admittedly, in comparison to the constraints imposed upon Canon Walker or Canon Hall of Durham Cathedral, Mennekes enjoys considerably greater latitude, despite coming under the auspices of the Catholic Church. Indeed he is something of a loose cannon, whose provocative statements irritate or disturb as much as the work he presents. The guidelines he follows are those of his own convictions and thus could understandably be subject to intense criticism. At the Chichester conference Canon Walker was resolute in his opinion that Mennekes's idiosyncratic policy could not be used as a model for church policy towards the arts. One can understand his caution, but it is in some ways indicative of an adherence to what we have been calling a right-handed orthodoxy, where Mennekes, if problematically radical and therefore marginalised, is striving to promote an intelligent and coherent dialogue between contemporary art and contemporary belief in a manner closer to what we might call a left-handed contingency. He has found himself in an interesting situation, straddling the two worlds of art and religion and having considerable autonomy to operate as he sees fit in both: 'I am unique,' Mennekes wryly exclaims, 'There is nothing else like St. Peter's anywhere.'[101] In fact he is not entirely alone, although he has, as it were, set a certain standard, as did Couturier, Hussey and Bell in their time. A more recent experiment in the church of All Hallows on the Wall, London, called Wallspace, has also sought to take up this challenge, in the spirit, if not exactly the terms, of this thesis. As both an active place of worship (albeit one without an established congregation by virtue of its location within the City of

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[99] Ibid.

[100] Mennekes in Byars. 1996 (no page numbers). In 2004 John Newling's *Stamping Uncertainty*, an installation in the Chapter House of Canterbury Cathedral, augmented just such a spirit of questioning (figure 46). Newling isolated every questioning sentence in a hymnbook, turning each into an individually rubber-stamped statement, thereby disclosing a seam of doubt running through the songbook's usually affirmative creed.

[101] Mennekes, cited in Goodrow. 1992: 44

London) and an art space, acts of liturgy necessarily overlapped with art installations, each bleeding into the spaces of the other. The spiritual life of the church not only took the art into account, but made whatever was currently being shown the central theme or focus of the act of worship. What this required is what we have been describing as *religio*: a return each time to make a new choice, to take up the liturgy as a renewed act, in order to enable an efficacious encounter with the art. This was not always successful but nevertheless it revealed a willingness to prioritise the art without compromising the worship, an attitude that was conspicuously absent in the Ono installation in St. Paul's Cathedral where, one sensed (at times it was evidently clear), a return had not been made to a new choice. Instead the art was simply expected to submit to the liturgical and para-liturgical aspects of the cathedral's life.

Controversies

One final aspect of the example set by Kunst-Station should be mentioned. The question postulated in Derrida's text of a sacred unscathed by belief marks an important distinction in the history of modern art and the church. The old question of separation or pollution between an art appropriate to the church and a modern art read as inappropriate, ugly, sacrilegious, or transgressive has been a point of contention since at least the 1950s, and though a perceived lack of orthodoxy seems less of a bar to artistic commissions today, it still remains contentious. In many respects the acceptance of art in churches has relied upon a distinction made between sacred and profane, religious and secular, the one permitted, the other prohibited. This was unequivocally the case in Couturier's day. He fought a long and difficult battle with his superiors, essentially within the terms set out by Derrida's distinction of sacredness and belief, comprehensively described in William S. Rubin's survey of Assy. Rubin's book offers a fascinating glimpse into the politics dominating attempts to introduce modern art into the church, in which Assy became something of a *cause celèbre*, and a benchmark for future projects. Couturier, for example, commissioned Braque to produce a work for his church, convinced that a secular work by an artist of Braque's stature would be more fitting than a more mediocre work from a self-professed believing artist. In other words, in urging the reluctant Braque, Couturier followed his conviction that artistic vision was of more sacred value than formal belief, defending his view that the spiritual power of a work of art relied upon using the best artists, and not the best religious intentions. That said, he did not see belief as, in any way, precluding artistic vision, most notably in the case of Rouault,

although in his view Rouault was an exception among modern Christian artists.[102] Couturier was very much inspired by Maritain, a significant figure in the revival of sacred art within a sacred milieu. Maritain's view is somewhat typical of the time, however. If he aimed to give legitimacy to the work of the artist, recognising 'that the first duty of the artist…is to be unshakably faithful to his own truth,' he also held that 'as a man is, so are his works.'[103] Christian art is produced whenever and wherever a Christian artist is at work (regardless of subject matter) whilst no Christian art can be produced by non-religious artists.[104] This might understandably be true of 'Christian art,' but what of an ecclesiastical art that could not possibly be described as Christian?

Mennekes exemplifies a view at the other extreme to Maritain et al, declaring a fundamental distrust of the believing artist. Mennekes simply refuses to use Christian artists, since artistic vision, he cautions, is always in danger of being compromised, or taking second place to, Christian zeal. In this he follows Couturier's lead. Other curator/priests like Canon Walker do not hesitate to employ artists with non-Christian or non-traditional beliefs, but still show a preference for the believing artist like Cecil Collins or Peter Eugene Ball. Many others have argued, and continue to argue, for an ecclesiastical art that is entirely faith-directed, or modelled upon theological truths. In a conference on commissioning art for the church in 1999 a fundamental disparity between the positions taken by Walker and Mennekes was evident. Despite his patronage of non-faith-professing artists, for the former it is artists who can claim some kind of spiritual agenda that can most effectively communicate within Christianity's sacred spaces, while for the latter the opposite is true. Thus Mennekes has invited artists, or presented work, that others might consider entirely inappropriate, often courting controversy.[105] For Mennekes it is the quality of their vision that matters, their ability to

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[102] Rouault is an interesting case in point. Almost alone among the modern artists at Assy in being a committed Catholic, working with conventionally religious themes, he received almost no recognition from the church (save from Couturier), excluded for the difficulty of his vision. Despite being one of the few genuinely believing and faith-inspired artists at Assy, Rouault's work was repeatedly dismissed as irreligious, ugly, hideous, among a collection of 'horrors' which formed part of an 'anti-Catholic offensive', denied as having any 'authentic religious feeling' (Rubin. 1961: 94-5). To the church authorities of the time, Rouault failed at every level – religious, sacred, liturgical, aesthetic. By contrast, to Paul Tillich, another champion of modern art for the church, his work succeeded on every religious level.

[103] Ibid: 26

[104] Ibid: 27

[105] For example, in an ongoing programme of *Altarbilder*, Mennekes utilises the focal point of liturgical worship, the altar, as a space for contemporary art which is typically difficult, challenging or unnerving. One of the most blatant examples was a work by Rosemarie Trockel, in which three stark words greeted the visitor to Sankt Peter: *Ich Habe Angst* (figure 47). The appearance in the place of sanctuary

illuminate, not merely illustrate. In comparison, Walker revealed, in his book *Images or Idols?*, the restrictive and controlling parameters of his agenda regarding content: 'The Church should dictate the subject matter, the artist the treatment.'[106] Central to Mennekes's philosophy is that art and religion deal with the same range of experiences, but that both realms must be understood as having their own independent fields of operation:

> Art and religion are different and separate fields of culture. One must not combine them. Art is art and religion is religion. The distance between the two does both good.[107]

Thus we see an 'irreducible duality' evident to a greater or lesser extent in attitudes that prescribe and attitudes that prohibit a necessary relationship between belief and the sacred. But the autoimmunity of that 'irreducible duality' allows for the persistence of faith in a discourse of the sacred, and the sacred in confessions of faith. A denial of denial is at the same time a denial of affirmation, between refusing (Mennekes) and insisting (Maritain, Walker), between a proscriptive and a prescriptive position. We cannot ignore those who claim a need for belief (we cannot deny their claim), but neither must we affirm belief as an essential requirement. If a place for art that *is not* explicitly religious has been affirmed in the church today, an art that *is* cannot be proscriptively denied; if a place for Christian art or explicitly religious art is not denied, neither can it be prescriptively affirmed. That one neither affirms absolutely nor denies categorically is an acknowledgement of this dimension of the autoimmune. Can we thereby discern what we might call artistic practices of the left within an ecclesiastical milieu for art, indebted to a left-handed sacred, or to a subjective sacred? Does an emphasis on left-handedness realign artistic practices with a non-authoritative sacred, a sacred of encounter, a sacred that undermines or challenges itself, autoimmunely, a sacred possibility of the impossible as opposed to right-handed conditions of sacred possibility reliant upon presupposed or pre-existing possibles, an architecture of the sacred whose unconventional topoi

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of so fearful a phrase typified the confrontation between the worlds of the church and art that Mennekes intentionally provokes. In 2006 the German angst expressed by Trockel's *Alterbild* was mitigated by a reassuring English text in neon affixed to the tower of Sankt Peter, a work which, in its own way, could be seen as problematic for an ecclesiastical context (figure 48). In many respects Martin Creed's *Don't Worry* has more in common with the advice of the British Humanist Association than the message of the church, as witnessed in their bus campaign in London in 2008 (figure 49).

[106] Walker. 1996: 119

[107] Mennekes in Thiel. 1996: 55

challenge the conventional or expected topography of the sacred with which we are so familiar? Such thoughts echo the words of Karl Barth, who spoke approvingly of the radical 'impossible possibility of God' but noted how easily that impossible possibility was transformed by the operations of the church into mere 'possible possibility.'[108] *The White Mass* took place in the mid-1990s, in a period seen by many as a decisive moment of change for relations between the church and contemporary art. In an issue of *Kunst und Kirche* from this time Mennekes reflected upon the sea-change that seemed to be taking place: 'Are there not again and again signs of encouragement, new approaches, successful mediations?'[109] Indeed there have been and still are, yet let us conclude by noting that this remarkable event is still regarded by many as a uniquely isolated case. Though belonging to ecclesiastical art's past it is still invoked as the promise of its future, a signatory to renewed expressions of possibility, with the implication that, to juxtapose Benveniste's definition of *relegere* with a phrase of Benjamin's, if this is dialectics, it is dialectics at a standstill.

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[108] Barth. 1933: 530, 388

[109] Mennekes. 1990: 120

Figure 42 Henry Moore, *Madonna and Child*, St. Matthew's, Northampton, 1943

Figure 43 Jacob Epstein, *St. Michael Subduing the Devil*, Coventry Cathedral, 1962

Figure 44 Ana Maria Pacheco, *Shadows of the Wanderer*, St. John's Church, London, 2010

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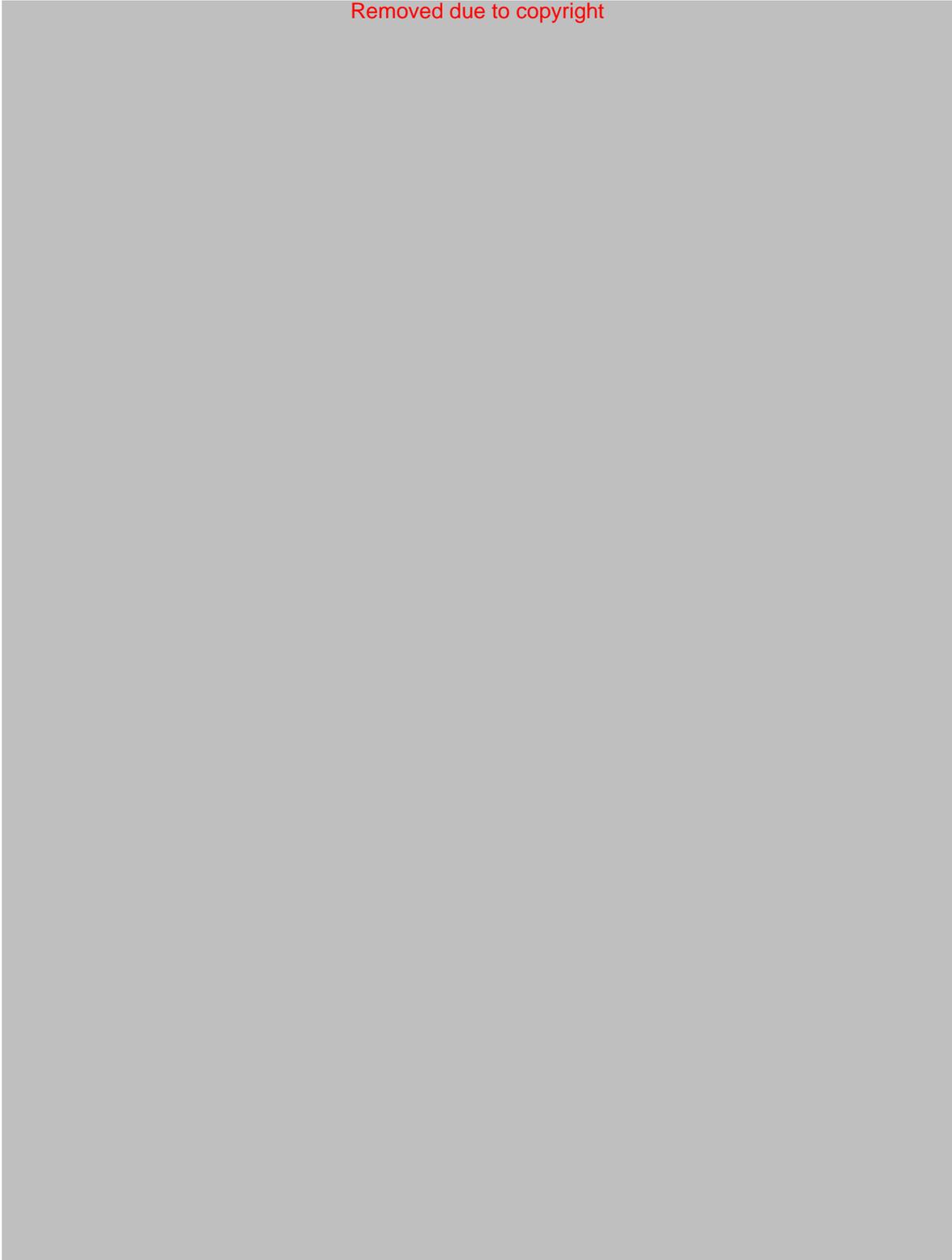
Figure 45 James Lee Byars, *The White Mass*, Sankt Peter, Köln, 1995

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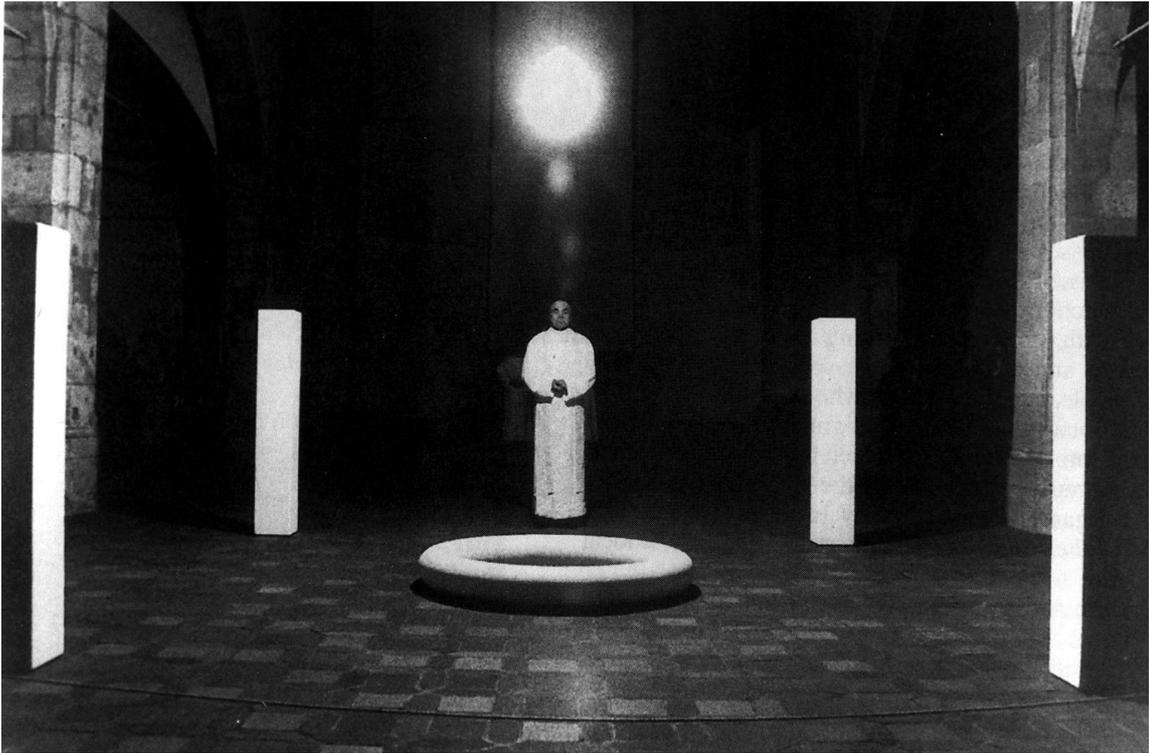
The performance of the liturgy
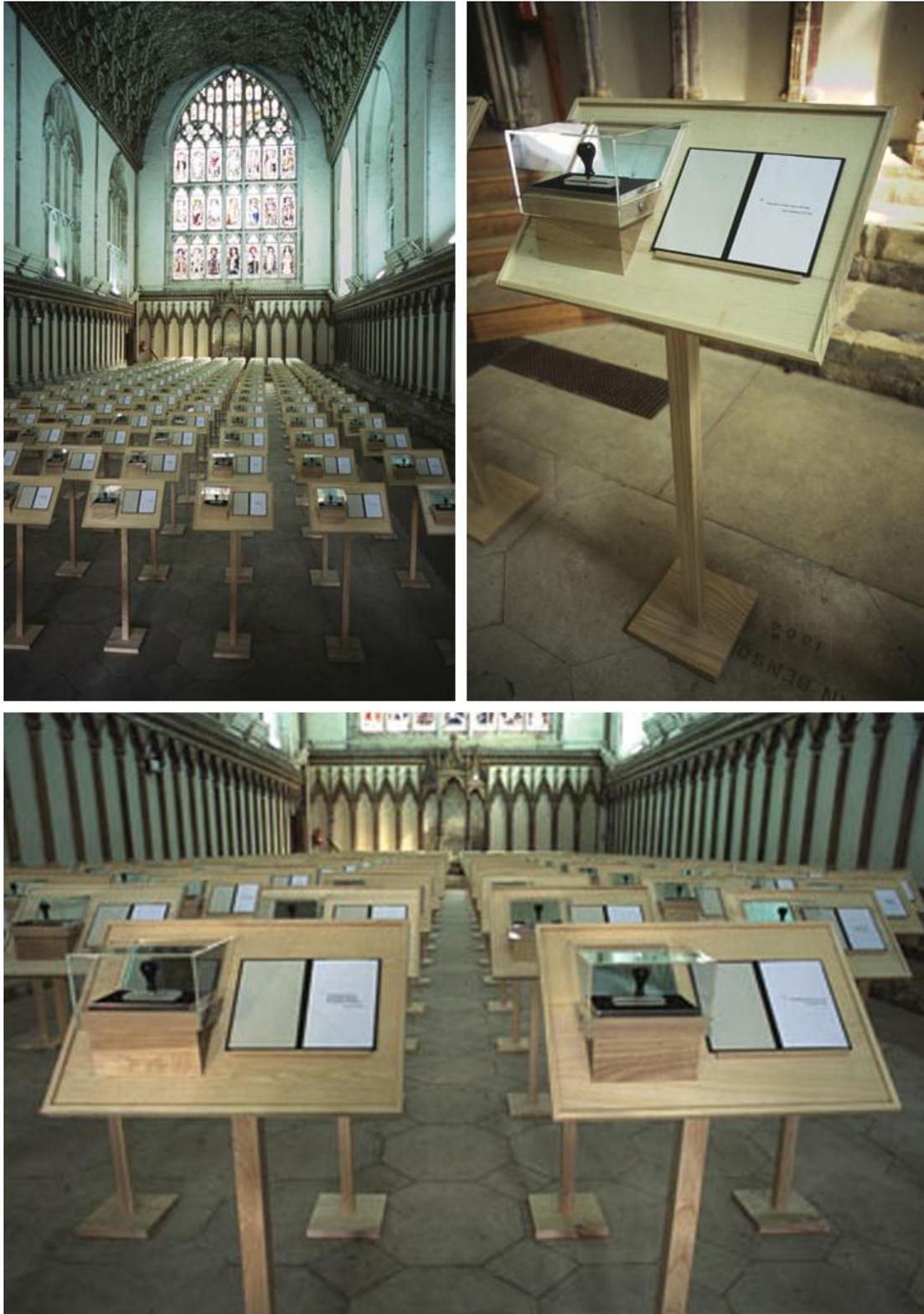
Figure 46 John Newling, *Stamping Uncertainty*, The Chapter House, Canterbury Cathedral, 2004

Figure 47 Rosemarie Trockel, *Ich Habe Angst,* Sankt Peter, Köln, 1993
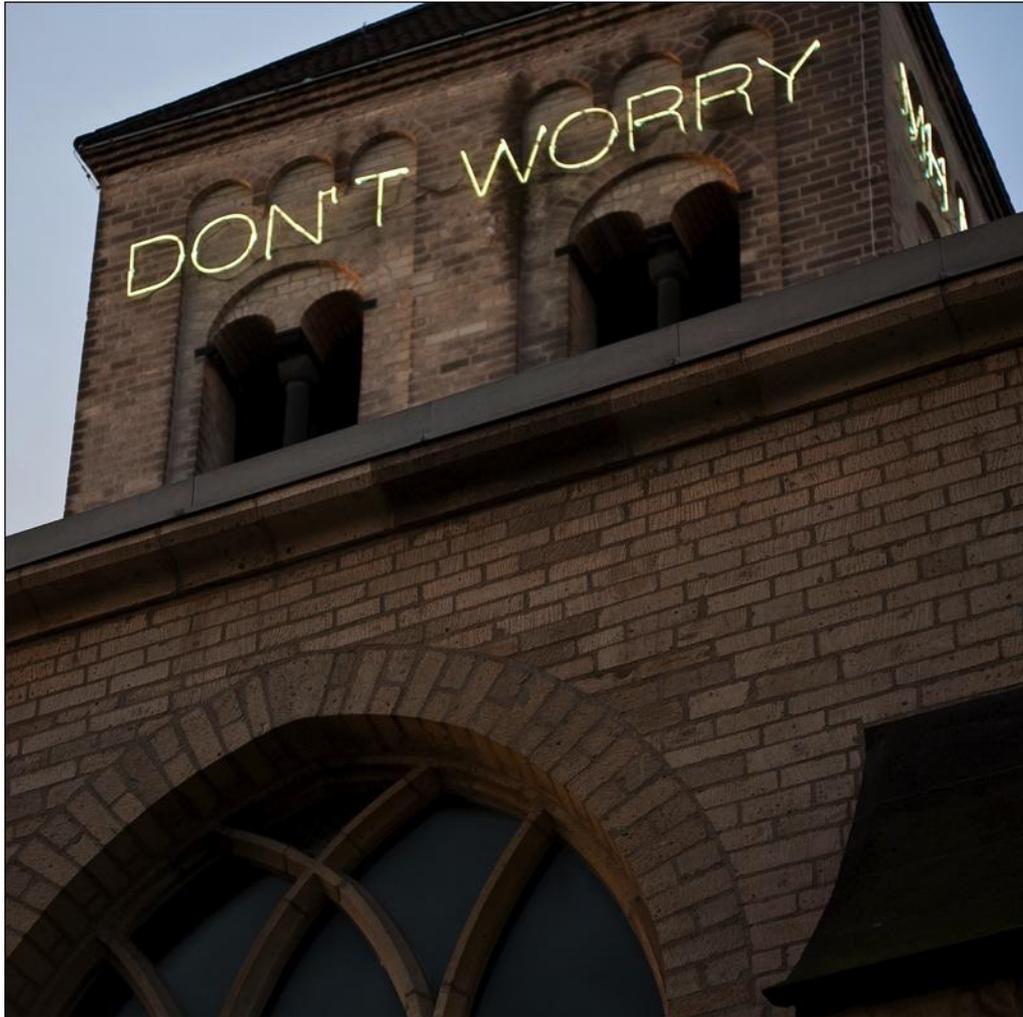
Figure 48 Martin Creed, *Don't Worry,* Sankt Peter, Köln, 2006

Figure 49 British Humanist Association, *There's probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life,* London, 2008

6

CHAPEL

Ritual practices and the ritual appropriation of art

In his classic definition of religion Durkheim gives as much value to rites and material practices as to beliefs. Indeed, he considers beliefs to be little more than rationalisations of practices.[1] As a sociologist of religion rather than a theologian this emphasis on ritual over creed perhaps indicates an unwarranted bias on Durkheim's part. Nevertheless, the pivotal stake of ritual in religious belief is upheld by anthropologists like Mary Douglas, who follows Durkheim in adducing a predilection for ritual as expressive of mankind's social character.[2] In the specific social context of the church, against the claim (that she equates with the Reformation) that codified ritual is merely empty form, 'alien to natural movements of sympathy,' as though such external shows of religion are detrimental to a 'true' inner religion, Douglas argues that even the most pared down acts of worship are exactly that: acts, with structured meaning and repetitive forms.[3] She believes it would be a mistake to suppose that that there can be a religion which is all interior, without rules, liturgy or external signs of inward states. Social relations require symbolic acts in order to be understood, and therefore if ritual is suppressed or neglected in one social form she insists that it will find expression in another.

Douglas presents a two-fold explication of ritual that fits well within the framework of threshold or liminality that presently we will see in the work of Victor Turner and Arnold van Gennep. Firstly, she says, it is a focusing mechanism. It provides a frame, a marked off time or place that alerts a special kind of expectancy and focused attention. As the image of the sacred precinct as *temenos* implies, framing limits experience, enclosing desired elements and excluding intruding ones, thereby 'mark[ing] off the different kind of reality that is within it from that which is outside it….'[4] Framing may be defined, shaped and focused by the architecture itself, or by the time and space given to the ritual, or the communities it involves. Secondly, ritual changes perception. It is not enough to say that ritual helps us experience more vividly what we would have experienced anyway – it is not just a visual or kinetic aid of what is known or anticipated – it itself formulates experience. Douglas's contention is that ritual engenders knowledge 'of what would otherwise not be known at all'; it does not simply give external form to

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[1] Durkheim. 1995: 44; Hamilton. 2001: 13

[2] Douglas. 1991: 63

[3] Ibid: 62

[4] Marion Milner in Ibid: 64

experience, but rather 'modifies experience in so expressing it.'[5] It is creative, the implication being that there are some things that cannot be experienced without ritual. In many respects this seems counter-intuitive, since ritual is so often perceived as a codified, repetitive and highly structured act, orientated towards the production of the same. It requires a different understanding of ritual, one that, as Bergson might claim, marks the actualisation of the virtual rather than the possible, that is, the unimagined or unimaginable rather than what is perceived as possible or predictable. Alongside an image of ritual with definite outcomes and specified patterns, then, we must paint a more dynamic picture of ritual with variable and unforeseen outcomes. This productive rather than reiterative capacity of ritual is captured rather well by a neologism from Zygmunt Bauman, who coined the term 'praxeomorphic' to define the way that changing ideas are shaped and informed by practices rather than beliefs.[6] Within the church many would no doubt adhere to a praxeomorphic notion of ritual in the production of the new, over and above its role as the codified production of the recognisably familiar. Does it also make sense to speak of a praxeomorphically-determined artistic practice? It is certainly clear that these two definitions of ritual equally apply to the 'work' of art, not so much as a material object (*oeuvre*) but in its activity (*mise en oeuvre*), the *work* of the work of art. In this sense art reveals itself to be akin to ritual; not merely a spur to ritualised behaviour, as in the case study, but intrinsically ritualistic (although it could be argued that a praxeomorphic production of experience *was* operative in Ono's installation for St. Paul's Cathedral – the rituals it invited seemed not to be merely a prompt to act upon joys, sorrows and desires, nor merely to announce them, but actually made them real, giving them voice and substance). The model of art that we are proposing is one that operates within this two-fold definition of ritual as framing or focused attention and as performative action, changing the parameters of expectation. Neither are strictly limited to the parameters of an ecclesiastical context of course; but for the sake of our study it will also be important to test how art may be put to work within the specific ritual context of the church. In such scenarios Kathleen Ashley adds the proviso, in a special issue of *Journal of Ritual Studies* devoted to art, that any examination of art in a ritual context requires 'a juggling act, with three concepts in motion, in the air simultaneously.'[7] These three are the artwork, the ritual, and the context. Put otherwise, the conditions for art are

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[5] Ibid: 65

[6] Bauman. 2000: 86

[7] Ashley. 1992: 2

determined by the work of art (in both senses of the word), the work of the people, and the context in which that work unfolds.

Ritual as liturgy

Ritual aspects of contemporary art have received considerable theoretical attention in recent years, exemplified by participatory and experiential works and associated with ritualised behaviour within the art museum. Ritualised artistic practices within the church or the potential of art as ritual have not gained such prominence, however, neither theoretically nor practically.[8] Icons, statues, wall paintings, windows, stations of the cross, the affective power of the architecture itself, have all played a role in the liturgical life of the church. This is nothing new; but neither is an evident distrust of the visual arts and the difficulties of their liturgical incorporation. Concomitant with their use has been a concern, historically associated with the iconoclastic tradition, though evident in all sectors of the church, over the appropriate uses of art, especially unconventional forms of art, as a vehicle for liturgy. Yet calls for an effective and demonstrable relationship of art and liturgy are regularly made. In response to such calls, one of the aims of this thesis is to rekindle not so much the idea of the importance of liturgical art, but the idea of art *as* liturgy, that is, as itself always already liturgical rather than appropriated into liturgy. To do so we must expand our notion of what constitutes a liturgical act.

The entry on liturgy in Macmillan's *Encyclopedia of Religion* prompts several possible entry-points into this matter. Firstly, it suggests that liturgy's religious capacity is broader than convention normally allows. As an ecclesiastical term, within modern Greek orthodoxy liturgy specifically denotes the Eucharist (in the west 'Mass' or the 'sacrament' are used for the Eucharist), while in the West, at least since the nineteenth century, liturgy has come to be used to designate corporate worship more generally and is, in all respects, a communal activity. For participants, religious liturgy performs particular metaphysical functions: it deals with theology (the nature of God), religious anthropology (the nature of man) and cosmology (the nature of the universe).[9] Liturgy expounds these three through various rites and doctrines, which posit sacred spaces, sacred time and sacred histories, as well as organising social relations within the ambit of some kind of

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[8] Conversely, the idea of the liturgy itself as a work of art has received substantial consideration, often framed within terms such as 'liturgical aesthetics' or 'the arts of worship.' In such cases if works of art are discussed at all it is generally only within the framework of their support for the liturgy rather than commanding any liturgical imperative of their own.

[9] Jones. 2005: 5491

metaphysical reality.[10] But liturgy also exceeds the boundaries of its institutional definitions. Though primarily a Christian term denoting acts and texts of worship, both Macmillan's *Encyclopedia of Religion* and *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* support the idea that liturgy may be applied to ritual that is not strictly religious at all, since it derives from the Greek *leitourgia*, meaning 'work performed for the public good,' albeit often a sacrificial act to placate or pay homage to the gods (*leitourgos*: literally the work of the people). In this sense the space of the liturgy brings together a certain community (*laos*) with a particular work (*ergon*) within a specific social space, drawing clear parallels with Ashley's 'juggling act.' This social space need not be religious as such, nor must a liturgical 'work' fit within the traditional parameters of religion (or perhaps religious parameters must be broadened to encompass other forms of *leitourgiai*). Differentiating liturgy as wholly religious distances it from its semantic roots. In Buddhist, Hindu or Judaic practices, for instance, domestic ritual can also justifiably fall into the category of liturgical practice. Secular rituals too reflect this blurring of sacred and secular. Nominally non-religious ceremonies may often contain remnants of religious origins, but may also be considered liturgies in a broader sense.[11]

Secondly, as a modern scholarly discipline liturgy concentrates on the hermeneutics and origins of religious texts. But a more significant recent development in the study of liturgy has been a renewed emphasis on its performative rather than textual role. It is present in every aspect of the performance, 'its words, gestures, melodies, clothing, spaces, props, and roles.'[12] Several writers and priests have commented on the performative character of the liturgy. Mennekes, for example, has said (in relation to *The White Mass*, in which art and liturgy came together in a sacramental performance) that 'the Mass is a holy theatre, and a good priest is always a performance artist.'[13] Similarly, Simon Bailey, writing in *Theology*, describes the liturgy as a theatre in which the priests are both actors and directors, drawing the congregation into worship through '[c]ostume,

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[10] Ibid: 5491-2

[11] National and civic rituals, rooted in yet professing no allegiance to any kind of religion, are nonetheless worthy of being called liturgies in the Greek sense of the word, as public works. The dictionary goes on to include 'liturgies of protest' (e.g. gay pride) and 'liturgies of anguish' (e.g. Diana's funeral, post-9/11 ceremonies). Some would include the ritualistic opening of an event like the Olympic Games as a liturgical act in this sense. Indeed Durkheim foresaw the replacement of religious liturgies by secular alternatives which, in an age of waning belief, would fulfil a similar social purpose (ibid: 5490).

[12] Ibid.

[13] Mennekes in Goodrow. 1992: 44

properties, movement, space.'[14] Furthermore, he equates the theatricality of liturgy to early Greek drama, an idea which, as we will see, forms the basis of Jane Harrison's thesis that art and ritual share a common ancestry and therefore a common impulse.

Thirdly, within the wider framework of liturgy (rather than the narrower parameters of the form of the Eucharist) the church in Britain, both Anglican and Catholic, has reassessed the meaning, significance and forms of liturgy, in response to emergent questions concerning the church's relevance to and place within contemporary culture. Indeed, calls for liturgical renewal within the Catholic Church, along with the wider demand that the church reorientate itself to contemporary conditions, formed the basis for Vatican II (1962-65). The *Encyclopedia of Religion* offers, as examples of changes wrought within liturgical practice, the language of prayer, the musical canon, inculturation (to what extent the liturgy should adapt to the culture of the times), the ordination of women, and the status of gays and lesbians.[15] Interestingly enough, amongst these changes no direct reference is made to artistic expression, which does not merit inclusion; it is perhaps indirectly assumed as an aspect of 'liturgical inculturation.' What is clear is that the reorganisation of Anglican as well as Catholic spaces in the wake of Vatican II has had distinct implications for the conditions for art. In Portsmouth Cathedral, for example, the re-ordering of the space carried out in the 1990s greatly facilitated the first cathedral installation of Yoko Ono's *Morning Beams* in 2004 (figure 50). Conversely, the council's imperative of 'full, active and conscious participation' for all in the liturgy raises doubts about the place for any works of art that fail to measure up to a standard of simplicity, accessibility and clarity. In relation to such imperatives Frank Burch Brown has complained that these are rarely the criteria for works of art, and indeed most demanding arts suffer the ignominy of being deemed elitist, inappropriate, alienating, irrelevant, even irreverent, when introduced into the church (sometimes even accused of being 'un-Christian' simply by failing to elicit popular appeal).[16]

The entry on liturgy in the *Encyclopedia of Religion* ends with a double admonition: Firstly, studies of the use of space and music in the transformation of texts into performance have been little explored. Secondly, studies of Christian liturgy rarely look beyond their own parameters of Western experience 'to include the vast panorama of

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[14] Bailey. 1988: 95

[15] Jones. 2005: 5490

[16] Brown. 2009: 125, 74

liturgical expression worldwide.'[17] In answer to both charges the arts offer a salient response. In this first category space is undoubtedly essential to any understanding of artistic practice, both in terms of spatial context and the spatiality of the work itself (the *work* of the work). The architecture of an ecclesiastical building has clear implications for the liturgical acts it enables; in many respects it defines the parameters of the possible, as Jeanne Halgren Kilde confirms in the opening lines of her work on sacred space:

> Religious space is dynamic space. Religious spaces house religious ritual, of course, but they do far more than simply provide the setting within which ritual takes place. They contribute in important ways to the very meaning of ritual practices and to the shape and content of religious systems themselves.[18]

Indeed, Ashley argues that '[t]he settings for ritual are inextricable from ritual meanings, and control over ritual space and architecture is integral to the politics of ritual power.'[19] Our argument is that this holds for sporadic artistic interventions as much as for regular liturgical acts of worship. Where the visual arts are concerned that relationship to the space may be more difficult to determine, but is undoubtedly present. Furthermore, the ritual power of art is reflected in its ability, if not to control the ritual space, then at least to reciprocate its influence. Architecturally speaking, art and ritual are mutually inseparable.

In the second category it is clear that a greater interest has been shown in recent times for non-Western expressions of Christianity through, for example, John Tavener's musical settings or the renewed value of icons within the life of the church, as at Winchester and Chelmsford Cathedrals (figure 51). One of the distinguishing features of recent art for the church has been its openness to other religious and cultural traditions, as Winchester Cathedral's exhibition in 2000, *Sculpture and the Divine*, made explicit, combining contemporary sculpture with the art of other faith traditions. More recently, installations such as Ono's introduce alien liturgies and vessels of ritual such as stones and trees that do not usually have a place in Christian liturgy yet have an established role within the Buddhist shrines of Ono's homeland. Art has this capability to challenge conventions and shift expectations, smearing across traditions and boundaries. Following on from the earlier discussion of modalities of the sacred, then, this chapter assesses the capacity of art in its complicity with ritual and liturgy, noting their comparative

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[17] Jones. 2005: 5493

[18] Kilde. 2008: 3

[19] Ashley. 1992: 8

etymological roots in the idea of a work done for the public good. Drawing a historical and conceptual line between art, ritual and liturgy we will see that from the triad of *drama*, *dromenon* and *leitourgia* we will arrive at an idea of the work of art as an active process rather than a finished object.

Ancient Art and Ritual

Another of Durkheim's contemporaries, writing during this fertile period for the anthropology of religion, and influenced by his focus upon the social causes of religion, was the classicist Jane Harrison, one of the founders of modern studies in Greek mythology. In one of her later books she turned her attention to art's relationship with ritual. This troubled relationship, concretised in the Catholic/Protestant split, is one that she traces to pagan roots in order to reassert their necessarily close affiliation. Although focusing specifically upon 'ancient' art and ritual she does not limit her theme to the ancient world, but accentuates an extant and vital concern for their mutual co-existence. As she outlines in the preface, *Ancient Art and Ritual* hinges around the word 'and' that unites them, a hinge upon which both art and ritual pivot as far more than a conjoining of two distinct modes of experience. Harrison considers their connection to be not only intimate, but indispensable to our understanding of either. If art and religious ritual in the modern, Western world have diverged, Harrison aims to show that these two wayward strands of human experience are rooted in a common source, and therefore a common association, or as she puts it, 'a common human impulse.'[20] Nevertheless, the divorce of art and religion so frequently lamented as a by-product of the inexorable drive towards secularisation is not really the gist of Harrison's argument. It would be very easy to automatically interpret ritual as religion, and indeed the inseparability of ritual and religion is prominent throughout her book (it is clear, for example, that religious ordinance is implicit in her use of the word ritual). But where we might habitually speak of a division of art and religion she more subtly registers a divergence of art and ritual, or rather, sees a more complex tripartite split in the modern mind between art, ritual and religion. Thus we find in her thought a double partnership at stake: art and ritual, art and religion.

Almost one hundred years after Harrison's thesis how does this unremarkable word 'and' figure in any consideration of art and ritual today? Does it act as the hinge that both joins them and determines their relationship, a third term that asserts some

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[20] Harrison. 1913: 9, 18

kind of mutuality between paired terms but also their distinctiveness? Derrida suggests something of this kind when he writes of the 'and' as a term of association and dissociation, juncture and disjuncture, juxtaposition and opposition, joining and disjoining.[21] Perhaps it represents a coupling of two diverse, even unrelated, aspects of contemporary experience, although recent artistic practice would suggest not. Art's association with ritual has, if anything, gained greater prominence in recent years through the kinds of participatory art practices theorised by writers like Nicolas Bourriaud, in which participation is prioritised over spectatorship. Furthermore, a vital thread of ritual has long been a motif of art, linking contemporary practices to a history of performance art, happenings and earlier theatricalities, in what could be seen as an endorsement of Harrison's thesis. But when we turn to art's role within the church, even an art that accentuates a ritualistic dimension, are we in danger of endorsing an unworkable syncretism? Would we be better to think of artistic and religious ritual as adjacent rather than adjoining, as the Ono installation in St Paul's Cathedral demonstrated, by which the boundaries of the respective ritual acts of the artwork and liturgical acts of the church were carefully preserved? Must we not conclude from this example that when art enters an ecclesiastical space one witnesses a clash, or to be more conciliatory, a concurrence of rival ritual behaviour? And if so, should this not be central to their often reluctant, sometimes fractious, partnership? This counter-intuitive proposition is surely dismissed by the evident historical bond uniting the two. And yet, evidence suggests that art's achievement of an autonomous place within modernity has accompanied its loss of liturgical relevance in anything other than strictly conventional forms. This is an issue that has exercised many within the church, and continues to do so. Art's perceived estrangement from liturgical practice has led, it is claimed, to an impoverished experience of both. Some thirty years ago the present Archbishop, Rowan Williams, broached a concern which, in many ways, underlines Harrison's contention that art and ritual are mutually conjoined by warning of the serious implications for their separation:

> Has the partial divorce between visual art and liturgy been an unmitigated disaster for the Christian (and the secular) imagination of the West? I am prepared to admit that we are currently faced with the menace of a total alienation of liturgy from art of any kind, and that far more serious thought is needed about this.[22]

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[21] Derrida. 2000

[22] Williams. 1976: 42

Two decades later, Tom Devonshire Jones, of the organisation Art and Christianity Enquiry, reiterated these concerns in more measured tones:

> One might ask why the liturgical factor in art for the Church has so far been given so little space. This is to question why works of art cannot simply be brought into conjunction with the place of the Eucharist. But the question has to be asked whether the work of art *as it is* can readily serve as handmaid of liturgy.[23]

More recently, art historian and curator, Daniel Siedell, has expressed a similar reproach, bringing an American perspective to this debate, as if to suggest that little has changed:

> There is nothing more silent and repressed than art's liturgical and sacramental dimension, due in large part to culture as a whole becoming insensitive to this aspect of human nature.[24]

Despite, therefore, the apparent parting of the ways of art and liturgical ritual, as art has become more disenchanted with, and distanced from, its ties to religion, condemning the etiolation of this joining term 'and' into little more than a historical footnote, many today would endorse Harrison's belief that their historical connection retains

> an important bearing on questions vital today, as, for example, the question of the place of art in our modern civilization, its relation to and its difference from religion and morality; in a word, on the whole enquiry as to what the nature of art is and how it can help or hinder spiritual life.[25]

Harrison posed this challenge in 1913. Perhaps she had in mind Ruskin's question from *Modern Painters* some twenty years prior to the publication of her book which expressed a similar concern: 'How far has Fine Art, in all or any ages of the world, been conducive to the religious life?'[26] It remains a vital question. Harrison states at the outset that her aim 'is to show that these two divergent developments have a common root, and that neither can be understood without the other.'[27] This is a strong claim, but she follows it up with the equally extraordinary corollary that '[i]t is at the outset one and the same impulse that sends a man to church and to the theatre.'[28] To modern ears this sounds hopelessly

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[23] Devonshire Jones. 1999: 3 (emphasis in original)

[24] Siedell. 2008: 130

[25] Harrison. 1913: v

[26] Ruskin, cited in Howes. 2007: 1

[27] Harrison. 1913: 9

[28] Ibid: 9-10

reductive (however much a priestly liturgy is equated with theatre), but in Harrison's particular field the equating of temple and theatre begins to make more sense. Her starting point is to ask

> what is it that links art and ritual so closely together, what have they in common? Do they start from the same impulse, and if so why do they, as they develop, fall so widely asunder?[29]

As Harrison demonstrates, in an earlier age art and ritual went hand in hand. While we, she says, 'distinguish between a form of prayer and a work of art and count them in no danger of confusion,' to the ancient or so-called primitive mind art is used in the service of religious and/or ritual observance. Attendance at the Greek theatre, for example, is itself 'an act of worship,' an essential element of religious festivals.[30] We cannot, in such contexts, reasonably make a distinction between art and ritual – the two are simply alternative forms or manifestations of the same impulse. Perhaps we might say art *is* ritual. Its autonomous status as 'art' is a relatively modern phenomenon and has no meaning within such contexts. Yet, she assures us, what art attempts to achieve today differs little from the motivations of ritual:

> At the bottom of art, as its motive power and its mainspring, lies…an impulse shared by art with ritual, the desire, that is, to utter, to give out a strongly felt emotion or desire by representing, by making or doing or enriching the object or act desired. […] This common *emotional* factor it is that makes art and ritual in their beginnings well-nigh indistinguishable.[31]

Effective ritual, Harrison proposes, is imbued with emotional engagement; and above all art too demands of its viewer a similar level of emotional response. In contemporary parlance, we might describe this emotional factor as 'affect,' an idea of art and ritual that emphasises their importance as sites for the production of experience rather than meaning or representation. Affect describes moments of intensity, demanding a more receptive response to our environment (appropriately described by Bergson as an *attention* to that which exceeds the mundane world[32]). Art and ritual both demand this kind of focus or attention. Art can hardly be reduced to 'emotional' motivations, of course, nor

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[29] Ibid: 21

[30] Ibid: 10, 18

[31] Ibid: 26 (emphasis in original)

[32] Bergson. 1991: 100

is ritual automatically creative or productive, but each is clearly involved in the production of affective experience. In many respects this seems a rather modern idea. Yet for Harrison, as we will see, this comparative relation of art and ritual as 'emotive' has an ancient history, its roots in ritual's early associations with drama. Related to this affective or emotional condition, art and ritual share another important aspect, also apparent in Harrison's description above. This is what we might call the *work* of the work of art or of ritual. This is art as praxis or praxeomorphic rather than as poiesis, that is, as action or doing rather than making, requiring a more active response on the part of the viewer or participant. Ritual too is a work. As the liturgist, Joseph Gelineau reminds us, liturgy 'is not only an –ology (as in theology) but also an –urgy (as in dramaturgy).'[33] It is in these terms that art and liturgy find themselves on common ground, and the work of art ceases to be simply an object imposed upon a ritual space. The work of art becomes instead, as O'Sullivan proposes, 'art *work*,' that is, 'no longer an object as such, or not only an object, but rather a space, a zone or what Alan Badiou might call an "event site"…'[34] In not dissimilar language Albert Rouet defines the role of liturgy as a call to creative action: 'It is not a mirror, but an event, an act, a *kairos* – a time for transforming encounter.'[35] Here, then, is how art might be rethought ritually or liturgically, a condition of possibility for art that goes beyond Harrison's limited, and to be fair, historically-bound, scope. But before jumping ahead of ourselves let us see how the justification for a premise that sees art recast as leitourgia begins with the historical and conceptual line that Harrison draws between art and ritual.

Work for the public good

Harrison uses a number of examples of religious and/or superstitious rites to show that ritual is performed 'for the public good.' She does not yet claim these as examples of art, but will go on to show their direct influence upon the development of cultural forms that could be called art. Art only enters when beyond the utterance and act of ritual, something is introduced which *represents* that ritual. Let us follow the thread of her argument. As one would expect of ritual it is something actively performed. Indeed, the Greek word for rite, *dromenon*, means 'a thing done.' Moreover, and of 'cardinal importance' to her argument, is the close etymology of *dromenon* and *drama*, which also

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[33] Gelineau. 1978: 97

[34] O'Sullivan. 2001: 127 (emphasis in original)

[35] Rouet. 1997: 7

means a 'deed' or 'thing done.'[36] Thus theatrical representation and ritual are closely related in linguistic terms; in their relation and distinction, she says, 'we have the keynote and clue to our whole discussion.'[37] But here too we find an unmistakable reference to liturgy. Although throughout Harrison refers to ritual and never to liturgy, as previously noted etymologically liturgy has its roots in the Greek term, *leitourgia*, meaning a work done for the public good, thus drawing a historical and conceptual line between drama, ritual and liturgy. All things done are not rituals, of course, and Harrison stresses that a guiding element in ritual is that it is collective.[38] Communal responses and deeds are required to turn an individual gesture into sacred rite (Durkheim's 'collective representations'). Hand-in-hand with collectivity is intensity (that mode of focused attention mentioned earlier), both of which she says are intrinsic to ritual, but do not as yet necessarily constitute art. 'When and how,' she asks, 'does the *dromenon*, the rite *done*, pass over into the *drama*?'[39] How do these two different 'things done' become so closely intertwined for the early Greeks, and then why do they part company?

The arrival of art

Harrison argues that a change took place in the role of the Greek theatre that saw a shift in participation from communal celebration within the dancing circle, the 'orchestra,' to performance and spectatorship with the introduction of the 'theatre,' or tiered seating. In the earlier stages there are no divisions between actors and spectators – all are assembled together to celebrate, say, an initiation ceremony. This is no place for spectators; all are participants in a ritual act of common or collective emotion. With the shift towards spectatorship, says Harrison, we draw closer to the differences forced between ritual and art. Where previously nearly all the worshippers were also actors, caught up in the celebration, now most are spectators – communal act becomes spectacle – 'the *dromenon*, the thing actually done by yourself has become a *drama*, a thing also done, but abstracted from your doing.'[40] Active observance is reduced to passive observation. Or to put it another way, a work done *by* the people becomes a work done *for* the people. Thus, she

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[36] Harrison. 1913: 35

[37] Ibid: 36

[38] Although she also notes an important distinction between unofficial private rites and publicly authorised acts, which could perhaps be classified as a distinction of ritual and liturgy (ibid: 33).

[39] Ibid: 37

[40] Ibid: 127

asserts, we know from tradition that in Athens ritual became art, *dromenon* became *drama*, symbolised by the introduction of a spectator-place, the *theatre*.[41] In the shift from *dromenon* to *drama* we see ritual and art as both complicit and edging apart. Ritual, she claims, always performs a mediating role which art lacks, since 'the end of art is in itself. Its value is not mediate but immediate.'[42] It is not exactly clear from Harrison's text what she means by immediacy in this context, other than a sense of art's detachment from what she names 'real life,' a process she documents as a transition from a holistic model of religious ritual through drama to what she considers to be art's present state of cultural autonomy. Certainly her model was the then-prominent notion of *l'art pour l'art*, itself a declaration of artistic independence, in which the figure of the socially-alienated artist is writ large. Art's justification lies in itself alone, and it is no doubt this autotelic function that is implied in her assertion that art's reality is to have become detached from real life and estranged from religion, its natural progenitor. Although *l'art pour l'art* assumes art to provide a uniquely distinctive, direct and immediate expression of reality, paradoxically this reality of art is distinct from real life where once, as an innate aspect of religious ritual, it was deeply imbricated with real life. Ritual, by contrast, is a copy or imitation of life with a practical purpose. Religious ritual mediates between real life and the divine; secular rituals mediate between the life of the individual and their society. But ritual is also the bridge that mediates the gap between art and real life. As Harrison sees it, 'ritual is…a frequent and perhaps universal transition stage between actual life and that peculiar contemplation of or emotion towards life which we call art.'[43] With the gradual loosening of art from its religious ties it becomes detached from the work of ritual. But what caused this change? She isolates two essential influences: the decay of religious faith, and the influence of foreign cultural and artistic practices.[44]

It might seem strange, she says, to equate the birth of art with a decay of faith in an age when religious belief is more or less universally assumed. But it is specifically the decay of a belief in the efficacy of magical rites, of the primitive faith in visual acts to guarantee a plentiful harvest, for instance, that is the focus of her attention. She notes a shift from an annual repetition of mythical rites, renewed each year by the faith of the

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[41] Ibid: 124

[42] Ibid: 135

[43] Harrison. 1913: 205. From the inclusivity of *dromenon* to the exclusivity of art, it is ritual that is the mediating factor.

[44] Ibid: 136

participants in its ritual power, to a perfunctory duty performed for tradition's sake but lacking the spirit that gave it life, as belief in Spring rites, for example, begin to wane:

> The spirit of the rite, the belief in its efficacy, dies, but the rite itself, the actual mould, persists…. […] So the *dromenon*, the thing done, wanes, the prayer, the praise, the sacrifice waxes. Religion moves away from drama towards theology, but the ritual mould of the *dromenon* is left ready for a new content.[45]

Ritual can become habitual, and the forces of habit mean that even when a rite is no longer believed in, 'it does not in the least follow that it will cease to be *done*.'[46] Where once seasonal rites were communally held to influence fate, or the partiality of the gods, those still practiced today, like the May-time *'Obby 'Oss* festival in Padstow, Cornwall, no longer carry any such religious impulse, serving merely communal jollity, tourist street spectacle, holiday larks and drunkenness, local cultural heritage, even historical enactment to a degree, but most surely drama and not ritual *dromenon*. Art steps in to fill the space left vacant by magico-religious belief. Harrison argues that as the ritual loses its efficacy and becomes merely hollow form it is replaced first by drama, and later by art. Therefore, when something becomes art it loses its ritualistic imperative, yet fundamentally the impulse for both remains the same. As art attains a more autonomous presence it retains within itself the traces or memory of its ritual origins, which perhaps accounts for the persistence with which spiritual values are attributed to both art and its modern home in the gallery or museum. There are two factors at work here: firstly, the form of a ritual can persist long after its content or meaning has disappeared, and secondly, an extant need for ritual sees its place filled by a new content, art, and a new figure, the artist. Thus, a second influence was a direct result of the first. In sixth century BC Athens, ritual monotony opened the door to innovation, with the arrival of Homer and introduction of Homeric heroes from which playwrights crafted new tales. At this moment drama and the artist come to prominence, marking a shift from communal practices to a focus upon individual heroes.[47] In ritual dance the individual was unimportant except as part of a communal rite, thereby reflecting collective tribal life. But in the heroic saga the individual is everything while the mass of the people a mere shadowy backdrop to his vivid personality. It is only a small step from here to the notion of the artist-genius, an

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[45] Ibid: 138, 140

[46] Ibid: 27 (emphasis in original)

[47] Ibid: 145, 157

individual isolated from his or her social environment, certainly gaining currency in Harrison's time.

Ritual, Art and Life

Part of Harrison's contention is that the cultural shift from *dromenon* to *drama* witnessed a change from ritual performed for practical and emotive ends, to a ritualistic art that gradually comes untied from those ends, to an art that exists for its own sake. Thus an art cut off not only from its ritual roots, but from 'real life' itself.[48] This shift also signifies a movement from an undifferentiated communal rite, to a spectacle acted and observed, to the emergent distinction of artist, work of art, and viewer or art-lover.[49] The point of her enquiry is to understand the function and purpose of art. By investigating its inchoate and embryonic origins she has determined that art begins in ritual but ends by distancing itself from it. Collective rituals still remain an extant need, which would in part explain the elevation of sport to semi-religious status. As she puts it, 'many, perhaps most of us, breathe more freely in the *medium*, literally the *midway* space, of some collective ritual.'[50] But art, she believes, no longer fulfils that role. Art, then, as we know it today, is no longer beholden to ritual; if it has rituals of its own these are for the express purposes of art. Nevertheless, the aim of her book is to show that art is but a later and more sublimated form of ritual. Both religion and art have common roots in ritual, from which they have sprung, but they differ in one significant aspect: where religion makes claims upon a truth hidden behind and beyond profane things, art asserts an imaginative role, born of emotion. Whilst both 'discredit the actual practical world,' religion does so only in order to divert attention to another world, as actual and objective, it would claim, as the visible world.[51] In Harrison's view, therefore, where religion is upheld by ritual practices, in the case of art it is debilitated by them: 'Ritual must wane that art may wax.'[52]

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[48] Ibid: 204

[49] We can see this shift illustrated in a discussion of liturgy and music, in which John Harper uses three simple diagrams to indicate different types of liturgical experience (see appendix 7). They mirror rather well the three-part shift that Harrison discusses.

[50] Ibid: 206 (emphasis in original)

[51] Ibid: 227. It is clear that, for Harrison, as no doubt for the majority of her generation, art fits a certain stereotypical model, one which in her time was undoubtedly pre-eminent but that ever since has tended to disappear. She sees the artistic life as an essentially contemplative, impractical affair (both for creator and spectator), detached from 'actual life.' Indeed, her description of the artistic vision rankles with views of art and artists today, striking us as exemplary of a romanticisation and idealisation of the artistic vocation, temperament and genius, one almost entirely debunked by a modern, market-driven art-world. In her world artists have 'vision,' an ambition 'purified from personal desire,' a 'spiritual' life of the 'imagination,' all practical considerations subordinated to

Far from looking backwards to a time when art, life and religion were inseparable, Harrison is all for looking forwards and accepting the discontinuities of the present age. She writes somewhat prophetically in the spirit of the Futurists, whom she endorses (though not without reservation, unwilling as she is to support their dogma of the destruction of museums): 'The Churches of today', she cries, 'must and should become the museums of tomorrow.'[53] Were Harrison writing today would she recognise the waxing ritual of art, and furthermore, a renewed elaboration of ritual in the name of art, revitalising those church spaces, not in the cause of transforming them into museums (though undoubtedly this is a frequent occurrence), but in a renewal of art's practical and creative (spiritual?) reconnection with religion? Could art as liturgy reunite the dislocated triumvirate of art, ritual, and religion through an endorsement of that originary and implacable 'and'? Her final conclusions are that, as in its ritual roots, art is in essence social, not individual: 'Even today, when individualism is rampant, art bears traces of its collective, social origin.'[54] In our present age of endemic, even enforced, individualism can we still consider that social impetus vital to art? Harrison's arguments that art has a social function and a social obligation, over and above the need for self-expression, are, on this point, cursory and weak, though may be simply indicative of her epoch. For her this sociality is seen in the striving for community and a common spirit, however imperfect and ill-defined, in the numerous art movements of the time. Such manifestos belong to an art historical past that the individualism of today seems to have put to bed for good, as a disillusioned utopia of yesterday. Yet art itself promises, at times, a relational agenda, one that speaks again of shared communal experience. That at least is its claim; whether or not it delivers upon that promise is more debatable.

Liturgical value

What does Harrison's argument offer us today? How applicable is it to current conditions for art in ecclesiastical spaces? One approach to this question is to ask, what

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'emotion' (ibid: 209-211). Harrison paints a picture of the modern artist as all self-belief, as visionary, from which art almost miraculously emerges. Her idealised claims for art and the artist are aimed towards supporting her thesis that modern art is far removed from the practical aims of magico-religious ritual, art's elevation of the individual and of private contemplative experience having displaced ritual's communal action and spirit.

[52] Ibid: 228

[53] Ibid: 237

[54] Ibid: 241

does art do? How is it put to work? This will require a narrow and a broad definition of liturgy, the latter present in the notion of leitourgia as 'a deed done for the public good.' Another response to this question, which we will consider first, is to return to the condition of porosity discussed earlier in the thesis, again in relation to Walter Benjamin, for whom the decline of ritual equates with what he has identified as the decay of aura. As Howard Caygill has noted, Benjamin sees an inseparable link between aura and ritual, and therefore, since art itself originates in ritual, the decline of aura coincides with the liberation of art from what Benjamin calls its 'parasitical dependence upon ritual.'[55] Benjamin appears to offer a similar argument to Harrison's, that ritual must wane for art to wax, but cast in different terms. To understand what Benjamin means by aura we must return to art's conditions of possibility, distinguishing between art as open and closed, or permeable and impermeable. As Caygill explains in his exemplary monograph on Benjamin:

> If the borders of the work of art are impermeable and closed, then the work is immutable, defying time and change; if they are permeable and open, then the work is constantly in a process of transformation, becoming other than itself.[56]

The closed borders of the work of art fix it as an object of contemplation, and deny it as an object that changes according to the uses to which it is put, responsive to different environments and receptive to alternate readings. Such a work is *auratic* and is associated with what Benjamin calls art's 'cultic value.'[57] Aura denotes immutable qualities of 'uniqueness, genius and eternal validity,' qualities that Benjamin associates with the art of the Greeks, compared to a modern law of 'constant movement and transformation,' referring to film but just as applicable to the visual arts more generally.[58] What is lost in the transition from the former to the latter is the aura of the work of art. It is symptomatic of art's permeability which, while extending 'its possible futures,' separates the work of art from any fixed tradition or attachment to an 'authentic' context, and opens its borders to other contexts, other interpretations, other uses.[59] This is as true for an altarpiece transferred to a secular museum of art as it is for a contemporary, non-explicitly religious work of art brought into an ancient cathedral. The tendency has been

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[55] Benjamin, cited in Caygill. 1998: 105

[56] Ibid: 93

[57] Ibid: 94

[58] Ibid: 101, 100

[59] Ibid: 105

for art to detach itself from its ritual origins in order to establish its own independent sphere of influence. And where ritual does inhere in the work of art it tends to be within the terms of the work and only rarely as part of some larger meaning, except in the case of, say, public- or community-based art such as that practiced by Stephen Willats or Marcus Coates (both discussed in the next chapter).

If, for both Harrison and Benjamin, art's ascendancy coincides with ritual's obscurity, the kind of emergent art that each envisages is rather different. For Harrison, an art whose ties to ritual have loosened results in an art of immediacy, cut off from 'real life': *l'art pour l'art*. Conversely, for Benjamin, *l'art pour l'art* remains an auratic art, tied to ritual, one which 'insulated the work of art from outside influences, and attempted to remove it from the passage of time.'[60] And, we might add, attempted to insulate it from the contingencies of context and the vagaries of subjective interpretation. Benjamin's concern is for art's 'possible futures.' To that end he employs other terms to denote the shift from an art rooted in ritual to an art liberated from ritual: 'cult value' and 'exhibition value.'[61] As cultic

> [t]he unique identity of the work of art issued from its function as an instrument of magic, its setting within the liturgically determined architecture of a temple or cathedral rather than from its being placed before the gaze of a public.[62]

By contrast, 'exhibition value' emancipates art from its pre-determination and domination by tradition and context; it exchanges 'auratic' values (contextually-closed, timeless, unique, hermeneutically-fixed) for 'agoric' values (contextually open, contingent, relative and reproducible, open to an exchange of meaning, having futurity), affirming more porous or permeable borders for art. Works of art in cathedrals and churches walk a tenuous line between 'cult value' and 'exhibition value,' that is, their location within a liturgically-focused context, in which they play a subservient role, and their exposure to the public gaze, a larger culture, and the variable conditions of reception, in which they play a more dominant role.

In many respects, our argument for art as leitourgia is an attempt to hold both possibilities in hand simultaneously. If ecclesiastically-sited art is distanced from the primary functions of its religious context, as something over and above the work itself,

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[60] Ibid: 93

[61] Ibid: 106-8

[62] Ibid: 106

its contextual engagement remains relatively shallow. If its ties are too close to its context, it ceases to be a work of art as such at all, becoming subservient to the functions of the church. In this scenario cult value entirely overshadows any independence for art or for its 'possible futures.' One danger, then, for the uses of contemporary art in ecclesiastical spaces lies in this tension between 'cult value' and 'exhibition value.' Unfortunately, exhibition value can be an unhelpful term when considering the place of art within the church. It goes beyond Benjamin's meaning perhaps, but one of the issues for art in ecclesiastical spaces, compared to the art museum, is how to avoid neglecting the specific context and treating the space in purely exhibitionistic terms. In other words, a vital relation between the work and its context is lost to the value of the context as a grand backdrop for the works themselves. In such scenarios exhibition value gains such prominence that cult value diminishes to zero. As Paul Bayley, of Art and Christianity Enquiry, says, sacred spaces can never be treated simply as a location for art, but must be respected as an active element of whatever work is on display.[63] He goes on to warn that the increasing prevalence of contemporary art exhibitions in churches and cathedrals brings with it its own problems:

> The artist and curator can fall victim to the evocative spell of a place and simply feed off the gravitas that the space brings to their work. There are also the constant needs of the heritage and cultural industry and, dare I say it, those who run our cathedrals, to produce an insatiable demand for spectacle: art can become a cheap, expected and unchallenging tick on the tourist trail after postcards from the gift shop and before cake and coffee in the teashop. Both sides should enter into this dialogue with caution and my feeling is that the more site and place is central to that dialogue the less chance we all have of making mistakes.[64]

Recent cathedral exhibitions like *Light* (Winchester, 2007), *Liminality* (Salisbury, 2010) and *Crucible* (Gloucester, 2010) all walk this fine line between Benjamin's notion of 'exhibition value' and our alternative adoption of this term. In my review of *Crucible* for *Art and Christianity* I remarked upon this issue but noted too that the curators had worked hard to achieve a sensitive correlation of work and place, in order to form 'more integral, dialogic relations with the cathedral.'[65] What these relations imply, beyond an awareness of the importance of context, is that where art in ecclesiastical spaces is concerned cult

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[63] Bayley. 2007: 9

[64] Ibid: 10

[65] Koestlé-Cate 2010: 3

value cannot be simply devalued or dismissed for the sake of exhibition value. But neither do these relations close down possibilities; we would contend that their 'possible futures' were, if anything, enlarged through their engagement within the restored 'and' of art and ritual implied by their context.

Bearing in mind Harrison's assertion of an indissociable link between art and ritual, we can posit two alternatives to Benjamin's twin poles of cult and exhibition value. Firstly, between the two polar types, contemporary examples of ecclesiastical art allow us to conceive of a continuum of what we could call 'liturgical value.' In its narrowest sense as liturgical art this limits an artwork to 'cult value' and in its broadest sense as leitourgia draws it closer to 'exhibition value.' Secondly, a seminal means of reintroducing the 'and' into art and ritual is through the tripartite notion of ritual as rite-of-passage, which follows a process of separation, transition and incorporation. In this alternative the central moment of transition or liminality is vital. Despite the apparent differences of these two models, in both possibilities the same forces are at work. For example, by redrafting the ritual process of separation-transition-incorporation using the values of cult-liturgical-exhibition we see a similar pattern at work, only in reverse. If exhibition value allows for a kind of separation of the work from any 'authentic' social, historical or cultural structures, cult value implies some degree of aggregation back into a particular context. In Deleuzo-guattarian terms we could speak of a process of de- and re-territorialisation. The liturgical value of the work of art (as we are defining it here) that resists capture by the ecclesiastical space, but refuses to assert its absolute independence from it, negotiates these two positions.

Here we also need to introduce a second distinction, between temporary events and permanent commissions. In delineating a path between liturgical art in the narrow sense and art as leitourgia in the broad sense, an important change of direction for art's inclusion in the life of the church in recent years has been the choice of, even preference for, temporary installations, whose impermanence allows for periodically refreshed encounters with art. Furthermore, it encourages a more daring or experimental approach to art's involvement with the liturgical life of the church, sadly a challenge only rarely taken up. Art springing up periodically presents a ritualistic presence that permanence often dissipates or dilutes. In many respects this development has been aided by the implementation of liturgical reform, although some commentators feel that the understanding and use of liturgical space has made little progress.[66] Others, like Robin

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[66] See Steczynski. 1997

Gibbons, are more optimistic, naming artists and architects as vital to inspiring the new liturgical possibilities, relevant to contemporary communities, that liturgical reform has enabled.[67] Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to automatically conflate permanence with cult value. Many permanent works of the past twenty years remain open to their 'possible futures,' despite being constrained to a particular site.

Where does this leave us in relation to the questions concerning art and liturgy posed by Williams, Devonshire Jones and Siedell? If their complaints are justified, how might the conditions for art be rethought liturgically? Williams and Devonshire Jones call for a greater integration of art and liturgy, while Siedell's emphasis is on art's intrinsically liturgical nature, which he claims we have forgotten. On the one hand, we have a call to regard art as having an explicitly liturgical role to play, without necessarily being limited to the status of 'liturgical art' as such, and on the other, art as implicitly liturgical. Harrison's thesis alerts us to art's intrinsic relation to ritual. But her work on the relation of *dromenon* to *drama* allows us to apply a third term, the concept of *leitourgia*. All three signify a work done for the public good, but this third term, understood within the terms of Harrison's argument, allows us to specifically infer a vital link between art and liturgy. Art as leitourgia recalls us to art's praxeomorphic potential compared to its customary role as a focus for passive contemplation. Our contention is that contemporary art in ecclesiastical spaces is rarely, if ever, simply an object of exhibition, but an object that is put to work, and this is essential to its presence in the church. Nicholas Wolterstorff has touched upon this idea in his description of art as action, although his advocacy of art's liturgical function tends to fall within a narrower bracket of liturgical art than we are proposing.[68] Art as liturgy or art in action, in Benjaminian terms, relies precisely upon the decay of aura to transform the work of art from a fixed object of contemplation into an object of use. Yet conversely, as Harrison argues, it is the decay of ritual that transforms immersive participatory action into distanced spectatorship. Installation art, or the art of context, could be seen as an attempt to reverse this process, releasing art from the capture of auratic values yet reinstating a role for ritual and underlining an essential relation between a work of art and its place of encounter.

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[67] Gibbons. 2006: 169

[68] Wolterstorff. 1980

Three examples

Thinking of art *as* liturgy rather than of a liturgical art alters the conditions of possibility for ecclesiastical art, but it is not yet clear how this translates into actual art objects or events. In two recent permanent installations we can discern a clear liturgical purpose, whilst in a third temporary piece this is implied. In each case a supra-liturgical role is equally apparent. Both of the permanent commissions centre explicitly upon the rite of baptism, the ecclesiastical example *par excellence* of a liturgical rite-of-passage, its liturgy built upon a threefold movement of separation, transition and incorporation. Writing on the relationship of art and liturgy, David Stancliffe, the recently-retired Bishop of Salisbury, has drawn our attention to William Pye's font in Salisbury Cathedral as an example of the way that liturgy as art mirrors art as liturgy (figure 52).[69] As he puts it, the font is a symbol, and at the same time an agent, of the baptismal rite. Works like this and others – such as Stephen Cox's *St. Anselm's Altar* in Canterbury Cathedral (figure 53) – are perfect examples of that conjoining of art and ritual that reclaims their fundamental relationship. But are they properly speaking objects of art? Stancliffe argues that they are. As always, time will tell, but Paul Bayley's recent assessment of the font certainly supports the view that it performs more than a purely liturgical function. Alongside its clear liturgical purpose, he suggests that it has also been designed 'with one eye towards the 90% of visitors to the cathedral that visit as tourists,' and thus encounter it other than in its capacity as a liturgical object.[70] This supra-liturgical role for the font is indicative of Stancliffe's desire to see art liberated from its functionally subservient role in the church, as merely an adjunct or support to the liturgical process. It indicates too his conviction 'that we are on the threshold of a new relationship between the Church and the arts,' one that recognises 'the Liturgy as a process, a process of becoming what we are called in Christ to be' but one in which 'the arts and their practitioners are co-celebrants with us in this process of celebrating life.'[71] I suspect a good number of artists whose work has appeared in churches and cathedrals over the past few decades would be reluctant to align themselves with such a statement. Nonetheless, their work may indeed operate in this way. Certainly, the idea of artists as 'co-celebrants' offers a broader notion of art as liturgy than the more restrictive role for artists as servants of the church that we might associate with liturgical art. What is particularly striking is that Stancliffe chooses to

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[69] Stancliffe. 2010

[70] Bayley in Moffatt and Daly. 2010: 16

[71] Stancliffe. 2010: 2

celebrate this 'process' as a contemporary phenomenon, one whose incipience is only now becoming clear. Has he forgotten that over the past twenty years we have witnessed what many are calling a 'renaissance' of ecclesiastical commissions alongside a spate of temporary exhibitions and installations?[72] Or has he in fact made an acute observation? Have the past twenty years leading up to this moment significantly shifted the parameters of the debate, but by no means brought it to a satisfactory resolution? Taking Stancliffe at his word, at a time when contemporary art's incorporation into the church is becoming concretised, it is now more than ever that ecclesiastical encounters with contemporary art need to be debated. In this respect, the drafting of arts policies and the use of arts consultancies like Modus Operandi in the commissioning process, all very recent developments, indicate a significant shift in attitudes towards ecclesiastical art, which we will examine in the conclusion.

Perhaps nowhere better exemplifies this new liturgical status for art and the artist as 'co-celebrant' heralded by Stancliffe than Anthony Caro's project for the church of Sainte-Jean-Baptiste, Bourbourg. This project has gone further than most in marrying a liturgical rite to a sculptural site, again structured around the rite of baptism, as part of a larger artistic installation. Since the 1980s Caro has been increasingly associated with what he calls 'sculpture as place,' that is, 'constructions that must literally (or imaginatively) be entered or measured against the body, if they are to be experienced fully.'[73] This intersection of artwork, body and space has been realised to great effect in *Le Choeur de Lumière*, a permanent sculptural reconstruction in the war-damaged church of Sainte-Jean-Baptiste, whose choir has been transformed into 'a kind of enterable sculpture' gathered around a central font (figure 54).[74] For *Le Choeur de Lumière* Caro has created a sculptural ensemble based upon the creation, integrated seamlessly into the space. Aside from the font, which forms the centrepiece of the installation, there are two sculptures in wood and clay on the east walls of the choir depicting the creation of mankind, nine groups of steel and clay inserted into the bays of the apse, taking as their themes aquatic aspects of the creation, and two imposing oak towers, with various spaces on different levels allowing different kinds of interaction for the visitor or worshipper. Solitary spaces for contemplation sit alongside more communal areas, or offer vantage points from which to

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[72] See Laura Moffatt's comments, for example, in the latest publication on the subject from Art and Christianity Enquiry (Moffatt and Daly. 2010: 7).

[73] Wilkin in Westley et al. 2010: 42

[74] Ibid: 45

view the activity in the choir. The door to the exterior, also designed by Caro, leads to an outdoor sculpture in red steel more typical of his oeuvre, through which a visitor passes to arrive at the choir, and accordingly designated a 'threshold sculpture.' *Le Choeur de Lumière* presents us with an interesting, and not altogether obvious, sense of art as liturgy. It is an environment that invites the viewer to become a participant, either in an actual service of baptism, or simply in entering the space and being a part of it. It is a reflexive work of art, open to alternate interpretation and use, yet it also deconstructs itself as a work, becoming a place of religious ritual. Various indicators signify this ambiguous alliance of art and ritual. A separation is maintained between the choir and the main body of the church, visually represented by an elevated floor, as well as a screen of opaque glass. If on the one hand it separates the normal liturgical practices of the church from the sculptural space of the choir, on the other it signifies a shift of zones or registers. This is heightened by an aspect of the chapel not commented upon in the literature, but of interest to us. Due to the sensitive nature of the floor (an easily blemished white concrete whose whiteness accentuates the luminosity of the space), visitors and worshippers are requested to wear white *chaussons* over their shoes. In so doing an unexpected element of ritual is introduced, alerting us to our entrance into an indeterminate space. It signifies at one and the same time a ubiquitous response to a religious (if not Christian) space, where shoes are removed, and a heightened awareness that one is not simply entering a religious but rather a sculptural space, subject to certain specified conditions, including those of preservation.

One final major project that attempted something comparable, only in a temporary and itinerant capacity, was Gabriela Nasfeter's *Lichtpyramide* (figure 55). Combining the languages of art and liturgy, *Lichtpyramide* was a travelling project that appeared in various ecclesiastical spaces in Europe and beyond, creating floating pyramids of light, crafted from white spinnaker cloth fitted to the character and proportions of each participating cathedral. Each appearance of the *Lichtpyramide* had a dramatic visual impact upon its ecclesiastical host. It treated art as an ecumenical language of religion, able to cross borders and traditions, but more significantly, able to operate both artistically and liturgically. One of the chief figures behind the ambitious project, the flamboyant Manfred Richter, had anticipated that, by non-traditional religious forms and unconventional artistic means, *Lichtpyramide* would provide a common language for diverse traditions – Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, Armenian – as

well as uniting the different languages of the liturgy, the church and the arts.[75] More specifically, he felt that *Lichtpyramide* posed a particular question, one which harks back to that earlier query from Ruskin:

> Could a new aesthetic experience in a church space possibly transform itself into an opening of religious mentalities, into a new spiritual experience?[76]

Despite the controversy and complaints the work sometimes elicited from congregations and visitors, Richter is convinced that it could and did. If we subscribe to Benjamin's definition of ritual as a form of technology, 'a means of organising and controlling the environment,'[77] isn't this also an apt description of the work of the work of art, especially when it escapes the controlled 'neutrality' of the gallery and directly engages with its context as the examples from Caro and Nasfeter show? Benjamin resists the notion of the work of art as a thing, an object; rather, it is a process or task. Its reproducibility sets it to work, of course, but it is more than this. Benjamin, we could say, calls for a politics of the image rather than a cult of the image where interpretation is limited to a fixed, unique and permanent moment. A politics of the image is one with a future, or rather, many futures: it has futurity.

From liturgy to liminality

For art to be a servant or a handmaid of the liturgy, as Devonshire Jones proposes, demands an acknowledgement of the primary liturgical focus of the church to which everything else submits. Although the artist and writer Edward Robinson has dismissed this agenda as a fixation upon 'liturgical fundamentalism,' from the point of view of the church's mission it is difficult to dispute.[78] The pronouncement that liturgical art must

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[75] Richter and Nasfeter. 2009: 44. This commonality was achieved not through some homogeneous form, but through the particularity of each religious site. Depending on the liturgical nature of the ecclesial space the format of the *Lichtpyramide* was adapted accordingly: in some cases 'the pyramid had its apex towards the roof of the building accentuating the transcendent and on other occasions its apex towards the seating, usually in the nave or on occasions above an altar, underlining the sense of immediacy and incarnation' (Leathard. 2006: 13). In Berlin, for example, standing directly beneath the pyramid the viewer was granted a view of the dove high up in the dome, through the aperture of the pyramid's inverted apex (figure 56).

[76] Richter. 2003: 23

[77] Caygill. 1998: 105

[78] Robinson. 1993: 36

not challenge but only support the liturgy is repeatedly heard.[79] There is, of course, a clear argument to be made for art's integration into the liturgical life of the church, one that upholds existing liturgical structures. Nevertheless, what actually constitutes liturgical art remains a contentious issue. How then to maintain a balance between art's obligations to the context in which it finds itself and its truth to itself? What about art that challenges, confronts or disturbs, such as the projects preferred by Mennekes? To ask, what is the *work* of the work of the art, we have to ask what the church hopes to gain from art; something that confirms its creed and practices or something that challenges them?[80] After all, *The White Mass* is particularly remembered for its radical reshaping of the liturgy, which submitted to the dictates of the artwork. While this produced for one commentator a liturgical form of 'emotional force and rare insight,'[81] for others, critical of Mennekes's combative agenda, it presumably disqualified *The White Mass* as legitimately liturgical. But are we not in danger of attempting a false comparison? We should not be asking whether a work of art has a direct relation to the liturgical practices of the church, but rather what is its liturgical or ritual role *whenever* art enters the church. Put otherwise, what qualifies the difference between an art gallery and an ecclesiastical space as a place to exhibit art is precisely the work of the work. Art in galleries may, of course, be put to work, but art in cathedrals cannot avoid it. Although churches and cathedrals are frequently utilised as exhibition venues, the art on display sometimes distanced from any purely liturgical or ecclesiological function, a common argument for art's inclusion in the church is that the church should resist any attempt to supplant the art gallery in the kinds of artistic projects it fosters.

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[79] Siedell. 2008: 147. Siedell follows a precedent set not only by the church, but by other writers on art such as Nicholas Wolterstorff who, some thirty years earlier, insisted that 'art in the liturgy is at the service of the liturgy,' something he suggests many artists find difficult to understand or accept (Wolterstorff. 1980: 184).

[80] John Gibbons, the curator of *Light* in Winchester Cathedral, spoke of the works as being both 'at home in the cathedral interior and at odds with it,' a view that some might consider a principle for art within sacred spaces (Winchester Cathedral. 2007). Though it is this quality of being 'at odds' which probably upsets some visitors and regular worshippers, Mennekes, to pick one prominent and outspoken example, would certainly say that this is the role that contemporary art must take up when introduced into ecclesiastical buildings. Nevertheless, it presents us with an immediate problem: how to accommodate into a liturgical space art that either eschews a Christian agenda, is rooted in some other faith tradition, or sets itself up as a form of critique or opposition to a religious worldview? For many critics of contemporary art, of course, these are precisely what ought to be excluded from the ecclesiastical space in the first place. But many others within the church with a vested interest in promoting the visual arts in these contexts would disagree with such prohibitions. Examples from the past twenty years throw up numerous instances where such criteria for art have applied, often to great effect, not only aesthetically but liturgically too.

[81] Cocke. 1999: 5

One of the arguments against art as liturgy is the former's perceived resistance to public or communal use, compared with the latter's fundamentally corporate and communitarian sacramental form, much as devotional ritual (private contemplation) and liturgical ritual (public act) serve very different purposes. Notwithstanding the turn towards relational and participatory art since the 1990s, discussed elsewhere in the thesis, art is seen rather as a private act of contemplation, an idea only exacerbated by the spiritual equivalence apparently offered by the art museum (as Graham Howes has frequently argued, the development of the art museum has coincided with a shift from the public to the private uses for art, in which private aesthetic veneration replaces public religious devotion[82]). Colin Hourihane offers an interesting objection to this limitation. In a discussion of art in the service of the liturgy, Hourihane introduces the term, para-liturgical, to denote the relationship between publicly liturgical and privately devotional art.[83] Where most scholars tend to maintain strict boundaries between the two, others have defined these categories as two poles of a continuum, and it is with this latter possibility in mind that Hourihane uses para-liturgical.[84] Stancliffe's appeal to artists to

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[82] Most recently at the conference, *Contemplations of the Spiritual in Contemporary Art.* Liverpool Cathedral. 2010.

[83] Hourihane. 2003: 6

[84] At one extreme of this para-liturgical continuum is the icon, in many respects not a work of art at all but a sacrament. At the other extreme are works of art ostensibly presented as exhibits for aesthetic appreciation. It is this end of the continuum that seems to be populated by so many examples of artworks shown in churches and cathedrals today, but what Hourihane's concept alerts us to is the possibility that such appearances may be deceiving. Take *Light*, for example, the exhibition of sculpture shown in Winchester Cathedral in 2007 (figure 57). It was perceived by its detractors to be way off the sacramental spectrum, suitable for an art gallery but not a cathedral. The comments book revealed one derogatory comment after another, condemning the artworks as inappropriate, out of place, unwanted, or the by now familiar trope of doubting the work to be 'art' at all. Those opposed to the exhibition saw no spiritual value in it (and frequently no artistic merit either), while many of those who responded positively were effusive in their praise, citing spiritual as much as aesthetic appreciation. More importantly, its advocates among the resident clergy seemed in no doubt that it supplied liturgical as much as devotional or contemplative ends. Many contemporary artworks have been created specifically to facilitate liturgical practice. Such works – altars by Moore and Cox, Pye's font, and many others – reinforce the union of art and ritual. However, while serving a clear liturgical function, an object such as Henry Moore's great circular altar for the church of St. Stephen Walbook, London (figure 58), does not cease to be a work of art. Although commissioned works like this belong to the interior life of a building, becoming a part of its fabric and its creed, they resist being entirely subsumed into their liturgical function, retaining an attachment to the name of the artist and considered a part of their oeuvre. Then there are those permanent commissions which it is agreed have developed an intrinsic relation to their ecclesiastical setting as exclusively devotional. Gormley's *Sound II* is one of the examples most frequently cited. Its presence adds a sacramental ambience to the space of the crypt, yet its location would not easily facilitate a liturgical function. Chris Gollon's remarkable *Stations of the Cross* for St. John on Bethnal Green (figure 63) add another dimension to the para-liturgical continuum. Not only are they clearly liturgical, both as permanent reminders of the passion and as processional elements in particular services, they are also devotional images for private reflection. But they also encompass aesthetic and contextual decisions, each station treated site-specifically in its location within the church. This is true of many pieces of ecclesiastical

consider themselves co-celebrants, a proposal that Devonshire Jones would no doubt share, is one way to allow for art's alternative voice as leitourgia alongside its narrower role as liturgical, operating somewhere on this para-liturgical continuum. As Mennekes's use of *The White Mass* shows, his demand for an art that provokes and agitates, though appearing to abet a third, disquieting position, actually draws closer to Stancliffe's position on this continuum than might at first appear.

Although there is an argument to be made for a greater integration of contemporary works of art into the liturgical life of the church, this is not a call for *all* art within the church to be liturgical in this narrow sense. That would be to make all ecclesiastical art liturgical art. From the idea of liturgy as the primary art form of the church, it does not follow that all art within the church must be liturgical.[85] In a more conciliatory tone, Siedell proposes a more general view of art's sacramental nature:

> There is what could be called a sacramental and liturgical presence in contemporary art, in which artists explore the potential of banal materials and gestures, in defined spaces, to embody and serve as a vehicle for profound meaning and experience. The liturgical dimension of contemporary artistic practice, which incorporates and re-performs the power of sacred space, ritualised gestures, and sacramental objects that testify to what philosopher William Desmond calls, the 'porosity of being,' which requires more expansive and richly-nuanced notions of both 'art' and 'religion' than those offered by modernist critics.[86]

In this riposte to a roundtable of 'modernist critics' Siedell defines a broader liturgical dimension to art, as a kind of liturgical aesthetics; an expansive sacramental vision of the world, that offers expanded possibilities for art.[87] One such possibility, fulfilling Hourihane's hopes for the para-liturgical, was Doris Salcedo's installation in Liverpool's Anglican Cathedral in 1999, a most effective and sensitive instance of a non-conventional form of ecclesiastical art (figure 60). Though ostensibly curated as part of the first Liverpool Biennial, Salcedo's contribution far exceeded these narrow parameters to create a work that could in truth be labelled liturgical. What gives Salcedo's work its

art. There are numerous works whose actual liturgical function is limited to certain times, perhaps once a year, yet remain sacramental over and above their secondary existence as works of art, serving a function beyond the merely aesthetic. A sculpture like Fenwick Lawson's *Pieta* (figure 59), for example, not only serves a liturgical purpose through its explicit incorporation into Good Friday services, but does so implicitly all year round through its evocation of the passion.

[85] A point made over thirty years ago by Rowan Williams, responding to Maritain's *Art and Scholasticism*, and reiterated more recently by Graham Howes (Williams. 1976: 42; Howes. 2007: 11).

[86] Siedell in Elkins and Morgan. 2009: 234

[87] See Siedell. 2008: 142-3

liturgical edge is the attention it focuses upon the human stories caught up in its various networks of meaning. Indeed, art put to work for the public good is a valid description for much of her highly politicised oeuvre, since her subjects are the dispossessed, the disenfranchised, distraught and disaffected, for whom her work provides a form of witness. One need not be an adherent of liberation theology to recognise the religious calling evoked by such themes. In the case of Salcedo's installation, the disconcerting effect of an encounter with contemporary art in a cathedral prompted by many of the artworks discussed in this thesis was exacerbated, firstly, by the apparent incongruity of the objects on display, and secondly, through their unsettling customisation. As the entry to the biennial's catalogue says, her use of 'the altered materials and circumstances of everyday life' turns the 'comfortable and familiar' into the 'strange and even terrible.'[88] Thus, through the odd conjunction of household objects (chairs, tables, beds, wardrobes, cabinets) and their sacred context Salcedo's brand of installation deliberately 'foregrounds an out-of-placeness for the work.'[89] Our contention is that such work produces a liturgical rather than purely aesthetic space.

What, then, might be the liturgical function of this piece? Here it is useful to note the liturgical economy of 'spiritual spaces' discernible in the work of Michel de Certeau, one which makes an important distinction between places and spaces, as outlined in chapter 1.[90] In this economy praxis is prioritised over belief in the production of a liturgical space. Throughout Certeau's writings the practices of everyday life are often valorised in sacramental terms, as the production of space as a practiced place. In other words, the uses of a place are instrumental in producing a certain sense of space, a space that is excessive to its location.[91] The work of art and the work of liturgy, as praxis, both exhibit this capacity. In this sense, as Ward argues, 'Certeau's concerns with the way in which practices organise space, rather than space providing an arena within which practices can be practiced, are concerns, therefore, with liturgy.'[92] But also with art, and more narrowly, with art as liturgy. Salcedo's use of the mundane made uncanny (literally unhomely: *unheimlich*) are also concerns with the way a certain space is organised or read. In this respect what is interesting to note is how little has been written about the

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[88] Liverpool Biennial of Contemporary Art. 1999: 130

[89] Bal in Salcedo. 2007: 48

[90] Ward. 2001

[91] Ibid: 503

[92] Ibid.

appearance of her work in Liverpool's Anglican Cathedral. In Phaidon's monograph on the artist, for example, one finds several full-page photographs of the event, but barely a word in the text. The photographs provide archival documentation of what is presumed to be in effect just one in a series of installations. Lacking in all this is any critical engagement with the particular dynamics generated by their placement in a cathedral, that is, what the work does in such a place compared with their more recent appearance in White Cube for instance (figure 61). There is a tacit assumption that although the inherent discourses might differ, and the architectural context is grander, a cathedral venue simply administers another kind of exhibition value, a failing, common to site-specific practices, that Kwon calls 'undifferentiated serialisation.'[93] But if we take heed of our earlier positing of the *work* of the work of art, of an art that is put to work, then the particularities of its location become imperative. A certain implicit liturgical value comes into play. It is in this sense that an audience's response to the political and psychological implications of Salcedo's work is important. Only the viewer's active engagement lends to these intriguing works an aptness, a fittingness, that belies their aberrant presence in the cathedral. The called-for response is neither strictly individual contemplation nor simultaneous collective reception, neither reduced to exhibition nor cultic value, but something that takes both into account, something we are describing as liturgical. Just as the individual is not disregarded in the liturgy yet is at the same time incorporated into a larger whole, so too Salcedo's sculptural practice makes considerable demands upon the individual viewer, requiring a thoughtful, considered response, yet it resists collapsing into purely passive contemplation or aesthetic spectacle. As a form of aesthetic experience it directs our gaze to something beyond the material or sensorial, something excessive to the object. This is possible in a gallery setting, of course, but is given greater impetus by its association with a cathedral and its liturgical framework, which also through sensory experience directs our attention to the other-worldly. As Catherine Pickstock says, in her discussion of liturgy and the senses, one finds 'a liturgical tension between the priority of a congregational construction of sensation, on the one hand, and a private sensory meditation, on the other. This tension is benign and perhaps never resolved.'[94] This same tension is at work in the work of art as leitourgia, which escapes both the limitations of its exhibition or spectacle value and its subsumption into purely

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[93] Kwon. 2002: 166

[94] Pickstock. 2010: 734

cultic value, in favour of interlocking networks of value: aesthetic, religious, liturgical, political.

Harrison envisages ritual as the bridge between real life and art. Ritual is what reforges a union between an art distanced from 'real life.' Pickstock appears to second this claim, seeing in the sensory and collective nature of liturgy a fusion of life with art.[95] Pickstock's argument centres on the liturgy as performative action, however, and thus on the liturgy itself as work of art. Though related, this is not our argument. Art in cathedrals forces us to rethink Harrison's image and place art in that midway position between real life and ritual. Where Harrison believes ritual must wane for art to wax today's practitioners frequently challenge that thesis. Yet even if, in an implicit sense, amidst the numerous projects past and present within the church, the 'and' that unites art and ritual remains as a condition of art's possibility, a persistent gap continues to separate art from liturgy. If Williams's and Devonshire Jones's summation of art's alienation from liturgy is mitigated by works such as Pye's font and Cox's altar (both dedicated by Williams in his capacity as Archbishop), the treatment of *Morning Beams*, we argued, even in its capacity as a ritualistic work, continued the tendency to dissociate art from liturgy as distinct spheres of activity. Nonetheless, this and many more recent projects, if not explicitly liturgical, have signalled a return to ritual as a central aspect of art's involvement in ecclesiastical life; a return, in other words, if Harrison is to be believed, to that neglected 'and' that determines the elementary exchange of art and ritual. Exhibitions based upon ambulatory, processional, sacramental, or participative formats, or encouraging a kind of pilgrimage, all rely upon a relation of art and ritual quite distinct from that experienced in the art museum or gallery (though these have rituals of their own). Possibly the church and art space known as Wallspace has gone furthest since its inauguration in 2006 to reconcile the often uneasy alliance of art and liturgy on a regular basis, providing an interesting model for the extant possibilities proffered by a conjoining of art, ritual and liturgy. Through its liturgical acts it has experimented with the reordering of aesthetic space, turning personal aesthetic contemplation into a means of collective experience. One might be so bold as to suggest that liturgy becomes the servant of the art on display, art the means by which a liturgical setting emerges. Art as the mediating force between ritual and real life is then, in part, an answer to the question, what is the work of the work of art? With this in mind, we should recall Derrida's words in *The Gift of Death*, where we find this possibility cast in more lyrical terms:

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[95] Ibid: 736

> God sees me, he looks at me in secret, but I don't see him, I don't see him looking at me, even though he looks at me while facing me and not, like an analyst, from behind my back. Since I don't see him looking at me, I can, and must, only hear him. But most often I have to be led to hear or believe him, I hear tell what he says, through the voice of another, another other, a messenger, an angel, a prophet, a messiah or postman, a bearer of tidings, an evangelist, an intermediary who speaks between god and myself.[96]

And – why not? – through the offices of an artist. The role of the artist as intermediary, operating within the non-place of the in-between, has become something of a cliché in critical art theory, one that is constantly invoked. But with ecclesiastical art it indicates a literal truth, at least for those for whom the church is not merely an elaborate exhibition space, and at least where the work of art, if not the artist, is concerned. In this respect, Derrida's list of intermediaries presages many of the works of art under discussion in this thesis, or could be read as such: a messenger (Viola), an angel (Quinn), a postman (Ono), a messiah (Wallinger), a prophet (Coates), a bearer of tidings (Creed), an evangelist (Hirst), and so on. With each of these works we may adduce, at least potentially, an intermediate position between the material and the divine, between the contemporary and the traditional, between culture and whatever is deemed to be beyond culture, and so on. This mediating status for art and the artist introduces us to a final point of contact between art and ritual: liminality.

Liminal thresholds

In many important respects liturgical theory is indebted to the anthropological rites-of-passage theories of Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner. Van Gennep's highly influential work in this field begins with the claim that the only clearly marked social division remaining in modern (that is, industrial) society is that distinguishing secular and religious worlds; movement between these worlds calls for ceremonies and acts of a special kind. So absolute is their incompatibility, one cannot move from the one to the other without passing through a ritually-negotiated intermediate stage or period of transition, permitting separation from the secular world and entry into the sacred.[97] This process is described by van Gennep as a rite of passage, for which he identifies three distinct phases: rites of separation (preliminal rites), rites of transition (liminal or

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[96] Derrida. 1995a: 91

[97] Gennep. 1960: 1

threshold rites), and rites of incorporation (postliminal rites).[98] The first, or preliminal, stage is one of separation, involving symbolic action (or actual physical removal) signifying detachment from normal social or cultural states. The second, or liminal, phase he termed a marginal or threshold stage, during which the social or cultural realm bears little resemblance to its previous or future state. The final postliminal stage is one of aggregation, a reincorporation into the familiar social world, reinstituting a degree of stability and accord with cultural norms. Such rites are significant in emphasising the transitional nature of experience, something lost beneath the accretions of modern life but still explicitly visible in religious rituals like wedding ceremonies, ordination or baptism, and implicit in certain secular formalities. For the societies studied by van Gennep and Turner they form the core around which entire cultures are structured.

In his own studies of the ritual process Victor Turner takes as his starting point this oft-cited work of his predecessor on rites of passage within so-called primitive cultures. Like van Gennep, Turner pays particular attention to the transitory stage of margin, or 'limen,' between sacred and profane states, affirming the impossibility of free movement between one and the other. One inevitably encounters a border or frontier, a 'liminal space' that acts as a kind of membraneous screen, essential to rites of passage. There is a sense (very evident in Durkheim's study of religions, for example) in which the sacred and profane inhabit different, even opposed worlds, and shifts between them imply changes in 'state' – by which he means 'any type of stable or recurrent condition that is culturally recognised' – effected in 'transition.'[99] The neutrality of intermediate spaces offers a very clear image of a zone of passage that prevents the simple movement from one state (literally) to another. Instead, ritual separation from one's familiar world and incorporation into another, as-yet unfamiliar, world demands a period of transition through a kind of non-space.

Van Gennep underlines the fact that transition is often identified with territorial or spatial passage – entrances and exits, movement from one room to another, the crossing of streets and squares. This identification explains why the passage from one social group to another is so often ritually expressed by passage under a portal, or by an 'opening of doors.'[100] This is not always merely symbolic but very often an actual territorial passage: crossing the threshold in marriage, ordination, or funeral ceremonies,

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[98] Ibid: 11

[99] Turner. 1969: 94

[100] Gennep. 1960: 192

for instance. Benjamin's topographical observations of Naples are replete with such transitional moments. Yet with van Gennep we seem to be confronted with a very different logic to the porosity of Benjamin's *Naples*. Or rather, what we see is a negotiated porosity, operating at the edges or limits of two worlds, in which one is in neither yet able to pass from the one to the other. Thus we could say that rites of passage are, in a sense, porous, and reliant upon that porosity, the possibility of transition, but that each passage through a threshold is necessarily a passage that effects a change of some kind.

How instructive is van Gennep's and Turner's ethnographic research for our examination of the conditions for art in ecclesiastical contexts? In the next chapter we will apply their findings to questions around the reception of art. For now, let us briefly enumerate a number of factors that underline the particular value of the middle or transitional phase for the purposes of a reading of art as liturgical. Unsurprisingly, liturgy is frequently represented as a rite of passage in the explicit terms employed by van Gennep and Turner, with particular emphasis laid on the middle liminal phase. But Turner also makes the important point that liminality is an essential element of the creative process. It is often regarded as a space of transformation or becoming, a transitional state by which one slips through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. In liminal space we experience interruptions, breaks and ruptures which do not conform to the rules of day to day living. Turner imagined the liminal realm as 'a time and place lodged between all times and spaces' in which 'the cognitive schemata that give sense and order to everyday life no longer apply but are, as it were, suspended.'[101] Within Turner's emphasis on the middle stage of transition, or liminality, the as-yet-undecided moment, 'when neither the old nor the new limit creative vision,' liturgy's potential for creativity emerges and art assumes a mediating function within liturgical space.[102] Liminality has long been a favoured trope of art discourses. The place of the threshold, the in-between, or the margin, is seen as a rich seam to mine for the indeterminate, undecided or unformed, or a means by which to explore those threshold spaces between materiality and the immaterial so beloved of artists like Anish Kapoor. Within the church, however, art confronts a space that is itself determined as liminal, both in its function as a space 'betwixt and between' mundane and divine reality,[103] and as a place for liminal activity in the form of the liturgy. In

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[101] Turner. 1980: 165

[102] Jones. 2005: 5492

[103] Turner. 1980: 95

ecclesiastical contexts contemporary art very often falls outside usual categorisations, caught somewhere between sacred and secular worlds, as though straddling both while belonging fully to neither. We might even say that art in this context works as a corrosive agent, eroding artificial distinctions, dissolving unnecessary borders. And it is in occupying this productive but indeterminate state that it can be understood in its capacity as the bearer of liturgical value. If there is a tacit assumption that art has come to occupy a transitional and transformative space within modern culture, there can be few venues so alive to these possibilities as a cathedral. Indeed, at the time of writing Salisbury Cathedral's most recent exhibition of art had been built around precisely the theme of liminality, chosen, as the catalogue explains, 'with that idea in mind of Cathedrals and sacred space as an in-between place, a place of possibility and encounter with that which is greater than ourselves.'[104] For their part, the works of art on show were chosen for their capacity to generate such encounters within the specific context of the cathedral.

In chapter 7 this theme will be explored further, from the perspective of the reception of art seen through the lens of Badiou's concept of the event and Turner's notion of *communitas*. As opposed to the conventional social structures of the secular sphere Turner suggests that the liminality invoked by rites of passage produces a particular modality of social relationship engendered by the sharing of experience and set apartness of the initiates, which he terms communitas. This transient community, on a more superficial level perhaps rather like that imagined by Bourriaud for certain art events (though I suspect very rarely achieved by the kind of events he names), presents a model of collective action that is temporary, contingent and exceptional. In our consideration of the subjective and communal possibilities for encounters with art especial significance will be given to Badiou's philosophy of event, which will prove immensely valuable in determining the role of the subject alongside the efficacy of non-traditional forms of art within places of Christian worship.

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[104] Salisbury Cathedral. 2010

Figure 50 Yoko Ono, *Morning Beams for Portsmouth Cathedral*, Portsmouth Cathedral, 2004

Figure 51 Anonymous, *Icons of St. Mary the Virgin, St. Peter, St. Cedd and Jesus Christ*, Chelmsford Cathedral, 2010; Sergei Fedorov, *Iconostasis*, Winchester Cathedral, 1997

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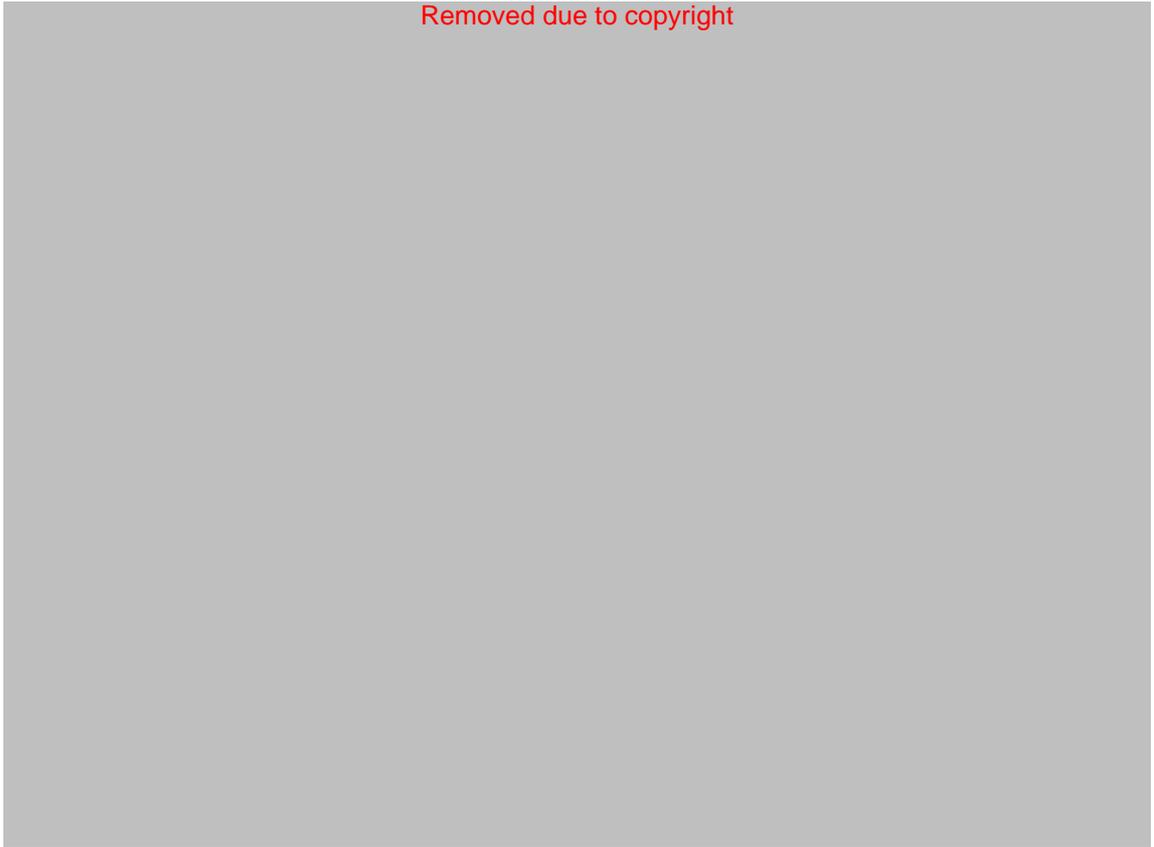
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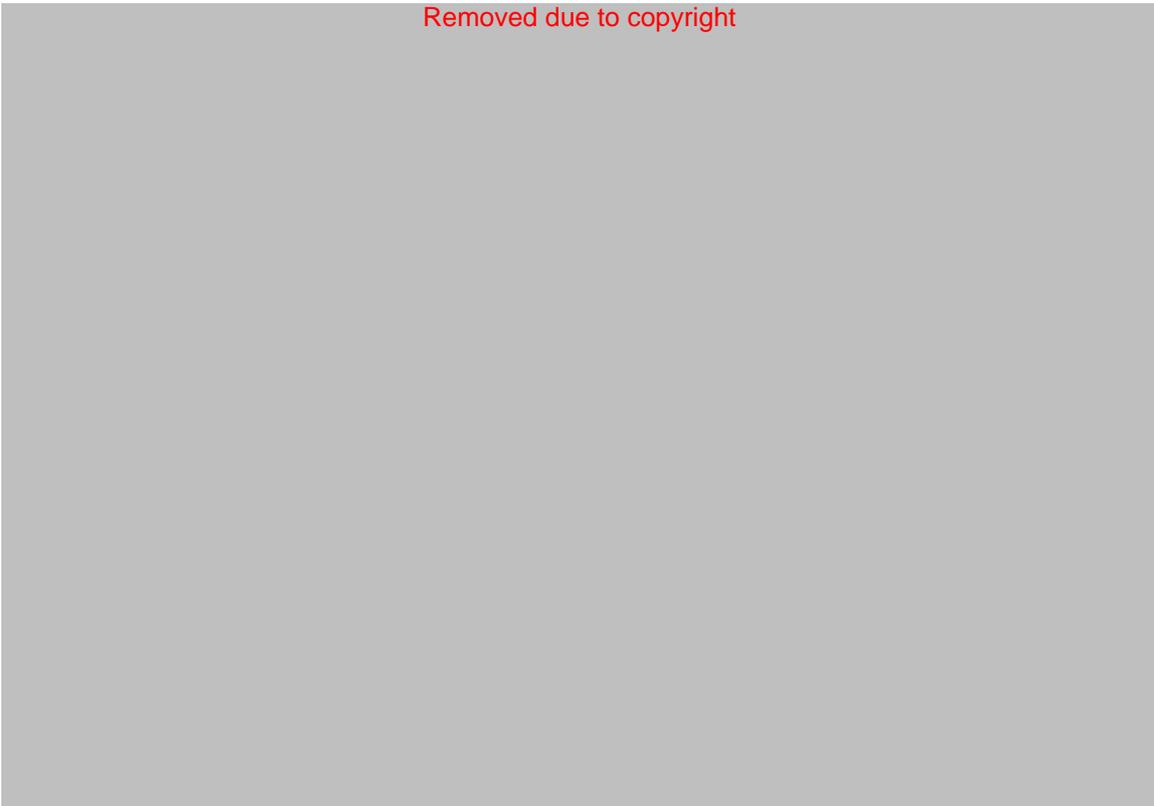
Figure 52 William Pye, *Font*, Salisbury Cathedral, 2008
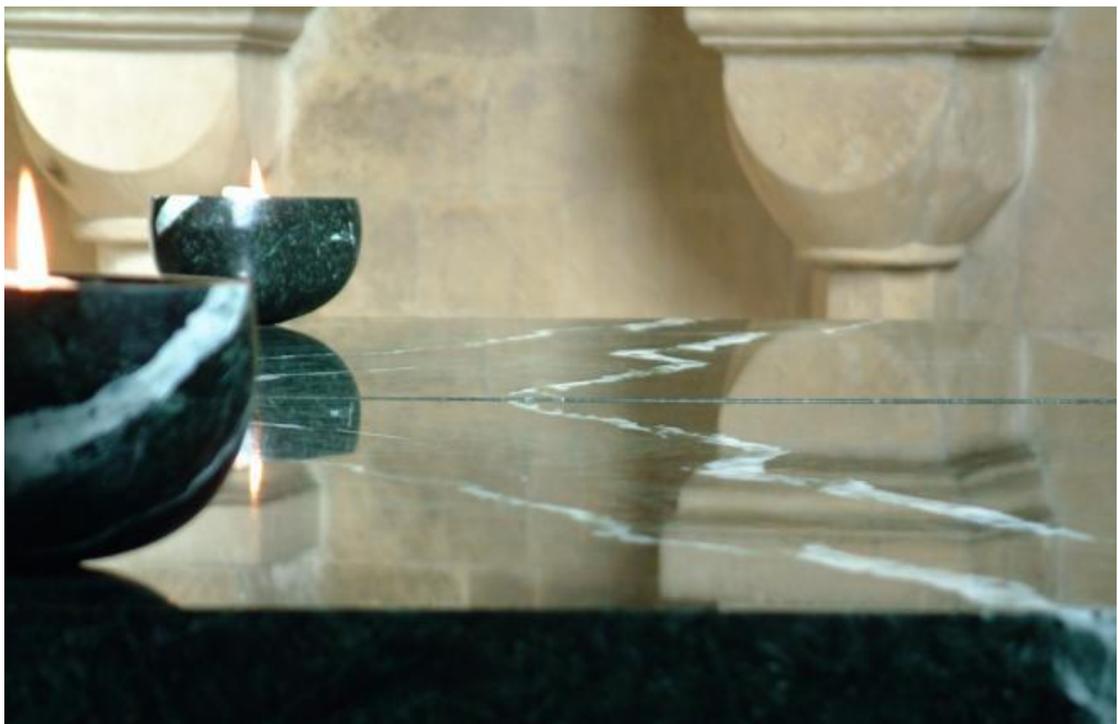
Figure 53 Stephen Cox, *St. Anselm's Altar*, Canterbury Cathedral, 2005

Figure 54 Anthony Caro, *Le Choeur de Lumière*, Saint-Jean-Baptiste, Bourbourg, 2008

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Top row: *Fruits, Beside the River, Undergrowth*,

Middle row: *Waterfall, Watering Hole, Seashore,*

Bottom row: *Galapagos, Sea Creatures, The Deep*

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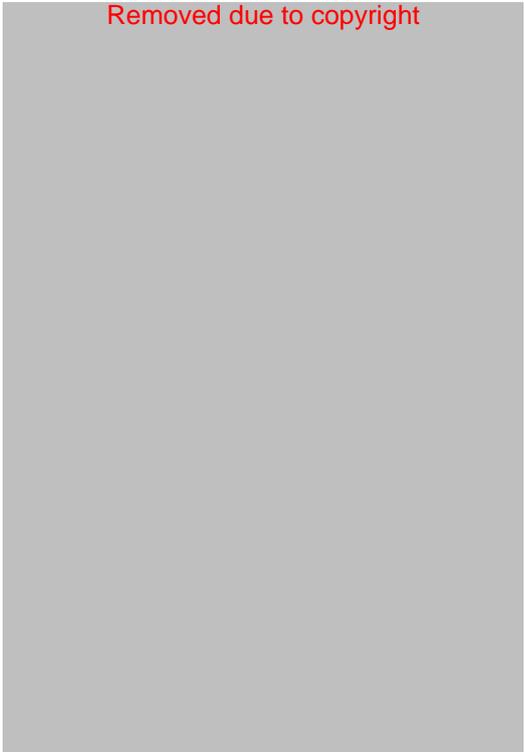
Alleluia, *Tower of Evening* and *Threshold Sculpture*
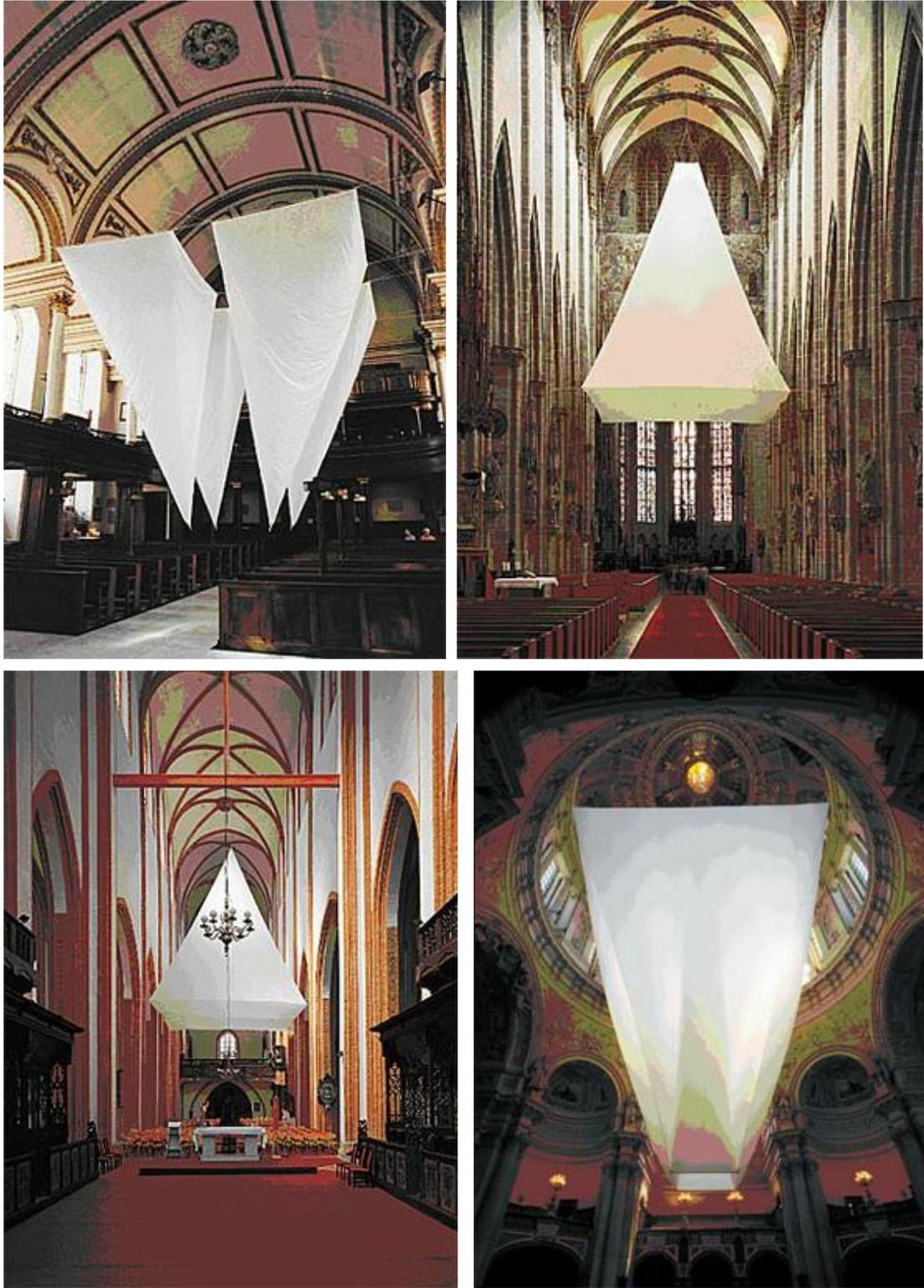
Figure 55 Gabriela Nasfeter, *Lichtpyramide*, various sites, 2000-2003

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Figure 56 Gabriela Nasfeter, *Lichtpyramide*, Berlin Dom, 2003
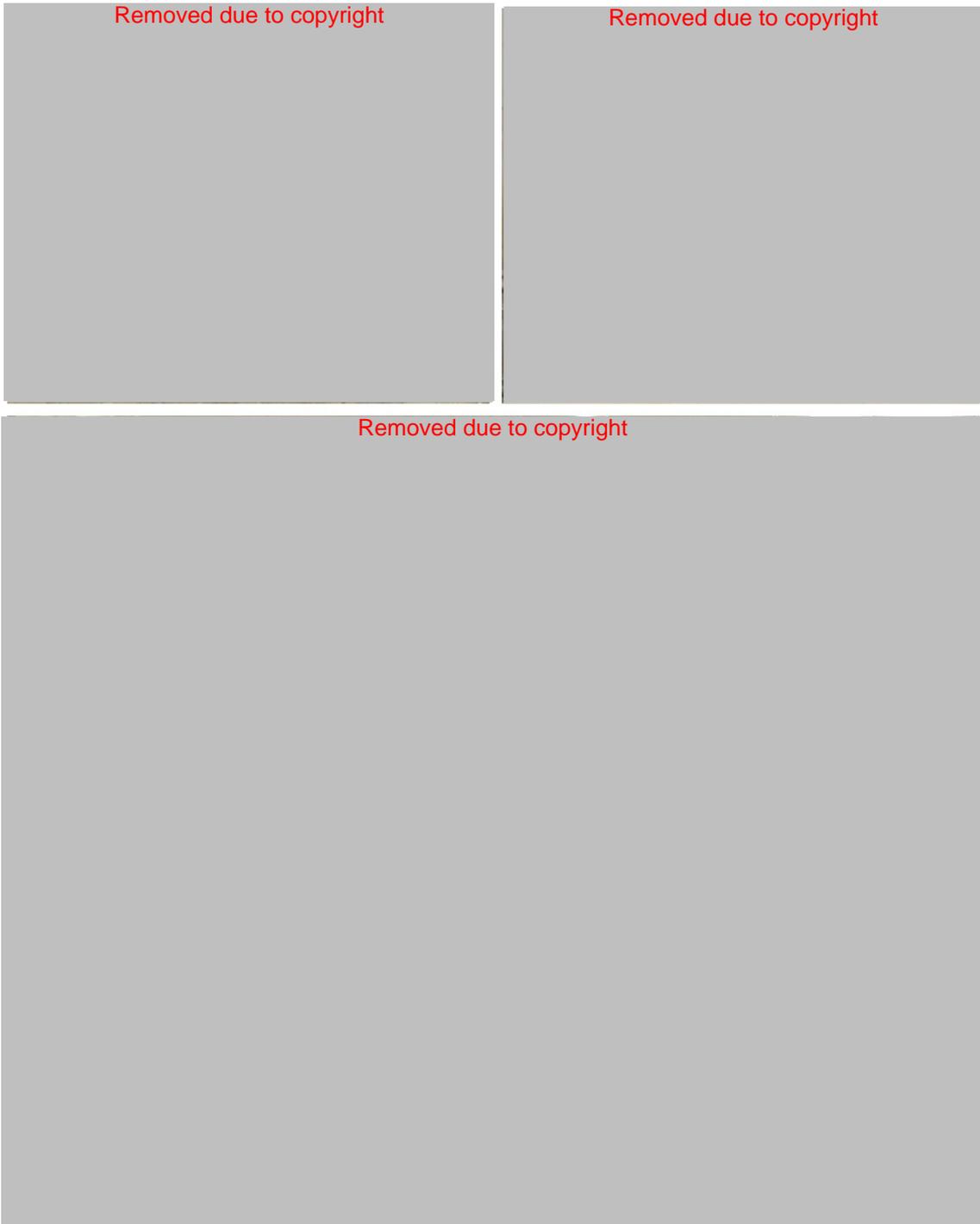
Figure 57 Winchester Cathedral, *Light*, 2007

Top: Rachel Whiteread, *Untitled (pair),* 1999; David Batchelor, *Waldella 6*, 2006
Bottom: Marc Quinn, *Angel*, 2006

Figure 58 Henry Moore, *Circular Altar*, St. Stephen's Walbrook, 1972

Figure 59 Fenwick Lawson, *Pieta*, Durham Cathedral, 1981
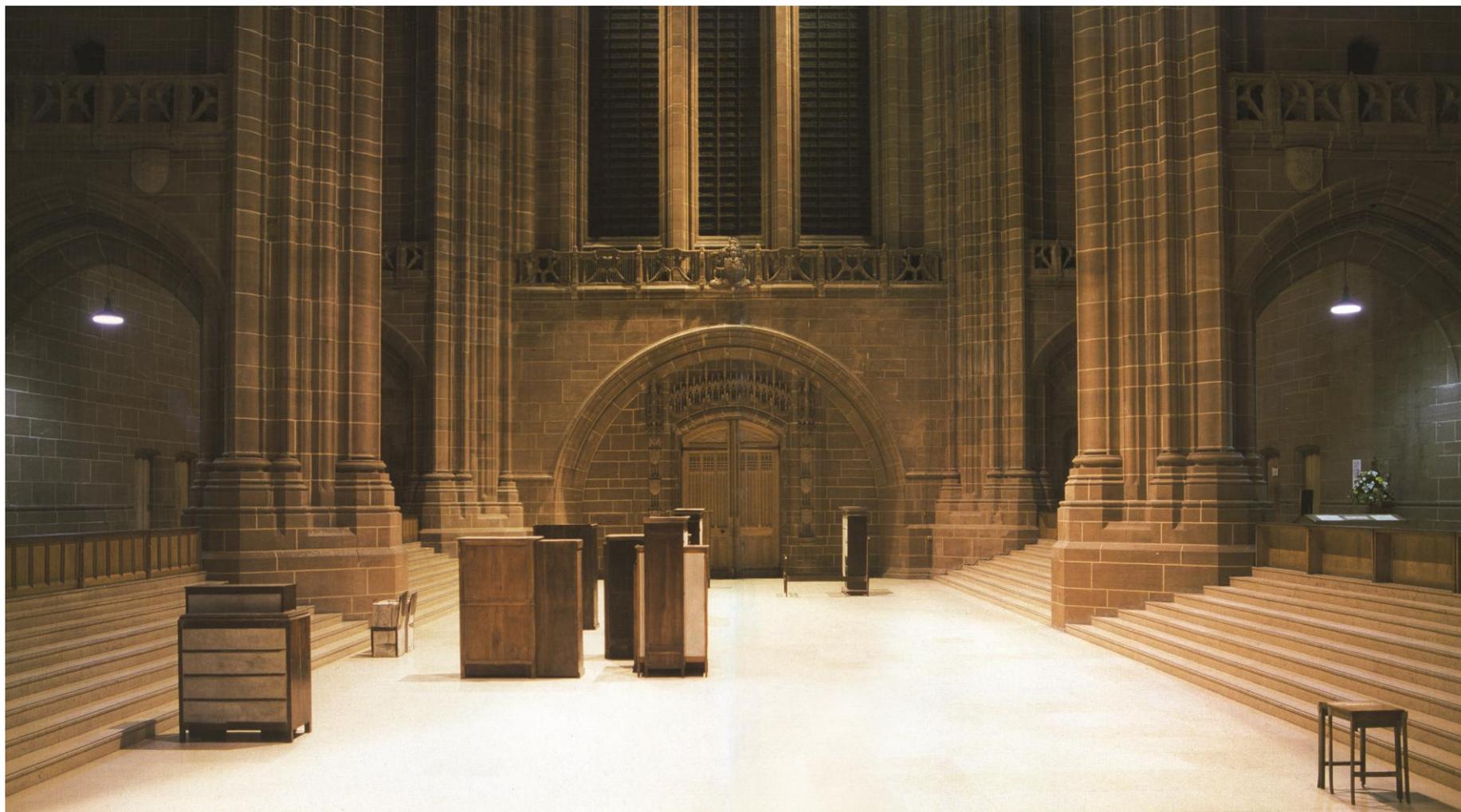
Figure 60 Doris Salcedo, *Untitled*, Anglican Cathedral, Liverpool, 1999

Figure 61 Doris Salcedo, *Untitled*, White Cube, London, 2007

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CRYPT

Ecclesiastical subjectivities

Any investigation into the conditions of possibility for art in an ecclesiastical context will always be incomplete without some aspect of theorisation around its reception, and thus the response of an individual, group or community to the art in question. This would itself constitute a substantial sociological study, undoubtedly one worthy of future research. For the purposes of this thesis we intend to restrict ourselves to some thoughts concerning the role of those who encounter such works, above all in their affiliation to some form of community, however fleetingly. As any sociologist would point out, the label of 'community' is always in danger of being rather freely applied in order to homogenise sections of a population, thereby debasing the term to mean little other than a unifying banner under which disparate groups or loose collectivities sometimes gather. Used carelessly it becomes effectively meaningless. Consider, for example, the media ubiquity of 'the Islamic community,' 'the business community' or 'the international community' as purportedly meaningful social groupings. In this respect the notion of a so-called artistic community is particularly suspect; outside of a certain sociability it is not certain how that 'community' manifests itself or operates at all. Mindful of these difficulties we intend to situate our inquiry within a particular interpretation of subjectivity and/or community invoked by the work of art. The purpose of this chapter will be to ask what conditions of possibility exist for the subjective (individual or communal) reception of art within ecclesiastical contexts, bearing in mind that this is always primarily a space marked by, or framed within, the presence of a worshipping community?

In an earlier chapter we argued the respective merits and demerits of a form of art practice that made communality, sociability or relationality its creed for art production. This concept has, since the late 1990s onwards, become increasingly prominent, in which individual contemplation of an artwork is replaced with a more social or collective reading. I speak, of course, of Nicolas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* and the Relational Art it conceptualises. Central to the argument in *Relational Aesthetics* is the notion that the reception of art is formed collectively rather than individually, and thus the art it describes facilitates a social or participative role for those who enter into any kind of relationship with it. Bourriaud argues that artistic experience has tended to be imagined as a relationship between the solitary viewer and the work of art, but today it

requires the 'joint presence of beholders in front of the work.'[1] Bourriaud's somewhat optimistic claims for these kinds of art practice have come in for some serious criticism but are nonetheless reflected in the ambitions and proposals expressed by the artists he admires. What seems of significance to us is the idea that art might have the potential to bring a sense of community into being through collective action or response; indeed, that this might be the very directive for the art of today. Perhaps discursivity and sociability are foregrounded in art today because they appear so scarce in other spheres, especially politically in an age when everyday community and democratic political citizenship seem over-shadowed by the individualism promoted by neoliberal capitalism and the consumer society. If participation appears threatened in other areas of life, its privileging in art is offered as a small way of reviving its value as social cohesion. This would be Bourriaud's claim, that '[t]hrough little services rendered, the artists fill in the cracks in the social bond.'[2] Modern life, he suggests, is characterised by ever-shrinking possibilities for social exchange, which has led to an 'irremediable pauperisation' of lived experience.[3] Bourriaud's hope is that, by employing relational aesthetics, contemporary art enables new avenues of exchange to be opened up, the work of art acting as a kind of 'social interstice.'[4] In many respects, however, the situations produced only provoke further uncertainty regarding their effectiveness. How do we evaluate the relationships produced by Relational Art? Bourriaud appears to assume that all relations that permit dialogue are automatically democratic and therefore good. But what does 'democracy' mean in this context? If Relational Art produces human relations then the next logical question to ask is what type of relations are being produced, for whose benefit, and why? Moreover, if, as has been argued, the power or effectiveness of an artistic practice can be gauged by the relational effects it continues to generate even after the initial event has passed, how can these effects be measured? Many of these questions will be applied to the conditions of possibility raised by other forms of subjective response, as a corrective to the model proposed by Bourriaud for participative art events. Some more immersive, affective and dedicated commitment to art may counter a commonly-voiced criticism of relational aesthetics, that the art itself, the apparent focus of attention, often turns out to be disappointingly insignificant.

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[1] Bourriaud. 2002: 57

[2] Ibid: 36

[3] Bourriaud in Doherty. 2004: 48

[4] Bourriaud. 2002: 16

As a prelude to this discussion, however, we ought to raise the more obvious question why a concern for community should be of significance at all to this thesis in a consideration of the reception of art in ecclesiastical settings, when responses to art are so often treated at the subjective level of the individual. Why should it be so important to stress the value of a collective response? Or, put another way, to what extent should a church or cathedral fulfil a private function for art (a function we typically associate with the art museum); to what extent should it promote a collective function? Our focus on community has been prompted by a number of factors, not least of which is the context of our discussion, as a corollary to the argument that art as *leitourgia* is itself liturgical or sacramental, and consequently communal. It is equally prompted by a desire to pose figures of artistic sociability that go beyond the somewhat insubstantial relationality promoted as Relational Art.

Art in ecclesiastical spaces, whether ancient or new, typically invites personal, private contemplation. Exemplary of such practices is the role of icons which, strictly speaking, are not works of art at all but rather a visual medium for prayer. Occasionally reference may be made to a work of art in situ within the context of a service of worship, exhorting a kind of communal attention. Services within the Trinity Chapel of Salisbury Cathedral, for example, frequently reflect upon Gabriel Loire's impressive *Prisoners of Conscience* stained-glass window, the work of art in this case acting as a form of ethical focus for those present (figure 62). The most evidently communal uses for art in ecclesiastical contexts are through ritual. Stations of the cross clearly perform a ritualised function, as personal devotion or public processional, although they may also be purely didactic or illustrative. A series by Chris Gollon unveiled in 2008 in the church of St. John on Bethnal Green have since been used within Good Friday services as a focus for communal worship, as well as being a permanent resource for private devotion (figure 63). Outside these, and other, conventional roles for art, however, ritualised uses for art as social or communal events remain the exception, even today, so much so that the groundbreaking Byars/Mennekes collaboration of 1995, introduced earlier, is still being discussed in paradigmatic terms.[5] Occasionally a modern work intentionally encourages social interaction while others may unintentionally inspire it. An example of the former was a recent travelling exhibition called *In Other People's Skins*, touring a number of Britain's major cathedrals, which invited viewers to sit at a table and 'share' in a meal for twelve projected onto the surface of the tablecloth and alternating between meals from

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[5] See Mennekes. 2009

various cultures (figure 64). Not only was the viewer present at the meal being served, but in communion as it were with whoever else happened to be sitting there too. That at least was the rhetoric surrounding the piece; in reality, at least in my observation of the work, absence and distance from the unfolding event marked the occasion, and whatever sociability was produced felt very shallow indeed.[6] An example of the latter was perhaps Rebecca Horn's *Moon Mirror* in St. Paul's Cathedral or Antony Gormley's *Field for the British Isles* in Salisbury Cathedral's cloisters, and more recently exhibited in the cloisters of Gloucester Cathedral. Both works elicited spontaneous communal responses between strangers, eager to share their thoughts or experience.

We might agree, then, that art *can* be discursive, *can* initiate a degree of sociability, and can do so in galleries, museums or churches, even if we disagree over the substance of such encounters. But that is not what we are arguing here. More fundamentally, if art is leitourgia, as was mooted earlier, and thus 'a work done for the common good,' then it necessarily demands a social rather than purely individual *modus operandi*. Moreover, if art is to be valued as intrinsic to the life of the church and not merely an ornamentation or aesthetic complement, then it raises the question of its participative role in that arrangement of building and belief, clergy and congregation, collective ritual and private faith. Ecclesiastical art, unlike its secular counterpart, invariably subsists within a social, rather than purely personal, context. It is for this reason that the question of an ecclesial community for art is worth pursuing.

The constitution of subjectivities

Contemporary art in churches and cathedrals is subject to various audiences, with a greater or lesser degree of engagement. First and foremost, there are the resident clergy and local congregation (the former having greater priority in cathedrals and the latter in parish churches), who may welcome a work of contemporary art as an enhancement of the space, begrudgingly put up with it, or angrily denounce it as intrusive, offensive or even as sacrilegious. Secondly, there is the regular round of tourists and visitors, for whom such works frequently come as an unforeseen surprise, pleasing or displeasing as the case may be. Thirdly, there are those who come specifically to see the art, most of whom come with some expectations of what they will find. In general, for the first it is

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[6] As a caveat to my criticisms I should add that many others considered it a successful work. Comments from the visitors' books at the first five cathedral locations were full of exuberant praise for the experience offered by the installation.

the ecclesiastical space as a place of worship that matters most, against which the presence of art will be measured. For the second group it is the building as a place to see, explore and experience that is uppermost; whatever art is there may enhance or distract from that agenda, according to individual response. In all likelihood it is only the third for whom the art is paramount, against which all other considerations will be secondary. This is, of course, a gross generalisation. We cannot make such strict demarcations between these groupings, since individuals may well straddle two or even all three groupings. Nonetheless, among those anxious to promote the role of art within the church it is a commonly accepted factor that outside of this third group the tendency is to assume a peripheral place for art, especially contemporary art, whose presence is often only tolerated if it is discreet.

In the particular scenarios outlined above the art itself is assigned a relatively passive role. It is in the space to which people come and they engage or not with it. In such circumstances the conditions of possibility for art are limited. They are vastly extended if art itself may be said to produce its own audience or community, brought into being by the work, or better said, *called* into being. This is the *work* of the work of art, which could equally be described in currently fashionable terms as the production of subjectivities. What we mean by this is the now commonplace notion of the formation of subjectivity through social reproduction. In *Empire*, for example, Hardt and Negri reiterate the observation, ubiquitous to modern social theory, that subjectivity is not pre-given but to some degree formed in the field of social forces.[7] Social institutions, they argue, provide a discrete place where the production of subjectivity is enacted: 'The various institutions of modern society should be viewed as an archipelago of factories of subjectivity.'[8] Each institution through which one passes, and by which one is formed, has its own logic of subjectification. Each produces its own material practices, as well as inducing a certain frame of mind and comportment, which we could label productive processes of subjectivity. According to this logic, the cathedral, like all other institutions, is productive of subjectivities, and indeed, this Foucauldian perspective is evident in the demeanour assumed by the typical visitor to a cathedral. They do not behave as they would while visiting a museum, despite the comparisons often made between them and even though certain comparable behaviours seem to correspond to both (see appendix 8 for a discussion of this issue of comparability between museums and cathedrals and the

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[7] Hardt and Negri. 2000: 195

[8] Ibid: 196

kinds of communities that populate them). Putting any such similarities aside, a cathedral presents the visitor with a very different environment to a museum. In the terms employed by Hardt and Negri, we could say that the church or cathedral, like the museum, does not just welcome different subjects into its space, but manufactures subjectivities fitting to that space. In this regard, an important distinction must be made between the regular users of a space and those who only briefly pass through. In his consummate exploration of spatial practices Lefebvre advances the proposition that 'architecture produces living bodies, each with its own distinctive traits'; distinctive, that is, to the inherent conditions of a particular place; but distinctive too according to modes of inhabiting.[9] Lefebvre adds restrictions to this productive capacity: it only applies to regular users through their ongoing lived experience of a place, barely touching the passing tourist or passive onlooker. Although there is much in favour of such an argument this is not quite the line we will be taking, even if we do return to the idea that subjectivity is produced rather than pre-given and predicated upon an active response to a space. Our focus is rather more upon the subjectivities produced by the work of art itself, when encountered within an ecclesiastical forum, based upon the proposal that the work of art produces its own conditions of reception. The task of the following sections will be to investigate these conditions through the categories of event, liminality and communitas.

The Badiouian event

Although a concept, or better said, concepts of event, feature prominently in contemporary European philosophy (distinct from Whitehead's use of the term), it is Badiou's which touches most closely upon our concerns, through his constitution of the subject of an 'event,' specifically the production of Christian subjectivities through Paul's affirmation of the resurrection event, which forms the core of his *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism.* Underpinning Badiou's adoption of Paul as 'a poet-thinker of the event' is the conviction that his mission is based upon a rupture to thought and an overturning of conventions through the resurrection-event of Christ, which inaugurates a 'thought-practice' for the subjectivities of those caught up in, or persuaded by, its consequences.[10] An event, as Badiou conceptualises it, is an unpredictable something that

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[9] Lefebvre. 1991: 137

[10] Badiou. 2003b: 2. Badiou's text is one of several philosophical responses to the legacy of Saint Paul, in which the New Testament according to Paul is receiving a number of vigorous re-readings, notably

allows the newness of an unanticipated truth to break into, and disrupt, the familiarity of the status quo. This new truth is dependent upon a subjective response for its continuance, the subject being the one who acts or lives in fidelity to it. Paul, and the Christian believer persuaded by his testimony, represents, for Badiou, precisely such a one. In the figure of the Pauline community Badiou presents us with a model for the production of subjectivity based upon the declaration of a truth-event, and subsequent adherence to a truth-process, faithful to its demands and consequences.

What might seem an immediate difficulty for our inquiry is that from the outset Badiou makes it clear that he is not interested in Paul as a religious figure. Indeed, he goes further, declaring that he has never really connected Paul with religion, nor does he consider religion to be an authentic category of truth.[11] He unequivocally declares the resurrection to be a fable, even though he recognises its importance for Paul as the founding event that gives birth to Christian subjects and consequently a Christian community.[12] Rather than truth as such, then, Badiou finds in his reading of Paul a new *conception* of truth. To this conception of truth Badiou applies four cardinal points, not ostensibly as a validation of the Christian experience, but as a means of theorising the subject more broadly, Pauline Christianity taken up as a kind of generic paradigm.[13] First, the subject called into being by the truth-event does not pre-exist that declared event; it is through and concurrent with the event that the subject appears. As he writes elsewhere, 'We might say that the process of truth *induces* a subject,' as if to say it actuates their birth.[14] Second, response to the call is an entirely subjective experience, a matter of conviction rather than law, rule, or tradition; it requires a necessarily singular declaration of faithfulness, inasmuch that it cannot be determined by any communitarian experience, nor limited to a common identity. Nevertheless, it brings the individual into the community of fellow-believers. Third, it is a process rather than a revelation, requiring ongoing fidelity to its truth as a constituent aspect of its realisation. Fourth, it is

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from philosophers not generally theologically inclined, and often aimed towards a political rather than theological agenda. Complementary to what some have identified as a 'pictorial turn' within theology has been what we could call a 'theological turn' within philosophy, in which Paul, above all, has emerged as an indispensible avatar, as if his epistles are not simply of continuing relevance today but are uniquely so within a contemporary cultural context, becoming a contentious site for a political rethinking of religion, or a religious rethinking of the political.

[11] Ibid: 1-2

[12] Ibid: 58

[13] Ibid: 14-15

[14] Badiou. 2001: 43 (emphasis in original)

indifferent to the situation in which it finds itself, undetermined by the world as it is. Underpinning each of the above is the universalism of Badiou's project, for whom Paul's gospel provides a foundational exemplar, as a condition of truth 'offered to all, or addressed to everyone, without a condition of belonging being able to limit this offer, or this address.'[15] On this last point, if for the Christian it is Badiou's unreligious reading of Paul that causes consternation, amongst secular philosophers also writing on Paul it is his universalism that provokes controversy (in the conclusion we will take up some of the issues raised by this latter debate).

At the heart of Badiou's philosophy is a distinction between *what there is* (the order of being) and *what happens* (the order of event). The latter takes place within the former through what he calls processes of truth, succinctly defined in his *Ethics* by the three dimensions of event, fidelity and truth. We will be looking more closely at each of these shortly but for the moment let's begin with the last: Badiou's deeply unfashionable penchant for truth. His philosophical schema, visible throughout his oeuvre, operates according to just four truth procedures, four conditions for philosophy: science, politics, art and love. Each of these disciplines or fields of discourse has its specified knowledges – its own language, traditions, history, practices and theory – which Badiou terms its 'encyclopedia.' The environment in which these instituted knowledges are operative as recognised fields of reference is their 'situation,' meaning the already existing world in which they have meaning. Badiou refers to a situation as a consistent multiplicity, meaning a set of conditions, whether political, scientific, amorous or artistic, within which an understanding of those conditions may be satisfactorily expressed. A situation may be a coherent political structure, a well-defined set of scientific laws, legitimate forms of sexuality, a canon of artistic works, even (pushing the bounds of Badiou's conditions a little) an adequate and persuasive theology. Within these established parameters something internal to the situation emerges, something with no proper place within it, making no sense within the recognised discourses of that situation. This is what Badiou calls an event. It is his term for something that bears no relation to whatever is assumed to belong, by common consent, to the recognised values, parameters or conditions of a situation as it is, yet is immanent to it, appearing as its unrecognised, illegible or supplementary aspect, thereby disrupting the balance of the situation within which it appears. If a situation is the order of possible opinions and instituted knowledge, and an event is that which is essentially unrepresentable in that situation,

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[15] Badiou. 2003b: 14

then it can be best understood as a rupture in the field of legibility; we simply do not know what to make of it. Nevertheless, this revolutionary and transformational moment exposes us to new eventualities and compels us, as noted above, to 'a *new* way of being.'[16] As theologian, John D. Caputo, explains:

> The event jolts the world, disturbs, disrupts, and skews the sedimented course of things, exposing the alternate possibilities that course their nomadic way through the normalised quotidian paths that things routinely follow.[17]

To speak in the Lacanian terms favoured by Žižek, event is the irruption of a traumatic Real, producing a disruptive kink in the subject's recognisable symbolic world. Badiou also speaks repeatedly of event as 'a passion for the real' but he prefers another comparable analogy, also taken from Lacan. Philosophy, he says, operates by a subtractive gesture. It makes holes in sense, interrupting the circulation of meaning, in an elision of recognisable representations in favour of unexpected encounters. Event is the name of these encounters:

> We might say that since a situation is composed by the knowledges circulating within it, the event names the void inasmuch as it names the not-known of the situation.[18]

Every situation is vulnerable to something that undermines its consistency – something inconstant – a void within the consistency that reveals that it is in fact less-than-all. Whilst a situation retains its apparent consistency this void remains out of sight, or better said, unavailable to sight. It is only with the appearance of an event that the unknown void becomes apparent. This void is the site of an event which, from the standpoint of knowledge, paradoxically appears as nothing, as an indiscernible incongruity in the situation, since it falls outside the epistemological structures that exist to give it meaning. An event is not nothing – it has reality, or truth – but it fails to be comprehensible. Peripheral, marginal or inferior, it is whatever belongs to, but is unrepresented in, a situation.[19] As such, it can only ever be recognised as an event retrospectively. Once recognised, however, an event reworks the encyclopedia of a situation, and ultimately its

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[16] Badiou. 2001: 41 (emphasis in original)

[17] Caputo. 2007b: 59

[18] Badiou. 2001: 69

[19] Corcoran, introduction to Badiou and Winter. 2006: xi, xii

assimilation recanonises knowledge, thereby forcing a need for future events to constantly put into question the limits of situated knowledge.[20]

The subject of the event

Within this process the role of the subject is crucial. An event always requires a singular, committed response to its call. This response is what Badiou calls fidelity and Simon Critchley describes as giving approval to a demand. Fidelity is the process of a sustained and ongoing dedication to whatever it is that the event brings about, 'the work that is done to *sustain* the break with the norms of a historical situation.'[21] As Žižek feels compelled to remind us time and again, it is vital that a decision of fidelity be made so that we are able to engage with art and not merely culture, with politics and not merely management, with faith and not merely religion, and so on; in other words, in order to sustain an encounter with the real rather than its 'decaffeinated' substitute. We could say that the moment of encounter initiates a process of truth, one maintained through faithfulness on the part of the subject awakened to its imperative demands. For that subject, as bearer of the process of truth, the situation has radically changed, since fidelity to the event requires that they 'relate henceforth to the situation *from the perspective of its evental supplement.*'[22] What is most revolutionary about a truth-process is the way it imposes a radical change on the logic governing a situation, at least from the subject's perspective, and therefore the change it has upon the world in which the subject finds him or herself.[23] This has exigent subjective implications. Through a rethinking of, or readjustment to, the situation according to the event or, otherwise put, the submitting of the situation to the disruptive force of an event, the subject is compelled 'to *invent* a new way of being and acting in the situation.'[24] It implies a positive commitment to the new

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[20] Badiou's subtractive gesture brings him surprisingly close to Deleuze and Guattari whose emphasis on resisting dogmatic images of thought produced the evocative figure of a screen of representations, in the form of a protective umbrella. This screen is periodically pierced by poets and artists, scientists and philosophers, in order 'to let in a bit of free and windy chaos and to frame in a sudden light a vision that appears through the rent' (Deleuze and Guattari. 1994: 202-204). It provides a vivid picture of the event and its aftermath, if faith is not kept with the original vision, for very quickly the rent is repaired with something vaguely resembling the vision, and held in place by the dissemination of clichéd opinions. Other visionaries are required to continually dissolve the calcified orthodoxies of image and idea.

[21] Santner in Žižek et al. 2005: 112 (emphasis in original)

[22] Badiou. 2001: 41 (emphasis in original)

[23] Hallward, in Badiou. 2001: xix.

[24] Badiou. 2001: 42 (emphasis in original)

perspective brought about by the event. This is what Badiou calls a truth-process, leading to the production of 'nonconformist thought,' hence a new subjectivity, the subject of the truth-process.[25] The subjectivity of the subject is in effect brought into being by the encounter which, through fidelity to its truth, the subject strives to sustain. (It is important to note that this is not necessarily an individual subject; the subject of an amorous encounter may be two lovers; the subject of a political truth may be a group or, more pertinent to our discussion, a liturgical or sacramental subject may be inaugurated through a collective response to a work of art, and so on. If the subject can be a collective, a group or plurality of individuals, then the production of subjectivities in the event goes further than summoning individuals to its call but may include some sense of communal response[26]). Badiou's primary interest in Paul is this connection between subject and event, inasmuch that the consequences of a religious-ethical event in Paul's epistles reflect upon the socio-political-ethical events closer to Badiou's own political commitments. Moreover, the particular value of the Christ event for Badiou, and hence his interest in Paul, one of the key faithful, is its non-demonstrable nature in the order of being. Only in the order of event can it have any meaning. The event thus necessitates an act of belief (or to be more accurate, an act of faith: praxis not doxa), an act that Paul compares to folly, as irrational and counter-intuitive as the demands made by Jesus upon his followers (see Matthew 5:43-8).[27]

Since an event takes place as something unrecognisable according to the discernment made possible by the situation as it stands, its occurrence is only guaranteed or safeguarded by those who affirm it, who name it as such.[28] Finally, then, the truth of an event must be named in order to find its place within a reworked or expanded situation. Truth, as a truth-event, is a kind of residual trace of the evental subtraction or supplement, sustained and constituted through fidelity, and given validation and recognition through naming, which marks an event's assimilation into some form of recognisable discourse. If an event produces an unexpected encounter, it is one that passes as quickly as it appears. Nonetheless, its evanescence is compensated for by the force of its appearing, whose effects continue to be felt long after the event itself has

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[25] Badiou. 2003b: 110

[26] Critchley. 2007: 44

[27] Critchley. 2000: 19

[28] Hallward. 2005: 18

disappeared.[29] It leaves its mark and thereby initiates a process of truth. It is through these marks or traces that a rapprochement becomes possible between an event and the situation in which it appears. Equally, it is at this stage that an event is endangered or betrayed, and that the question of true and false events arises. In a dramatic sense, if event is Saul struck blind and thrown from his horse by a sudden vision of Christ on the way to Damascus, truth is the faith (or fidelity) to that vision that, from that point onwards, determines his subjectivity as Paul, an apostle of Christ. But in the movement from an evental Christianity to a situated ecclesiastical Christendom the event of truth risks falling into creed, dogma and tradition. Paul becomes Saint Paul. Christianity seems to exemplify this danger, mutating from a truth outside the situation of its time to become the established orthodox position. By irrevocably altering the parameters of the situation it becomes, in three centuries, the dominant discourse around which the situation is itself structured.

Approving the art event

Fidelity to an artistic act demands a similarly engaged response; art's demands are meaningless without the viewer's engaged approval. This can be difficult to act upon since the museum has taught us to have a relatively passive attitude towards art through disinterested admiration. Yve Lomax's creative description of the aftermath of an event goes some way to explaining the relationship of fidelity to event in terms of the demands it makes upon a subject. An essential aspect of the event as a procedure of truth is that, for those who affirm its truth, it becomes impossible to carry on as before. It is worth citing her at length:

> You're a mortal individual pursuing your ordinary interests and then by chance something happens to you. It seizes you and in that moment, which is nothing but truth's undoing of time, you let the not-known, the incalculable, seize you. Astonished? Perhaps. Perhaps inexplicable tears. What can you say? However, what you can say – what [Badiou] says – is that you are being seized and punctured (his word) by something in excess of your ordinary living situation. It could be an amorous encounter. It could be something in a photographic image that is nonspecifiable. It could be, as he says, the sudden feeling that this poem is addressed to you; or it could be, as again he says, a scientific theory whose initially obscure beauty overwhelms you. Perhaps it is over in a flash; nonetheless, you are seized and this means you cannot continue as if nothing has happened, as if nothing consequently will happen. And this is where – for the sake of those future consequences – a fidelity takes hold and bores through you. And this is

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[29] Badiou. 2010: 215

> where for you there is a 'piercing through.' And this piercing through is what calls us to become – for the sake of something new to happen – the subject of a truth-process.[30]

Events for Badiou are periodic, exceptional and transforming. When Clemens and Feltham describe the Badiouian event as 'a name for that itch of unreason that stupefies thought, that forces thought to a standstill, demanding new forms of thinking which themselves cannot be resolved except at the cost of inconsistency' we must assume that event in their conception stands for a rare and momentous shift that, if followed, will inscribe itself into and utterly transform the 'encyclopedia' of its situation.[31] Lomax's description supports this sense of an out-of-the-ordinary experience, and we should therefore be cautious in presuming that event, in Badiou's terms, may be turned to an account of aesthetic experience per se. One risks hypostatising event into each and every artistic gesture of consequence. On the other hand, that this degree of creative invention is so rarely achieved takes nothing away from its imperative. Yet when Badiou writes of an 'artistic truth' or what elsewhere he calls an 'affirmative art' he often does so in terms which imply a less rarefied experience, albeit one that undermines expectations or overturns conventions. 'The sole task of an exclusively affirmative art,' says Hallward, in his exemplary monograph on Badiou, 'is the effort to render visible all that which, from the perspective of the establishment, is invisible or nonexistent.'[32] This is not the 'making visible the invisible' so commonly attributed to spiritual or religious art, although it certainly does not dismiss it. The 'invisible or nonexistent' asserts rather the unrecognisable, unthought or unrepresentable possibilities in any given situation. Badiou has something like the avant-gardist production of the new in mind, whereby exceptional breaks and entirely unforeseen configurations mark the emergence of a new artistic consistency (to stick with Badiou's terminology). This is no valorisation of novelty per se; indeed, is entirely opposed to such a thought. We must not make the mistake of supposing an event to be just anything that appears to be new, every unprecedented occurrence that requires some degree of commitment to sustain it. Rather, art's evental truth, if such it has, will be evident in the subjects who, as a consequence of an encounter with that art, act in fidelity to this unexpected something that has interrupted and transformed their situation so significantly. Ultimately, fidelity to this event operates

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[30] Lomax. 2005: 179

[31] Clemens and Feltham. 2010: 19

[32] Hallward. 2003: 195

upon the situation itself, extending its potential, shifting its parameters, realigning its functioning inasmuch that it incorporates the consequences of that evental truth.

Although we should be circumspect in our application of event to the subject of our inquiry, cast in such terms a greater parity between an artistic encounter and a reframing of a subject's ecclesiastical context seems viable. It is clearly not the case that every art event is an event in Badiou's terms, but experience tells us that many installations and commissions of the past twenty years have significantly altered the parameters for ecclesiastical art, in a way that can be framed within evental processes. In each and every case, for those convinced of the truth, or perhaps better said, the integrity of the work, the utmost need for fidelity to its truth-process, to the rethinking of artistic possibility it inaugurates, has marked the subjects of the work. The art event always requires fidelity to *its* truth, and it is here that we find striking parallels between the art event within a church and the Badiouian event, when viewed through the lens of Badiou's Paul. Fidelity to the work of art requires fidelity to the work from those who encounter it, fidelity to the demands of the work, especially if it requires an actual response, and fidelity to the work from the ecclesiastical institution in the way it incorporates it into its worship and into its space. This is especially the case when art is fragile, ephemeral, or contingent. An art ignored or taken-for-granted may be ineffectual, but an ephemeral art that is ignored simply disappears. Ultimately, fidelity becomes a mode of doing justice to art, rather than fixing a law of art, that such and such is acceptable and such and such is not, an institutional responsibility all too often abnegated through the demands of other commitments, through public pressure or bad faith towards the requirements of the work of art. A striking example of this necessity was offered by a performance at Wallspace, All Hallows Church, in 2008 by Marcus Coates (figure 65). In order to clarify the nature of fidelity a brief explanation of this particular event may be useful.

Becoming-animal

Coates uses ritual performance to interrogate the boundaries of the human by experimenting with 'being' an animal, entering into and travelling through a spirit world of birds and beasts in order to seek answers to serious questions.[33] Adopting a shamanic role the artist becomes both a traveller and translator between alien worlds (human, animal, bird), undertaking shamanic rituals on behalf of an attendant audience, often

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[33] Bourriaud. 2009b

composed of representatives of a particular community. These 'shamanistic' journeys are made for the benefit of the audience, to answer questions asked by individuals present, questions that he insists must be of significant personal concern to the questioner.[34] His intention is to question our perceptions of being human through imagined non-human realities, seeking access to forms of knowledge outside the realms of the human. He describes it as a way of inhabiting the animal, or put in Deleuzian terms, a process of becoming-animal. It is a process that is both performative but also informative, a form of imagination or visualisation. In *Pastoral Spirit* he was assisted by a live choir mimicking a range of animal calls and bird songs, prompted by Coates's own trance-like state in which he mimics the sounds of the birds or animals he visualises. As if filling the shoes of the priest, following each ritual phase, undertaken in search of an answer to a single question, Coates went up into the pulpit and delivered his response. Although he gave an answer of sorts to the question asked, he tended to describe rather than decipher what he had seen, apparently aware of the dangers of moving from encounter to signification, of the potentially corrupting interpretative power bestowed upon the artist by the audience. Simply put, he offered descriptions of journeys made.

These shamanic rituals are precisely a process and not a work, with no guaranteed outcomes. It is performance as a performative, whereby the work of art cannot be said to pre-exist the event. This, one could argue, is the nature of all performance, its uncertain dynamic of artist and audience, but with Coates one feels a greater element of risk is at stake. It is highly reliant upon audience participation in the event, audience complicity in the premises of the event and audience receptivity to the event. One can believe or not in this power but one must at least be faithful to the event itself, to give oneself to its peculiar logic as it unfolds. Following the exit of a sizeable section of the audience after the first ritual performance, those who remained to see the piece through displayed an apparent dedication to, and complicity in, the process through the serious attention they gave to it. In an interview recorded shortly afterwards, the curator, the artist himself and a member of his choir all commented upon the rapt engagement of the audience that remained.[35] It was also agreed that, although a pre-

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[34] In *Journey to the Lower World* (2005), for example, he performed before a cross-section of residents of a Liverpool tower block scheduled for demolition, while in *The Plover's Wing* (2008) his audience was a representative figure of another embattled community: the Mayor of Holon, Israel, and his interpreter. In the former a particular community asked one single question germane to their situation, whilst in the latter a single prominent figure asked a question relating to, and on behalf of, the community for which he was responsible.

[35] Lightman. 2008

Christian or non-Christian form of priestly mediation, in Wallspace these shamanic performances felt consistent with the usual life of the space.

Coates actualises a virtual world, a world inaccessible to his audience, a world different in kind to that with which they are familiar. But through the ritual process he allows that other alien world to impinge upon the world to which we are habituated. The crucial element is not only the production of something different but, as Simon O'Sullivan says, 'our encounter and *engagement* with this difference.'[36] Openness to this difference signals the audience's fidelity to the work. O'Sullivan is not, in actual fact, speaking of Coates. Nevertheless, in his discussion of what he calls 'the production of the new,' we find a remarkable congruence with Coates's practice, as if his is the unspoken material practice behind O'Sullivan's thoughts. For example, he promotes an idea of the new that, rather than a recombination of existing matter, is 'a turning away from matter to a different realm (a realm that is different in kind) and a drawing on this source before returning to the world and allowing the journey to affect that world.'[37] This is the potential promised by Coates's performances, but it is also the case that, as O'Sullivan cautions, all such practices entail a degree of risk. The production of the new is all too easily subjugated to the production of the recognisably familiar or, as in Coates's case, the strangeness of the new simply leaves an audience alienated or perplexed, while the ever-present element of chance and uncertainty leaves the artist vulnerable to failure. These hazards may be compounded when brought into the church.

In the catalogue to *Journey to the Lower World*, an earlier ritual performance, questions of risk and faith come to the fore. An evident anxiety permeates the texts, as Coates himself admits, and his collaborator, Alec Finlay, and other interlocutors concur, beginning with an initial apprehension that his shamanism will be equated with charlatanism. This potential for mistrust, compounded by the ever-present risk of failure, threatens ultimately to undermine the performance through scepticism, where engagement is of the essence. Thus the irreducible difference of faith and belief is writ large in an event of this kind. Fidelity to the art event, fidelity to its premises and purpose, could be easily misconstrued as a belief in Coates's ability to communicate with bird and animal spirit worlds. But this is entirely beside the point. It is not belief that is required but faithfulness to the event, as JJ Charlesworth makes clear, writing about the source of this fidelity:

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[36] O'Sullivan. 2008: 99 (emphasis in original)

[37] Ibid: 92

> Was Marcus having them all on? He does believe it all really happened. Or at least he says he believes. If it did happen then it can only have been through an act of faith. Whose faith? Not the conviction of the shaman who knows that he is communing with animals, but the faith of his audience, the people who must believe in him to make it real.[38]

Writing in the same catalogue, Mark Wallinger assumes that no-one seriously believes in the event, and yet its plausibility is somehow unquestioned. Faith in the project, he concedes, 'doesn't reside…in the presence of actual shamanic powers, but rather in something credible and authentic that takes place between artist and audience.'[39] What we see in a ritual practice like Coates's is the Pauline 'as if' at work, the radical condition or perspective of the early church in its interim state. One shows fidelity 'as if' he indeed has this ability, and by this commitment the answers given seem less indebted to the artist's imagination and more to the possibilities evinced by this encounter with a non-human world of animals and birds. One could argue that the event is directed towards the formation or production of subjectivities; an endeavour to escape the capture of recognisably human subjectivities through an exposure to other virtual worlds. Even the question and answer format is not, in the end, orientated towards the production of knowledge, but rather, towards the production of other registers, modes or conditions usually closed to us. In this sense the subjectivities that emerge, on the part of artist and audience, are as much informed by non-knowledge, absurdity or otherness as they are by answers to questions. What does Coates communicate and what does the audience receive other than some kind of evental consistency contrary to habitual expectations of both artistic practice and ecclesiastical contexts? In the case of Coates I am tempted to follow Žižek's political analyses and perceive his performances as moments of truth that disregard normal standards of 'knowledge' in their demand for engagement over understanding:

> [T]ruth, as opposed to knowledge, is, like a Badiouian Event, something that only an engaged gaze, the gaze of a subject who 'believes in it,' is able to see. […] [T]here can be no Event for a non-engaged objective observer.[40]

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[38] Collingsworth, in Coates. 2005

[39] Wallinger, in ibid.

[40] Žižek. 2010: xiv

Knowledge, understanding, objectivity, all are barriers to the performative experience. One must take a risk and engage in the event, be faithful to it, have faith in it, even if it fails. And this, in itself, risky procedure, could be adopted as the basis for all projects, at least all those that do not attempt to eliminate the possibility of failure and go for 'the least bad option.'[41] In this respect, All Hallows Church may be one of the few following in the footsteps of Mennekes's *Kunst-Station*, in which the production of the new (encounter) rather than the representation, or reproduction, of the familiar (recognition) is at stake. This agenda is indubitably enhanced by the inclusion of someone like Coates, whose rituals produce, as a recent essay in *Art Monthly* affirms, 'a form of social engagement which manages to be both bizarrely ridiculous yet poignant.'[42] Its 'sheer atavistic ridiculousness,' its 'remnant of exoticism,' all add up to 'a source of estrangement and disorientation,' as well as fascination and delight.[43] We could even go so far as to propose that Coates is dealing with a particular register of the sacred: a shamanic sacré gauche that sits uneasily with the more familiar sacred rituals of the church, doyen of a sacré droit.

The nature of the demand made upon us by a work like *Pastoral Spirit* is what Critchley calls faith as an 'infinitely demanding' process in that, '[o]ne is true to a demand insofar as one persists in being faithful to its summons.'[44] Thus we might conclude that through fidelity to this work a certain form or aspect of subjectivity was constituted by the work of art. Nevertheless, this conclusion might strike some as presumptuous. Can we really be so bold as to assume that an event, in the sense that Badiou gives to the term, was at work in this performance, a concept that, for Badiou, is strictly associated with the inauguration of truth? We would argue that there is, in fact, a striking correlation between the Badiouian event and an art event like Coates's. *Pastoral Spirit* engages in a form of artistic experience that touches upon a previously-mentioned element of Badiou's concept of event that is not only fundamental to that concept but equally so to the majority of the artworks under discussion in this thesis: the situated void. Sticking with Badiou's terminology, in an ecclesiastical milieu art can uphold and sustain the unity of an encyclopedia of situated knowledge, what Badiou calls the state of a situation (which incorporates whatever can be named or counted as belonging to it). Alternatively,

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[41] Ibid: xv

[42] Smith. 2010: 14

[43] Ibid.

[44] Critchley. 2007: 43.

it can plumb the unknown for its resources, meaning art can operate out of the void of a situation and its knowledges. If working within the situation implies an art of orthodoxy, of patronage, traditions and conventions, from which, it must be said, truly remarkable art and architecture has been achieved, the situated void refers to whatever remains, from the perspective of the church and church-goers, illegible within ecclesiological parameters: whatever seems foreign to the situation, whatever cannot be encompassed within it, whatever fails to be recognised, counted as belonging, or named within it, and yet appears from or forces an opening within it.[45] Such openings are what Badiou deems truths, from which appear the subjects orientated by and faithful to those truths. By Badiou's reckoning truth always exceeds the knowledge of a situation, and this is no less true of a Christian or ecclesiastical situation. However, the preference for orthodoxy, tradition and the familiar can often obscure this fact, delimiting experience, as David Brockman has observed: 'So long as Christians operate solely within the Christian situation, what they can "know" is limited to the elements collected therein.'[46] But, as might be argued for Christianity, its truth cannot be limited to those elements. Indeed, it is the not-known that appears to be of greatest significance, as that which gives shape to the known. Is it not the case that for many contemporary artists producing work for the church a desire for a kind of evental truth has displaced the reproduction of familiar religious themes, even if is far from clear how the former may be achieved? In this sense, art is always an excursion into unknown territory. It is exploratory, experimental and, at least potentially, revolutionary. In Badiou's schema art is one of the privileged sites of approach to the edge of the void, although, by the logic of his philosophy, it offers immanent not transcendent truths, 'a realisation of what was always-already there.'[47] Yet even for someone committed to the reality of transcendent truth the possibilities of Badiou's philosophy of the void holds. If Christianity mediates a relationship with the divine what it cannot include except as its void is any immediate (unmediated) experience of the divine. If it is revealed at all, it is through the elimination or suspension of the mediate. Thus when Rothko alleges that it is not his self but his 'not-self' that he expresses in his painting, he indicates the void in himself as that which constitutes his self, and thus makes a surprisingly Badiouian claim.[48] Equally, we find crossovers here

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[45] Ingram. 2005: 565

[46] Brockman. 2010: 304

[47] Ibid: 307

with practitioners of participatory works who 'talk of creating "blank spaces" and "holes" in the face of an over-organised and bureaucratic society, and of being "mediators" between groups of people who normally don't have contact with one another.'[49] The value of art as a means of mediating human relationships must be fairly obvious for church-based projects.

Badiou does not shy from introducing so unfashionable a term as truth into his ideas (along with his equally outmoded propensity for 'discredited "metaphysical" concepts' such as ontology, love, universal emancipatory politics and the subject[50]), including the realm of art as one of the four principal foci for a truth procedure. He adds weight to the idea that art generates its own truth or access to truth, an idea often employed in support of art in churches. Badiou's contention is that truths are specific to particular conditions, the inference being that art offers a singular access to meaning or experience, irreducible to other realms of truth. Art is a singularity, meaning the truth peculiar to art may be found nowhere else than in and through art. The question that one might ask would then be what constitutes the singularity of a particular artistic truth procedure? In *Handbook of Inaesthetics* Badiou outlines his schema.[51] He aligns artistic truth with, firstly, whatever 'subtracts itself' from any identification with 'established forms of knowledge.' Secondly, an artistic truth is not a single work but whatever institutes a series or 'singular multiple of works,' but crucially one which breaks with previous artistic forms. Within this series a particular work of art is simply the local instance of a truth procedure. Badiou calls this 'singular multiple' an artistic configuration, 'an identifiable sequence, initiated by an event, comprising a virtually infinite complex of works.' Finally, an artistic event is recognised *as* an event only retrospectively, through the artistic configurations that it has initiated, that is, when it is given a name. Not a particular art form, genre, artistic period or movement, but something like the break from figuration or the appearance of the readymade, which gives birth to a sequence of works generated by the truth of an evental moment in art. Ultimately, Badiou makes the claim that it is not the work nor the author that constitutes an artistic truth but the artistic configuration

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[48] Eynatten et al. 2007: 56. This notion of the void draws attention to a thorny problem which has frequently troubled critics of secularisation – the idea that it results in a God-shaped hole – for which Badiou's philosophy provides an incisively perceptive answer. Space does not allow us to elucidate further but see appendix 9 for some thoughts on this issue.

[49] Bishop. 2006: 180

[50] Noys. 2003: 123

[51] Badiou. 2005a: 10-13

produced by an eventual rupture.[52] Clearly this precludes the misconception that any singular work constitutes an event. Rather, it is that periodically new configurations appear which radically alter the landscape and language of their context, perhaps beginning with a particular work or occasion but by no means limited to it, to produce a new constellation of possibilities. With hindsight these eventual moments come to be seen as pivotal, but from the perspective of the consequences they set in motion. A classic example might be Duchamp's *Fountain*. What makes it an event is not the work itself, which in fact disappeared soon after it was photographed, but the consequences that ensue from its arrival in the realm of art. The urinal could have been greeted as a novel take on sculptural form; instead it militated against every existing criterion of art. It is the debate (which is still going on) which is of far more importance than the object, the fact that what appeared at the time as an anomaly without a name gave birth to an entirely novel perspective on the constitution of a work of art. Can we give a name to some of these moments in the aesthetic life of the church? Tentatively we would propose the following candidates: Assy, St. Matthew's, *The Messenger* at Durham, *The White Mass*, perhaps even Wallspace (although it may still be too early to say what its long-term impact will be). Fidelity to the ongoing repercussions of these inaugural moments does not consist in re-enacting them ad infinitum but remaining faithful to their original vision, open to other untried possibilities that they have enabled, returning to their original vision not in order to repeat but in order to sweep away the clichés that threaten to clog the screen through which that original vision appeared.

Miracles do happen!

Badiou's concept of event is, in many respects, analogous to Turner's concept of the ritual process in that it follows a three-pronged path of interruption, separation or rupture (within the field of knowledge and/or societal structure out of which it emerges), followed by a liminal period between past and future states (production of subjectivities, marked by fidelity), and culminating in its assimilation (into knowledge or structure via naming) as a truth-event. We have perhaps been rather complacent in alternating between event and truth-event, as if they refer to the same thing. In fact, there is an important distinction to be made between them. To take a relevant example, the primary Christian event (Žižek repeatedly plumps for the crucifixion, Badiou for the resurrection)

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becomes a truth-event when it leads to the constitution of a community of believers, singularly and collectively faithful to that event. Just what kind of community that is will be subject to few if any guarantees. Žižek's belief is that the event of truth may take several paths. Thus there is an important difference between the event itself and its consequences, which in ecclesiological terms transmutes a dramatic encounter with the Real (Žižek has Paul's conversion in mind) into its incorporation as Christian doctrine.[53] The event itself provides the initial encounter, but the event is destined to disappear almost as soon as it appears; what remains are the traces of its appearance and its subjects, concretised through naming, and perpetuated through fidelity or, as Badiou says elsewhere, a declaration of love.[54] For Paul, the Damascus event, an encounter with the risen Christ as an act of divine grace, is over as quickly as it appears, but it marks him bodily with sudden blindness and spiritually with the revealed truth of the resurrection, to which he and future believers will testify by their fidelity to it. If it is the event that produces the Christian subject, it is its naming through a declaration of love, that is, fidelity, that constitutes the emergent community. Fidelity is both the ethical-practical labour of the subject, their perseverance in a process of truth, but also the consequential shaping of subjectivity, both singly and communally, in accord with the demands of that truth. Nomination of the truth-event is what allows a movement from singular experience to collective, or even universal, experience (as many would claim a propos of Paul). Naming inevitably actualises ephemeral experience. This is not to be lamented, since every event reworks the situation to which it belongs; it renames the terms by which it is understood in order to articulate its own truth and sustain its continuity. To do so, at some stage the radical choice or decision made by a subject becomes formalised.

From the interruption or rupture of event, then, to the fidelity of the subject who gives assent to its demands, we arrive at the marks or signs of that fidelity. How can we differentiate between an event and its consequences, between the evental irruption of the unnameable encounter and its eventual reincorporation into the known and nameable? Alongside the recurrent theme or condition of faithfulness to an event there arises the tricky question of nomination and signification. By what name and by what signs can this fidelity be recognised? In many ways this is what is at stake in the birth of the Christian church itself. As Jacob Taubes stresses in his late work on Paul's theology of the polis, in

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[53] Žižek. 1999: 141

[54] Badiou. 2008: 188

the epistles we see a moment prior to a turning point after which a recognisable community with a definite identity emerges. The criteria that govern notions of what makes a congregation are yet to be established and are often contentious. Indeed, even the nominative term 'Christian,' does not yet exist for Paul, in whose world what is Jewish and what is Christian has yet to be decided.[55] At this stage in its life the Pauline *ekklesia*, not yet established, not yet legitimised, is built upon its fidelity to the miraculous event of the resurrection, yet this new discourse remains without nomination within the recognised discourses of its time. It cannot be named and cannot be assigned a definitive identity. In the church's historical shift from these early ekklesial assemblies to its formation as ecclesiastical, concretised in Constantine's adoption of Christianity as the official religion of the empire, what is at stake for many is the disparity between the radical revolutionary potential of what we could call the Christ-event and the institutionalisation and orthodoxy of the established church.

This is, in many respects, the crux of the Badiouian event. In his schema, politics, science, art and love are not truths but truth procedures; they are the way to truths. The danger then lies in how this procedure proceeds and herein lies the potential failure of an event, since in the realm of truth one always runs the risk of falsehood. Badiou outlines three particular risks to be avoided: simulacrum, betrayal and disaster, namely whatever betrays truth, masquerades as truth or totalises truth, thereby precluding all possibility of future events. Accompanying every event, therefore, is the necessity for discernment against simulacra of truth, perseverance against the compromise or betrayal of truth, and diligence against disaster, the temptation to enforce that truth wholesale upon everything.[56] We can see this at work in the avant-garde object which at first finds no place within the art scene in which it appears. Yet before long what begins by being unrecognisable as art ends up canonised within mainstream culture. Duchamp's *Fountain* was recently appraised in this manner, voted the most influential artistic creation of the twentieth century. Though at first vilified and excluded from the art world, it eventually became entirely assimilated into it and even heralded as a great artistic achievement. Yet, as is well-known, its initial appearance caused nothing but bafflement, consternation and embarrassment. By leading to a new orthodoxy, the art historical genre of the readymade, the readymade suffers a form of betrayal; via the repetitions of appropriation art it leads to a kind of failure. The same may be said of many of the modern works of art

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[55] Taubes. 2004: 21

[56] Ingram. 2005: 566

introduced into the church in the last century, which met with considerable opposition before being accepted, and finally praised, as valued additions to their respective religious spaces. In each case their appropriation into a recognisable discourse of contemporary art for the church is accompanied by the concomitant risk of betrayal. In ecclesiological terms, faith as an enunciation of fidelity is reduced to dogma, codification, law or tradition, the implication being that if a point of naming institutes a truth it must do so within a notion of religion as *relegere*, a return to a new choice, if it is to avoid the closed institutionalisation of religion implied in its alternate derivation as *religare*.

Badiou stands apart from many of his contemporaries in proclaiming the very possibility of a truth-event. Where a standard 'postmodern deconstructionist' position advocates the failed encounter, the encounter 'to-come,' where truth remains an always-deferred moment, Badiou works with the proposition that 'miracles do happen!'[57] Nevertheless, there are no guarantees. If deconstructive thinking retains an element of the undecidable in every decision, this is also true of Badiou's miracle, reliant as it is upon a discourse 'of pure fidelity to the possibility opened by the event.'[58] Its truth is discernible, says Žižek, 'only for the potential members of the new Community of "believers," for their engaged gaze,' without which, as he claims elsewhere, there can be no event.[59] The resurrection event is one such truth, necessarily immanent to the community of believers and a stumbling block (*skandalon*) or foolishness (*gaucherie*) to those who remain outside the influence of its truth. To that end, an interesting parallel has sometimes been drawn between the precarious outsider status of the early church and a form of communality, produced via ritual processes, called 'communitas.'[60] The readings of Paul from both Taubes and Badiou would seem to support such a view. Taubes highlights the fact that, at this early stage in its life, the composition of this nascent community of believers is in what Victor Turner would call a liminal phase, separated and distanced from normative social structures, whether Judaic or pagan, yet maintaining a sense of its own contingency, with no view to becoming established in the long-term. The time-frame of its messianic hope is perceived to be brief, hastening towards an impending event: Christ's return. It is always, therefore, in a state of impermanence, even abeyance, as an as-yet-unlegitimised third discourse between Jewish

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[57] Žižek. 1999: 135

[58] Badiou. 2003b: 45

[59] Žižek. 1999: 140; Žižek. 2010: xiv

[60] See Meeks. 2003

and Gentile worlds or, as Badiou has it, between two subjective positions.[61] What Badiou discerns in Paul's epistles is a message of truth whose address exceeds all differences without rescinding them, hence the universalism central to his project.[62] Perhaps what is most significant about the nomination of a truth-event in Christian terms is its disavowal of all recognisable traits (according to the standards of the world) in the affirmation of a community, an indifference towards differences based on Galatians 3:28. Instead of the distinct ethnos of Judaism, Christianity posits a community of believers faithful to the Christ-event in which all ethnic divisions are suspended.[63] Differences may persist but they no longer count. With Christ's return an ever-present expectation they are simply unimportant, accepted as a part of the social structures of a world whose impending disappearance is eagerly anticipated. But it may also be taken to be indicative of forms of grouping or community whose identity escapes the usual predicates upon which temporary or permanent communities are established. Neither belonging to a particular community, nor the signs of that belonging, nor the site of that belonging, have any bearing upon a community based upon event, whose categories of belonging, signs of belonging, and site in which that belonging is expressed are necessarily uncertain and contingent.[64] Finally, Paul's own graphic description of the church as an illicit, subterranean community whose members are 'the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world' (1 Corinthians 4: 13) draws an even closer likeness to communitas, a calling above all distinguished by 'folly, scandal, and weakness.'[65]

Liminality and Communitas

In the constitution of subjectivities a conceptual line can be traced joining a Pauline 'left-handed' discourse of folly, scandal and weakness to Turner's concept of communitas as a figure or condition of community in which *liminality* (in-between), *marginality* (at the edges) and *inferiority* (unvalued, excluded) are characteristic elements. Together they form the common features of Turner's description of the ritual process in its liminal phase, since all those who participate in this liminality fall in the interstices of social structure, all

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[61] Badiou. 2003b: 41

[62] Miller. 2005: 38

[63] Žižek. 2003: 130

[64] Badiou. 2003b: 4

[65] Ibid: 47

are on its margins, and all occupy its lowest rungs.[66] The community as communitas that results, albeit temporarily, exhibits a transgressive quality that is at the same time sacred and powerful:

> It is almost everywhere held to be sacred or 'holy,' possibly because it transgresses or dissolves the norms that govern structured and institutionalised relationships and is accompanied by experiences of unprecedented potency.[67]

As opposed to conventional social structures Turner suggests that communitas produces a particular modality of social relationship engendered by the shared experience and set apartness of the initiates. For Turner this communitas has no specific territorial or spatial location; rather, it emerges where the normative social structures of everyday life have been rescinded, expressly for the purpose of some ritual process.

Clearly Turner has very specific circumstances in mind which should caution us against making glib comparisons between these communities and those of our discussion. Nevertheless, I believe the principle of communitas may be extended to encompass other less obvious groupings who appear 'betwixt and between' (to use Turner's favoured term) everyday social structures,[68] as in his later work does Turner himself. In simple terms communitas is, we might say, an epiphenomenon of liminality, and as such is a community that *happens* rather than a community that *is*, one which has meaning *only while it is together*. It operates, Turner surmises, in the subjunctive mode, and is thus best expressed as potentiality.[69] As such it is equally subject to what Agamben names impotentiality, that is, the potential *not* to happen. If in 'tribal' societies liminality provides a setting for intersubjective relationships outside normative social structures, in industrial societies Turner identifies art, sport, or theatre (but not religion) as the milieux in which different ways of socialising or 'experiencing one's fellows' may sometimes be realised.[70] Where a creative social bond is instigated through spontaneous social solidarity, then a form of communitas comes into being. Yet the spontaneity of this evanescent moment cannot be long sustained without the communitas instituting its own set of social

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[66] Turner. 1969: 125

[67] Ibid: 128

[68] Turner. 1980: 95

[69] Turner. 1969: 127

[70] Turner. 1982: 46

structures and consequently subordinating the singular spontaneity to a rule: at such times, says Turner, spontaneity is subordinated to norm-governed relations.[71]

Turner identifies three categories of communitas: spontaneous, ideological and normative.[72] The first denotes 'direct, immediate, and total confrontations of human identities' as an unmediated and unpremeditated manner of being together or an absorption into 'a single synchronised, fluid event.' The second is a set of theoretical concepts that attempt to understand or describe the interactions of spontaneous communitas. It is a retrospective memory of the communal event rather than the actual event itself. The third marks an attempt to maintain a more or less permanent state of communitas, but can only do so by denaturing itself since, as Turner notes in suitably theological terms, 'spontaneous communitas is more a matter of "grace" than "law"... it cannot be legislated for or normalised, since it is the *exception*, not the *law*, the *miracle*, not the *regularity*…'[73] Normative communitas, it could be argued, militates against the very notion of communitas itself. The original impulse of an exceptional and contingent gathering gives way to a desire to prolong its effects, to ensure its survival in the face of its perceived vulnerability, achieved through its institutionalisation or adherence to larger social structures. Here we find a remarkable congruence with the Badiouian event which operates according to these three conditions of spontaneity (evental interruption), the ideological (fidelity to the emergent phenomenon) and the normative (naming). The persistent threat to expressions of communitas is that antistructural spontaneity will be lost to overly-prescriptive ideological structure or institutionalised by normative structure. Putting aside for the moment this perpetual difficulty, reminiscent of the delicate transitivity between event and truth-event, let us concentrate on the processes by which communitas is achieved.

Turner's elucidation of the social phenomenon that he calls communitas rests upon an earlier formulation by Arnold van Gennep concerning rites of passage or transitions of place, state, social position or age. All such transitional processes, claims van Gennep, are marked by three phases: separation, transition and aggregation or incorporation. The first phase signifies the separation of an individual or group, either from a particular place within the social structure (childhood, for example), or from particular cultural conditions, or both. In the third phase the subject is reincorporated

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[71] Ibid: 47

[72] Ibid: 47-50

[73] Ibid: 49 (emphasis in original)

into the community or into some clearly defined structure, albeit with an altered status or condition. It is the intervening period, however, that is of primary interest to us. Sometimes referred to as the *limen* or threshold, it represents a kind of non-place between states, and the 'liminal personae,' or 'threshold people' who populate it, as Turner calls them, are the subjects of this non-place of exception and ambiguity.[74] For those caught up in the ritual process their place within a recognised societal or cultural framework becomes uncertain and ambiguous, having few of the attributes of either the preceding or subsequent social states. Communitas is the name that Turner gives to the 'community' that emerges during these periods. It is, if you like, a state of exception in which normal structures no longer apply. A significant aspect of the liminal or transition phase, certainly within 'tribal' societies, is the nature of the separation it demands from the rest of society, effectively producing a 'liminal' subject. On the one hand, the initiate is excluded, perhaps feared or reviled, certainly abased; on the other hand, his or her status and/or state becomes uncertain (ill-defined), inverted (redefined), or effaced (undefined).[75] In this state, language is suppressed (because it is associated with normal social interaction) and other non-verbal forms of expression encouraged, such as dancing, painting, making masks, that is, art (particularly an art associated with the religious figures of their society: healers and witch-doctors habitually described as 'liminaries'), typically in playful or subversive ways. Familiar elements of structured society are subverted or defamiliarised, or used to produce odd conjunctions, out of which novelty emerges.[76] In this sense liminality operates as a kind of virtual space in which to upset the bounded and stable equilibrium of normative social structures and test out potential alternatives. For Turner, it is this potential to recombine or reconstitute the patterns of a familiar order that constitutes the essence of liminality *par excellence*, as opposed to seeing in liminality an internal logic or definite symbolism at work.[77] It is its ludic or creative, and necessarily contingent indefinability that marks out its exceptional

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[74] Turner. 1969: 95. According to the particular rite enacted, van Gennep noted that one of the three stages tended to predominate. In funeral ceremonies, for example, it is the rites of separation whereas in marriage ceremonies more weight is given to the rites of incorporation. In initiation rites it is the period of transition that plays the greater role. Such socio-cultural passages are typically accompanied by spatial or geographical passage from one place to another, from 'a mere opening of doors' to 'the literal crossing of a threshold separating two distinct areas, one associated with the subject's pre-ritual or preliminal status, and the other with his post-ritual or postliminal status' (Turner, 1982, p. 25). This is something clearly operative within ecclesiastical rites and was also used to good effect in Ono's installation in St. Paul's Cathedral.

[75] Turner. 1982: 26

[76] Ibid: 27

[77] Ibid: 28

status and role. In Turner's conception it is this proactively creative aspect that is most noticeable in the ethnological translation from a purely 'tribal' milieu to his own, more familiar, culture. Liminality, says Ashley, is 'pre-eminently the time when ritual impels action and "art" becomes important.'[78] If artistic creativity is a natural consequence of liminal processes, amongst those temporarily subject to a state 'of unmediated and egalitarian association,'[79] in other cultural milieux more typically it is art itself that mediates the experience. That, at least, is the claim often made.

It must by now be clear why liminality and communitas, along with event, are such useful categories for the conditions of possibility for art, especially within religious contexts. The somewhat elusive concept of liminality (which has enjoyed a period of resurgence within theories of art since the 1980s), in particular continues to be invoked as a viable descriptor for church-based art projects. As recently as 2009 it formed the conceptual framework for an exhibition of sculpture in Salisbury Cathedral. Turner describes artists as liminal and marginal 'edgemen' who strive to rid themselves of clichés, and to enter into vital relations with others.[80] Even if this presents us with a somewhat romanticised view of the artist as a mystic outsider, rarely upheld today, the avoidance of cliché is exactly what many artists, working within, or invited into the church strive to achieve, alongside an awareness of the potential social interaction which certain new media or forms enable. In this respect, the artistic practice of someone like Marcus Coates might simply be the more visibly obvious example of a general tendency. Art in the subjunctive mode, unspecified and uncertain, is an evocative way to think of its potential for unsettling traditions, for playing within the margins, and slipping between categories. At the same time, the delicate question of maintaining communitas is fairly obvious. The creative and subversive potential of liminality, whether we are speaking of religious ritual or art, is forever in danger of being compromised by the introduction of new structures and new patterns, which may ultimately rigidify into normative structural systems. Any study of liminal phases of major rituals, says Turner, soon reveals the intrusion of 'implicit rules…which limit the possible combination of factors to certain conventional patterns, designs, or configurations' and hence 'the intrusion of normative social structure into what is potentially and in principle a free and experimental region of culture, a region where not only new elements but also new

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[78] Ashley. 1992: 3

[79] Eade and Sallnow. 1991: 4.

[80] Turner. 1969: 128

combinatory rules may be introduced.[81] In theological and cultic terms, of course, the church operates according to quite specific structures, creeds and practices. The rules governing the making and use of certain forms of religious art (I'm thinking particularly of icons) can also be highly structured. Generally speaking, however, we expect art to resist all such structural limitations; a demand that, in the history of modern art created for the church, has often brought it into direct conflict with the structured traditions and expectations of congregations and authorities.

We should be aware of the limits of this analogy, of course. Liminality and communitas, as Turner describes them, can only be co-opted so far in an attempt to rethink communities for art. At a certain point the analogy begins to unravel. It should not be forgotten, for example, that the anti-structure of 'tribal' liminality operates with a drive towards restoring structural equilibrium, the disorder of liminality a constitutive part of social order. Within 'tribal' rites of passage, liminal phases do not usually permanently subvert the existing societal structure, but rather temporarily invert it (as happens in the inversion of hierarchies in carnival). The chaos of anti-structure is introduced with a purpose but ultimately as a step toward the restoration or reaggregation of normative structural order. In ecclesiastical spaces there is clearly something of this dynamic at work too, but it is hoped that the artistic act also retains the potential to shift the parameters within which it moves, and not simply reinforce them. Nevertheless, if the structure remains fundamentally unchanged by the ritual process, the subject does not. The reaggregation we see in communitas is an aggregation of subjectivity not as a renewed (re)production of the same but another type of subject, as art indeed in its political-spiritual drive, also seeks to induce.

Thus, there is an important distinction to be made between the liminality integral to the ritual process and that effected by the art event. Art is ambiguous, equally capable of maintaining the status quo as subverting it, even if only in the realm of the imagination. As such it is what Turner terms liminoid rather than liminal. By liminoid, Turner effectively means liminal-like, analogous-to, appearing-to-be, and so on, where the –oid of liminoid derives from the Greek *eidos*, a form, shape or resemblance.[82] Liminoid resembles but is not identical to liminal. Where liminality ultimately upholds the existing social structure, reentrenching the codes and values of a society following an exceptional but not anomalous period of liberation, alienation, and sequestration from

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[81] Turner. 1982: 28

[82] Ibid: 32

them, liminoid phenomena may be revolutionary or subversive, opposing existing structures or, at the very least, inciting new ways of inhabiting them. If in so-called tribal societies liminality is a duty, an expectation required of its members in rites of passage, in industrial society it functions more often as 'choice' and 'play,' and finds outlet through cultural effects like art:

> *Liminal phenomena* are centrally integrated into the total social process, forming with all its other aspects a complete whole, and representing its necessary negativity and subjunctivity. *Liminoid phenomena* develop apart from the central economic and political processes, along the margins, in the interfaces and interstices of central and servicing institutions – they are plural, fragmentary, and experimental in character.[83]

An art of encounter would seem to be necessarily liminoid. If it is productive of subjectivities they are of a rather different kind to those caught up in the liminal phase of rites of process. Neither can we assume that artistic interventions involving participation or ritual are expressions of liminality; it is probably truer to say that they are, in the main, liminoid. Or it might be possible to argue that within the very same work subsists the virtual potential for both liminal and liminoid activity, the one or the other depending perhaps upon one's fidelity to the work of the work, and to the structures being put into question. Our whole argument concerning communitas and ecclesiastical art may rest upon this distinction. Can art be said to instate a rite of passage in liminal terms as the religious rituals of the church appear to do, or does it operate in a liminoid fashion, to creatively subvert and undo all familiarity via novelty? Can it do both or does it do neither? When we translate the separation-transition-incorporation triad into, let's say, the Deleuzian deterritorialisation-reterritorialisation dyad do we draw closer to art's mode of operation? According to this model art separates or deterritorialises away from the familiar, conventional or expected, the *work* of the work is whatever happens in that transitional or liminal phase, and then reterritorialises back into the milieu in which it is operative. Where it goes wrong is when that reterritorialisation fixes a new tradition or paradigm, rather than setting the stage for a new deterritorialisation to occur.

Expanded communities for art

In an artistic climate intensely aware of the unavoidable agency of context, any space for art today may be said to extract meaning from the interaction of art with the

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[83] Ibid: 54 (emphasis in original)

environment, history, and ideology of that space. But if art in ecclesiastical contexts is to have any meaning beyond this, must it not also take into account the communities who inhabit those spaces? When art enters the museum or gallery there is no compunction upon it to operate as anything other than private contemplation or aesthetic pleasure. When art in such contexts *is* assumed to confirm a more communal role, as is implied in Relational Art, or is presented as participative or interactive, this is still very often at the level of the individual, whatever the claims made for its relationality or sociability, or else it is a shallow, generally unsatisfying, form of communality where the viewer remains psychologically outside the environment created by the art. Even when we perceive art to perform some form of ritual function it is generally a private affair, as those like Carol Duncan, who have made studies of such processes, attest. We should, therefore, be wary of the kind of collectivising discourse that sees community in every group that collects in front of an art work or every transitory body of disparate but proximate people who happen to be in the same place at the same time (Sartre's seriality of the bus queue misread as a social gathering!). Any such claims are invariably spurious or specious, or operate at such a shallow level that they cease to have any substantial meaning at all. For art to have any collective meaning, value or substance it surely cannot be enough to be merely public but must be relational, communal or social.

Compounding this situation, contemporary art has become increasingly visible and the parameters of its public catchment greatly expanded. Prominently public art is in greater danger than ever of becoming little more than an extension of other forms of modern public pleasure, a criticism sometimes made of the installations in Tate Modern's Turbine Hall. Blockbuster shows predominate in which attendance is the overriding concern (since the art itself can be so difficult to see through the crowds), once-difficult artistic genres achieve astonishing popularity, the proliferating art market gives birth to any number of fairs and biennales, and so on. In such a climate of art ubiquity churches become a logical extension of the available sites for art, valued for their unique ambience, architecture and history. We would not deny that there is a place for their use as exhibition venues, nor discount the efficacy of the art displayed in its private function as a focus for prayerful reflection or aesthetic contemplation. But in such contexts it cannot escape the demands of a more expanded communal role too. Ecclesiastical contexts are inseparable from social responsibilities, something that the artist Jaume Plensa was attentive to in his proposal for the current Chichester Cathedral commission for a permanent work of art. In all his public works of art he expresses a desire to give priority

to their immediate relationship with the people living and working around them.[84] One question that can hardly be avoided in a study such as this, then, is who is ecclesiastical art for? Or perhaps if that seems easy enough to address, who is the ecclesiastically-sited art that we have been investigating for? Rather than asking what art addresses it seems more germane to ask to whom such art addresses itself, and how. Although a church is populated by many different groups and subjects, above all it is the home of a lay and ecclesiastical community of Christian believers. When it ceases to be so it becomes merely an historical object or aesthetically stimulating architectural conceit or offers a peculiarly otherworldly ambience. This difference becomes clear whenever one enters a decommissioned church that has become an art space. The primary directive of an active church is its worshipping community, and although art need not be directly engineered towards an encounter with that community, and indeed often is not, it cannot really afford to ignore it if it is to have a sustained and effective presence within ecclesiastical contexts. However, art not only responds to an existing community, it also constitutes community, or at the very least constitutes groups who form around it. That at least is the argument of this chapter.

At a conference on theology, liturgy and the arts, Christopher Irvine, Canon Librarian of Canterbury Cathedral, speaking of the role of theology and the visual arts in ecclesial formation, asked a number of questions pertinent to this discussion: how is the ecclesial community nourished, informed or challenged by visual art? What is the place and role of art within 'believing' communities? How is art involved in the formation of subjectivities, and in particular, in forming Christian subjectivities?[85] Irvine's description of the modern ecclesia as a community 'called together,' a community responsive to the call and bound together with others similarly called, resonates with the evental phenomena we have been discussing. According to Irvine, this calling is to a sharing in Christ, a participation in the divine life through a sacramental life, but also to radically reconfigured relationships with one another. Moreover, it is a community gathered together into a defined and designated space. From one point of view this is a space that pre-exists the community that populates it; a recognisable space, replete with traditions and expectations. But from another perspective it engenders new conditions of possibility. Irvine refers to the seminal moment when Christ emptied the temple,

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[84] Paveley. 2009. Plensa's winning proposal for Chichester specifically works with the social notion of togetherness, represented by the variegation of language in the form of a hand raised in benediction (see figure 74).

[85] Irvine. *Theology, Liturgy and the Arts*. Sarum College, Salisbury. 2009.

pondering what that cleared space made available. Irvine identifies three things: a space for encounter, a space where we are addressed, and a space of meeting. Using the terms with which we have become familiar we could classify these as event, fidelity, and the naming of community. The telos of this ecclesial life, Irvine continues, affirming an imperative of Vatican II, is 'full, active and conscious participation' but also 'responsive participation,' through various types of ecclesial formation. If this begins with being formed and conformed to the likeness of Christ, the standard expected of the Christian, it extends further to encompass other subjective responses, taking a number of forms in relation to the space in which it operates. It has a liturgical form inasmuch that the social body relates to what it *does* not what it *is*. It has a symbolic form in that the space itself is moulded according to the human activity taking place there. It has a processual form that organically shapes, makes and remakes the social space and the community that inhabits it. But it also has a form defined by its art, for which Christ's clearing of the temple finds a comparable resonance with Deleuze's insistence that the artist must clear away the clichés that adhere to the canvas before he or she can begin. Indeed, this analogy holds at a concrete level, numerous writers attesting to the literally emptied church space as the catalyst for artistic creation. As you may recall, this was precisely the starting point for Byars's liturgical installation.

One path to this clearing away is art's relocation, a by-now commonplace strategy within the art world. Liberating art from its secular institutions is commonly perceived as a means to reanimate engagements with art by recontextualising it in unexpected places, or more pressingly to initiate encounters with art amongst those rarely exposed to it. Despite the rich artistic legacy of the church, bringing contemporary art into churches and cathedrals can be perceived in both senses, both positively, as a reengagement or fresh encounter with art, and negatively, as an intrusion, disruption or undesirable presence. In either case, a common factor is a meeting between a work of art and a public, whose reaction to the work is likely to be very different to that of a museum-going crowd. Here we find some overlap in our proposition for a community for art with a number of contemporary genres for art. We could think, for example, of 'community-based public art,' typified by the projects of Stephen Willats, where the members of a particular community become the co-producers of a work as well as its viewers, or 'new genre public art,' a name coined by Suzanne Lacy to signify interactive, community-based projects, or the installations by Hirschhorn which purposefully interact with the non-art spaces of communities that usually fall outside the art spectrum. In events like those

orchestrated by Hirschhorn and others, the 'art' exists solely to facilitate a sociable situation, gathered under the umbrella of Relational Art. These forms tend to be dialogic in principle (sometimes referred to as 'dialogical aesthetics'), often with the audience working alongside the artist in a collaborative gesture, and usually working within the local spaces of the community at hand rather than requiring their relocation to the spaces usually set aside for art activities.

In contrast to projects such as these a more conventional approach to art is content to work within existing paradigms and presuppositions, to which we could add tradition, convention, familiarity, and so on, which such art aims to contest. Grant Kester, writing on community-based art projects, stresses the importance of taking an audience into account where a more conventional approach to art has tended to occur in isolation from the potential viewer. By contrast, the ideal scenario envisaged by Kester for dialogic art bears a close relation to our hopes for ecclesiastical art:

> In dialogic practice the artist, whose perceptions are informed by his or her own training, past projects, and lived experience, comes into a given site or community characterised by its own unique constellation of social and economic forces, personalities, and traditions. In the exchange that follows, both the artist and his or her collaborators will have their existing perceptions challenged; the artist may well recognise relationships or connections that the community members have become inured to, while the collaborators will also challenge the artist's preconceptions about the community itself and about his or her own function as an artist. What emerges is a new set of insights, generated at the intersection of both perspectives and catalysed through the collaborative production of given project.[86]

Dialogic art is primarily collaborative which, for Kester, is theoretically underpinned by a figure of community associated with Jean-Luc Nancy: the inoperative community, a form of sociability predicated upon 'being in common.'[87] Not a common being or substance, or the sharing of some kind of pre-existing *sensus communis* (which Nancy terms 'communion'), being in common is based instead upon communication and negotiation, on the recognition of a lack of common, shared or substantive identity, in which 'the participants think, act, and speak beyond their a priori roles and identities.'[88] It does not seek to produce a community as a grouping with fixed borders but rather to realise the ongoing possibilities of community and its necessary opening to whatever or whoever

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[86] Kester. 2004: 95

[87] Nancy. 1991: xxxviii

[88] Kester. 2004: 155

remains on its outside. This is all very well, but mustn't a community have a value or principle to which it adheres in order to make it a community at all? Otherwise, what is this being-in-common? One answer, I believe, is to be found in Wayne Meeks's sociological study of the early church. In a chapter devoted to its formation he asks himself what gives a group its identity? How is it produced and what holds it together? He proposes a definition from George C. Homan who regards a community as 'a number of persons, or members, each of whom, *while the group is meeting*, interacts with every other, or is able to do so, or can at least take personal cognizance of every other.'[89] What does Homan's definition tell us about the notion of community expressed and of the subjectivities that populate it? Can a tenable community be sustained by embracing contingently, fleetingly, a value, principle or experience *for the time being*? In the words of Miwon Kwon, Homan's definition implies a thinking of community not in terms of 'an existing social relation,' but rather as a 'call or appeal to a collective praxis.'[90] Any kind of community-based art, whether one taking as its target audience and collaborators-in-process a pre-existing community of some kind, or one with an indeterminate social grouping in mind, invariably rejects any kind of 'monolithic collectivity' asserted over 'the specific identities of its constituent members' and against those perceived as non-members.[91] Even where a community is deemed to pre-exist the process of artistic participation it is hoped that the social grouping that emerges through the process is not the self-same grouping that preceded it. As Kester emphasises, there must always be room for 'unanticipated new insights that emerge from collaborative interactions or dialogic encounters.'[92] This applies not only to the process itself but to any consequential exhibiting of the work. In an ecclesiastical setting this imperative is no less demanding than in the secular settings described by Kester et al, even if the more collaborative aspect of art practice is less apparent. Those responsible for inaugurating such works must be prepared to trust the artist's vision and those responsible for overseeing its period of showing must be ready to allow a public to respond to it in perhaps unexpected, even unprecedented ways.

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[89] Homans, cited in Meeks. 2003: 74 (my emphasis)

[90] Kwon in Kester. 2004: 159

[91] Ibid: 158

[92] Ibid: 163

Artist, context, audience, art

Let us bring this chapter to an end by briefly focusing on a model for the relationship of artwork, artist, audience and context by turning to the work of Stephen Willats, one of the artists promoted by Kester. Although his work, to my knowledge, has never coincided with an ecclesiastical context, his considered thoughts on the relationship of artwork and audience, and his conceptual framework for that relation, offer valuable insights into this question. Artists like Marcus Coates and Stephen Willats (both known for their community-based social projects) are concerned with art's frequent failure to address an audience for art outside or beyond the institutions of art, which their practice seeks to redress.[93] One of the issues that art has faced within expanded art practices has been the difficulties it faces when it attempts to step outside of the validating structures of the art world, as Willats notes: 'When artists did try such a transference they were met with complete misreading, or indifference, even failing to obtain recognition from people that it was indeed a work of art which they were confronting.'[94] In many respects the hostility to modern art in the church mid-twentieth century was precisely a series of such misrecognitions. The audience for art today is considerably more visually literate (even if conversely the ability to read religious symbolism has diminished). Nevertheless, outside the institutions of art the work of art faces very different conditions. It cannot be assumed, for instance, that the intended audience will be equipped with the kind of visual literacy or receptiveness generally expected of an audience for art. Even though ecclesiastically-sited artworks, generally speaking, are not community-based social projects of the kind that Willats engages in (although they can be), they raise similar issues of contextual specificity. Just as his works attend to the specifics of their non-institutional setting, so too it cannot be forgotten that a very different relationship pertains to artworks in cathedrals than in museums or galleries, especially in terms of their reception. When this difference is ignored the cathedral becomes simply another venue for the exhibition of art. As we become increasingly habituated to the cathedral as a site of heritage and tourism this situation will undoubtedly worsen.

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[93] Willats raises the issue of accessibility, noting that the audiences for his community-based work tends to fall outside those for the art institution, whose esoteric language further alienates, acting as a form of insider knowledge, such that prior knowledge on the part of the audience is a prerequisite for any degree of hermeneutical satisfaction. In social projects Willats proposes that the artist must act responsibly towards their potential audience and must strive to achieve some measure of meaningful communication.

[94] Willats. 1986 (contains no page numbers)

Despite the very different nature and contexts of his projects Willats employs a number of transferable strategies that may enhance our understanding of the use of art in ecclesiastical spaces. He prescribes, for example, the necessity of engaging directly with the audience's frame of reference, with their sense of normality, not in order to reflect or describe that normality, but more often than not to challenge, perhaps change, that normality. He puts this process in an interesting way. The artwork, he says, originates from outside the audience's reality, 'but it is from the inside that the artwork must grow.'[95] He also suggests strategies for enhancing audience participation in the work. Firstly, existing languages and shared references should be employed. To a great extent, early examples of modern art for the church could be said to have worked this way. Despite the rejection by many critics of Moore's *Madonna and Child*, Sutherland's *Crucifixion* or Epstein's *St. Michael*, each made use of a familiar religious vernacular, something which is perhaps only evident in hindsight. Even the numerous examples of abstract stained-glass windows installed in this period continued to utilise the visual language of medieval glass, deliberately replicating the kinds of colours and light effects typical of an earlier age. The same could even be said for Richter's pixellated window at Cologne. Again we find a synergy of colour with the added familiarity, to a twenty-first century audience, of the ubiquitous coloured pixel. Secondly, as well as actually being sited within it, the existing world of the audience is reflected by the work. The space itself becomes the subject of the work, or as Willats puts it, 'the language of the artwork is built from the references drawn out of the audience's own reality.' In a very obvious sense the mirror works of Horn and Kapoor literally reflect the familiar environment, albeit in decidedly unfamiliar ways, through unexpected conjunctions of context and art object, but the same process may be said to occur in less explicit ways. As Willats argues, it is not that the work simply reflects in a descriptive way the familiar reality of the audience; it attempts to rework that reality, as the aforementioned mirror works aim to do:

> The artist's intervention is to change what is perceived of as normal by the audience, not reflecting to them what is already normal, but using normality to provide an access into what initially are likely to be difficult concepts to internalise. […] Thus a concept is represented through references already meaningful to the audience, or, itself grows out of those references.[96]

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[95] Ibid.

[96] Ibid.

Lin Holland and Jane Poulton's projection onto the altar of Liverpool's Metropolitan Cathedral is a case in point (figure 66). *Two Seas: High Water* was a film of the two seas that define the east and west coasts of Britain, an image with particular resonance for a port city like Liverpool.[97] The familiar sight of undulating water attained a meditative, even spiritual quality when encountered in this context, and served to induce a more pronounced stillness and reflective response to the space.[98] Kathleen Herbert's *Stable*, a super 16mm film following the passage of three horses through the spaces of Gloucester Cathedral, is another good example of a reworking of familiar references (figure 67).[99] Shown in the Chapter House and with other video works in the nave this was a project that resulted from her tenure as artist-in-residence at Gloucester Cathedral. The conceptual basis for *Stable* built upon a period in the cathedral's history when horses were kept in the cloisters by puritan forces during the English Civil War. More interestingly, her film considers the intrusion of an alien presence into the familiar ecclesiastical space, which, as we have seen, is a familiar complaint made against contemporary art. The example of these three artists is instructive in this respect. It is possible that the increasing popularity of artist-in-residence programmes in Britain's cathedrals will help to attenuate this problem, overcoming opposition by reproducing the kind of embeddedness associated with the traditional role of the church craftsman. Residencies, by definition, lead an artist to investigate in-depth the particular location where they are based. The artist's first-hand experience over an extended period frequently results in a form of ethnography, through their acclimatisation to the space, and sensitivity to the communities who inhabit it. Sometimes this results in a close collaboration between artist and audience, as in Holland and Poulton's combined residency in Liverpool's two cathedrals, where the public were responsible for transforming the familiar spaces of the two cathedrals through their interaction with the artists. As the catalogue that accompanied the residency attests, they were motivated by the desire to make work relevant to their contexts and sensitive to the mixed audiences that cathedrals attract. Each of their installations responded specifically to the dynamics of their site, while a joint venture for both cathedrals was effectively a community-based project, reliant upon the contribution of local people for its manufacture: *Ring of Roses /*

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[97] Available for viewing at http://www.sitematerialobject.com

[98] Holland and Poulton. *Artists' Residency Report*. Liverpool Cathedral and The Metropolitan Cathedral of Christ the King. 2007-2008.

[99] Available for viewing at http://www.peter-emery.com/info-stable.php

Paper Falls on Stone (figure 68). Unlike other collaborative projects such as Gormley's *Fields* or Weiwei's *Sunflower Seeds* installation for Tate Modern, those involved in the production were equally involved in its reception, since these ephemeral works existed only for the sake of the commencement and finale of a ceremony that brought together the three participating groups. Direct participation of this kind allows the work of art to exist as a 'Symbolic World' for those involved, says Willats, a heuristic process able to remodel references to everyday reality and recompose assumptions regarding social forms. More pertinently, residencies offer the potential for the artist to become a more integral member rather than a privileged outsider, able to benefit from a more sustained dialogue and interaction with the place and its people. Such an agenda is clearly uppermost in the mind of Gloucester's current resident artist. At the beginning of his residency David Behar Perahia stated that his prime objective for the coming year was 'to make a community.'[100] In his case this meant gathering about him a body of collaborators, local people willing to commit to a year-long project, whose principal aim would be to return to modern visibility the invisible structures undergirding the cathedral's medieval construction (figures 69-70). Behar Perahia anticipated that each person involved would form the material of the work, himself included, whilst a participatory engagement would be encouraged from members of the public coming to view the results. In an interview with the artist towards the end of his residency, one of his interlocutors proposes that he is crafting temporary, time-based, communities, constructed for the art, whose dissolution occurs with the end of the project, very much in keeping with Homan's model of community that exists only 'while the group is meeting.'[101] The interviewer cites Miwon Kwon's theories of community construction within the art domain as a conceptual precedent for such practices but it could be argued that they owe as much to the models of community presented in this chapter. This sense of a limited but intensive duration for a community brought into existence by the work is summed up rather well by Willats as a reconfiguration of the *work* of the work of art, whereby

> an artwork changes from being a contained object to a structured programme of events over a specific duration. In this sense an artwork may have a 'beginning' and an 'end,' and it would be the sum total of events between the beginning and the end that is called the artwork.[102]

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[100] Behar Perahia. 2011 (no page numbers)

[101] Ibid.

[102] Willats. 1986

The contextualising of meaning involved adds to the relevance of a work of art's appearance in a particular location. This is especially valid for works that are installed, say, in more than one cathedral. In each case presuppositions must be abandoned for the sake of treating each location and its communities on its own terms. Here, however, we depart somewhat from Willats. The art he favours tends to be highly socially structured, promoting a model of social art practice based upon pre-defined contexts, specific audiences and tightly specified frameworks. Willats argues that a programme of community-based artistic collaboration in which 'the acts of making and reception [are] mutually bound' will only succeed if 'the audience [is] known in advance of the work's conception, pinpointed by the artist and given the highest position in the determination of the work's concerns.'[103] To some extent this is clearly true of any ecclesiastically-sited project, in that certain specific groups are identifiably present within a cathedral, and indeed Jaume Plensa, winner of the commission for Chichester Cathedral, stresses the importance of prior knowledge of the audience before commencing to make work. However, as Robin Gibbons has noted in his study of liturgical space, modern congregations are far from fixed. If there is stability to a liturgical community, its assembly is mobile and its constituent members inconstant.[104] Even if a core group can be identified there are always occasional worshippers, visitors, unexpected participants, or aesthetic voyeurs, entering into the occasion from a peripheral standpoint of aesthetic pleasure, but perhaps not belief. Willats too leaves out of his calculations the unknown audience, the subjects who appear in the space of appearance of the work itself. Such an incalculable factor is, of course, precisely closed to any such calculus. What remains are the known elements, if not their exact composition: artist, context, audience, art.

Willats has produced a diagrammatic model of his form of interaction which attempts to make sense of the dynamic of these four factors (figure 71). It places the work of art at the centre of a triangle whose three corners are represented by artist, context and audience. Art takes the central role around which artist, context and audience are configured, its creation involving a recursive interplay between each of the players. According to this conception, the context simply operates as the site of 'intervention' while the work of art is more often than not the agent for social interaction rather than having any intrinsic value in itself:

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[103] Ibid.

[104] Gibbons. 2006: 156

> Between these variables it will be the conceptualisations made by the audience that constitute the work of art, not its material form, which is simply seen as an agent for remodelling.[105]

In this diagram, therefore, the central place of the artwork is simply the locus for the more important interrelation of artist, audience and context, much as Coates's shamanic rituals provide a visual forum through which an audience plays out its particular concerns through the mediation of the artist. However, it could also be interpreted as descriptive of conventional artistic reception which configures audience, artist (usually only present as the signatory to the work) and context around the central point of the artwork. In such configurations context may be low on the agenda, as may be any considerations regarding the audience. Willats also posits a slightly different triad around the work of art (figure 72): this consists of the artist's intentions, the location and the composition of the group formed around the work (what Badiou would call the consistency of the subject). In each case, each is said to pre-exist the work: the artist's role is to formulate his or her intentions for the project based upon the known context and its existing communities.

An alternative configuration, one more relevant to a church, say, than to an art museum, would be to place the audience in the centre, as community (figure 73). In a church it is the people that populate the space that are fundamental (and art may be relatively absent) whereas in a gallery or museum it is the art that populates the space that is central, albeit requiring at least an occasional visitor. Where Willats's model presupposes a consistency in the community, the figure of the audience could stand for any number of subject positions. It is true that art that enters ecclesiastical spaces necessarily engages with an on-site community (as in the tower blocks that are Willats's favoured haunt), but it is also engaged in constituting its own community, even if temporarily or contingently so. More interesting to us is where artistic intention is not so predetermined, or the composition of a community is unclear, and the location unpredictable, or subject to extraneous and unforeseeable intrusions. Moreover, one in which the subjects of the work of art cannot even be said to exist as yet. An author, says Nancy, 'must find his own readers or, what amounts to the same thing, it is the author who creates his own readers.'[106] We would contend that this is no less true of the work of art.

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[105] Ibid.

[106] Nancy. 2008: 9

Figure 62 Gabriel Loire, *Prisoners of Conscience window*, Salisbury Cathedral, 1980

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Figure 63 Chris Gollon, *Stations of the Cross IV: Jesus Meets His Mother*, The Church of St. John, Bethnal Green, London, 2003. The Stations were completed in 2008.

The paintings in situ

Removed due to copyright

Figure 64 Terry Flaxton, *In Other People's Skins*, shown in the cathedrals of Winchester, Worcester, Gloucester, Bristol, Wells, and Southwark, and Bath Abbey, 2007

Here we see several of the projected meals. The installation showed one meal at a time, projected relative to the proportions of the actual table on site, around which a 'participating' audience sat.

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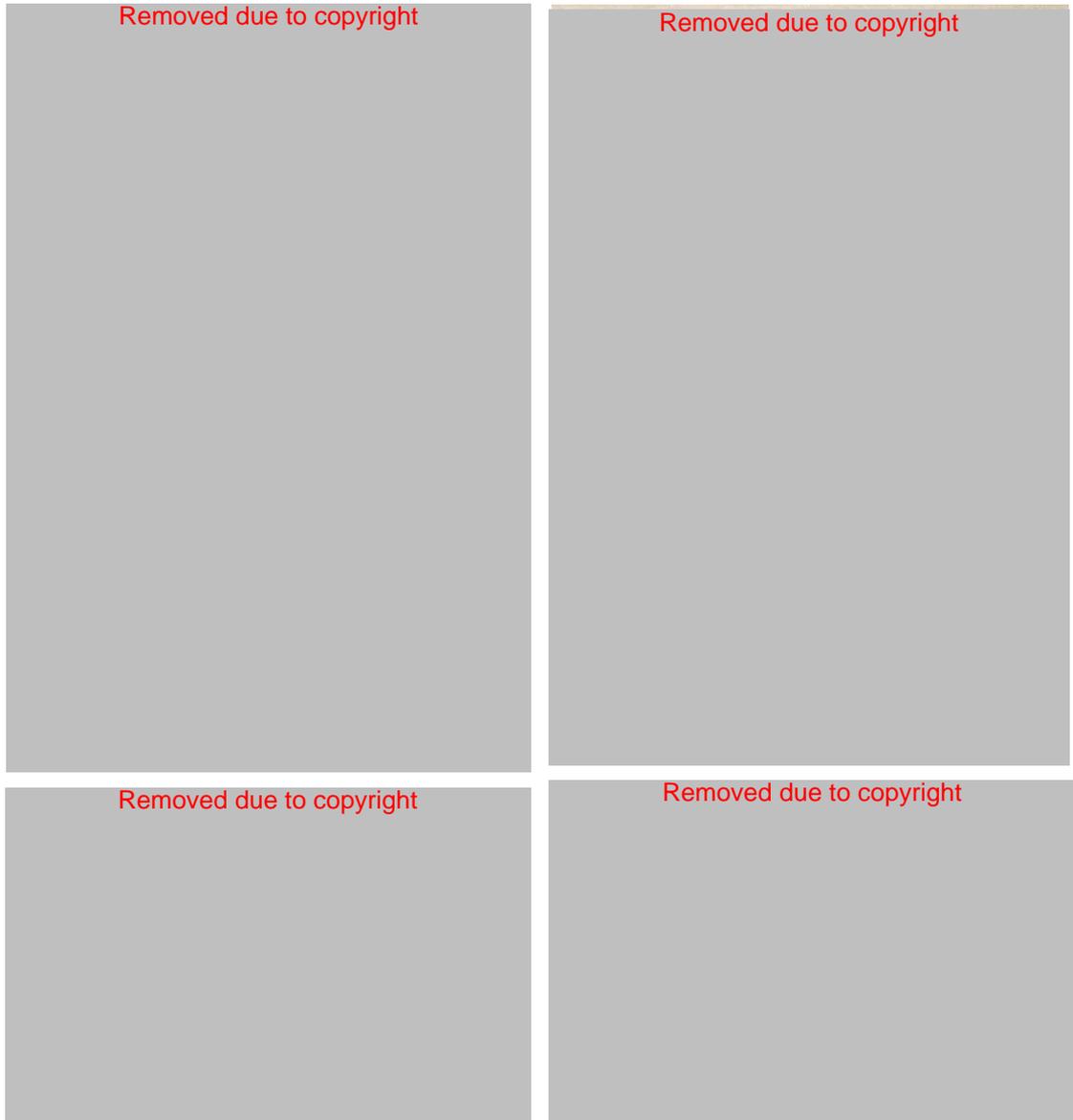
Figure 65 Marcus Coates, *Pastoral Spirit*, Wallspace, London, 2008

Figure 66 Lin Holland and Jane Poulton, *Two Seas: High Water*, Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral of Christ the King, 2008

Figure 67 Kathleen Herbert, *Stable*, 16mm film, Gloucester Cathedral, 2007

As seen in Gloucester Cathedral

Figure 68 Lin Holland and Jane Poulton, *Ring of Roses*, Metropolitan Cathedral of Christ the King, Liverpool, 2008; *Paper Falls on Stone*, Liverpool Cathedral, 2008
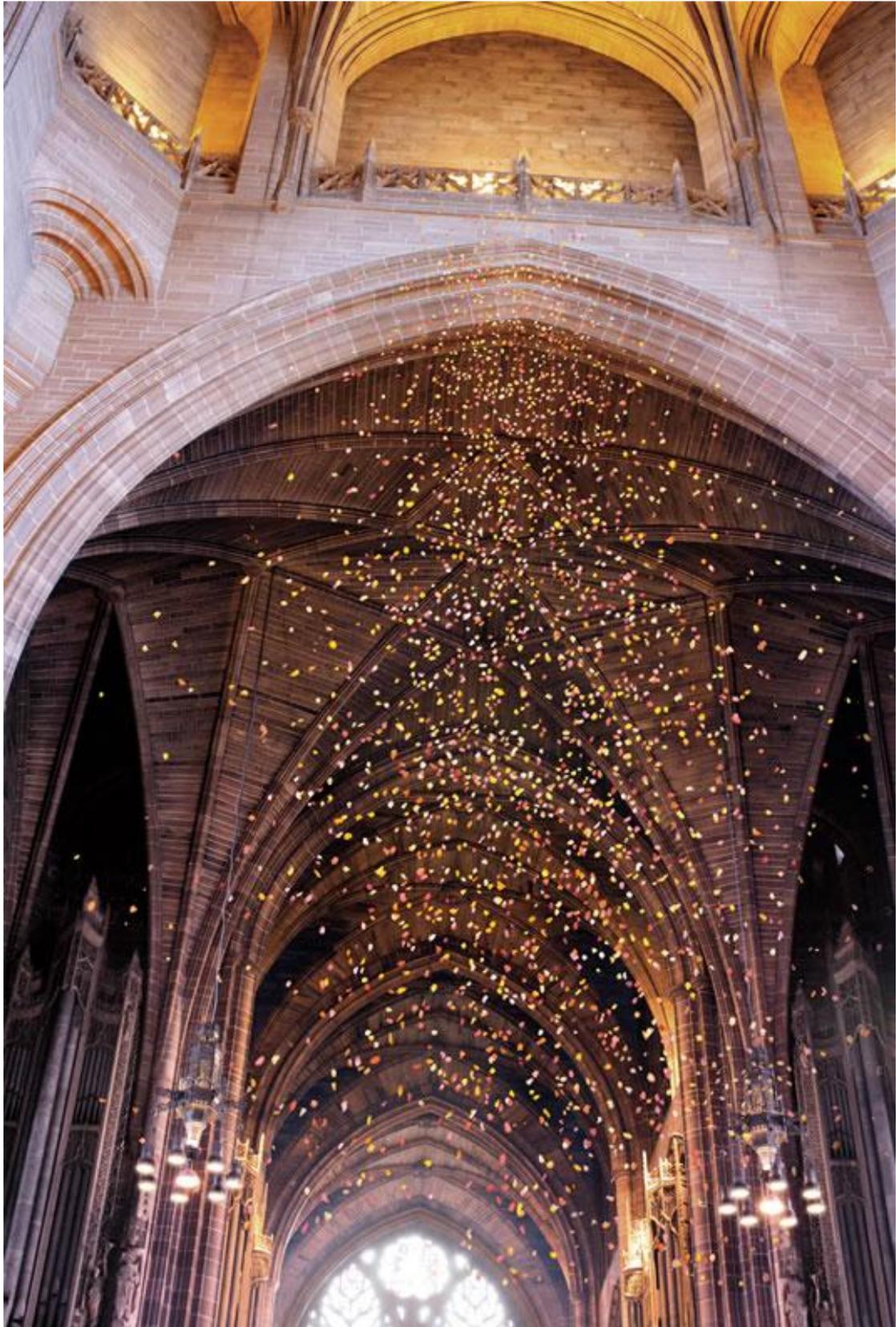
Lin Holland and Jane Poulton, *Paper Falls on Stone*, Liverpool Cathedral, 2008

Figure 69 David Behar Perahia, *Invisible Structura I*, Gloucester Cathedral, 2011

Performance-based piece, utilising the various spaces of the cathedral through promenade, in an examination of the proportions, aural resonance and materials of the cathedral's interior structures.

Figure 70 David Behar Perahia, *Invisible Structura II*, Gloucester Cathedral, 2011

Participative group project investigating the system of medieval scaffolding utilised in the cathedral's construction.
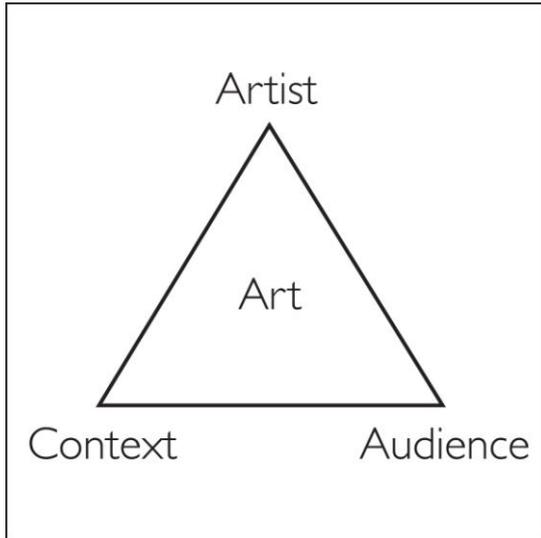
Figure 71 Stephen Willats, diagram of configuration of artist, context, audience and art
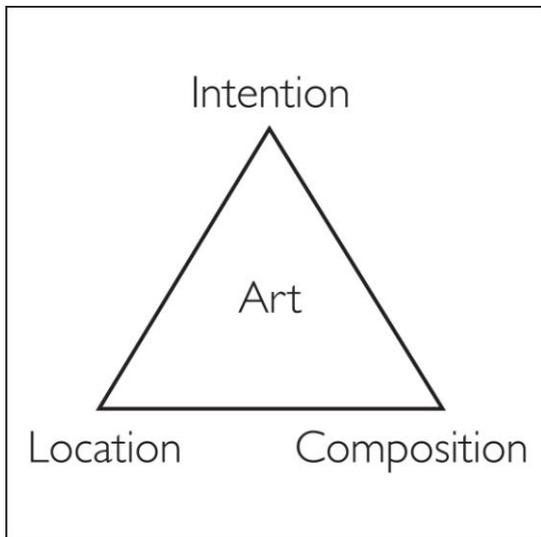
Figure 72 Stephen Willats, diagram of configuration of intention, location, composition and art
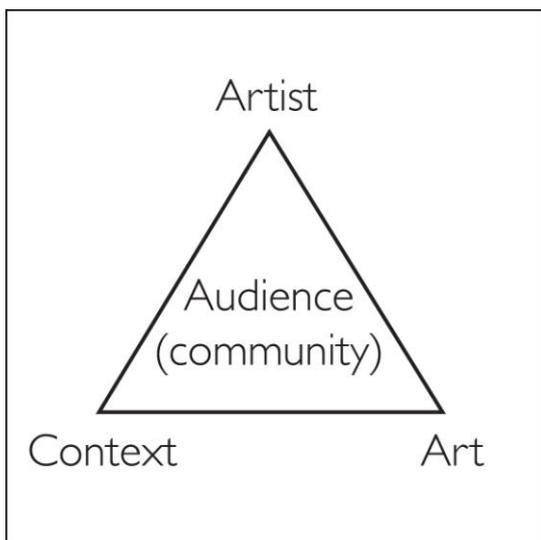
Figure 73 Diagram of configuration of artist, context, art and audience (community)

8

A P S E

The universal and the exception

One of the fundamental disagreements between Badiou and Agamben, in their respective work on Saint Paul, concerns the consistency of the early Christian ekklesia – whether in its membership it was orientated towards universal aspirations (Badiou) or towards subsistence as an exceptional remnant (Agamben). On the one hand a principle of full inclusion, on the other an acceptance of necessary exclusion as a messianic fracture, remnant or remainder outside any feasible universality. Relative to the issues at stake in this thesis their divergent views on this specific matter, though undoubtedly engaging, are of marginal significance. However, if we appropriate the terms of this particular debate we will find that they highlight a central problem for our inquiry. These contradictory readings will then have a distinct bearing on the reception of art in ecclesiastical contexts where injunctions to artists are habitually formulated towards fully inclusive ends.

In considering the reception of art in ecclesiastical spaces one question can hardly be avoided: must the art be potentially or categorically available to all, or can it be legitimately addressed to a few? In the domain of ecclesiastical art one regularly encounters a discourse of universal address in terms of full accessibility, legibility, appreciation, and so on. The inclusiveness of the faith proves to be something of a handicap to usual expectations for art, which is typically presumed to speak to a minority of the interested, with different people responsive to different works. It is as if Christianity's imperative of universality – in its apostolic mission and its more local aspirations of social inclusivity – must include all articles employed in support of that faith. This is especially the case where permanent commissions are concerned. A current example appears to indicate as much. An accent on universality is evident in the rhetoric surrounding the forthcoming sculpture for Chichester Cathedral by Jaume Plensa (figure 74). The original brief called for a work which would 'engage the imaginations of all who visit the cathedral.' In answering that brief, the selection panel for the commissioning process seems eager to stress that, when installed, Plensa's piece will be 'comprehensible to all.'[1] It is not clear, however, how realistic or even desirable an objective this is. Here, then, we encounter the problem of the universal and the exception in the debate over accessibility, legibility, and audience engagement, all perennial issues for art in the church: should art in the service of the church strive to appeal to a wide audience, pleasing to all, addressed to all, inclusive of all, or can it be legitimately content to engage the minds and

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[1] Press Release: The Hussey Memorial Commission for Chichester Cathedral, 2011.

imagination of a few? Where in the balance between due regard and disregard should the viewer feature in the considerations for art?

Our earlier reference to *The Messenger* may be instructive here. Viola's oeuvre repeatedly enacts the most universal themes imaginable: the cycle of birth and death, the purgative and destructive power of fire, the cleansing properties of water, the vitality of breath, the grounding of the earth, and the vulnerability of nakedness. Several of these themes were evident in *The Messenger*. However, as a work of art it clearly addressed itself to an interested minority, and for the rest offered only a sequence of controversies: the controversy of nudity circumscribed by a certain social agenda, the controversy of a spirituality perceived by some to exceed the bounds of Christian theology, the controversy of technology (notably a potentially invasive medium of light and sound) incongruent with an ecclesiastical space, and so on. In an important sense, any focus on a universal address for art seems doomed to fail. Even if Canon Walker's emphatic assertion that, in matters of art for the church 'due regard should be paid to what congregations would accept' seems an indispensable obligation, it may also be, at times, an untenable demand.[2] What a congregation will accept can be translated into whatever is generally acceptable or deemed appropriate, yet it has already been pointed out that this is usually narrow:

> Confronted by the new, the Churches have habitually opted for the familiar and safe – a strategy that may have placated the faithful in the short term, but that has further attenuated the already weakened links between the communities of art and Church.[3]

In this respect, what has become known as the Heidelberg controversy is often treated as a salutary lesson to high-level commissions. This was a project to produce a series of windows for the *Heiliggeistkirche*, whose unconventional designs won approval from the church commission as well as German aestheticians of the highest rank, but was ultimately quashed through the 'pious plaints' of a disgruntled public, the disapprobation of a leading academic whose presumed theological and artistic aptitude added grist to the laypersons' mill, and finally the recantation of an originally supportive prominent cleric (figure 75).[4] Of this episode, Mulder disparagingly concludes that it disclosed a desire for

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[2] Walker. 1996: 50

[3] Pattison. 1998: 178

[4] See Mulder. 2005

'easily identifiable religious clichés' where the artist, Johannes Schreiter, offered complex, contemporary images whose meaning could not be so easily discerned:

> At a time when Christianity struggles for relevant, meaningful self-expression, dissenting Heidelbergers ultimately demanded their right to an art that was comprehensible at a glance.[5]

Schreiter presented his point of view in a 'design apologia,' in which he stated that art should not concern itself with being understood, nor should it attempt to woo those who do not understand it. Like religion, its principal concern is with truth, which is 'exactly what drives art into the strange vicinity of religion.'[6] As such, it cannot overly concern itself with an already existing audience, since that audience is likely to overwhelmingly approve only those works that fit the paradigms with which they are familiar. Art must create its own audience along with its works. This is not to disregard the extant audience; as Jaume Plensa acknowledges, an artist is also being invited to work with and for communities that will not simply disappear because they disapprove of an art installation.

The normative and the exceptional

The desire for art to address itself to the widest possible constituency presents almost insuperable difficulties, since the universality of art can be read as an impetus to join two immiscible concepts if, as might be argued, the universal tends towards the normative where art tends towards the exceptional. We would argue that an equally problematic demand for an agenda of exceptions is the only possibility for a living theologico-aesthetics that seeks to repeatedly inaugurate anew communities and subjects receptive to, or called into being by, the art event. But how viable is it to work with a model of exception in the domain of ecclesiastical art? The exception always opens up the problem of the normative. We have come to expect art to trouble fixity and rigidity, to resist the normative, but art is equally capable of entrenchment and preservation, of normative practices. Indeed, the manifold manifestations of art can be crudely reduced to two

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[5] Ibid: 137. Such attitudes are what the modern church is constantly wrestling with, yet is it not the case that the initial impact of a work of art, positive or negative, changes over time and repeated viewing? What appeared acceptable and sufficient at first may in time become ineffective and disappointing; what appeared an intolerable and disruptive presence may become powerfully apt. For a church congregation prolonged exposure to the work of art may effectively render it invisible; alternatively from a protracted engagement with the work of art nuances of meaning and import may emerge through a developed relationship with the work.

[6] Schreiter, cited in Mulder. 2005: 137

objectives: as a representation or reflection of the world as it is (an art of being, let us say, sticking strictly to Badiou, i.e. an object of recognition); as a radical disjuncture in the way things are (an art of event, i.e. an object of encounter). What do we find in ecclesiastical spaces? We could argue that the vast majority of ecclesiastical art has tended toward this former normative direction. Ecclesiastical art has a history and a tradition of objects of recognition reflecting a world of the spirit, the divine and the miraculous cast in the mould of an anthropomorphised world. This is equally the case for modern art in the church, which now belongs to a tradition going back to the early decades of the twentieth century. Contemporary ecclesiastical art is part of that genealogy, such that a tradition of contemporary art in churches is being established, each new work bearing a trace or residue of that tradition, even when the works themselves are transitory. Viola's *The Messenger* is a case in point. Where once Viola's nude messenger generated controversy and was threatened with closure, today it is regarded as the great success story for installations in churches. Its general acceptance became clear when, in 2004, it reappeared in St. Paul's Cathedral without a murmur of disapproval. What was once problematically exceptional has become, to a degree, accepted into a normative programme of art. More typically, contemporary art events in churches combine the normative and exceptional, in which objects of recognition and objects of encounter cohabit. In such events tradition is inevitably disrupted by something which fails to fit expectations, something we are calling the exception, without actually displacing in its entirety the traditional context in which it appears.[7]

What is of particular value to us in the exception is the vitality it brings to a policy for art as exceptional event, notwithstanding all the practical difficulties this itself entails. Here we find ourselves arguing against the proposition that any conditions for art can be generally assumed. Indeed, when it comes to art, Samuel Laeuchli, in his study of religion and art in conflict puts it succinctly: 'In general,' he says, is the enemy of art.[8] The exception cannot operate according to a set of pre-existing possibilities, nor a notion of the 'in general.' It deals instead and on each occasion with the singular. Any art that truly takes the exception into account will necessarily encounter this demand: that it deal

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[7] At one extreme are the ubiquitous sculptures of Peter Eugene Ball (figure 76). The great merit of Ball's sculptures, it has been favourably said, is that they 'settle without conflict into ancient and sacred spaces,' giving the impression that they have always been there (Kazimierczuk. 1999: 7). The same might be said of David Holgate's sculptural additions to the entrance of Norwich Cathedral (figure 5), except that, though undoubtedly sensitive and fitting to their location, they yet project a powerful contemporary presence, which Ball's sculptures often fail to do.

[8] Laeuchli. 1980: 172

with each as the case may be and not fall back upon tried and tested methods. Grant Kester makes this point in his study of community-based public art, emphasising the necessity to treat each artist-community interaction as a specific case.[9] Each project needs to be analysed individually, according to its specific aims, its particular participants and its local effects. In expanding the usefulness of this notion of the exception the anthropologist Rodney Needham cites this helpful proposition from E. R. Leach (said in relation to the necessity of caution in drawing ethnographic conclusions), that rather than relying upon set formulas, traditions or assumptions 'we must take each case as it comes.'[10] With these thoughts in mind we should qualify our use of the contingency of exception as a conditional term. It is all too easy these days to invoke the mantra of contingency; better by far to utilise a more concrete and specific notion of taking each case as it comes. Why, then, this preoccupation with the exception? If it is the case that, as Carl Schmitt had argued, a philosophy of concrete life cannot avoid the issue of the exception but must be interested in it to the highest degree, what can we learn from his formulation? Schmitt's proposition is that if we want to understand a situation it is not the 'in general' that we must study but its exceptions. Whatever stands out or fails to fit that situation throws light upon the entirety of its suppositions. The exception, we might say, reveals the truth of a situation:

> The exception is more interesting than the rule. The rule proves nothing; the exception proves everything: It confirms not only the rule but also its existence, which derives only from the exception. In the exception the power of real life breaks through the crust of a mechanism that has become torpid by repetition.[11]

However much we might resist the political implications of Schmitt's schema, knowing as we do the dangers of the sovereign exception (not only in the history of National Socialism but in politics today, where political legitimacy is mandated by a perpetual state of emergency), Schmitt's final sentence presents a compelling argument where art is concerned, if art is indeed to be understood as a passion for the real that inveighs against

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[9] Kester. 2004: 131. In a forum on art criticism the salient point was made that there could be 'no "general public" for art,' nor for art writing; what was sought instead was a public that artists and writers constituted through their work (Elkins and Newman. 2008: 189). O'Sullivan makes a comparable claim, calling for an heuristic rather than hermeneutic approach to art, in which the emphasis is on the thinking of, and writing on, specific art works: 'This will involve attending to the specificity of an art work, and the specificity of the milieu in which the art object operates' (O'Sullivan. 2001: 130). Thus he advocates an exploratory rather than interpretative framework for art history.

[10] Leach, cited in Needham's introduction to Durkheim and Mauss. 1963: xli

[11] Schmitt. 2005: 15

the torpidity of repetition. On one level, the purpose of ecclesiastically-sited art can be understood as the propagation of a particular tradition, an affirmation in visual form of a certain history, creed or doctrine. We would not necessarily accuse the tradition, say, of icon painting, of torpidity because of its adherence to a codified treatment of image production. On another level, however, what this thesis has shown and to which experience testifies is the desire for art so sited to fulfil a rather different function: to break through the 'crust' of tried and tested mechanisms of art production, or rather, *reproduction*, in an effort to release 'the power of real life.' Put in the terms of this thesis, where exception enables the possibility of encounter, torpidity is the fate of the repetitions of recognition. On a purely practical level, therefore, the art event calls to be treated on each occasion on its own terms, for each case to be taken as it comes. In this respect, overly prescriptive policies for art and over-policed installations close down unpredictable possibilities for the sake of predictable outcomes. In other words, whatever rule governs the implementation of art in churches that rule must always be measured against its necessary disruption by a dynamic art of exception.

The problem faced by every work in an ecclesiastical space, and in relation to a rule, is what we could call, after Kant, the production of a determinant judgement as compared with a reflexive judgement. Each presents us with a scenario that a focus on the exception seeks to avoid. In the first an encounter with the object of art is determined by an already existing law (tradition, say, or the parameters fixed by an institution's policy for art); in the second through an encounter with the object a law is established to be able to accommodate it (what in sociological terms Bourdieu describes as an expanding field that brings inside what was formerly outside; what we could call an openness on the part of the church to that which was formerly outside its canons of representation). The singularity of the exception is in its resistance to both forms of framing, the first a movement from the universal to the particular, the second from the particular to the universal. What we are trying to establish is a condition of possibility for art that validates each singular occasion, each singular work, each with its singular problems and singular possibilities, in a way which exceeds the delimitations of the ecclesiastical frame.[12] Badiou's own response to the question of the singularity of the

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[12] Irit Rogoff's contrast of 'singularity' and 'specificity' is helpful here. The latter infers a context-directed situation, 'specific to one particular location,' wherein an art work accommodates itself to the specifics of a particular place. The former denotes an art-directed situation, 'singular to a logic of its own organisation,' whereby the context accommodates itself to the work of art (Elkins and Newman. 2008: 102). For Rogoff the latter is preferable by dint of the dynamic potential it grants to the work of art, where the former threatens to stifle it. In the context of our discussion, however,

work of art comes through his reference to the 'formula.' The formula is his term for the process that determines what we have been calling objects of recognition, or an ecclesiastical framing, or a Kantian judgement. The formula may be descriptive or it may be prescriptive; it may enable or it may proscribe. But it is in order to resist a programmatic and generalised art production that Badiou prescribes an avoidance of the formulaic repetitions of the formula, that is, 'established devices for the production of art'; instead we should preserve a '*multiplicity of formalisations*.'[13] Another word for the formula, of particular relevance to our argument, is the arts policy.

Ecclesiastical Arts Policies

When Needham expresses, through Leach, the imperative of taking each case as it comes, rather than pursuing an overall agenda or policy that accounts for all, he draws us on to a further difficulty for ecclesiastical art today, one that is generally reckoned as a positive sign of art's incorporation into the church. Due to the rising prominence and prevalence of ecclesiastically-sited artistic projects, in recent years the Church of England has attempted to ratify the conditions of possibility for art in churches through the implementation of arts policies, to regulate and legislate what has until now been a rather piecemeal affair. Indeed, it could be argued that prior to their introduction all works of modern or contemporary art have been treated as exceptional, with sometimes outstanding, sometimes dire, results. This more consolidated approach to the use of permanent and temporary works, administered in a bid to maintain standards, procedures and control, threatens to create a situation in which the exception, by necessity, is excluded. Perhaps some clarification of this point is required. Ecclesiastical policies for art are, on the one hand, pragmatically reasonable, defensible, and forward-looking, displaying a willingness on the part of ecclesiastical authorities to seriously engage with contemporary art. On the one hand, their perceived necessity indicates the promise of further opportunities for artists interested in producing work for the church. On the other hand, however admirable their intentions, they may unwittingly prove a hindrance to art. There is a danger that, by setting out the conditions of possibility for ecclesiastical art, arts policies foreclose those possibilities, inhibiting and restricting their efforts to think progressively and expand the opportunity for commissions (see appendix 10 for a

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though we would also second the importance of singularity, we cannot ignore the demands of specificity.

[13] Badiou. 2007: 155 (emphasis in original)

fuller analysis of this problem). Rather than resulting from a structured policy, successful collaborations between artists and the church in the past have, in almost every case, relied upon the vision and perseverance of particular clerical individuals in collaboration with chosen artists. This tells us something important. It replicates in many respects the artist-curator relationship we typically find in the art gallery. More often than not, the visionaries of the past found themselves in opposition with their superiors, their congregation, their contemporaries, or a combination of all three. Yet their belief in the art, their faith in the artist, and their desire to accord to art a valid and viable role in the life of the church, frequently resulted in works that remain highly regarded today.[14] A criticism will be made, and rightly so, that these visionaries were the pioneers of what has since become a roundly established, recognised and ubiquitous phenomenon requiring coordination and regulation. Chapters exist today to oversee not only the various arts projects proposed but also the expanding number of artist-in-residence programmes operating within many major cathedrals. Chapters facilitate, make possible, but they also compromise or are compromised. As we know, even the best of commissions and installations have been subject to compromises of one sort or another, whether the visual impediment to *Sound II* of an obtrusive wall whose requested removal was refused (see figure 17), or the well-documented scenario at Durham that resulted in *The Messenger's*

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[14] Questions concerning the authority of the priest in such matters had already been rehearsed over Assy. This had prompted the Papal authorities to reject the autonomy given to individuals, like Couturier, to make decisions affecting 'the religious life of Christian society,' with some calling for church authorities to formulate rules as a guide to artists (Rubin. 1961: 48). Shortly after the publication of Rubin's study of Assy, art historian Meyer Schapiro added his voice to the dispute. Drawing perhaps upon the examples of Hussey and Bell, and certainly Couturier, Schapiro proposed precisely the need for inspired individuals: 'The churches cannot rely here on a view already set by their traditions and shared by all the members; much, if not everything, depends on the initiative and self-reliance of a particular inspired individual – a minister, priest, or layman – whose convictions about art are strong enough to surmount the usual constraints of denominational opinion and the tastes of parishioners' (Schapiro. 1999: 190-1). A far more recent critical voice proposes an apparently similar but actually overly-administered approach. Philip Ryken's advice to the artist called upon to create work for the church, 'to submit to the judgement of experts,' reflects a common, but problematic, practice today (Ryken. 2006: 25). Ryken's own agenda for art in the church calls for a cautious and prescriptive approach, one in which the artist's own creative judgements ought to be confirmed 'by those who are qualified to know' (ibid: 26). Ryken's 'experts' operate here as a kind of Lacanian 'subject supposed to know.' Yet, as the history of the gifted, mystical or visionary artist has so often shown, those supposed to know are often the last to recognise artistic creativity. It is not experts but visionaries that are required. There is, of course, a place for expert opinion. Hussey sought advice from prominent experts like art historian Sir Kenneth Clark, then Director of the National Gallery, art critics like Herbert Read and Eric Newton, as well as Bishop George Bell, another ecclesial advocate of modern art for the church. He was also adamant in the importance of enlisting the support of the Parochial Church Council, unwilling to go over their heads with something with which they were unhappy. In reading his version of events, however, one senses that the expert opinion was as much to supply weight to his project – a means of convincing others – as it was to settling things in his own mind (Hussey. 1985).

sequestration, or the many obstacles that beset Ono's installation in St. Paul's Cathedral (see appendix 4). Some might argue that compromise is surely unavoidable within such contexts and not to be lamented other than by those with unrealistic aspirations. Nevertheless, it is striking that the one piece referred to time and again, and frequently elicited as a point of reference, was remarkable for its determined unwillingness to compromise. We speak, of course, of *The White Mass*. Even if its achievements have been exaggerated (which is far from certain) it seems unlikely that it could have resulted from the stringent guidelines of an ecclesiastical arts policy. *The White Mass* remains an exceptional event.[15]

Arts policies operate as a framing mechanism, a condition of possibility, but one that restricts as much as it enables. Is it not the case that arts policies attempt to formulate all-encompassing rules to cover every eventuality, but thereby rule out the unforeseen or exceptional? Even when arts policies allow for the viability of temporary works, even when they may be broad enough in scope to consider the place of the exception, they seem unlikely to be able to consider in each case an artwork as an exception or site of unpredictability. When dealing with the modern church the imperative of full inclusion becomes a serious issue and arts policies are, in part, an aspect of that universal vision. In many respects the perceived appropriateness or not of a work of art hinges upon its appeal to a wide ecclesiastical and secular audience. Yet art simply does not work this way. Hence the fundamental stumbling block of all arts policies, however well-intentioned.

Ecclesiastical frameworks

Many would no doubt agree with theologian Tina Beattie's view that 'art has a capacity to achieve what institutional Christianity no longer can.'[16] The inference of her statement is

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[15] In a 2009 article for *Religion and the Arts* Mennekes recalled that earlier seminal work. His text tells us a great deal about the problematic nature of commissioning for the church and how, in this instance, an effective installation resulted. *The White Mass* deliberately coincided with a six-week period in which the space of the church was emptied of all extraneous visual distractions and customary furniture. The artistic intention was for the liturgy to be performed in a similarly reduced form, for which Byars requested, even demanded, that the altar be removed and the Eucharist performed within the auspices of the proposed artwork. Initially this was deemed to be pushing the measure of acceptability too far. Misgivings set in, threatening the consummation of the work at all, and many discussions ensued before a consensus, but not a compromise, was reached. The radical demands of the work, though unorthodox, were not sufficiently heterodox to be unable to overcome the initial objections. Ultimately, agreeing to do without the altar came down to trusting the artist and his artistic vision (Mennekes. 2009).

[16] Conference. *Finding God in Holy Places*. St Chad's College, Durham. 2010.

the loss of the church's capacity to convey an experience of the spiritual or sacred in an age of increasing secularisation, declining belief and inefficacy of religious symbolism, in a culture in which, as Graham Howes likes to remind us, aesthetic veneration has replaced religious devotion.[17] Nevertheless, the argument of this thesis is that, no matter how true this scenario may be, a thriving relationship of art and church is still clearly discernible. Indeed, it may be, as Bishop Stancliffe contends, that we have in fact entered a new phase for ecclesiastical art. In which case we should ask, what identifies this new phase? What language, form or direction will it take? As we have already noted, from Maritain to Tillich to Walker, among many others, a tendency to prescribe the parameters of art seems to be typical of those theologians and members of the clergy generally perceived as defenders of a modern ecclesiastical artistic tradition. At their best such prescriptions are delimiting; at their worst they could be characterised as a kind of 'soft iconoclasm,' to coin a phrase from a very recent study.[18] Even amongst those at the forefront of encouraging a vital role for art in ecclesiastical spaces such discourses continue to predominate. For example, in 2009, at a conference debating the role of the visual arts in cathedrals, a set of criteria for commissioning was proposed by the Right Revd. John Inge, Bishop of Worcester. He outlined three essential qualities that he felt had to be taken into account or, to use his term, negotiated, in any commission for the church: aesthetic quality, clear Christian symbolism and accessibility, all indicative of an attitude post-Vatican II.[19] Although we can see why he would describe these three as essential it is not insignificant that he chose to speak of negotiating since the viability of all three conditions is debatable. We would be unlikely to demand such rigorous criteria of a non-ecclesiastical work, and might well question the advisability of doing so for an ecclesiastical context. How so?

The first condition may be subsumed into subjective criteria of taste, however much voices within the arts, media or the church call for certain objective standards to be upheld. If we are to utilise this criterion we would need to understand precisely what is meant by aesthetic quality. Although there may be an argument in favour of this condition it is no easy matter to decide its parameters or scope, especially where the use of new media are concerned. It may be that certain assumptions inform (or rather pre-

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[17] Most recently at the conference, *Contemplations of the Spiritual in Contemporary Art*. Liverpool Cathedral. 2010

[18] Siedell. 2008: 14. By 'soft iconoclasm' Siedell means to defend art's fundamental right to be art against all other extraneous demands.

[19] Conference. *Cathedrals and the Visual Arts*. Sarum College, Salisbury. 2009

form) aesthetic expectations. The second condition barely seems to apply at all based on many of the successful precedents of ecclesiastical art of the past two decades. Christian symbolism is often absent, and when it is present, implicitly or explicitly, is often far from clear. This lack of clarity is compounded by a frequently lamented lack of visual and symbolic literacy among the lay public (where a common complaint concerning the first condition is that it is compromised by a lack of visual sensitivity or education on the part of the clergy). Of course, a perceived decline in the power and communicability of traditional Christian symbolism, along with the appropriation and wilful distortion of religious imagery in much contemporary art outside the church, does not necessarily devalue the importance of such symbolism, but it does cause us to ponder the efficacy of such a condition, with all its Cartesian implications. As Tillich once caustically noted, the poverty of a great deal of 'church-sponsored art' has been its adherence to such clear and distinct directives, often resulting in an art that calls for iconoclasm! Does clear Christian symbolism preclude all forms of abstraction, for example, or rule out ambient or conceptual works? Are works based upon the symbols of other religions automatically disqualified? Several significant pieces discussed in this thesis and elsewhere from Viola, Gormley, Kapoor, Ono or Byars would be ineligible on these grounds. Would it discount works that might be considered difficult or abstruse? This was a criticism often levelled at Epstein's sculptures, but few today would dismiss his works for the church as lacking in relevant symbolism. In his contribution to the *Images of Christ* exhibition catalogue, Rowan Williams even went so far as to propose that art is 'most seriously religious, even theological, when it isn't perceived as trying to illustrate Christian truths.'[20] We could go on but let's move on to the third condition of accessibility, which is an extension of the second. What is required of a work of art for it to be accessible, and to whom must it be accessible? Does this imply easy, perhaps universal, access to a work? Does it infer that at some level everyone should be able to appreciate it? Is it not the case that complexity of content or form offers its own form of accessibility, albeit less easily obtained? Isn't there a sense in which at times accessibility takes second place to mystery, uncertainty or complexity? A work of art may be initially accessible on one level but esoteric on another, requiring effort, patience or determination on the part of the viewer. Multifarious discourses of art, no less than the complexities of theology itself and the richness of human experience would seem to militate against anything other than a discrepant view of accessibility.

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[20] Williams in Devonshire Jones. 1993: 27

From a certain Christian standpoint one might justifiably lay down the law on these three conditions and demand that it is only good and right that a work of art in an ecclesiastical setting fulfil these requirements, but one would be going against a tradition of modern art in the church, from Couturier, Hussey and Bell onwards, that has sought to extend the range of artistic form and content beyond such narrow limitations.[21] For example, doesn't Inge's model place all the emphasis of communication upon the work of art: to be aesthetically pleasing, symbolically clear and hermeneutically unchallenging? It presupposes an ideal or universal subject to whom it communicates its meaning and message. Such a model is rarely invoked outside the church today. Instead, in arguing for a subject-based or reception approach to art in the mode of exception, these conditions strain to exceed the restrictions of their framing, and an established or presumed object-subject relation. To take one example, McEwen's caustic response to *The Shape of the Century* exhibition in Salisbury Cathedral exposed precisely his own internalisation of these commonly-held assumptions. In decrying the lack of 'Christian subjects' he fell into the trap of assuming a direct and accessible translation from art object to Christian meaning, into which Inge's model too is in danger of collapsing.[22] If we take the last three winning entries of the *ACE Award for Art in a Religious Context*, a recognised award for works that are judged to be not only significant works of art in their own right but specifically so within their ecclesiastical setting, then we will discover that Inge's criteria, although undoubtedly widely supported, hardly apply at all. Neither Tracey Emin's permanent neon work, *For You*, in Liverpool's Anglican Cathedral (figure 77), nor Rose Finn-Kelcey's *Angel*, temporarily sited atop St. Paul's Church in London (figure 78), offer a straightforward aesthetic, clear symbolism nor certain accessibility. Although we might think we know to whom Emin's statement – 'I felt you and I knew you loved me' – is directed this cannot be taken for granted. And although as a work of light it clearly resonates with the aesthetic quality of the stained glass directly above it, what about the fact that it is delivered in an aesthetic form whose nearest equivalent is the electric signage found in any public institution today? There are many for whom the use of neon represents tawdry populism ill-suited to what might otherwise be read as a statement of devotion. In point of fact, the work is surprisingly nuanced. Unlike the neon texts of

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[21] In his defence of Hussey's commissions for St. Matthew's, for example, Kenneth Clark offered a robust retort to critics of the use of a contemporary, often difficult, idiom in art for the church, which is no less relevant today, objecting to 'the fallacy that works of Church Art must be immediately perceptible and understandable to everybody' (Clark, cited in Hussey. 1985: 41).

[22] McEwen. 1999: 9

Bruce Nauman or Martin Creed the thicks and thins of her pink neon script replicate the personality of the written hand, adding a candid note of intimacy to a very public setting. Set beneath the enormity of Carl Edwards's colourful and multi-fragmented window, Emin's text posits a still and meditative focal point, offering the viewer an affective, tender statement; mawkish perhaps, but sincere, a human dimension within the cavernous proportions of the nave. Finn-Kelsey's work, on the other hand, is saturated with the language of popular culture, using the economical language of mobile phone texting to spell out, in colourful shimmer discs, the most 'visually economic rendition of an angel.'[23] *Angel* gained widespread popularity during its brief tenure at St. Paul's, but her use of the emoticon seemed designed to appeal to a specific audience able to recognise the unorthodox language it applied. Alison Watt's painting, *Still*, in Old St. Paul's Church, Edinburgh (figure 79), depicting folds of white fabric, a cross negatively formed by the gap between the four canvases, seems to indicate a closer correlation with Inge's conditions, yet retains sufficient mystery in its silent presence within the church to confound all but the most indirect and allusive of interpretations. Perhaps it is Stephen Cox's *St. Anselm's Altar* in Canterbury Cathedral (figure 53), the joint winner with *Angel*, which represents the most conventional tradition for ecclesiastical art. Aesthetically pleasing and fitting to its liturgical purpose, if its many symbolic nuances are not obvious, its liturgical role certainly is.

A matter of trust

Each of these examples is a reminder of the vital role of fidelity, for which an equivalent is commonly encountered in certain views expressed regarding the process of commissioning work for the church. At a one-day workshop of a relatively new body set up to oversee and inaugurate art commissions for the church a prominent refrain shaped the discussion: the injunction to trust the artist.[24] In effect this asserts the necessity of having faith in the artist, of fidelity to the artist themselves. Drawing on a principle often voiced by Canon Keith Walker, Jonathan Evens stressed his conviction that the church 'must be prepared to trust its chosen artists to begin their work and carry it through to the end as the fulfilment of a trust, the terms and circumstances of which they understand and respect.' This precedent was set by Walker's predecessor, Bishop George

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[23] Moffatt. 2004: 4

[24] Commission4mission study day. *Perspectives on Commissioning Christian Art*. Chelmsford Cathedral. 07/11/09

Bell, who had endorsed trust for the sake of the liberty of the artist 'without which their creative faculties cannot be exercised.'[25] Bell offset the necessity of trust against the element of risk that accompanies any art commission, a requirement given official status in the Goring Judgement, Bell's defence of a mural design by Hans Feibusch.[26] In this particular case, the artist for his part counterbalanced the vital importance of artistic freedom of interpretation of a brief against the artist's responsibility to be worthy of the trust invested in him. Although this judgement was made almost sixty years ago the question of trust periodically resurfaces, clearly an extant issue along with the anxieties of risk so frequently provoked by art proposals.

One of the chief contemporary instigators of ecclesiastical commissions is Canon Bill Hall of Durham Cathedral. It has been said of him that he 'likes artists and trusts them absolutely, often introducing them into situations where he could be held responsible if things go wrong.'[27] His trust of artists extends to choosing those whom he considers the best artists, regardless of their personal convictions of faith. Piety does not automatically guarantee insight, and indeed Hall believes it often leads to second-rate work. A genuinely visionary non-believing artist, through his or her avoidance of the over-familiar, or what we have been calling objects of recognition, may open up wider avenues of thought and experience, in often unexpected ways. Nonetheless, his desire not to compromise the integrity of the artist's work is balanced against a comparable desire not to compromise the integrity of the church or cathedral in which it is seen. In this respect, Hall's fundamental conviction is that artists and Christians are able to inhabit and explore 'common ground,'[28] a goal he believes was achieved by his most famous (and infamous) commission, Bill Viola's *The Messenger*. Described by one critic as 'one of the finest pieces of twentieth-century church art,'[29] Hall is keen to emphasise that it was never envisaged as 'church art' exactly, but rather as a work investigating universal themes of birth and death, dissolution and rebirth, and so on, which a more traditional iconographic brief might have precluded. Even when a proposal is rejected Hall's response is, as Cooper summarises it, 'better to risk something ground-breaking and fail,

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[25] Bell, cited in Cameron. 2002: 6

[26] See Foster. 1999

[27] Cooper. 2001: 2

[28] Ibid.

[29] Januszczak. 1996: 8

than timidly resign oneself to something anodyne.'[30] At the afore-mentioned conference debating the place of the visual arts in cathedrals, Charles Saumarez Smith, current Secretary and Chief Executive of the Royal Academy of Arts, remarked on Hall's collaboration with Viola along precisely these lines. Hall, he stressed, had been willing to encourage the cathedral to go with an adventurous work without knowing what to expect, thereby taking upon himself the responsibility for the risk involved.[31] Risk always entails the possibility of failure, and yet is continually advanced as indispensible to the creative process. George Pattison, for instance, speaks for many when he says, 'For me risk is one of the most important things about the making of art, and is integral to what makes art art, rather than just production.'[32] Trusting in the artist implies an element of risk in every commission, and it will come as no surprise that Hall's attitude, especially in utilising works by non-confessional artists, has often been criticised. A typical complaint is that it results in an imposition of 'alien' elements into a sacred space. Nevertheless, a rhetoric of risk continues to be associated with works considered to be successful. The Liverpool commission that resulted in Emin's pink neon sign, for instance, was praised not only for its use of an unorthodox genre but for the willingness of the commission to treat it as permanent, a commitment that 'indicates risk-taking with conviction on the part of the Cathedral.'[33]

The situation

This question of risk and the unorthodox imposition of foreign elements leads us to a final aspect of Badiou's thought and an alternative agenda for rethinking the potentially divisive relations of art and the church. Interestingly, in this scenario we will find that Hall's focus on 'common ground' is supplanted by a greater emphasis on a lack of commonality, but as a positive condition of possibility for coexistence. A central aspect of Badiou's system of thought of particular relevance to the arguments presented here is the way he envisages the advent of philosophy in any given situation. He argues that a situation for philosophy (a condition of possibility) relies upon the kind of contentious relationship that so often characterises contemporary art and the church, or at the very least is assumed to do so. A situation prepares the ground for philosophy or thought

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[30] Cooper. 2001: 3

[31] Conference. *Cathedrals and the Visual Arts*. Sarum College, Salisbury. 2009.

[32] Pattison. 2009: 137-8

[33] Hedley. 2010: 5-6

when it produces an encounter between foreign terms. Badiou has several appellations for such encounters: the compossibility of incommensurables; the conjunction of disjunctive elements; or more simply, a disjunctive synthesis.[34] The assumption of this thesis has been that, however desirable their conjunction, contemporary art and ecclesiastical spaces maintain tense, even fractious, relations, as a disjunctive synthesis of foreign terms. Art and religion are frequently labelled as 'reluctant partners,' to quote Ena Giurescu Heller on the uneasy dialogue between art and religion, or two systems of thought and practice in conflict, as Laeuchli proposes. Some have held that art and religion are two very different but complementary ways of describing the same phenomena but, for the iconoclasts (or iconosceptics) among us, as contrary and incompatible ways. Sometimes this relation produces an awkward, perhaps embarrassing, insubstantial or unsatisfying mismatch; at other times, a genuine encounter. But are there conditions that might avoid the former and foster the latter? Surprisingly perhaps, Badiou provides us with an apposite philosophical basis for this uneasy relationship, which in part explains his insistence on the inherent militancy of every authentic event.[35] In *Polemics* he defines a philosophical situation, for which he provides three examples. Setting aside Badiou's examples let us focus on his terms:

> A situation is philosophical, or 'for' philosophy, when it forces the existence of a relation between terms that, in general, or in common opinion, can have no relation to each other. A philosophical situation is an encounter…between essentially foreign terms.[36]

In this encounter of foreign terms Badiou prescribes three conditions, which he sees as three tasks of philosophy: to deal with choices, distances and exceptions. First, with each such confrontation a choice is demanded, a decision required. Second, between creative thought and authorised tradition there can be no consensus. Third, it is essential that a place be found for the exception and the rupture it induces:

> This is the story that philosophy is forever telling us, in all kinds of ways: be in the exception, in the sense of event; keep a distance from power; and accept the consequences of a decision, however remote and difficult they may be. […]

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[34] Badiou. 2007. In many respects a better term to employ, one more in keeping with Badiou's ideas, would be disjunctive consistency.

[35] Badiou and Winter. 2006: 179

[36] Ibid: 3

> Philosophy is possible because there are paradoxical relations, or because there are ruptures, or because there are decisions, distances and events.[37]

Decision, distance and the exceptional event. Are these the parameters within which a disjunctive relation of contemporary art and the church may be thought? Some years ago an enlightening exchange took place between two significant figures in the world of ecclesiastical curatorship, both of whom operated as priests and curators of their respective churches, both of whom championed a progressive engagement with contemporary art within the church, but who represented in many respects opposing viewpoints: Canon Keith Walker (at that time Canon of Winchester Cathedral) and Father Friedhelm Mennekes (of Sankt Peter, Köln). The disparity of their respective opinions, reflected in the concrete direction of their curatorial policies, was played out at a conference in Chichester in 1999, but the basis of their disagreement may be more clearly gleaned from interviews they gave around the same time.[38] In a private interview with me a few months prior to the conference Canon Walker stated that central to his agenda for art in ecclesiastical settings was an assertion that all such art should serve the liturgy, and support the doctrine of the church.[39] In curatorial theory and practise such apparently commonsensical criteria, supported by many other writers with a similarly Christian agenda, is emphatically opposed by Mennekes, whose primary aim is to see a conflict occur, for art to actively disrupt both the space and its inherent ideologies, not in order to exacerbate their differences but rather, as he said in an interview with Gérard Goodrow,

> to establish a new discourse, to restore the severed relationship between not only art and the church, but between both of these and the community to which they belong.[40]

Mennekes recognises that art can be hostile to faith, challenging his own certainties. He does not shy from this possibility, however, but rather is happy to install work that directly criticises his faith:

> I don't use art to fill my church. I use art because I can't live without art, even though art can destroy my belief, because art is doubt. It is a culture of doubt, a

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[37] Ibid: 4-8, 9, 10

[38] Conference. *Commissioning Art for Today's Church*. University College, Chichester. 1999.

[39] Interview with Keith Walker, Canon of Winchester Cathedral. Winchester. 07/07/99.

[40] Goodrow. 1992: 44

> culture of questioning. […] Art forces me to bring new questions and to give new answers. But these new answers don't contradict what was said before; art specifies or actualises the problems.[41]

Central to Mennekes's philosophy is that art and religion deal with the same range of experiences, but that both realms must be understood as having their own independent fields of operation, such that between the two recognition of their differences must be maintained.[42] Art and religion's point of meeting is a tense and tenuous threshold, a place of crossover, dialogue, negotiation and exchange, one which highlights perfectly the description, in *Tate Magazine*, of art and religion's 'close though sometimes fractious embrace.'[43] For Mennekes, therefore, good ecclesiastical art is ecclesiastical only by virtue of its location; to be in any way effective it must first of all be successful as a work of art, which may or may not deal directly or indirectly with a religious theme. Many of those within the church responsible for artistic projects would no doubt concur with this argument, although few go quite as far as Mennekes in his disparagement of Christian subjects. His argument that all good art should never begin its life with a religious agenda, since all such good intentions will only ever lead to mediocre art, is a radical view with which many would find much to disagree, even if they share Mennekes's desire to see art used well within the church. It may be that the stridency of Mennekes's position (as a priest/curator it is a significant one for the arguments presented here. Is he not, after all, still a priest while he is curating, and vice versa?) is simply an outworking of his fervency to avoid all possibility of introducing 'religious art' into Sankt Peter. This is not to preclude or deny any possibility of a spiritual encounter with the work. Rather it is the exact opposite. He stresses a need for art to break the character of the space, to establish its own voice within the environment, and thus make possible an experience of the sacred. He believes the art that enters his church should be free of overt associations, thus freeing the mind and imagination of the viewer, sometimes an art-educated spectator, but often a regular worshipper, in order to efficaciously interact with the work, the space, and the ideology it serves. Nevertheless, It may be that, for the sake of his own radical programme, Mennekes neglects too many of the lessons to be learned from earlier pivotal figures like Hussey and Couturier, upholding the rather jaded rhetoric associated with a 'white cube' mentality. As Howes has argued, what cannot be forgotten

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[41] Morley. 1998: 50

[42] Thiel. 1996: 55

[43] Morley. 1998: 53

is 'the highly complex nexus of patron, artist, parish, community and society that is so often integral to the making of religious art, yesterday and today.'[44] The contextual interplay of all these elements is key to an understanding of art in ecclesiastical locations. Where contemporary art meets the modern church, then, Mennekes's brand of antagonistic discord cannot be easily upheld and may even be counter-productive.

Permanent and temporary

Perhaps this disparity of views in which a discourse of conflict itself conflicts with the more typical criterion of the harmonisation of art with its ecclesiastical setting, a holistic agenda more in keeping with Walker's ruling, should be set against the contrasting qualities and expectations of temporary versus permanent works. Where Mennekes deals almost exclusively with temporary installations, Walker, like his predecessors, Hussey and Bell, has been involved in several permanent commissions. But is it reasonable to suppose that permanent works fall outside of a discourse of conflict? If conflict is a desired consequence, the danger with this supposition is that we come to assume, or worse, prescribe, that the only art capable of working effectively in an ecclesiastical space must therefore be one that reflects the contingency of the impermanent, thus rendering obsolete almost the entire canon of ecclesiastical art; as if the static and permanent will always fail to transmit a more evental dynamic. Two very recent examples from the cathedrals of Durham and Liverpool are instructive in this regard, one temporary, one permanent: Jane Alexander's *On Being Human*, installed in the Galilee Chapel of Durham Cathedral in 2009, and Tracey Emin's aforementioned piece, *For You*, in Liverpool Cathedral. Alexander created a discomforting and provocative, even transgressive, installation that invited reflection upon being human in distressing conditions of poverty, deprivation and oppression, based upon her experiences of South Africa's apartheid regime (figure 80). The impact of this work relied upon its transitory presence and its invasive encroachment of the space, available only to a temporary installation, from which it was hoped would come 'a fruitful encounter between Jane's depiction of the human condition and the Christian tradition with its insights about the possibility of renewal and hope for humanity.'[45] Was this a work that provoked encounter through conflict? There were certainly plenty of visitors who deemed it inappropriate for a cathedral, judging by online comments and blogs. Inevitably it revised a long-standing

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[44] Howes. 2009b: 148

[45] Sadgrove. 2009

contradiction between ecclesiastical wealth and power and a history of clerical coercion in oppressive states, and the New Testament injunction to look after widows and orphans in their distress as a sign of true religion (James 1:27). Time will tell if Emin's permanantly-installed neon work continues to retain its initial impact. The choice of materials, its associations with the non-aesthetic acroutrements of any public building, its evocation of a fleeting and very personal experience, all conspire to evoke a sense of impermanence. Perhaps over time it will lose its evocative quality; perhaps like Gormley's *Sound II*, in Winchester Cathedral's crypt, it will maintain a powerful presence through its alternate conflictual and harmonious relationship with the space. Both examples stress once again the conviction to resist any compulsion for safe options; to validate instead the place of the exception, the necessity of risk, and the importance of distancing oneself from traditional validations of what constitutes good or appropriate art.

Cathedrals and the Visual Arts

Since the time of that debate between Walker and Mennekes there have been three major changes in cathedral arts practices, which have accompanied the expanded visibility of contemporary art more generally. Firstly, the implementation of arts policies by several cathedral Chapters; secondly, the proliferation of artist-in-residence programmes; thirdly, the increased involvement of arts intermediaries in an official, advisory capacity. Clearly the institutional frameworks supporting an ongoing commitment to the use of contemporary art in the church have changed dramatically. However, the contours of the debate remain largely unchanged, if Inge's not-untypical comments are anything to go by. Pessimistically, we can also see, a propos of Badiou, decisions becoming democratic, the distance between art and an authorised milieu for art being reduced, and the potential for exception increasingly curtailed.

What this thesis has attempted to do is to address the conceptual frameworks available to that debate, thereby extending the vocabulary upon which a progressive relationship of art and church may be based. By this method it is hoped that the use of art for the church may be continually revised and rethought, a concern more rather than less urgent in an age of its increasing viability and visibility. Thus we have married the actual expanded practices of art to certain conditions of possibility: the porosity of the space and the work's relinquishing of its boundaries to that porosity; recognition of the work's durational and evental relationship with its environment; awareness of the sacred's many modalities and ambiguities; adoption of a gaucherie that disrupts tradition

and expectations, that stumbles over interpretations and understanding, and obstructs the application of formulae; scrupulous resistance to the absolute closure of affirmation or denial; the paradoxical suspension of art's autonomy through autoimmune processes; recourse to exceptional contingency over definitive and calculated certainty; temporary and ephemeral liminality as art's persistent state; the extension of art's liturgical presence and communal imperative; fidelity to art's evental possibilities, and so on.

Although a considerable number of highly effective church projects and commissions have worked more or less within the paradigms of the ecclesiastical art with which we are familiar, the most interesting of the past ten or twenty years have been those that have fallen outside those frameworks. It is projects such as these that have tested and extended the possibilities for art within the situation and thereby changed the very landscape of the possible for ecclesiastical art. Moreover, they have produced new subjects, either by shifting patterns of expectation in an existing audience, or by inventing a whole new audience or participant receptive to the work. Such singular artistic moments exceed their situation; not just a situation for art, but for belief, for liturgical practices, for subjectivity, perhaps for community. An objection will be made that art in ecclesiastical spaces is not always predicated on the presentation of the new, and that many effective works signify, in many respects, the continuation of a tradition. This is indeed the case; throughout this thesis we have attempted to plot a path that anticipates the opening up of new routes for art without attempting to sever all ties to an earlier tradition. Nevertheless, what we would caution against is the almost inevitable co-option of art. As Stephen Willats warns, in the conclusion to his text on social art practices, every new or unorthodox artistic practice is inevitably co-opted by the dominant culture, which tends to 'legitimise those aspects of a new practice that will reinforce the continuation of its own ideologies, and will act to inhibit or marginalise anything else.'[46] Approval can therefore prove to be a form of betrayal or compromise. The artist, says Willats, must constantly look to him or herself to initiate new frameworks of practice. Essentially he cautions the artist to beware of 'the criteria of the institution' as a mechanism of validation, not only for the control it exercises over artistic production but also in acknowledging that exclusion from this criteria does not necessarily invalidate a work of art. Although the ecclesiastical scenario for art is rather different from that envisaged by Willats, it must be remembered that art in the service of the church also falls outside the usual institutional frameworks for art. But if, in the

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[46] Willats. 1986 (no page numbers given)

service of the church, art escapes the mediation of secular institutions of art, it may be only in order to be entrapped in orthodoxy, imitation, tradition, spectacle, or the desire for easy legibility as an object of recognition. Here we re-encounter the fidelity that accompanies each and every event and marks the subjects of that event, a fidelity which itself depends upon mounting resistance to 'its own regulation and institutionalisation.'[47] To be faithful to fidelity itself, to do it justice means, then, to be responsive to the necessity to return, in each and every case, to the beginnings that Žižek insists underpin every creative action. This is precisely what we infer in a rethinking of ecclesiastical encounters with contemporary art.

Let us finish on a practical note. In his review of the 2009 conference, *Cathedrals and the Visual Arts*, Graham Howes noted approvingly of a perceptible sea-change in the relationship between the worlds of art and church, fostered by a palpable improvement in their 'mutual trust and shared accountability.'[48] Just a few years earlier, in his joint publication on the state of the church's patronage of the visual arts, his prognosis had been considerably gloomier. Nevertheless, we should take heed of those well-situated to know, like Paul Bayley of Art and Christianity Enquiry, whose cautious optimism regarding the current climate for ecclesiastically-sited art urges us to resist the temptation to take every opportunity to fill our cathedrals and churches with art. Here Charles Saumarez Smith is again instructive. At the conference mentioned above, Saumarez Smith outlined a number of maxims for art in churches, which correspond closely to the arguments we have proposed. Firstly, it pays to be bold in commissioning – better to be bravely ambitious than predictable; secondly, attention must be paid to context – a sacred space should not be seen as merely another venue for art; thirdly, it is important to maintain quality over quantity – better to initiate a small number of significant and highly imaginative works than to inundate the church with numerous projects; finally, he issued a warning with which we would concur: the church is an aesthetic environment often spoiled by undue, peripheral clutter, to which art, at its worst, merely contributes.

That these issues extend beyond the tiny enclave of enthusiasts for contemporary ecclesiastical art is clear from comments that regularly appear in the press, where one typically encounters diametrically opposing views on this issue. Let me cite two relatively recent examples. Jonathan Jones, writing in *The Guardian*, calls upon the Church of England to desist from 'clutter[ing]' the spaces in their care with 'modern trash'

(although it gets no mention in the text his diatribe is accompanied by an image of *The Messenger* in St. Paul's Cathedral).[49] The intimation of this and previous pieces by Jones is to deny any place for the use of contemporary art within Britain's cathedrals, churches and abbeys. By contrast, writing in *The Times* Rachel Campbell-Johnston notes with approval the recent 'flurry' of contemporary art commissions and installations for the church, which, she argues, as the original patron of the arts, ought to continue to welcome art in the idiom of its time.[50] With Saumarez Smith's recommendations in mind we hesitate to endorse the latter, nor to berate the former, however much the one presents a progressive attitude which we might share and the other a conservative rejection of all things new. The desire for preservation is not without its merits, nor is the enthusiasm for creative novelty something to be unreservedly embraced. In fact, if forced to choose, we would position ourselves closer to the former, recommending restraint over an exuberant proliferation of projects. This is, in part, out of sympathy for the antipathy felt by many towards contemporary works of art shown in their cathedrals and churches, for whom such events can be experienced as a kind of symbolic violation. Sensitivity to their point of view ought not to be scorned, and need not necessarily lead to capitulation. But primarily we call for a renewed emphasis on the value of art as a source of spiritual, aesthetic, and indeed evental encounter, best served by occasional but intensive experiences than recourse to an events calendar filled with one art project following hard upon the heels of its predecessor, a tendency increasingly evident in a number of British cathedrals.

At the commencement of this thesis we spoke of the entrance onto the ecclesiastical scene of a vital role for contemporary art, reanimating a relationship that many had thought to be moribund. What we have sought to accentuate is that, as one writer has evocatively put it, art 'opens a door, and leads one to a place one couldn't have reached by oneself.'[51] More to the point, our supposition is that art opens doors closed to other aspects of experience. This is what Jeremy Begbie terms art's irreducibility, by

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[49] Jones. 2009

[50] Campbell-Johnston. 2010: 6. In the same article Campbell-Johnston pitted flagging attendance at services against the opportunities granted the church to exploit its potential as an exhibition space (ibid: 6-7). This is as much as to say that art now fulfils a need that the church once, but no longer, provides. To some extent this may be so, but the argument presented by this thesis strongly resists the transformation of ecclesiastical spaces into exhibition venues implied by the article's assertion that '[i]t is less art that needs the Church, but the Church, in its waning popularity, that needs art.'

[51] Lucie-Smith. 2008: 5

which art 'generat[es] meanings which cannot be attained in any other way.'[52] Art, he continues, is not that which redescribes or represents, but that which discloses.[53] Contrary to those who continue to bemoan the strained relationship of art and the church, many might justifiably take the view that that door has been well and truly opened, that a place for contemporary art within the church is now more or less assured. At the time of writing two major commissions are underway to produce permanent works for St. Paul's and Chichester Cathedrals. Chichester has announced Jaume Plensa's *Together* as a new permanent commission for the nave, and St. Paul's awaits the installation of a permanent double screen altarpiece by Bill Viola. This thesis began by outlining the extraordinary advantages offered by a contemporary shift in ecclesiastical commissions towards the use of temporary works; it ends with the prospect of two prominent forthcoming permanent works. With temporary projects like *The Messenger* and *The White Mass*, and numerous other works of art since, a door opened onto previously unforeseen and untried possibilities. Even *Sound II* began as a temporary installation, only becoming permanent once it was seen to be such an extraordinarily good fit for the space. With a move towards more permanent pieces does this mean a return to the earlier precedents set by Bell, Hussey, Couturier et al to install works fit for their age? Is this a sign of the church's readiness to fully revive its role as patron of the arts? Or might we be witnessing the re-entrenchment of a kind of orthodoxy of the image? With so many projects continuing to appear in British churches and cathedrals it is important to refrain from complacency. Concurrent with these signs of promise for the future relation of contemporary art and the church comes the regrettable news that Wallspace has been obliged, for lack of funding, to close its doors. Thus, a truly unique venture dedicated to the exploration of ecclesiastical encounters with contemporary art has disappeared in the same moment of art's evident ascendancy by dint of the church's revivified patronage.

Coda: priest-door

This thesis has followed a kind of ambulatory progression through the spaces of ecclesiastically-sited contemporary art in a search for the conditions that favour its effective use. Let us, finally, slip out through the priest-door, and take stock of where we have arrived. In the past a progressive role for art within the church relied upon the patronage, and indeed belligerent determination, of particular individuals. This in an age

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[52] Begbie. 1991: 248

[53] Ibid: 249

when modern art did not enjoy the kind of popular appreciation it has today but rather was subject to intense scepticism and considerable hostility. Each successful installation was seen as an important achievement, therefore, and another step along the path towards a more radical, prominent and enlightened role for art within the life of the modern church. Today's ecclesiastical arts programme exists within a very different cultural climate, one which, at the risk of exaggerating the influence of one specific institution, seems to have developed along with the creation and development of St. Paul's Cathedral's neighbour across the water. If the art museum can be said to be the offspring of the church's patronage of the arts then the Millennium Bridge, acting like a great umbilical cord joining parent to child, acts not only as a physical conduit for the cultural tourist, but is also a symbolic conduit for art's traversal between the two sites of cultural heritage, its transcription between sacred and secular cathedrals. This in turn reflects a massive cultural shift in the visibility and acceptability of contemporary art within the wider culture, which could perhaps be aligned with the success of Tate Modern, seen by many as a watershed in the public taste for contemporary art, or the notoriety and publicity afforded the Young British Artists. In fact, 2000 was not only remarkable for the opening of Tate Modern, but for a whole series of modern extensions to existing sites or collections (Dulwich Picture Gallery, The National Portrait Gallery, The British Museum, The Imperial War Museum, Somerset House), not only in the capital but in less likely locations such as Walsall, and later, Gateshead. These extensions might be seen as analogous to the expansion of interest in art and its increasing cultural importance, not only to the economy but as a kind of cultural barometer for our sense of cultural and spiritual well-being. It is an expansion that has extended the reach of contemporary art through the porticos of our churches and cathedrals in an ever-increasing proliferation of projects. In the same moment that this cultural change improves the reception for contemporary art it threatens to impede the possibilities for meaningful art through over-exposure and a degree of complacency in the face of a loss of art's questionable and oppositional tendencies, particularly in a cultural climate in which the avant-garde has become the mainstream.

Challenges to the perceived lack of contemporarily meaningful art began with the refusal of a certain hegemony of form and content first effected by a handful of priests eager to introduce modern art into their churches, but despite their example new traditions follow hard upon old. Many ecclesiastical commissions since have done little to promote that earlier vision and indeed there is a tendency to simply repeat the successes

of the past. In this country, for example, current negotiations for a permanent installation by Viola for St. Paul's Cathedral might be read as an indication that his work has now become the safe bet where commissions of new media are concerned, while Gormley is fast becoming the default choice for ecclesiastical art projects.[54] If the 1990s was a period of testing the waters, of experiment, uncertainty and risk-taking, building on the legacy of Coventry, St. Matthew's and Chichester, the 2000s was a period of marked expansion and perhaps consolidation, as cathedrals increasingly became viable sites for contemporary art. The hesitant, often embattled steps of the 1990s have become the more confident gait of the 2000s, and at the risk of complacency may even become a swagger. The optimistic rhetoric that accompanies each new ecclesiastical project, responding to those who twenty, ten, or even five years earlier, had prognosticated disconsolately about the limited value accorded to contemporary art for the church, should not blind us to the fact that we are in many respects still stumbling in the dark, and indeed would do better to remain so in the face of overweening confidence. With an ever-increasing number of projects, this incursion of art into ecclesiastical spaces suggests that, as this thesis has attempted to show, curation has become as significant an issue as creation; and, I would venture, curation tempered with caution as well as animated by boldness. My suspicion is that we have arrived at a delicate juncture in the development of the church's relationship with contemporary art. And whilst we speculate upon the hopes and prospects for what the next decade will bring, a degree of reflexive retrospection is also in order, always with a care to begin from the beginning. As a final corollary to the attention paid to art in the specific context of the church, this thesis has also reflected on the contemporary art world itself – its art-critical orthodoxies, its reluctance to engage seriously with religious themes, its refusals and resistance to 'religious art' and spaces – questioning its persistent need to derogate any art employed in and for the church that exceeds a purely secular-cultural role. What we hope to have shown is art's enormously rich potential for encounters with a vital contemporary religious milieu, often in the most unlikely of ways.

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[54] At the time of writing sculptural works by Gormley could be seen in the cathedrals of Canterbury and Salisbury, had lately been on show in St. Paul's, and were included among those short-listed for the Chichester cathedral commission.
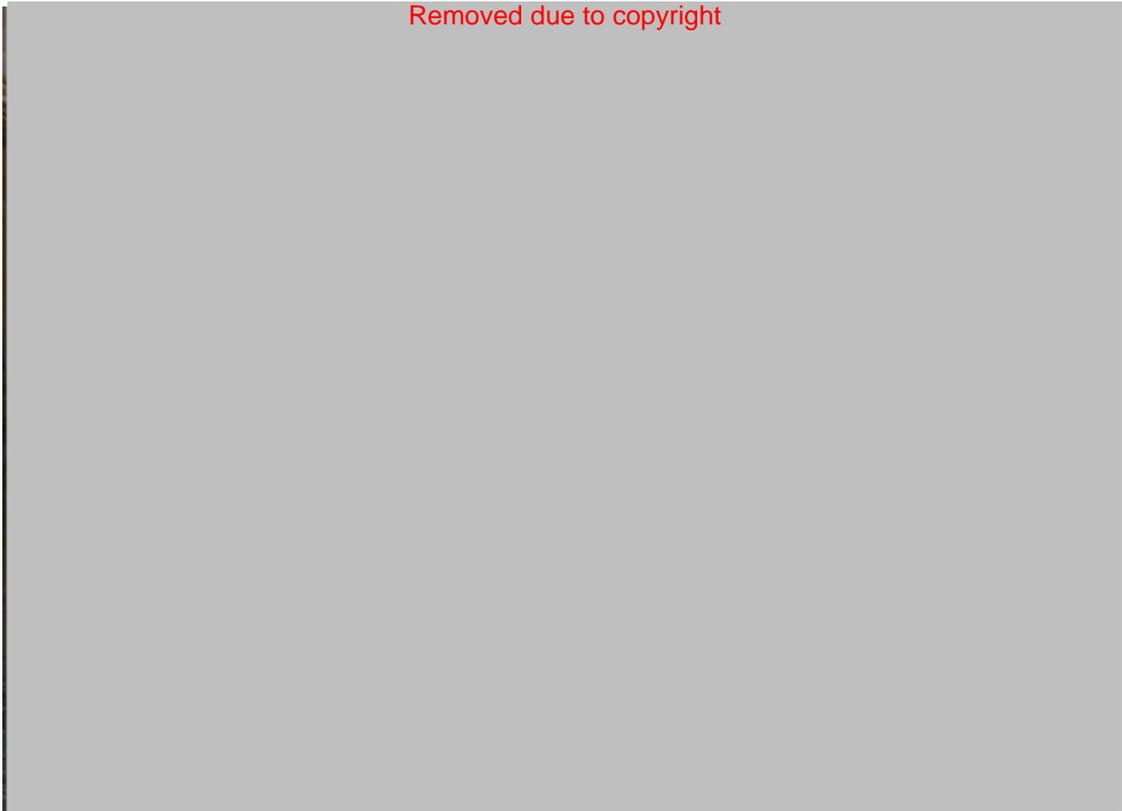
Figure 74 Jaume Plensa, artist's impression of *Together* in situ, Chichester Cathedral, 2010.

The proposed sculpture is a semi-transparent hand raised in benediction, composed of scripts from many different languages and cultures.

Figure 75 Johannes Schreiter, stained glass windows for Heiliggeistkirche, Heidelberg, 1983-7

Left: *Physics* window, the only one of the series to be installed, 1986; Right: designs for *Biology*, 1983, and *Traffic/Transportation*, 1987

Figure 76 Peter Eugene Ball, *Crucifix* and *Pieta*, Winchester Cathedral, 1990

Figure 77 Tracey Emin, *For You*, Liverpool Cathedral, 2008

Figure 78 Rose Finn-Kelcey, *Angel*, St. Paul's, Bow Common, 2004

Figure 79 Alison Watt, *Still*, Old St. Paul's Church, Edinburgh, 2004

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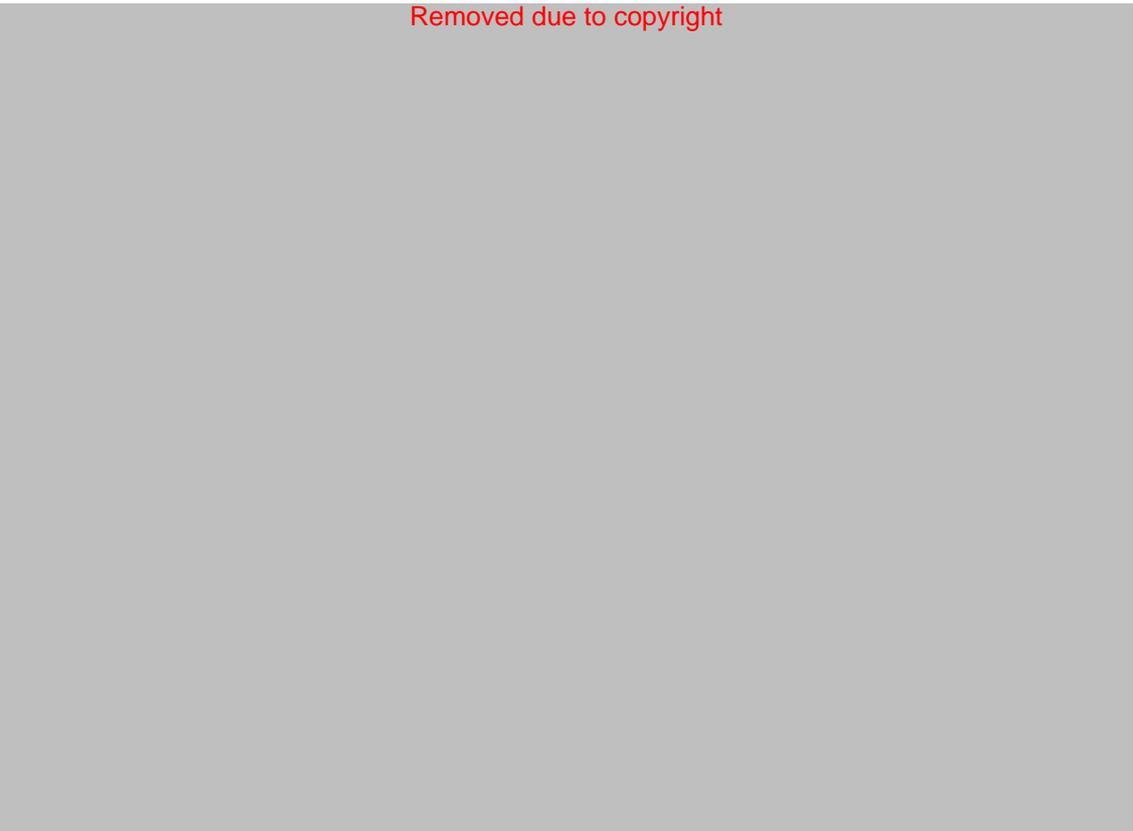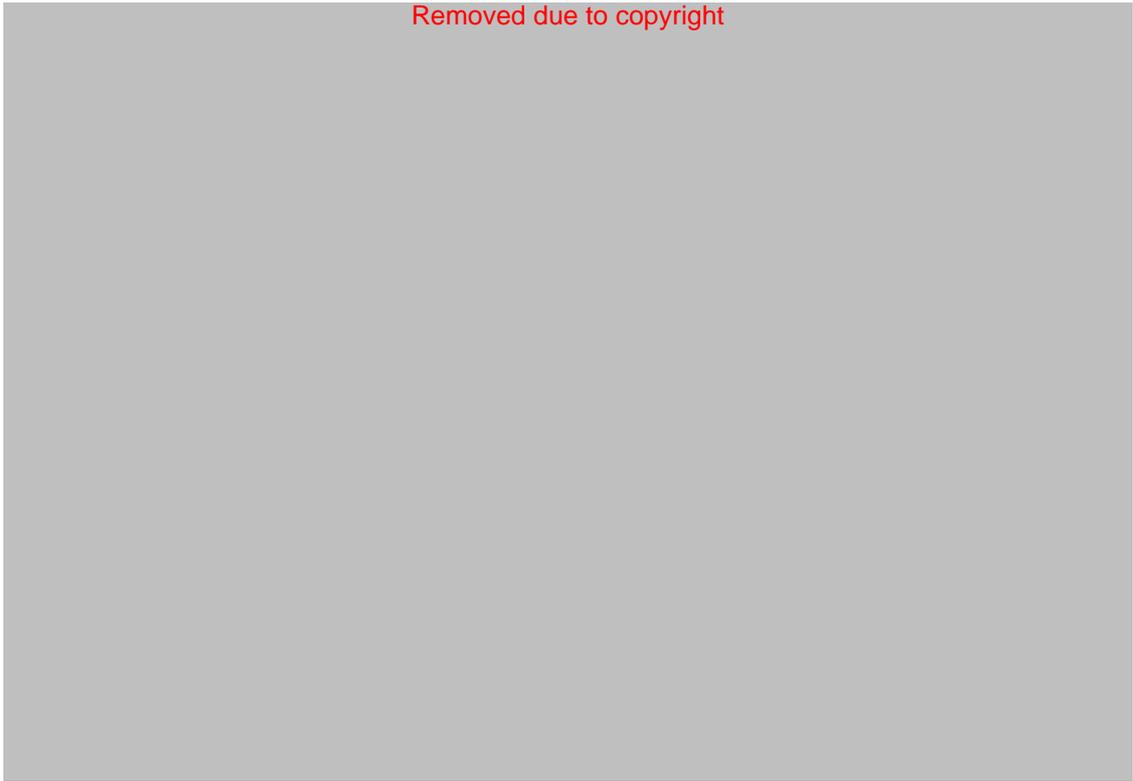
Figure 80 Jane Alexander, *On Being Human*, Durham Cathedral, 2009

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

List of categories

The Space   Porosity

Event

Duration

The Sacred   Ambiguity

Hierophany

Gaucherie

The Work   Scrupulosity

Leitourgia

Exception

The Community   Fidelity

Liminality

Communitas

Appendix 2

Literature review

The scope of the inquiry

At the beginning of the 1990s theologian George Pattison had observed that scholarship had produced little in the way of a coherent modern dialogue between art and religion, a lack which had prompted the writing of *Art, Modernity and Faith* (1991). By the time of its second edition, at the end of the 1990s, Pattison had noted a distinct change: 'In the last decade there has been an enormous growth of interest in "art-and-religion," an interest reflected both in the installation of new works in Churches and in an expanding theological and critical literature.'[1] Another ten years down the road this trend has continued to grow apace. Today the wide sweep of a theme that encompasses art's relationship with the church can seem so overwhelming as to prohibit any possible practical review of its literature. What is immediately required, therefore, is a method for minimising the range of material to be covered. Clearly the backdrop to this thesis is the well-known story of modern art's inception into both centuries-old and newly-built ecclesiastical spaces, largely through the persistent enthusiasm of isolated clerics, a history which, for sake of argument, can be dated to the mid-twentieth century (several of the latter a result of renewal following wartime destruction). Modern religious architectural projects, such as Coventry Cathedral (1962), offered considerable scope for the incorporation of an art more in keeping with the times, along with a shift in liturgical practice, of particularly relevance to the Catholic Church in this period, following the revisions of Vatican II (1962-65). Equally significant were the singular efforts of particular individuals within the church (both Anglican and Catholic) to introduce modern art into more conventional ecclesiastical environments around the same period.

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[1] Pattison. 1998: 188. To get a sense of the significant expansion in the critical literature available these days we could cite the small but growing number of journals currently dealing with this subject, some of which are relatively recent additions: *Nouveau Arts Sacré* (France, 2009) replaced *Chroniques d'Art Sacré* which ceased publication in 2007, *Material Religion* (Oxford, 2005), *SEEN* (USA, 2000), *Religion and the Arts* (USA, 1997), *Art and Christianity Enquiry* (London, 1995), *ARTS: The Arts in Religious and Theological Studies* (USA, 1989), *Image: A Journal of the Arts and Religion* (USA, 1989), *Faith and Form* (USA, 1967), and the long-running *Kunst und Kirche* (Germany, 1924). *l'Art Sacré* (France, 1935), which until 1955 was the only journal dedicated to this subject in France, ceased publication in 1969. Of greater significance these days, of course, is the role of the internet as a resource and repository of related ideas and information. This is a rapidly expanding field, with numerous websites devoted to crossovers between art and religion, produced either by institutions or individuals, though so far inadequately exploited by the established church itself, judging by the difficulties one often has in finding information on artworks or exhibitions on cathedral websites.

France and England took the lead in this respect, though Germany and others were quick to follow suit. George Bell (Bishop of Chichester) and Walter Hussey (Vicar of St. Matthew's, Northampton and later Dean of Chichester Cathedral) pioneered the introduction of art works by such luminaries as Henry Moore, Maurice Chagall, Graham Sutherland, Jacob Epstein, John Piper, and others, into their respective spaces, often in the face of virulent opposition. At the same time in France, Père Marie-Alain Couturier, responsible in the 1920s for the first abstract stained-glass windows in France, was patronising artists like Fernand Léger, Jacques Lipchitz, and Georges Rouault, thereby fomenting, as a recent study puts it, 'nothing less than a Copernican revolution in liturgical art.'[2] His agenda was made explicitly clear in a response to his spiritual superiors, when asked his opinion of the current state of church art: 'Our church art is in complete decay,' he said, 'it is dead, dusty, academic—imitations of imitations . . . with no power to speak to modern man.'[3] Precisely this complaint was shared by Bell and Hussey across the channel, for whom religious art had become mired in tradition and stiflingly archaic in form. To anyone interested in this field this is a familiar history. Such reforms, congruent with the Modernist project within Western European culture, have been richly documented by theologians within, and art historians outside, the church. More significantly, during and since that time the field of art in churches has been richly supplemented by numerous texts from those who fulfil both roles, being both art historians and theologians or philosophers of religion.

The question asked by this thesis – what are the conditions of possibility for contemporary art in ecclesiastical spaces? – at first sight would seem to be one that has been frequently examined, and indeed strikes the reader as offering little scope for inquiry that adds anything new to the many thousands of pages devoted to the subject of art and religious spaces. And yet, once we begin to draw the parameters of our inquiry with a more defined line it soon becomes clear that there is in fact a surprising absence of literature. Of those texts that currently exist certain tendencies may be isolated. Firstly, we can identify numerous historical studies whose focus is specifically modern art and the church.[4] On the whole these tend to be art histories stretching back to the earliest

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[2] Orenduff. 2008: 7

[3] Time. 1949

[4] It is worth noting the difference made between modern and contemporary art within the terms of this thesis. By contemporary art we mean art produced over the past twenty years or so, say from 1990 onwards, a date which seems to accord with much of the literature on the subject, with a particular emphasis upon factors such as the use of new media, a common preference for temporary projects, a dialogue with contemporary culture, and so on. By modern art we mean specifically art

roots of art and a nascent Christian faith, but their endpoint being Modernism (sometimes allied with an anticipation of the encroaching influence of Postmodernism), including innovative ecclesiastical architecture, often contextualised within the tensions felt by the modern church between tradition and modernisation, the pressures of secularisation and later generated by the cultural shift we call Postmodernism. A second identifiable subset are those texts which take for their theme the extant presence of spirituality within modern and contemporary art and the importance of spiritual inquiry for modern artists, not forgetting the apparently inexhaustible fascination of the public for religious themes, judging by the number of well-attended exhibitions that have been built around this leitmotif in recent years. A third group comprises those writers concerned with a theological understanding of modern and contemporary art, its place within and relevance to the modern church; its value *as* theology or exegesis. Finally, and by far the least numerous, are those texts which consider the necessary conditions, requirements and effectiveness of contemporary art within both modern and traditional church spaces. Within this more specialised field the logic of choosing contemporary art-forms for modern architectural spaces seems clear, but for our Medieval, Romanesque, Baroque and Neo-Gothic cathedrals, all witnesses to various permanent commissions and temporary installations of contemporary art, especially since the 1990s, some justification seems necessary. Clearly there is a considerable degree of convergence between these four, but for the sake of analysis they provide a useful differentiation of practice, intentions and conclusions.[5] Let's look more closely at these identified categories:

1. Histories of modern art and the church, often with a specific focus on 'Modernist' art

Although it could be argued that this category forms the precursor to any study of current attitudes towards art and the church, this thesis makes no attempt to produce any such in-depth history. The ground has already been well-covered by previous research and although there is always room for reinterpretations and reevaluations that is not the

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associated with the period or movement known as Modernism, during which the pioneering projects by Hussey, Couturier et al mentioned above took place.

[5] John Dillenberger's inclusion below as an art historian, for example, should not exclude the theological motivations behind his historical survey of the visual arts and religion. As a disciple of Tillich's, his survey was as much theologically informed as historically.

intention here. Several works could be cited, and no doubt some important contributions to this field have been omitted. The following suffice to give a broad overview of the work that has already been done.

Within this art historical category John Dillenberger's *A Theology of Artistic Sensibilities: The Visual Arts and the Church* (1986) stands out as particularly significant. Frequently referenced, it remains a key text within this field. As its title implies, though framing modern art within an historical survey of the church's equivocal attitude towards the art within its walls, it draws theological conclusions for a viable working relationship for art and ecclesiastical spaces, somewhat along the lines of the visual theology of Paul Tillich (with whom Dillenberger studied). His ex-partner, Jane Dillenberger, has also made important contributions. In *Style and Content in Christian Art* (1986), for example, beginning with the foundations of Christian art she follows its historical development through major periods (Byzantine, Medieval Gothic, Renaissance, and so on) through to the twentieth century, closely analysing key works of art for their sacred style and content. In each case Dillenberger stresses that imperative to all her examples is their testimony to artistic integrity, a claim that, as she shows, became a central point of contention in the church's attitude to modern art in the twentieth century.[6] Both Dillenbergers have written extensively on American examples of modern art, but the broad sweep of their canvas extends far beyond those shores, and is framed within a European history.

For a French perspective one recent text worth inclusion is Jérôme Cottin's, *La Mystique de l'Art: Art et Christianisme de 1900 à Nos Jours* (2007). In this distinctive history of art and the church in the twentieth century Cottin divides his field of study into three areas: the adaptation of a spiritual or religious impetus for the visual arts throughout the century, the persistent traces of Christianity within contemporary culture and public spheres, and the utilisation of art within the environs of the church. Within these three categories he deals with three types of artist: those who profess a Christian conviction, those outside a Christian tradition but preoccupied by religious themes, and those whom one might describe as spiritually or mystically inclined without being Christian. The mystique of art of his title refers to the analogous relations generated between artistic

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[6] Her point of view is based upon the principles laid out by Lionello Venturi who declared '[a] painter who creates his picture in order to stimulate faith in others, rather than to give free expression to his own faith, is not a sincere artist, even though he is a sincere believer' (Dillenberger. 1986: 225). But she is clearly indebted to Couturier's example too. The fundamental conviction that directed his commissioning was that one should turn to 'geniuses without faith' rather than 'believers without talent,' aided by his belief in the spiritual nature of all truly great art (Couturier, cited in ibid: 227).

activity, aesthetic emotion and religious experience; Cottin's aim, to think about art theologically and theology aesthetically.[7] Père Marie-Alain Couturier's earlier *Sacred Art* (1989) offers a limited survey of his own early introduction of Modernist art into the church in his dual guise as priest and patron of the arts. Reflective, perhaps, more than historical, it nonetheless highlights an important chapter in the development of an unconventional or non-traditional role for art within the church, through a selection of articles from *L'Art Sacré*, the influential journal that he co-edited with Pie-Raymond Régamey and which acted as a forum for the promotion of a frequently contentious arts policy for the church. Couturier's example is more fully examined by William S. Rubin in *Modern Sacred Art and the Church at Assy* (1961). This tells the history of the commissioning and creation of the works of art for the church of Notre Dame de Toute Grâce at Assy, in the face of often vociferous opposition, providing a case study of one of the early collaborations between many of the great modern artists of the time and the established church. A frequently-cited collection of essays within this historical category (though also encompassing aspects of the following categories), is *Art, Creativity and the Sacred* (1984), edited by Diana Apostolos-Cappadona, which brings into one volume essays by several major scholars in this field, not only from an historical perspective, but also theological and cultural, drawing comparisons with other religious visual traditions. It includes, for example, John Dillenberger's response to Rubin's somewhat pessimistic assessment of the experiment at Assy which, as a corrective to Rubin's argument, provides a more balanced summary of Couturier's achievement.[8] In 2008 a monograph on Couturier extended this analysis, placing Assy within the context of Couturier's personal spiritual, philosophical and critical development, and paying particular attention to the scandal surrounding Germaine Richier's crucifix (discussed in chapter 4).[9] Couturier's co-worker

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[7] Cottin. 2007: 7

[8] Dillenberger. Artists and Church Commissions: Rubin's *The Church at Assy* Revisited. In Apostolos-Cappadona. 1984: 193-204.

[9] Orenduff's *The Transformation of Catholic Religious Art in the Twentieth Century: Father Marie-Alain Couturier and the Church at Assy, France* (2008) acts as a kind of supplement to Rubin's text, providing background material to Couturier's own artistic and spiritual journey prior to and including Assy, but adding little to the much earlier work. Where Orenduff does score over Rubin is in situating the row at Assy within the larger debate concerning the Catholic Church's dubious behaviour during the war, many seeing in Richier's brutalised, featureless and emaciated figure an image of the Holocaust. Thus the condemnation of Richier's crucifix as 'degenerate' inevitably aligned its ecclesiastical critics with Vichy and all it represented. Orenduff also draws our attention to the fact that Couturier's place in the history of modern art and the church extends well beyond his efforts at Assy, to include the endorsement of Léger and Bazaine at L'Eglise du Sacré-Coeur, Audincourt, his close involvement with Matisse in the construction and decoration of La Chapelle du Saint-Marie du Rosaire, Vence, his sponsorship and support of Le Corbusier's commission for Notre Dame du Haut, Ronchamp, and even the creation of The Rothko Chapel, Houston, through his long-standing association with the de

on the journal *L'Art sacré* has also written in defence of modern art for the church. In *Religious Art in the Twentieth Century* (1963) Régamey discusses, among other issues, the arguments for employing non-believing artists in the service of the church, and the use of non-representational imagery. Unlike his more radical partner, however, if enthusiastic Régamey takes a somewhat conservative and defensive position. He works on the unhelpful principle that all art is basically sacred; moreover, his is a very rigid sense of the sacred and its translation into art for the church. A more contemporary French perspective of note is a PhD thesis, included for the apparent uniqueness of its scope at its time of writing. Taking the projects at Assy and Audincourt as its starting point, Inge Linder's *Pilgrimage to the Millennium* (2000) is a history of late twentieth-century church architecture and art in France, structured around a series of case studies focusing primarily on contemporary stained-glass. Since 2000 several comparable studies have appeared which focus on the particular projects she discusses, but Linder's text remains the only substantial work available in English.

A text devoted to modern art in this country is Michael Day's *Modern Art in English Churches* (1984), which focuses on early projects such as Coventry Cathedral and St. Matthews, Northampton. The great merit of this book is the substantial archive of permanent works of modern art in churches included as an appendix. However, as an historical record it is lightweight and the archive, though useful, is twenty years out of date. A more significant record of ecclesiastical commissions is provided by Canon Keith Walker, one of the few proactive contemporary clerical actors in this drama, whose close working associations with Hussey at Chichester led to a number of significant commissions under his own incumbency, first at All Saints, Basingstoke, then at Winchester Cathedral. As a work of history, *Images or Idols? The Place of Sacred Art in Churches Today* (1996), is often unconvincingly argued, suffering from too many indefensible generalizations, until we enter Walker's own period. His first-hand involvement in projects to commission artists like Cecil Collins and Antony Gormley to create modern works for the church (resulting in some remarkable achievements) adds to

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Menils. In recognition of Couturier's remarkable role, therefore, one text in particular that should be added to any history of modern art and the church is the chronicle of Vence's creation, told through the correspondence that passed between Matisse, Couturier and his associate, Father Rayssiguier: *La Chapelle de Vence: Journal d'une Création* (1993). It provides an illuminating record of the relationship between an artist, his ecclesiastical patron and its priestly mediators, as well as an insight into the myriad of details and decisions that go into a project of this kind.

the depth of his analysis.[10] His book also offers valuable insights into the practical business of negotiating between church and artist, clergy and congregation and, crucially, the committed, visually-literate, commissioning cleric and his superiors, in the creation of visual arts for the church. A thorough if somewhat partisan history of many important ecclesiastical commissions is Walter Hussey's own account, *Patron of Art* (1985). Sir Kenneth Clark once described Hussey as 'the last great patron of art in the Church of England,' meaning presumably at the time the only one doing anything worthwhile.[11] His example continues to be instructive, perhaps even cautionary, in an age of vastly increased artistic production for the church. In a similar vein, Basil Spence's *Phoenix at Coventry* (1962) provides an architect's view of the development of modern art for the church through a first-hand account of the closely-integrated conjoining of art and architecture in the creation of Coventry Cathedral.

Many other texts could be included in this category, but one final work worth mentioning is Margaret R. Miles's, *Image as Insight: Visual Understanding in Western Christianity and Secular Culture* (1985), a historical comparison of visual language used within and without the threshold of the church. Miles focuses on particular moments within the church's troubled attitude towards imagery, finally touching upon modern times to describe what she sees as the secular world's monopolization of engaging images, and hence the imperative upon the modern church to respond to that visual hegemony.

2. Spiritual or religious themes within modern art, not necessarily within a religious context

The recognition that artists today still turn to themes of religion or spirituality in overt or implied ways, or claim such notions as their inspiration, or that numerous secular gallery spaces house exhibitions broadly touching upon this theme, makes it clear that even before we consider texts or examples relating specifically to art and the church a broad field of interest is evidently thriving.[12] A trend initiated by Kandinsky's *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1912), texts within this category often take the form of catalogue essays

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[10] Keith Walker is a founder member of *Art and Christianity Enquiry* (ACE), an organisation committed to the promotion of art within the church.

[11] Clark, cited in Hussey. 1985: ix

[12] To cite the latest example of this persistent fascination, in 2010 the art journal *Frieze* devoted an entire issue to the theme of religion and spirituality.

for significant exhibitions. Particularly noteworthy examples include *Traces du sacré*, Centre Pompidou, Paris (2008), *Beyond Belief: Modern Art and the Religious Imagination*, National Gallery of Victoria (1998), *Negotiating Rapture: The Power of Art to Transform Lives*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (1996), and *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art (1986). The success of exhibitions like these is testament to the persistent draw of the spiritual or religious, reflected in the seriousness of the featured authors' respective disquisitions.

Several specialists have emerged within this area of study. Jane Dillenberger, for example, has again written widely on this subject.[13] Two other frequent contributors to catalogues and conferences whose themes presume an extant spirituality within modern Western culture are Donald Kuspit and David Morgan. The latter is renowned for his particular interest in forms of 'visual piety' that suffuse secular culture, the former for his fascination for the language of 'the spiritual' and 'the sacred' that recur within modern, purportedly secular, art histories. A comparable inquiry motivates Roger Lipsey's, *An Art of Our Own: The Spiritual in Twentieth-Century Art* (1988), Wendy Beckett's *Art and the Sacred* (1992) and a frequently reproduced essay by the anthropologist, Mircea Eliade, 'The Sacred and the Modern Artist,' which argues for a qualitative shift in expressions of the sacred in the wake of Nietzsche's proclamation of the death of God.[14]

Another significant writer in this field is Peter Fuller, whose *Images of God: The Consolations of Lost Illusions* (1985) and *Theoria: Art, and the Absence of Grace* (1988) argue for the deeply unfashionable idea that art should make great claims upon us, morally and spiritually, *pace* Ruskin, against the spiritual poverty of a purely materialist, affective or cognitive art. Though describing himself as 'an incorrigible atheist' Fuller nonetheless laments the divorce of aesthetic experience from the idea of the spiritual, exploring modern art values that cut across a more prevalent secular perspective. In a similar vein, though more didactic than polemical, a more recent publication from a professor of art

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[13] See, for example, *Secular Art with Sacred Themes* (1969), and a compilation of her essays entitled, *Image and Spirit in Sacred and Secular Art* (1990). In the former, Dillenberger begins from the premise that artists once worked with recognised symbolism, some of which still retain their power today, but at a time when art and religion sprang from the same soil. The modern artist, she argues, either uprooted from that soil, or cultivated in very different circumstances, creates his own symbols (Dillenberger. 1969: 17). Nonetheless, the secular artworks under discussion are palpably religious in content: crucifixions, last suppers, stations of the cross, and so on, from artists as diverse as Chagall, Eakins, Derain, Picasso and Newman. The latter reflects the breadth of Dillenberger's scholarly interests ranging from representations of women and the human body in sacred and secular art, theological analyses of traditional Christian art, or cultural histories of the spiritual impulse in modern art, with a particular focus on American examples.

[14] Eliade. 1985

history, James Elkins, seeks to understand the curious disjunction between contemporary art and religious perspectives in *On the Strange Place of Religion in Contemporary Art* (2004). Religion and art, it would appear, do not and cannot mix, and this is perhaps nowhere more apparent than within art school pedagogy. The core of the book, therefore, comprises of five case studies, responding to five art students' attempts to incorporate a religious dimension into their art practice. Two other recent additions to this field are *God in the Gallery* (2008) by Daniel A. Siedell and *Re-Enchantment* (2009), jointly edited by James Elkins and David Morgan, both of which adopt the language of art criticism in a discussion of spirituality, one with a distinctly Christian, the other a more secular, bias. Siedell seeks to develop a critical language to discuss modern and contemporary art within the art museum, based on philosophical considerations and theological reflection, but above all rooted in his own Christian sensibility and practice as an art museum curator and art historian. His argument is that when a Christian perspective is brought to bear on contemporary art, it habitually lacks a nuanced and informed critical vocabulary. *God in the Gallery* aims to redress this lack. Whether or not it succeeds is debatable; it is a book both praised and disparaged in equal measure. *Re-Enchantment* begins from the common assumption of art and religion's estrangement and the authors' sense of a pressing need to address this situation within the art world. Through a discursive seminar format it attempts to bring these two discourses of art and religion together. This it does with only sporadic success. If anything, the seminar reveals a persistent tendency to see the gap between art and religion as unbridgeable, whereas it is in fact the gulf between the speakers and their object of study that is most pronounced, along with an overly abstract idea of religion which fails to take material practices into account. The assessments in the second half of the book, responding to the seminar, provide more possibilities for thought and ways forward than the seminar itself, which rarely manages to escape the capture of each contributor's own discipline and position, thus doing little to bridge the aforesaid gap.

Finally, a rich but contentious field of recent years has been contemporary art's more abrasive appropriation of a discourse of religion, spirituality and the transcendent, in which art's propensity for blasphemy, sacrilege and religious provocation have been exploited.[15] Excepting the appearance of such works in ecclesiastical settings this theme

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[15] A pertinent text within this field is S. Brent Plate's *Blasphemy: Art That Offends* (2006), the author a respected critic of the relationship of art and religion. Plate notes the crucial element of context in disputes over what constitutes a blasphemous image, and the usefulness of 'sacred' and 'profane' in framing the perverse or pathological. Another notable publication is *Iconoclash* (2002), which

falls outside the remit of this thesis, as do notions of the transcendent or sublime in contemporary art.

3. Theological responses to modern art, both within and outside the church environment

These might be a theological reading of art, or proposals for a theology of art, investigating its explicit relevance and value for the church and its architectural spaces, often in relation to a postmodern sensibility orientated around theological responses to the so-called 'death of God.' The Protestant theologian, Paul Tillich, is a significant figure in this field, often considered to be the foremost writer on art and theology, with a bias towards an existentialist perspective current within the philosophy of his time, and prompted by Nietzsche's particular brand of modernity. A selection of his writings on art, outlining the development of his thought, were gathered by John and Jane Dillenberger in *On Art and Architecture* (1987). Though he distinguishes between the religious and non-religious as motivating factors in the production of art, Tillich's is a theology of art that attempts to elide these problematic categories as they are conventionally understood by equating them with the more humanistic notion of 'ultimate concern' and by arguing that art's concern is for what he calls 'ultimate reality.' He develops a schema of aesthetic judgement that qualifies art within a sliding scale of

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accompanied an exhibition in Karlsruhe examining the fraught relationship of image production to image destruction. In 2008-9 a three-part series of projects was initiated by BAK, Utrecht: an exhibition, *The Art of Iconoclasm*, a programme of discussions, and a critical reader, *The Return of Religion and Other Myths* (2009). Though ostensibly a text about the perceived return of religion in a post-secular age, its primary focus is on various forms of iconoclasm, as an extended record of the earlier exhibition and discussions. A text dealing with many of these same issues from a Catholic perspective is *L'Église et l'art d'avant-garde* (2002). The book is part of a larger ongoing project under the banner of Arts-Cultures-Foi, comprising an internet forum for discussion, resources and virtual exhibitions (see http://arts-cultures.cef.fr), its objective to initiate dialogue between the church, artists and contemporary society under the rubric of *La chair et Dieu*. As the title of the initiative suggests, it aims to reconcile the discord of the spiritual and the material exemplified by the seemingly irresolvable difficulties for the church provoked by contemporary artists like Serrano, Cattelan, Hirst, Nitsch and their ilk. This same theme is taken up by Eleanor Heartney in *Postmodern Heretics: The Catholic Imagination in Contemporary Art* (2004), which focuses on many of these same prominent artists accused of producing sacrilegious works of art and investigates the influence of their Catholic backgrounds on their artistic practices, noting the degree to which their preoccupations with corporeality reflect a Catholic materiality of religion. The mooted compatibility of contemporary art with a religious sensibility motivates Catherine Grenier's question, *L'art contemporain est-il chrétien?* (2003). Grenier's text sets out to discover whether the profusion of religious references in contemporary art is a sign of a rehabilitation of traditional iconography for subversive and manipulative purposes, or if it is a symptom of a genuine reinvention of religious concerns? Or, whether in fact we confuse basic existential concerns (for which religion has tended to be a source of vital inquiry) for religious inquiry.

'religious' or 'non-religious' style and content, that is, works that express or fail to express ultimate reality. Thus some works of art generally considered to be secular are valued as properly 'religious,' whilst others usually presumed to be religious are rejected as 'non-religious.' Although in some respects his is a useful way to think about art, Tillich's carefully-constructed schema tends, in the end, to close down the options available to artists rather than expand them. Nonetheless, Mark C. Taylor is not alone in his conviction that Tillich was an exception in his field, most twentieth-century theologians and philosophers of religion choosing to ignore rather than engage with modern art, except from the more discrete perspective of theological aesthetics (see below).[16] Another exception to the rule is Gerardus van der Leeuw's *Sacred and Profane Beauty* (1963, Dutch edition 1932). Van der Leeuw's was one of the first attempts at a reconciliation of theology and the arts, envisaged as a necessary reuniting of their formerly fractured though indissoluble union. In a more recent, revised edition, Apostolos-Cappadona introduces *Sacred and Profane Beauty* as a 'search for a phenomenology of theological aesthetics,' surveying religion's relationship to dance, drama, literature, painting, sculpture, architecture, and music.[17]

In his aforementioned text, *A Theology of Artistic Sensibilities*, John Dillenberger usefully outlines three modes of engagement between modern theology and the visual arts. The first sees no possible relation between art and theology, the second envisages a positive and beneficial relation, often with the emphasis upon theology's hermeneutic value in interpreting art, and the third a relation whereby the arts have a direct effect upon theological methods.[18] If the Protestant theologian Karl Barth's renowned distrust of the visual arts (based upon his conviction of God as 'wholly other' and thus unrepresentable) places him firmly within the first category, a substantial number of twentieth century theologians have responded more positively towards the visual arts, with a bias towards the one or the other of Dillenberger's final two categories. We have already mentioned Tillich, who wrote not so much a theology of art as a theology of culture in which art played a central role, under the rubric of 'ultimate concern,' and who was perhaps the twentieth century's principal figure responsible for establishing a vital place for art within theology. In contrast to Tillich's particular concerns, where an engagement with art has been forthcoming from theologians it is more commonly within

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[16] Taylor. 1992: 3

[17] Apostolos-Cappadona. Introduction to Leeuw. 2006: xxiii

[18] Dillenberger. 1985

the context of religion and aesthetics, in particular comparing theological and artistic notions of beauty. The theological centrality of Christ's incarnation clearly lends itself to discussions of aesthetics and material culture, as do the centuries of artistic efforts to depict the incarnate God. A number of preeminent theologians have made this subject their own, above all Hans Urs von Balthasar, who it is generally agreed has produced 'by far the most comprehensive, sustained and systematic study of theological aesthetics' (in *Seeing the Form*, volume 1 of his seven volume, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, 1983).[19] Von Balthasar's theological aesthetics rests upon the triple foundations of beauty, goodness and truth (or aesthetics, ethics and metaphysics, in an inverse reflection of the Kantian tradition). It is an 'aesthetics read theologically' which gives primacy to the work of art as a focus for contemplation, but with the aim of revealing or radiating God's glory outwards from the form.[20] As Austin explains, what results is a theology of art 'rather than an aesthetic which allows art to inform theology *in its own terms.*'[21] This is not an 'aesthetic theology,' a theology built from a 'this-worldly' viewpoint of beauty, but rather a 'theological aesthetics,' a recognition of beauty that points towards theological truth.[22]

If, in the light of many examples of contemporary artistic interventions in ecclesiastical spaces, this emphasis on beauty, with its accompanying commitment to disinterested perceptual contemplation, no longer seems an adequate criterion, if it appears as outdated as, and in many ways not dissimilar to, Clive Bell's and Roger Fry's argument for art as 'significant form,' it has had an undeniable presence in the thinking behind modern art's early engagement with the church. It is evident, for instance, in Couturier's rather surprising insistence that beauty should be the sole legitimate criterion for art, the only one that retains its effectiveness *as* a criterion.[23] Couturier sees in the history of art, from at least 1800 to 1950, the year in which he is writing, 'irrefutable proof' that the only works to have lasted are those in which the primacy of beauty has

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[19] Austin. 2005: 26. An opinion shared by numerous other writers on theological aesthetics, for whom von Balthasar's focus on the potential of art for theological contemplation exceeds the more typical reduction of art to 'an explicitly ecclesial function or a didactic purpose,' as Howes concludes in his assessment of von Balthasar's achievement (Howes. 1997: 681).

[20] Howes. 1997: 680

[21] Austin. 2005: 29 (emphasis in original)

[22] Ibid: 28

[23] Couturier. 1989: 14

been asserted over all other considerations.[24] In this respect a major influence upon Couturier was the Catholic theologian, Jacques Maritain, himself a significant figure in the revival of sacred art, seeking to endorse art's validity within a sacred milieu in which primacy was always given to the word. The first duty of the artist, he said, was fidelity to his own truth (he had Rouault in particular in mind). Nonetheless, in *Art and Scholasticism* (1946, first published in 1920) this manifesto of artistic freedom is considerably circumscribed by a series of prescriptive demands that appear to complicate this duty: as a form of visual theology art must be intelligible, it must be finished (that is, display its own integrity); though art should be unhindered by any deference to an 'appropriate style,' it must rely on theology for guidance, consequently presupposing the artist to be a believer (on this point Couturier clearly departed from Maritain's conjecture that no religious art can be produced by non-religious artists); finally, it should be religious in order to be beautiful, 'for beauty presupposes essentially the integrity of all the requisite conditions.'[25] Today this accent on beauty feels misplaced, even though theologies of art continue to be written based upon beauty as a prerequisite. An unlikely source for an answer of sorts would be to follow the route taken by Roger Fry, who sought a way out of this impasse by identifying two uses for the term beauty, 'one to indicate sensual charm and the other to mean the appropriateness and the intenseness of the emotions aroused, though what is depicted may be extremely ugly.'[26] For Jane Dillenberger this approach offers far more scope for modern art within the church, so often criticised as an insult to conventional and appropriate standards of beauty. One of the works at Assy, a crucifix by Germaine Richier, was a notable *cause celèbre* in this respect, criticised by the religious authorities for its allegedly unedifying ugliness and hence liturgical inadequacy. Any such rejection of ugliness as liturgically untenable is surely questionable in the light of the horror of the crucifixion, even if upsetting to our modern sensibilities.

German theologian, Hans Küng, acknowledges the necessity of artistic independence, affirming both art's autonomy and its ability to communicate or give form to the sacred. He argues that theologians should be wary of using art for religious ends

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[24] Ibid: 15-16. It is an ironic position considering his defence of works dismissed on the grounds of ugliness. On the other hand, bearing in mind Tillich's championing of Grünewald, it is apparent that a strain of ugliness runs through many works upheld as great examples of religious art. In this respect, an argument has been made that an ugly or horrific subject need not preclude a work of art from being considered beautiful (Rookmaaker. 1970: 233). What it requires is a revised notion of beauty, as Fry proposes below, or a recognition that ugliness is invariably mistaken for unfamiliarity, as Graham Sutherland wrote in defence of his *Crucifixion* for St. Matthew's (Hussey. 1985: 50).

[25] Maritain. 1946: 111-113

[26] Fry, cited in Dillenberger. 1969: 91-2

but should rather allow artists to speak on their own terms and in their own visual language. Art for Küng, then, has an 'immanent sense,' that is, it exists for itself, rather than as a means to an end. As a consequence of its 'for-itselfness,' it is freed to reflect upon the 'crisis of meaning' endemic to a secularised contemporary culture: can works of art be meaningful in an age of meaninglessness, he asks? They can, he conjectures, if they communicate meaninglessness in a way that is aesthetically meaningful.[27] Küng's ideas offer tentatively what Tillich would assert is demonstrably true, that '[m]odern art, even the most despairing, even that art which portrays man and his existence as absurd, may be fundamentally religious.'[28] One final figure, reiterating many of Tillich's ideas, but from the opposite theological corner, is Karl Rahner, who recognizes the necessary completion of theology by non-verbal means of expression. Theology cannot be complete, he insists, 'until it appropriates these arts as an integral moment of itself and its own life, until the arts become an intrinsic moment of theology itself…'[29] Rahner's ideas resonate with those who look to art as another way of both seeing and seeking theological insights.

The seminal work of van der Leeuw, Tillich, von Balthasar, Küng and Rahner, among others, has had an enormous influence, continuing to be felt in what has since become a far more extensive field of study. Yet even taking into account these earlier examples, as late as 1990 David Jasper noted a more general lack of scholarship in the field of theological aesthetics, suggesting that a 'discussion of aesthetics in religious and theological discourse has been very largely ignored.'[30] Attentive readers will have noticed how closely Jasper's comment resembles that made by Pattison (quoted at the commencement of this review) writing around the same time and lamenting a similar lack. Like Pattison, Jasper too no doubt registered a change in the later 1990s, notably through his close involvement with Canon Bill Hall on the formative project at Durham Cathedral that not only came to be seen by many as the benchmark for a progressive contemporary approach to art in churches, but also reanimated a somewhat dormant critical field: Bill Viola's, *The Messenger.* Jeremy Begbie's theological study of the arts, *Voicing Creation's Praise* (1991), also reflects this earlier despondency. What emerges is a sense of art's alienation from theology and the church more generally, with Begbie acting

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[27] Austin. 2005: 31

[28] Ibid: 32

[29] Rahner. 1982: 24

[30] In his foreword to Frank Burch Brown's *Religious Aesthetics* (Brown. 1990: ix).

as an apologist for a vital role for the arts, as a particular, and by no means inferior, 'mode of knowing the world.'[31] In this respect its date of publication is telling, as we noted in the difference between the two editions of Pattison's book. When Begbie urges the church to 'feel no shame in employing the arts as media of theological truth' we recognise that this admonishment has been largely heeded, in theory if not in practice.[32] Regarding the field of scholarship of the past twenty years, a brief list of subjects covered plucked almost at random gives some sense of the scope: theology and visual culture, art and beauty, visual faith, spirit and beauty, beauty and holiness, religious aesthetics, art and incarnation, art and theological imagination, and so on.[33] In an essay on the importance of the arts to theology, Brown notes that since the 1990s his own field of religious aesthetics has grown exponentially, showing that interest in the relationship of art, religion, theology and spirituality shows no sign of abating. Nevertheless, Brown adds the caveat that many discussions of aesthetics manage to leave art itself on the margins in favour of a focus on imagination, beauty, sublimity, and so on.[34] Even von Balthasar's massive seven volumes on theological aesthetics, he says, pays scant regard to actual works of art. Some like Edward Farley's *Faith and Beauty: A Theological Aesthetic* (2001) make it clear from the outset that their study of aesthetics consciously ignores art. More typically, others like Richard Viladesau's *Theological Aesthetics: God in Imagination, Beauty, and Art* (1999) consider the lessons that a religious aesthetic teaches concerning the beauty of God, that is, the aesthetic dimension of theological discourse, beauty as divine revelation, or art as an embodiment of religious experience or experience of the transcendent, sometimes with precautionary warnings against idolatry or distraction. Art is thus seen as a prop to theological insight. More rarely, scholarship within this field takes the less-trodden path that sees theology responding to, and learning lessons from, art.[35] This is precisely the project behind Michael Austin's *Explorations in Art, Theology and*

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[31] Begbie. 1991: 257

[32] Ibid.

[33] See Bergmann. 2009; Harries. 2005; García-Rivera. 2003; Dyrness. 2001; Farley. 2001; Viladesau. 1999; Robinson. 1993; Sherry. 1992; Martin Jr. 1990; Brown. 1990. Each of these texts argues for the profound contribution that the visual arts make to the Christian faith or the theological imagination.

[34] Brown in Vrudny and Yates. 2005: 39. As recently as 2005 Brown bemoaned a situation in which calls for an open-ended process or dialogue between art and theology in which each reflects, and is thereby transformed, by the other, have in fact gone largely unheeded: 'in so many contexts,' he says, 'the theological conversation with the arts (and vice versa) never even begins!' (Ibid: 43).

[35] Theological education plays an important role here. Parallel to a widening participation of contemporary visual arts in ecclesiastical life is a development in training in the arts for a new generation of clerics. In the 1980s research into the state of art education in American seminaries was carried out by Wilson Yates and documented in *The Arts in Theological Education* (1988). Yates sought

Imagination (2005), written in part as a response to George Pattison's earlier, highly influential, *Art, Modernity and Faith* (1991/1998), which claimed a similar motivation, overturning much of the scholarship that had gone before. Austin's verdict on Tillich, for instance, was that '[h]e was incapable…of theologically valuing an artwork for its own sake and in its own terms.' According to Tillich, he continues, works of art 'are cited as evidence for a theological argument the truth of which he had already accepted, rather than evidence upon which a theological argument could subsequently be built.'[36] Both Austin and Pattison call for an art accepted on its own terms ever before it becomes incorporated as part of a larger religious aesthetics or Christian theology of art. Indeed, Pattison's conviction that art is inevitably engaged in particular situations, with a recognition of the difficulties that must be surmounted by localised solutions to the aesthetics of ecclesiastical environments, implies an acceptance of an ethnological principle that is central to this thesis, namely 'to take each case as it comes.' Pattison's concluding words attest to this programme and could be taken as the springboard for this thesis. It is worth quoting at length:

> I have argued that art has to be justified out of its own resources, and has its own unique way of being present in the world. If art works, it works because of the way it works through the specific media of visual experience. If we are not moved by art in its own terms, we will not be moved to attend to it as part of a larger theorization of Christian self-understanding. However, Christian theology seems to be singularly ill-placed to allow art an appropriate autonomy, since it is congenitally reluctant to concede its privilege of judging art in terms of its relation to a (verbally determined) dogmatic meaning or narrative. This is true even of theology's attempts to interpret important works of secular art: it is especially true of theology's approach to art in and for Churches. Even apart from the vexed issue of getting a new work accepted by a particular congregation, a work of Church art must be able to survive a theological interrogation that can easily distort or destroy its artistic integrity, as the values of art are subordinated to the demands of doctrinal formulations or narrative reference.[37]

to outline a three-fold role for the visual arts in theological education: a theoretical role: the relation of the arts to theology, aesthetics, sacrality and beauty; an analytical role: the arts as a vehicle for interpretation and understanding; a practical role: the involvement of the arts in the practice of ministry and worship (Vrudny and Yates. 2005). Though it is not the concern of this thesis, the lack of the visual arts in theological education in British seminaries is perceived to be an ongoing problem, often blamed where resistance to art comes primarily from the clergy. A frequently-voiced complaint is that this neglected aspect of ecclesiastical training results in a clergy uninformed in their understanding and unsophisticated in their treatment of the arts in ecclesiastical contexts.

[36] Austin. 2005: 26

[37] Pattison. 1998: 177-178

Pattison's plea for a shift in the church's approach to commissioning or using art has, in several instances, been vindicated in the decade since the revised edition of his book was published. The example of Viola's *The Messenger*, shown to great acclaim as well as public hostility and media sensationalism, at Durham Cathedral in 1996, has come to be seen as a defining moment for ecclesiastical art. Its later appearance without fuss in St. Paul's Cathedral in 2004 was read as a sign of how far we have come.[38] It could equally be read as a sign of familiarity with more unusual forms of art and new media (no longer all that new) within our ecclesiastical spaces without their necessarily contributing to anything like a renewed discursive relationship between the art and the church.

That a conservative attitude prevails is evident in one of the latest books to emerge from within this field of art and theology. Roger Homan's *The Art of the Sublime: Principles of Christian Art and Architecture* (2006) upholds morality and integrity as the highest principles of a Christian aesthetics (echoing somewhat Pugin's marrying of architecture and morality) over and above art's fidelity to itself. The emphasis throughout is that art, above all, must serve the needs of faith, whilst retaining a sense of truth to itself, a dichotomy presented as mutually acceptable. Artistic integrity, therefore, is measured according to religious integrity, entirely in opposition to the art-centred principles of many of the writers previously discussed. It is not surprising to find, therefore, that as a theologically-informed historical survey of art within the church, *The Art of the Sublime* is notable for its complete failure to take into account any art beyond the early twentieth century, when the artists championed by Couturier et al were active. Admittedly, its theme being Christian aesthetics, it could be argued that this excludes the majority of modern art produced for the church, if we conclude that the motivation for artists such as Matisse, Chagall or Epstein, and priests like Couturier, Hussey or Bell, was not primarily to produce Christian art so much as an art worthy of the space, aesthetically and conceptually. Yet the absence of any mention of Rouault's contribution to Christian art, to pick one worthy example, or Sutherland and Moore's achievements (although Moore is at least privileged with a single brief entry), or the projects at Vence, Ronchamp or Coventry to produce an ecclesiastical architecture relevant to the times, let alone anything more recent, betrays the continuing wariness of writers like Homan towards contemporary art within this field.

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[38] Meryl Doney, the curator responsible for bringing *The Messenger* to St. Paul's Cathedral, told me that she had anticipated a negatively critical reaction similar to that experienced at Durham, but found that it was generally accepted without controversy.

Although it is now some 30 years out of date we should mention Laeuchli's *Religion and Art in Conflict* (1980) since its theme appears to so nearly approximate our own. In fact, this is not the case. Laeuchli identifies a field of 'religion and art' but as one that operates within other disciplines, such as theology, philosophy, art history, psychology, anthropology, or sociology, rather than having any kind of autonomous existence. As his title implies he considers their modern relationship to be principally one of conflict, in face of which his is not an attempt to repair this conflictual breach of art and religion, but an exercise in historicising and theorising that breach. The issue rests on a series of ambiguities: on the one hand, the transcendent God; on the other, God incarnate; on the one hand, an anti-iconic or aniconic religion (decreed by the Council of Elvira on the basis of the second commandment); on the other, a profusion of art within the church. Laeuchli finds evidence within the Judeo-Christian tradition for both a pro-iconic, pro-ritualistic thread and an anti-iconic, aniconic and anti-ritualistic thread operating side by side.[39] This tension is compounded by the fact that religious traditions are 'caught between the prospect of change and the panic about change,' an ambivalence reflected in their positive and negative responses to artistic creativity.[40] Even at its most conciliatory, art's inherent proclivity is to confront the church with a series of political, aesthetic, theological and social threats through, a) its potential to be anti-canonic, b) its revolutionary nature as novelty, c) its challenge to the primacy of the verbal and textual, and d) its expression of a different level of reality to the accepted social consciousness. In conclusion Laeuchli considers that, whatever art's relation to religion, it must transcend that relation if it is to be art at all and not merely a religious prop. In the same way, for the believer religion must necessarily transcend art, for which the latter remains merely analogous. Furthermore, Laeuchli notes that just as art is operative in the creation of religion, it is equally operative in periods of crisis for religion. Art operates to preserve, to create and to critique; it is necessary to the study of religion and antithetical to it at the same time. Ultimately, Laeuchli phrases their disputatious relationship in terms analogous to the ambivalence of the sacred: that fascination and repulsion constantly surface in their confrontations with each other.[41]

One final book that should be included in this survey is *Disfiguring* (1992) by the afore-mentioned Mark C. Taylor. His theology is a form of deconstructive atheism,

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[39] Laeuchli. 1980: 62

[40] Ibid: 158

[41] Ibid: 160

bounded on one side by the cultural implications of the Nietzschean death of God thesis and on the other by Derridean deconstruction. Indeed, in an earlier text he declares deconstruction to be nothing less than 'the "hermeneutic" of the death of God.'[42] Taylor's analysis of contemporary secular art and architecture aims to show how religious presuppositions have informed recent artistic theory and practice, as though a spiritual subtext underpins the secular imagination. Taylor describes this as a postmodern a/theology 'in which irreconcilable differences are repeatedly negotiated,' principally in a bid to overcome art and religion's incessant conflict.[43] One of the unanticipated consequences of postmodernism, he avers, is an ability to think religion otherwise, coupled with a percipience of the parallels between twentieth-century art and theology. His recondite formula for this mutuality, given form and voice above all by Kiefer and Kierkegaard, is 'something like a nonnegative negative theology that nonetheless is not positive,'[44] which in Hegelian-Žižekian terms might approximate a constructive 'tarrying with the negative.'

4. Attempts to develop the specific value of contemporary art for church contexts: its effects upon and suitability for their environment, its relevance to the liturgy, its efficacy as a tool of private contemplation or collective worship, the links it makes between a modern church and its socio-cultural context

This category draws closer to the interests of this thesis, and is significantly less well-served by existing literature. A number of books have been produced on the practical application of art within churches, but these tend to offer advice and ideas rather than critical reflection.[45] Some thirty years ago, a more focused effort to address art's practical

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[42] Taylor. 1984: 6.

[43] Taylor. 1992: 318

[44] Ibid: 316

[45] A typical example being Fiona Bond's, *The Arts in Your Church* (2001), a practical handbook for church leaders and laity eager to engage with the arts, published by the organization, *Theology Through the Arts*. The director of this initiative is Jeremy Begbie, who offers similarly pragmatic guidance and theological insights into the ecclesiastical value of the creative arts, with a particular bias towards music. Begbie has produced a number of texts through the *Theology Through the Arts* project. *Sounding the Depths* (2002) is an edited collection of proceedings from a conference/arts festival in Cambridge University in 2000, which brought theologians and artists together in dialogue. Its mission was, in part, a prompt to Christian artists to be unapologetic about their faith, as well as an attempt to convince theologians of the intrinsic value of the arts. His earlier *Beholding the Glory* (2000) aims to consider the arts through the lens of the incarnation. This central mystery has frequently been invoked as a defence of the image, and here provides the theological reasoning for an exploration of visual art, dance, music and literature. Other books that fall broadly within this remit are W. David O. Taylor,

role within the church was made by Nicholas Wolterstorff. *Art in Action* (1980) outlined a Christian philosophy of art, in the face of its perceived lack, written from the perspective of a Christian believer, taking a functional approach to art: art in and as action, art as a means of acting in the world. Against the observation that preference is always given to the work of art as an object of perceptual contemplation, Wolterstorff posits a broader remit for art, pondering how it works and how it is put to work in the world. It is a distinctly Heideggerian question, as the title to his first chapter clearly shows: 'artistically man acts.' This implied influence is evident in one of his principle themes: the notion of 'world-projection,' meaning the work projects a world distinct from the actual world. The work of art we could say puts a world to work, thereby confirming, illuminating, or contradicting that world outside the world of the work. Wolterstorff turns to Marcuse to make his point: 'Art challenges the monopoly of the established reality to determine what is "real," and it does so by creating a fictitious world which is nevertheless "more real than reality itself."'[46] There is much to be gained from such an approach. Rather unhelpfully, however, Wolterstorff's claim that art functions in varied and particular ways is aimed towards understanding what is universal in art. Furthermore, his work has been criticised for lack of reference to actual works of art.

An excellent collection of texts, edited by Ena Giurescu Heller, called *Reluctant Partners: Art and Religion in Dialogue* (2004), provides an overview of the state of play

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For the Beauty of the Church: Casting a Vision for the Arts (2010), Kimberly J. Vrudny and Wilson Yates, *Arts, Theology, and the Church: New Intersections* (2005), Robin M. Jensen, *The Substance of Things Seen: Art, Faith, and the Christian Community* (2004), and Hilary Brand and Adrienne Chaplin, *Art and Soul: Signposts for Christians in the Arts* (2002). We could also add Steve Turner's *Imagine: A Vision for Christians and the Arts* (2001), which aims to provide a cultural, theological and historical context for the use of the arts within the church with a specific practical objective: the promotion of artistic practice amongst Christians. In a similar vein, Karen Stone's *Image and Spirit: Finding Meaning in Visual Art* (2003), attempts to diminish the distance between an art perceived as abstruse and forbidding and an interested but non-specialist public, drawing out the spiritual value of art for the modern Christian, and developing their ability to interpret and appreciate works of art. One final advocate for a viable, practical and creative use of the arts, particularly within worship, is Richard Giles whose *Re-pitching the Tent: The Definitive Guide to Reordering Your Church* (2004) has been influential in rethinking the creative use of ecclesiastical spaces. Plenty of examples can be found of reactionary promotions of the arts in the church, of course, in which a distinctively Christian aesthetic and explicitly Christian inspiration is deemed solely acceptable against the perceived godlessness of contemporary art and contemporary culture. Philip Ryken's *Art for God's Sake* (2006) is representative of such restrictive agendas but is far from unique in this respect. Ryken promotes Christian arts but warns against the 'absurdity,' 'irrationality' and 'cruelty' of much present-day art (Ryken. 2006: 13). Against the malaise of contemporary culture he makes a case for certain absolute values and standards, i.e. whatever is perceived to be a reflection of God: in sum, the good, the true and the beautiful, inadvertently reaffirming a Kantian framework. As his title indicates, art for art's sake should be relinquished in favour of art for God's sake, whereby sacramental values predominate over purely artistic ones, lest art become a form of idolatry.

[46] Wolterstorff. 1980: 152

within this field, recounting its present applications and considering its possible futures, operating as a kind of resource for those with an interest in exploring things further. Its programme is spelled out in David Morgan's opening essay, which wonders whether there is, in fact, a field of study that could be named 'art and religion.' Nowhere within the cross section of available scholarship can one find a field of inquiry called simply 'art and religion,' he argues, nor can one find a body of scholarship pertaining to it. Rather, the one is employed as a guide to, or foil for, the other. Implicit in Morgan's observation is that, outside of any historical or theological discourse, this lack has gone more or less unnoticed and unformulated. In an attempt to redress this situation, Morgan highlights comparable categories within which a dialogue *has* been conducted between art and religion, thereby disclosing the notable absences or silences such dialogues have unwittingly concealed. These modes of inquiry are either object-centred, practice-centred, or a form of religious aesthetics, but give no prominence to a philosophy of art and religion.[47] Where art and religion have been thought together in modern times, says Morgan, is in a spiritualisation of art, as in the now commonplace assumption that the art museum is our modern spiritual home, and the politicisation of art, whereby art serves to uphold a kind of civic religiosity, as the theological cultural capital of nationhood and democratic citizenship.

Implicit within *Reluctant Partners*, then, though undeveloped (perhaps necessarily so due to the general scope of the book), is the governing motivation for this thesis: the reluctant partnership of art and religion and an effort to theorise their 'close though sometimes fractious embrace,' as Simon Morley has so aptly characterised it.[48] This argument sets the tone for the rest of the book and consequential essays explore facets of the problem (although with evidently diverse agendas, such that each writer seems to be pulling in very different directions). If a desire to see a renewed relationship of art and religion is very much in evidence, what is less easy to identify within the terms of its 'dialogue' is a philosophy able to theorise the tensions between, and possibilities for,

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[47] In the first, art appears in its relation to an institutional, credal, or liturgical context, its function as the material expression of a particular faith, even art as a spiritual form of 'contemplation, meditation, introspection and revelation' in itself, whether part of a religious institution or a purely secular setting. The second considers the 'cognitive and behavioural frameworks' in which art is experienced. This has for more to do with the appropriation and reception of images and spaces, of 'ways of seeing,' rather than the actual works themselves. Finally, there are those who consider the theological implications of art or the aesthetic significance of religion. In this field there is little emphasis on the work of art and its context, nor on visual practices, but rather a focus upon a theological understanding of art, or the aesthetic significance of religious experience (ibid: 18-22).

[48] Morley. 1998: 53

contemporary theology, liturgical practice and artistic fidelity. In fact, the concluding essay by Marcus B. Burke exposes many of the problems that have hampered any such inquiry, resting upon a number of commonly aired assumptions. It opens, for example, with the fundamental supposition that the divorce of religion and art is a *fait accompli,* and is premised on the supposition that renewing their estranged relationship would be a desirable outcome for both church and art world.[49] We would contest that this assumption cannot be so universally supposed, and the fact that this essay presents it as an acknowledged fact exposes presuppositions that have dogged the field. The evidence of the past decade alone would suffice to show that this relationship is far from irremediably fractured. Few would deny that art and religion remain 'reluctant partners,' but evidence of recent years would suggest more than a hint of optimism for their viable, if at times agonistic, partnership. The interesting question facing us today is not how to repair or renew a purportedly broken relationship, but how to understand and facilitate attempts to formulate a philosophical, artistic, liturgical and theological framework for an extant and evolving relationship.

Following in the footsteps of Tillich, Rahner, von Balthasar et al, Burke outlines a programme for modern art and the church which narrows rather than expands the possibilities for artistic projects, not only in his championing of conceptual figures first arrived at some fifty or sixty years earlier, but in his advocating of an attitude first dismissed as unworkable by Couturier and unequivocally rejected by the German Jesuit curator/priest, Friedhelm Mennekes, summed up in Burke's opinion that '[w]hile it is good if a nonbeliever or a partial believer makes holy art… how much better if the artist is one of the faithful.'[50] What he seeks to preserve has been seen by many as part of the problem that has so often hindered development. Burke offers several modes for art that he claims enable a renewed relationship of modern art and the church, but what is remarkable about his chosen categories is their conservatism: he portrays art as revelation, i.e. a non-verbal means of knowledge, as prophecy, as expressive of God-inspired creativity, as a conduit to grace, as an embodiment of theological values, as exegesis, as praise, as applied Christian art, as evangelism. Although in his defence we could say his is a legitimate call for a greater commitment to specifically Christian art, the evolution of artistic practice has shown a marked progression in quite the opposite direction.

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[49] Burke, in Heller. 2004: 143

[50] Ibid: 163

Reluctant Partners is useful for setting out the parameters of what has been achieved and for speculating on the future potential for a nascent field of art and religion. It sets the boundaries, not as a point of containment but in that Heideggerian sense as the place from which one begins. What is lacking is a language or a vocabulary with which to theorise this journey, with certain of the contributors to this volume tending to narrow rather than expand its available possibilities. Ultimately, the scope of this relatively short volume is rather broad and thus it can do little more than offer albeit often excellent introductions to various aspects of the debate (including theological, museological, anthropological, and art historical perspectives), along with an indispensable bibliography and a useful, if brief, list of exhibitions. Another worthy publication is *Art and Worship* (2002) by Anne Dawtry and Christopher Irvine, originally published as part of a series of liturgy guides for the clergy. It is essentially a practical book, exploring the contemporary church's attitude towards the visual arts and offering advice on how to commission works of art, how to place them, and how to set up exhibitions, but with an informative rather than prescriptive agenda. Dawtry and Irvine place great emphasis on the need to resolve the poor communication between artists and the church, and focus their attention in particular on the impasse that continues to divide art from worship. Ultimately, *Art and Worship* exhorts the clergy to a committed recognition of art's significant role within both the spaces and the life of the church. Walker's earlier book had a similar remit but often felt like a lone voice.

Shortly after the publication of *Reluctant Partners,* which, as a production of the American Bible Society, had a generally American bias, Tom Devonshire Jones and Graham Howes, under the remit of the organization, Art and Christianity Enquiry, produced a short report on the state of the arts within England's cathedrals. Though brief, *English Cathedrals and the Visual Arts: Patronage, Policies and Provision 2005* (2005) is of considerable practical value as one of the rare attempts to outline the problems, practicalities and potential of commissioning contemporary art for cathedrals. Through case studies, commissioning successes and failures, visitor responses, artist viewpoints, clerical concerns, and policy recommendations, it aims to offset some of the potential stumbling blocks and underline many of the advantages for a progressive and evolving relationship of contemporary art and the modern church. As Canon Walker also attempted with his earlier *Images or idols?* this offers a pragmatic guide to the actual business of facilitating successful projects, without taking any kind of limiting theoretical position.

Graham Howes continued this process with a further interrogation of the aesthetics of art and belief, again using case studies, in *The Art of the Sacred* (2007). Although this takes a broader art historical, theological and theoretical view, aimed perhaps at a non-specialist audience with a general interest in art and faith, it raises a number of useful questions relevant to this thesis. It also has the virtue of being up-to-date, and therefore cognizant of recent exhibitions and scholarship, and functions well as a general guide to the relationship of religious institutions, notions of belief, artists and their work. Along with his collaborative work with Devonshire Jones, *The Art of the Sacred* is significant to this project partly for the groundwork it offers as a prompt to further reflection, but also in part due to the prominent and influential position both Devonshire Jones and Howes enjoy within Art and Christianity Enquiry (ACE), one of the very few independent bodies in this country with a serious and active interest in the promotion of contemporary art within ecclesiastical spaces.[51] One of the chief merits of *The Art of the Sacred* lies in its reliance upon case studies, each of which claims to show a distinct relation between belief and artistic production, between creed and creativity. The first looks at the Victorians' interest in religious art, the second reports on the National Gallery's exhibition, *Seeing Salvation*, and the third focuses on Walter Hussey's efforts to introduce modern art into St. Matthew's, Northampton. Also of critical interest are three questions previously asked by theologians and/or art historians, to which Howes returns. The first from Ruskin ponders art's value for, and contribution to, religious experience: 'How far has Fine Art, in all or any ages of the world, been conducive to the religious life?' The second reworks a concern that exercised Tillich: can one discern between aesthetic and religious experience or are they necessarily co-implicated? The third reiterates a provocative question voiced some thirty years ago by Rowan Williams, who wondered 'whether the partial divorce between visual art and liturgy [had] necessarily been an unmitigated disaster for the Christian (and secular) imagination of the West.'[52] In each case art and religion are seen as separate milieux, yet assumed to be necessarily and mutually complicit. Indeed, in an earlier paper Howes had proposed that art and theology may not need to be seen as two separate 'things-in-relationship,' co-implicated in a

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[51] Another is Art in Sacred Places, a sister organisation to ACE, and Commission4mission, launched in 2009. Of the three this most recent venture offers the most distinctly Christian agenda. In Autumn 2010 ACE published a short but informative guide to permanent commissions of contemporary art for the church, *Contemporary Art in British Churches*, which discusses the current state of play, gives the artists a voice, and ends with a number of helpful resources.

[52] Howes. 2007: 1, 158-60, 11

common goal, *but as the same thing.*[53] This is a rather different proposal to that extended in his more recent book: 'The central question remains whether in *practice*, as well as in *theory*, art is a way of seeing and knowing which is as truth-bearing and personally transformative as the language and message of theology.'[54] The first proposes that art and theology are inseparable co-advocates of a spiritual or religious realm of whatever it is we consider to be 'truth'; the second implies that the one may be just as effective as the other in its communication or expression of that truth without diminishing either. The first closes the gap between them, the second retains a difference, but in either case he seems to be motivated by a concern to see art and theology not so much in dialogue, but deeply invested in one another. Although this position reanimates, not without difficulties, a vital tension between art and religion (their 'close but fractious embrace'), it can also set limits to the conditions of possibility for an art tied too closely with belief. Howes puts it better when he says that 'the history of Western culture has been characterized by multiple, overlapping and shifting relationships between different kinds of theological and artistic modes of perception and expression.'[55] This fugal image seems altogether more suited to the mercurial nature of their contemporary expressions.

Finally, there are the numerous texts and catalogues produced to accompany works of art commissioned for, or invited into, churches and cathedrals over the past decade or so, many of which contain sometimes substantial critical responses to the works on show, while others are only valuable inasmuch that they provide a record of the event. Rather than include a précis here, those of value to my discussion will feature throughout the thesis. However, it would be remiss to ignore the exemplary status of Sankt Peter, Köln, otherwise known as the *Kunst-Station*, whose projects and accompanying publications map a transient, though arguably ground-breaking, often controversial, series of temporary installations inaugurated by Father Friedhelm Mennekes, priest and curator of Sankt Peter. One of these works was especially notable for its impact upon the space and congregation of Sankt Peter at the time, but invaluable too in that the ripples it caused in German circles extended across the channel to become

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[53] Howes. 1997: 670. He seems to have been inspired in this idea by Frank Burch Brown's *Religious Aesthetics*, which in turn restates an earlier principle proposed by Paul Tillich, 'that at points religion takes the form of art, and art the form of religion; that whatever is considered ultimate in being and meaning can speak through both forms, and can call both into question; and, finally, that even outside the realm of formal religion, art in the various aspects we have discussed can become religiously significant, though without some of the meanings supplied by the institutional religious milieu (Brown. 1990: 111).

[54] Howes. 2007: 148 (emphasis in original)

[55] Ibid: 146

the centrepiece for a conference at the Tate Gallery in 1999 entitled *Contemporary Art and the Christian Imagination*, an event noteworthy for introducing a British audience to Mennekes's radical approach.[56] The publication about this installation by James Lee Byars, called *The White Mass* (2004), followed the conference, and was an amalgam of texts concerning the work itself as well as critical responses to it. Amongst those with an interest in promoting a progressive programme of ecclesiastical art Byars's artistic-liturgical intervention is the single most frequently referenced example outside of the United Kingdom. Virtually without precedent and arguably unsurpassed in its incorporation of art directly into the liturgy of the church, it has been elevated almost to the level of a paradigm.

An additional category that could be included within a review of relevant literature concerns contemporary or 'postmodern' theology, where it has been aligned with a concern for visual culture. However, since this thesis does not set out to establish a theological framework for the works under discussion, looking elsewhere for its guiding concepts, it seems unnecessary to pursue this line of research here. Neither is there any attempt to survey the history of the church's ambivalent relationship with art, nor analyse the roots of this often disputatious, certainly uneasy, partnership. However valuable this might be to the background of this work, it is well covered by existing literature and need not be reiterated here. Scholars such as Mary Charles-Murray and Robin Jensen have already unearthed what they see as art's integral place in the practices of the early church, such that later iconoclastic controversies might be seen as doctrinal differences rather than some kind of return to a purer, image-free, sacerdotal origin. In many ways these questions are of little relevance to this thesis, building as it does upon the assumption that a place for art within the church has long since been taken for granted, and that contemporary forms of art are continuing to find acceptance and support. In many ways it is this taken-for-granted status that is now at issue, and which this thesis aims to address.

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[56] A subsequent conference at Chichester, on the theme of commissioning art for the church, highlighted many of the discrepancies, disagreements and incompatibilities between positions, notably between Canon Walker and Father Mennekes (*Commissioning Art for Today's Church*. University College, Chichester. 1999).

Appendix 3

Site specific and installation art

It is important to stress the difference between the installation *of* a work of art and installation art proper. The former is a general requirement of any work of art, which must be installed whenever an exhibition is mounted, whereas the latter is a form of art that develops a specific relation with its context, spatially, discursively or socially. Michael Archer points out that the 'formal congruence' of a work and a space is not enough to define a work as an installation, otherwise any and every work of art would be an installation, and the term would therefore become effectively meaningless.[1] Indeed, one of Miwon Kwon's complaints is the way that site-specific installation art has been 'uncritically adopted as another genre category by mainstream art institutions and discourses' and applied without discretion, thereby undermining its radical implications and demands.[2] Claire Bishop, who has produced one of the foremost works on installation art, agrees with Kwon that it has become a term almost without meaning today, so casually and ubiquitously is it applied to any arrangement of objects in a particular space, 'to the point where it can happily be applied even to a conventional display of paintings on a wall.'[3] For Bishop this is a lamentable state of affairs, blind to the necessary distinction between an installation of art and installation art itself. Even if they share some common ground, their differences are pronounced:

> What both terms have in common is a desire to heighten the viewer's awareness of how objects are positioned (installed) in a space, and of our bodily response to this. However, there are also important differences. An installation of art is secondary in importance to the individual works it contains, while in a work of installation art, the space, and the ensemble of elements within it, are regarded in their entirety as a singular entity. Installation art creates a situation into which the viewer physically enters, and insists that you regard this as a singular totality.[4]

Where Bishop is keen to stress the differences between the two types of art it is in fact our contention that in an ecclesiastical space no such differentiation is possible.

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[1] Oliveira et al. 1994: 14

[2] Kwon. 2002: 1

[3] Bishop. 2005: 6

[4] Ibid.

A second factor to take into account is that not all installation art is site-specific, in the sense that it could not appear elsewhere, but all installation art relies upon a specific relationship with its context. Essentially it refers to the recognition that 'site' describes not only the place of the artwork but its mode of being: it is sited. Various terms have emerged to describe the specificity of this form of art. From Kwon comes this extensive list of possibilities: site-determined, site-orientated, site-referenced, site-conscious, site-responsive, site-related, context-specific, debate-specific, audience-specific, community-specific, and project-based.[5] Collectively, she says, they 'signal an attempt to forge more complex and fluid possibilities for the art-site relationship.'[6] Thus installation art marks a further distancing from the ideologies bound up with the white cube gallery. Installations are not spatially autonomous art objects but are in fact inseparable from their environment, sometimes intrinsically so, as in site-specific installations whose content specifically reflects upon its institutional environment or whose form is shaped by its spatial environment (such that to remove it or relocate it is to destroy it – the most famous instance of this scenario is, of course, Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc*, but a work like Dan Flavin's light installation for Santa Maria in Chiesa Rossa is similarly tied to its location). Other works are site-adaptable, such that their nature as integrally related to their environment could be repeated elsewhere, even if in each case the object-context relationship is unique to each appearance (Gormley's various *Fields* are a prime example). In other words, some installations are particular to a site and cannot travel; others change and adapt according to the site of their installation.

Perhaps the most significant factor in installation art is the spatio-temporal relation it establishes with the viewer, for whom the place of viewing is inseparable from the experience of viewing. Famously dismissed by Michael Fried as 'theatricality' the essence of installation art is the participation of the viewer over time and within a specific space.[7] Douglas Crimp outlines this triadic relation in *On The Museum's Ruins*:

> The coordinates of perception were established as existing not only between spectator and the work but among spectator, artwork, and the place inhabited by both. […] Whatever relationship was now to be perceived was contingent on the viewer's temporal movement in the sphere shared with the object. Thus the work

[5] Kwon. 2002: 1-2

[6] Ibid: 2

[7] Fried. 1969. Fried's *Art and Objecthood* was a specific attack on the Minimalist works of the time, above all for their assertion of necessary complicity between the work of art, the context and the viewer, whose appreciation of the works developed through the time of viewing and movement through the space.

belonged to its site; if its site were to change, so would the interrelationship of object, context, and viewer. Such a reorientation of the perceptual experience of art made the viewer, in effect, the subject of the work....[8]

This key characteristic of installation art – the embodiment of the viewer and the deployment of all their senses in the experience – raises a number of questions. For example, whether between the viewer and the art there is a subject/object relation or is the viewer in fact the subject matter of the art? Another might be whether not only the presence of the viewer but their participation in the work is integral to installation art.[9] In either case, first-hand experience is essential, extending even to the viewer's self-awareness within the constellation of elements, which include 'sensory immediacy,' 'physical participation' and 'activated spectatorship.'[10] This makes installation art a remarkably reflexive art in which, in O'Doherty's words, we find ourselves 'looking at ourselves looking.'[11] As a consequence, it is often orientated around the production of a subject of, or for, the work. As Bishop concedes, all art needs a subject, but installation art changes the spatial and temporal requisites of that subject. Distance from the work is virtually eliminated, the time of viewing is extended such that the work cannot be experienced all at once but is transitive, and the space through which the subject moves is itself part of the medium of the work, resulting in a 'mutual imbrication' of subject, object and context.[12]

All this was anathema to Fried. Using surprisingly religious language he concluded his famously tendentious text opposing such works with the declaration that 'presentness is grace.'[13] The presence in question refers to the work of art rather than the presence of the viewer. Indeed, in Fried's terms the viewer, says Bishop, 'is virtually

[8] Crimp. 1993: 154. This is in stark contrast to the ideal of the modernist work of art whereby 'the art object *in and of itself* was seen to have a fixed and transhistorical meaning, determining the object's placelessness, its belonging in no particular place, a no-place that was in reality the museum...' (ibid: 17).

[9] Bishop. 2005: 6, 131; see Reiss. 2000

[10] Bishop. 2005: 11. Many writers on installation art acknowledge the difficulties of writing about an art that requires first-hand experience, and on presenting visual material for works that are not only three-dimensional but require one to be inside the work. But even if communicating one's experiences remains problematic, the writer can to some extent mitigate this problem by at least concentrating on works that they have personally experienced. This has been my approach to this thesis, deliberately avoiding discussion of any works that I have not seen for myself, except where secondary sources are particularly strong.

[11] O'Doherty. 1986: 61

[12] Bishop. 2005: 128

[13] Fried. 1969: 147

eclipsed by the work of art.'[14] For Fried what matters is that the viewer responds to a work that is at every moment 'wholly manifest' and 'perpetually present.'[15] The art to which he objected debases this experience by demanding that the viewer engage with a work of art that unfolds through space and time, thus refusing any possibility of that immediate presence. Hence the accusation of 'theatricality.' The work was constantly 'in play,' constantly unfolding in time, but never truly manifest.[16] One of the targets of Fried's ire was Robert Morris, whose writings on the expanded practices of minimalist sculpture provide an interesting and, I suspect, targeted riposte to Fried's manifesto for 'presentness.' In a relatively recent text Morris too describes the tradition in which he works as one that valorises 'presentness.' His meaning, however, is diametrically opposed to Fried's. Morris was one of the first to emphasise the importance of the viewer's movement through the space shared with the work of art. For Morris the type of images and objects to which Fried had appended his concept of presentness belonged to 'the past tense of reality.' It evoked a sense of timelessness that was no longer applicable, superceded as it was by duration, 'the present tense of immediate spatial experience.'[17] Morris's concept works within an idea of duration not dissimilar to Bergson's:

> What I want to bring together for my model of 'presentness' is the intimate inseparability of the experience of physical space and that of an ongoing immediate present. Real space is not experienced except in real time. The body is in motion, the eyes make endless movements at varying focal distances, fixing on innumerable static or moving images.[18]

The minimalism that Morris had championed contra Fried was theorised around the phenomenological ideas of Merleau-Ponty rather than the perceptual ideas of Whitehead's earlier work. Nonetheless, clearly it broaches similar issues. Above all, Whitehead's emphasis on 'presentational immediacy,' whilst appearing closer to Fried's idealisation of presentness in its terms, expresses in fact the 'present tense' of experience

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[14] Bishop. 2005: 133

[15] Fried. 1967: 145

[16] One must, for example, walk around the work, or view it in relation to other works, in relation to other non-art types of objects and experiences, and in relation to its surroundings, to understand it in terms of art. Thus Fried's call for 'presentness' in art must be distinguished from what Whitehead calls 'presentational immediacy.' For Fried an engagement with art takes place effectively within a frozen moment, in which the work reveals itself in its completeness; for Whitehead there can be no such moment for each event of immediacy is perpetually in process.

[17] Morris. 1993: 176

[18] Ibid: 177

that Morris aimed to awaken in his readers. The temporal experience described above is augmented by a comparable sense of space:

> In perceiving an object, one occupies a separate space – one's own space. In perceiving architectural space, one's own space is not separate but coexistent with what is perceived. In the first case one surrounds; in the second, one is surrounded. This has been an enduring polarity between sculptural and architectural experience.[19]

In a text aptly titled *Blurring the Boundaries* Ronald Onorato adds a further dimension, arguing that the spatio-temporal experience of context is supplemented by the actual changing conditions of that context from moment to moment:

> Fundamental aspects of installation artwork are its habitation of a physical site, its connection to real conditions – be they visual, historical, or social. […] The aesthetic power of installation art does not reside in the singular, commodified object but in an ability to become, rather than merely represent, the continuum of real experience by responding to specific situations.[20]

This has consequences for interpretation. Meaning is no longer assumed to be embedded in the work of art, merely awaiting the discerning viewer to access it, but arises instead from the encounter between spectator and artwork.[21] There is no one fixed point of view, each object-subject relation radically contextualised and subjective, disavowing one single 'theological' meaning, as Barthes might have put it. Using terms highly relevant to our discussion, Michael Archer goes on to suggest that installation art has been effective in its effort 'to render permeable that barrier which separates us…from the realm of the artwork.' It has, he continues,

> allowed meaning, the content of the work, to seep into its surroundings. In breaking open the 'artistic realm' and making it one with social space, the observer of the work of art becomes implicated with it in a manner that differs considerably from the conventional relationship between viewer and painting or sculpture.[22]

One of the significant ways in which this difference is felt is in the work's discursive relation with its context, cast here in the language of porosity. The work's reconfiguring

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[19] Ibid: 182

[20] Onorato in Davies. 1996: 13

[21] Archer in Oliveira et al. 1994: 13

[22] Ibid.

of the space of its appearance extends to questioning the 'ideological and institutional frameworks' within which the work of art is contextualised.[23] Context thus becomes the subject matter, rather than merely the setting of the work, reflecting back upon the institution itself and/or the communities who inhabit it. Rosenthal describes this as a rapprochement in which the artist treats the context as an accomplice in the production of meaning.[24] The artist Cath Ferguson makes similar claims, speaking of the 'coduality' of works of art with their environment, by which she proposes a mutual relation of exchange between work and space rather than one of the work's subservience to its host as the bearer of meaning, which is then reflected in the work, whether secular or religious ideologies are involved.[25] Drawing closer to the object of our inquiry, a short text on the nature of installation art by Hans Ulrich Obrist gives a description which shows that the created conditions typical of an installation piece replicate the given conditions of a cathedral environment. Firstly, one finds 'a rejection of the limits of objecthood,' a rejection, if you like, of the white cube presumption of an autonomy for the work of art from its surrounding milieu. Secondly, 'there is a refusal to address a single object without exploring its interactions, its relationships, the interstasis of objects and contexts, not only in space, but also time.' Thirdly, the appeal of installation art for Obrist is that it is not so much object-based but rather 'nurtured…by events and intensities.'[26] Obrist does not expand upon his use of these terms, but they adequately convey the arguments presented in chapter 2. The first condition, we could say, is installation art's passive condition as an integrated element of its environment; the second its active condition of engagement with its milieu; and the third its affective and evental condition. Obrist appears to associate this third condition of 'events and intensities' with the experience of the viewer, hence with what we could call its social, receptive or even prehensive condition. In every discourse on installation art the reciprocal relation of work and space includes the place of the spectator, in a triad of relations between the work and the space, the space and the viewer and the work and the viewer, regarded as the one who in some sense completes the work.

With Obrist's third condition in mind, Miwon Kwon identifies three historical stages of site-specific installation art – as phenomenological experience, as ideological

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[23] Suderburg. 2000: 5

[24] Rosenthal. 2003: 27

[25] Conference. *The Work of Gilles Deleuze*. University of Greenwich. 2006

[26] Obrist. 2001: 95, 96

critique and as public experimentation.[27] We could rethink these three diachronic stages as three concurrent synchronic phases. If the first is primarily an exploration of the phenomenological and experiential possibilities of a site, the second is concerned with the ideological frameworks of the institutional setting, and the third extends the art context into more public or communal realms. Since the 1990s this third approach to artistic production has become increasingly prevalent. Artists have sought to acknowledge the site of art as socially specific: an understanding, if you like, of art's social implications or obligations, in recognition of the social and cultural contents of a place, and an awareness that each environment brings with it a different audience. A discussion of art within ecclesiastical spaces relies heavily upon just such an understanding of 'the human particularity of places,' individually and communally.[28] Those who champion forms of artistic practice that acknowledge this human particularity invariably stress its potential for initiating dialogue between and amongst subjects. Nevertheless, this shift towards the dialogic brings with it its own limitations. Claire Bishop has highlighted some problems with this approach, noting that arguments for a shift away from a fundamentally private visual and sensory appreciation of art towards 'discursive exchange and negotiation' means that 'a socially collaborative art project could be deemed a success if it works on the level of social intervention even though it founders on the level of art.'[29] In such cases the work of art is frequently itself of little consequence, principally acting as the catalyst and focal point for the collaborative process. What is also lacking in such rhetoric, she continues, is any sense of art's potential to offend or discomfort an audience, which may be in fact crucial aspects of an artistic intervention. Kwon has similar doubts about their overall effectiveness. For example, the communities identified as receptive to art projects tend to be pre-existing social formations, where Kwon envisages the potential for art and artists to engender as-yet inexistent social formations. This is far closer to what she means by public experimentation, a possibility tackled in chapter 7 in an interrogation of the potential communities for ecclesiastical art.

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[27] Kwon. 2002: 3

[28] Jeff Kelley in Lacy. 1995: 141

[29] Bishop. 2006: 181

Morning Beams: observations and criticisms

At an early stage in the period of the installation's placement, it became clear that the work was beset by a number of problems: technical, logistical and administrative. A relatively minor technical issue was the tendency of the ropes to slacken over time, losing something of their dynamic tension as an allegory of light, despite the weight of the sleepers tethering them to the ground. When *Morning Beams* had appeared in galleries the ropes were usually fixed directly to the floor thus obviating this problem, a solution unavailable to the curators in St. Paul's. A second logistical and, to our mind, more serious problem, was the persistent interference in the space of the work by the cathedral's other activities. A third problem was the highly administered stewardship of the work on the part of the church authorities, which exposed a conflict of interests between the artist's intentions for the work to be participatory and the authorities' reluctance to allow the mounds of pebbles to grow. This discouraged a process which, one could argue, was integral to the concept and form of the work for the sake of preserving the marble floor from being damaged by stones tumbling from the mounds or being accidently dropped. The technical issue is of little concern to us here, and in fact took little away from the drama of the work.[1] The remaining issues are significant, however, in highlighting a disparity between the laudable desire to exhibit contemporary works in the cathedral and the duty of those responsible to fulfil their obligations to the requirements of that work. Though a welcome addition to ecclesiastical spaces, in many cases works of art are not yet being considered integral to the life of the church, and hence are not given the deference or consideration they require. This complaint was recently made by Bishop David Stancliffe, in calling for the arts to be treated 'as integral and interrelated forms of expression, rather than as optional decoration or functional

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[1] A few comments are worth adding on this technical issue. Although the sleepers were heavy and weighted with extra steel underneath, the high tension and elasticity of the ropes gradually pulled them towards the east end of the transept, by as much as two inches in some cases, thereby causing a slackening of tension in the ropes. Unfortunately, this natural slackening over time was accelerated by members of the public pulling on the ropes. The work clearly suffered from such interference, becoming a palpable problem that highlighted a secondary aspect of the work's durational limits beyond that primarily imposed by the transference of stones, and ultimately by its limited period of residency. Admittedly, tactility is a pleasure too often denied the art visitor and *Morning Beams* is a work that particularly invites touch: to feel the tension and texture of the ropes in one's hand, to gain a first-hand sensation of the materiality of a work that sets out to interpret an immaterial presence. In this regard *Morning Beams* was laden with the double bind of encouraging direct intervention at one level alongside the curatorial directive of refraining from touch at another.

illustrations.' However much the arts are championed in the service of the church, he continues, all too often they are treated in isolation.[2] Hence, a fourth issue worth calling attention to was the distinct delineation drawn between the liturgical ritual of the cathedral and the art-inspired ritual practices within the north transept. One might have imagined some degree of interaction between liturgical and artistic ritual but in fact a distance between the two was carefully preserved, even actively enforced. While Sunday services or Evensong were taking place the installation was itself roped off, preventing public access to the space. It is undoubtedly the case that such variant acts of catharsis are not easy to unite. In his own curatorial practices Mennekes has spoken of the difficulties and dangers, for a priest, of attempting to do so. But perhaps it is exemplary of a tendency to preserve sacred distance, to initiate borders or boundaries, against sacred contamination, a threat especially acute when the work in question is rooted in a Buddhist rather than Christian sensibility. It is interesting to note, for example, that during the entire time I spent observing public reactions to the work, at no point did I witness a priest partaking in the ritual process. Indeed, through the example set by this particular event we might discern a competitiveness, even rivalry, for the sacred between liturgy and the arts.

The logistics of space

On the second day of the installation's residency a recurrent problem for the work became apparent. Due to other aspects of the cathedral's cultural life its space was regularly disrupted, on one occasion virtually split in two by the comings and goings through the north transept door of the preparations for an evening concert, and then by additional rows of chairs, which intruded directly into the space between *Morning Beams/Cleaning Piece* and the mounds. As the empty space between the riverbed and the mounds was occupied by these chairs, the easy flow between the one and the other was disturbed, the activities of the cathedral obtruding into the artwork's designated (but evidently not clearly defined) space of activity. Thus the practicalities of the cathedral's functioning overrode all aesthetic or conceptual considerations. It exposed an evident lack of awareness that empty space or transit space may also be a vital part of an interactive work of art of this kind, which all too often tends to be seen in purely material terms. The thoughtless imposition of rows of chairs into the vicinity of a sculpture or

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[2] Stancliffe. 2010: 4

installation remains a persistent problem for art in cathedrals. In a review of Salisbury Cathedral's 2010 exhibition, *Liminality*, I noted that several of the sculptures on display suffered from this encroachment, inhibiting a spatial engagement with the works that each demanded.[3] One of the key aspects of installation art is the porosity of its boundaries. Within a cathedral, rather than gallery space, this porosity is registered within the uncertainty of the work's limits, and its unclear delineation between its space and the cathedral's space. One of the unsettling aspects of so much contemporary art is its resistance to being bounded within set limits. Hence, many visitors' difficulties in associating the mounds of stones with the riverbed, and the frequent disregard of the space between the two. From a curatorial point of view these are the kinds of issues which should be taken into consideration when deciding upon the location for an artwork. This particular problem was compounded by the regular appropriation of this transit space by tour guides and their groups, many of whose pre-programmed itinerant talks simply ignored the presence of Ono's installation as they related the story of Holman Hunt's painting and the transept's history of bomb damage from the war, often standing amongst the mounds of pebbles as they did so. Whilst doing so, of course, they obstructed and fragmented the flow of the work, both ritualistically and aesthetically. Though the north transept had been temporarily assigned to the work the 'empty' space between was still seen as the domain of the cathedral, which regularly asserted its prior rights over the space, both through its programme of education and through its virtual negation of the work's existence.

Thus, a two-fold difficulty emerges: a) the (albeit justifiable) continuation of other activities and predominance of other agendas; and b) the lack of awareness of a work's total space or horizons. When a work like this appears in a gallery, as it has done several times within the last decade, it is understood that the space, during the period of its installation, is dedicated to it, given over to it, reserved for it, such that all other activities within that space are secondary. In a busy, multifariously-active space like St. Paul's, despite the work having been allocated a place and a time – a recognised location of its own for a specified duration – it seems to be with the proviso that the integrity of the artwork (as both a unified work or works, and reliant upon a certain conceptual activity for its completion) will always be sacrificed for the sake of other events. Clearly one should be cautious in apportioning blame or levelling criticism at those responsible for the running of St. Paul's, in recognition of their manifold responsibilities. But one

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[3] Koestlé-Cate. 2010: 3

must, at the very least, firstly, identify such issues as something that a work of art in an ecclesiastical context may have to face, and secondly, draw the attention of those authorities to these genuine concerns. Fidelity to the work as to the larger space must be taken into consideration if one is to take art seriously.

Contextualisation

Of course, it would be senseless and contrary to the spirit of the work to consider isolating such a work of art from its environment, and indeed this is not a call to do so. As the Rev. Tom Devonshire Jones observed, in a private conversation, *Morning Beams for the City of London* is a piece that becomes 'tangled' in the rhythms and flow of the cathedral's life. The clutter of ecclesiastical and cultural activities is a factor that both needles and delights those who oversee such spaces. Outside of the gallery the work finds itself re-contextualised within a space far larger than itself, in every sense, responding to, and part of, its palimpsest character. In the cathedral an installation finds itself automatically competing with, or to put it more favourably, in dialogue with, the meta-ideologies that permeate that religious space. In a gallery space such works encounter an entirely different set of determinants. But of course in a gallery other discourses are at work. This is a quite separate issue from the problem of external intrusion into the spaces of the work, but it is one that raises interesting dilemmas. There is something almost wilfully obstinate about the idea that a work should be freed of the restraints of its context. Earlier ideas about the autonomy of the artwork and the neutrality of the white cube gallery space have long been repudiated, and these days few, if any, would argue that the two can be clearly separated.[4] This is certainly not being called for here. Rather than try to dissociate a work from its context, better to recognise the rich panoply of associations that the latter, with all its concomitant affects, can bring to that work. Some may burden the work with unwanted implications; others may enrich the work in unforeseen ways. Within the cathedral one cannot help but make associations with *The Light of the World* as a congruent element of the installation, as if the one is somehow indebted to, or at least in communion with, the other, or see the

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[4] From Brian O'Doherty's critical reflections in *Artforum* in the 1970s onwards, the white cube's spurious claims to neutrality have been the subject of keen debate. In a roundtable on exhibition spaces featured in an *Art and Design Profile* of 1990, some curators argued that for an artwork to be in anything other than the 'neutral' detachment of a gallery it can become lost amidst a barrage of visual distraction and overloaded with exterior signification. Others argued the contrary however, proposing the idea of a neutral space to be entirely spurious. (Panel discussion: 'New Museology.' 1990: 15).

installation in terms of divine light. One thinks of Bernini's, *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*, for example, with its radiant beams descending from heaven, or Veronese's painting, *Adoration of the Kings* where the Christ child is illumined by a heavenly beam of light, or van Eyck's, *The Annunciation*, in which delicate strands of light descend from a high window to touch the head of the virgin (figure 81).

At times such associations burdened the work through what one could call a highly administered approach to its reception. One of the invigilators was highly didactic in her interactions with the public. She left no-one in any doubts as to the required reading of the work, stressing that the ropes 'represent' beams of light, which in turn 'represent' resurrection. Thus, in her terms, this work was entirely 'representative.' And yet as well as reflecting its environment a work of art also creates its environment. Art may be thought of as an emergent aspect of the world and not just a copy of it. In this sense it may be non-representative. Art may be able to create a new sensibility of the world, which is where the potential for significance lies in contemporary works of art brought into a space like St Paul's. Perhaps this is the reason for their being here at all. History and tradition is inevitably a part of the work's environment, it is unavoidable and cannot but reflect upon the reception of the work. It is, as we might say, the past's active presence within the present. The temptation is always, therefore, to fall into making reductive *a priori* interpretations which incarcerate the work within each particular context. Therein lies the danger of an over-emphasis on representation, on what a work *represents* rather than what it *is* or might become. Thus we might ask does *Morning Beams* suffer from its cathedral environment? Is its potential for multivalence stymied by the history, traditions and ideologies of its host? Both *Wish Tree* and *Cleaning Piece* reflect an eastern and oriental, rather than western, ritual tradition, which for some visitors was problematic, but for others offered a refreshingly new way of ritualising their experience of the cathedral. It offered an alternative ritual participation to that of the liturgical rituals of the Eucharist, offering of prayers and chanting of creeds. The two need not be in opposition, though some perceived a fundamental disparity in this conjunction of Buddhist symbolism with a Christian space. In fact, this disparity is evident in Ono's own background and grew out of her experiences of having both a Buddhist and Christian heritage.

These are complex issues and not easily, if ever, resolved. Should a work of art be allowed to set its own theoretical agenda or establish its own parameters rather than being shoe-horned into a ready theory or ideology? Is this the challenge that artists,

curators and church authorities face when considering the next commission or invitation to a work? Or are we still working with a system that chooses works according to their ability to reflect or respond favourably, even passively, to the context into which they are introduced?

Administering the stones

Another aspect of the conflict of interests between church authority and artistic intent became evident within the first few days of the work's installation. The church authorities were concerned about the practical care of their marble floors while the curatorial team responsible for the installation of the work were chiefly concerned with allowing the conceptual integrity of the work to be realised, which required public participation in transferring the riverbed's stones to the steadily growing mounds of joy and sorrow. While the latter's intention is to initiate movement, ritual activity and public involvement, the former's is to enforce some degree of order and control. The permanent state of the floor is of more concern (understandably so) than the three-week integrity of a work of art. It is not difficult to sympathise with their concerns, despite the history of this space as one able to survive considerably worse events than an art intervention.[5] But on the other hand, if the work has been accepted into the space then presumably its concept too has been understood and approved. As the mounds grew the authorities became increasingly twitchy, afraid of a great tumble onto their marble floor. For the invigilators, therefore, in compliance with the cathedral authorities' directive to prevent too great a mound from accumulating, a regular task at the end of each day was to reduce the height of the mound of joy by taking stones from the top and moving them further down the pile where there were fewer stones, thereby slowing its vertical growth.

This particular incursion into the operation of the installation was also adversely affected by the fact that members of the public sometimes mistook the manner of placing stones invited by the work. Instead of taking pebbles from the riverbed they sometimes shifted them from one mound to another, generally from sorrow to joy and only occasionally from joy to sorrow, interfering with the natural cumulative and relative growth of the two. It was a simple enough mistake to make, especially if the visitor had not read the accompanying text. As a result, rather than growing, the mound of sorrow

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[5] This is a section of the cathedral that survived a direct hit from a German bomb which destroyed the original floor and the ornamentation around the doorway (still visible in the south transept).

diminished in size, while the mound of joy benefited from its depletion. Indeed, by the second week it had become clear that sorrow was being decimated by visitors while joy was growing to a size that would clearly alarm the concerned clergy. The resulting mounds offered, therefore, a false impression of the collective response to the work, if such was a desired outcome of the installation. On the other hand, to describe this secondary process as a 'mistake' or a 'problem' is itself a form of prescriptive ordinance that may be entirely unwarranted. Instead, we could see it as a prompt to certain questions, firstly regarding the nature of our relation to joy and sorrow, and secondly, regarding the nature of the work of art itself.

For those who concluded that the invitation to the visitor was to take a stone from one mound and place it on the other there was almost without fail a compulsion to take from sorrow and give to joy, which accounted for the former's almost negligible growth. Unsurprisingly perhaps. What *is* surprising is why this should be unsurprising. Is sorrow such a negative emotion that it should always be negated? It begs certain questions regarding our relation to these emotions (and to what Durkheim calls piacular rites). Why are people so quick to attempt to alleviate sorrow? When I spoke about this to one man who had just moved a stone from sorrow to joy he insisted that it be left there, declaring that he had just 'negated someone's sorrow.' This might be considered an undesirable interference in another's emotive response. Occasionally when this was observed invigilators returned the stones to their original mounds once the visitor had moved on. But whether or not this was also an unwarranted interference is debatable. It did at least allow the mound of sorrow to maintain a certain equilibrium, its size dwindling through people adding its stones to joy, and replenished through the efforts of the invigilators. Thus it hardly changed, a sorrowful constant throughout the tenure of the installation, compared to joy's continual growth.[6]

A degree of control was therefore regularly exercised over the work's form by those in charge of its protection. Its natural development was hampered by ecclesiastical restrictions and concerns, and over-protective invigilators. This interference raises new questions and difficulties. Where is the work of art in the mounds? What part do they play? Is it in the placing of each stone and the story each one bears or is it in the accumulation, as a collective gesture of expression? If it is the former then surely the

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[6] It is interesting to note that the mound of joy had a unified quality. It felt like an organic whole in which the stones were gathered and growing together. The mound of sorrow, by contrast, seemed composed of disparate elements, of individual stones, deliberately placed far apart from each other. One felt somehow that joy is shared, but sorrow is experienced singly, in isolation.

removal or replacing of stones has no effect upon the process of the work, which resides in the selection and placing of a stone rather than in the building of a mound. As such the mounds may be merely representative, or better traces, of that process, of the action of placing; a memory of an event, but not the event itself. At the work's inception I had thought that it would be a useful part of the ethnographic exercise to make a regular daily photographic record of the growing mounds and the flowering tree. But this would have been to place too much emphasis upon the 'objectness' of the works when in fact the work exists in those moments of placing a stone or tying a wish, that is, in the relational or participatory aspect of the works. Accumulation may be merely a by-product which nonetheless encourages further participation by example. If this is so then it is unimportant if stones are moved on the mounds, or from one mound to another, or spread out more thinly to manage the growing height of the mounds, because it was their moment of placing that mattered. It is each individually placed stone that has a story to tell, rather than their collective totality.[7] If, on the other hand, it is the latter that counts then the mounds operate as a kind of mountaintop cairn, a symbol of a collective and accumulative response which links each visitor in a long succession to those who have been there before and already trodden the path that we are to take. In this sense it would be important not to move the stones since by doing so that collective offering is diminished.

Complicating the matter, it was interesting to note that intermediate stones regularly appeared in the space between the two mounds. An irrepressible need to transcend prescribed borders seemed to be evident, inviting a more complex response to what had been asked of the participant. The mound of joy itself frequently exceeded its borders, seeping into the surrounding space, creating an appropriate sense of exuberance against the austerity and sparseness of the mound of sorrow. From one day to the next, however, I noticed that all intermediate stones were removed. It would seem that there was to be no 'mound of ambivalence' or 'uncertainty' as if to say that one must respond in definite expressions of joy or sorrow – no indeterminate in-betweens will be

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[7] This interference is not dissimilar to the church worker who scrapes away the wax and removes candle stumps from the candle-holder in front of Holman Hunt's painting, beginning each day with a blank canvas, as it were. It does not diminish the validity of the prayers represented by those candles as they burned to stumps during the previous day. Were the thoughts or motives of those who placed stones on the first day upon an empty floor space any less meaningful than those whose stones were placed last upon an accumulating pile? Perhaps the desire to maintain a mound is rather an aesthetic consideration, a material sign of the work's progress and accomplishment, like those Catholic churches in Spain whose dark recesses are atmospherically lit by the glow of hundreds of red candles. As an epiphenomenon the sight is impressive, but one assumes that for the devout it was the individual candle that counted, not the collective result.

acceptable – a move which disavowed the possibility of joy in sorrow or vice versa. Or put another way, the mound of sorrow and mound of joy presented a kind of dualism, resisted by certain members of the public who placed stones between the two, but enforced by those in charge who replaced those intractable stones onto one or other of the two piles.

A final observation of the ancillary role of the invigilator adds a cautionary note to these questions of interference in the ritual process. Towards the end of the three weeks, as the riverbed itself began to show signs of attrition, one invigilator took it upon herself to tell visitors how many stones they could take ('one per couple'; 'one per group') afraid that the pool of stones would diminish to nothing (which no doubt would have been an acceptable outcome). This policy of hers denied personal responsive choice on the visitor's behalf, indeed made choices for them, and made the work a showpiece rather than an opportunity for effective participation. Without such interference, such strict policing of the work, it would find its own natural durational depletion.

Similar questions were raised by *Wish Tree*. Throughout the three-week period it had endured several downpours and some of the wishes had run, or washed out to the point of disappearing. It again reiterates the question of where the work resides: in the object produced or in the action of producing? What remained was a memory or trace of a wish. But in a way each slip of paper tied to the tree was a trace of a wish that, if genuinely expressed, was something that happened between the work and the participant. Here we would do well to recall David Morgan's proposition that 'the spiritual in art is not a formal feature embedded in the surface of the image, but something that happens between the work and the viewer, or better, the worlds in which the viewer exists.'[8] The paper tied to the tree, this accumulated bouquet, *re*presented the wish rather than surviving as the wish itself.

Let us conclude by noting that this particular incarnation of *Wish Tree* was unique in this respect. In its previous guises *Wish Tree* has generally appeared inside the art space, and it had been thought to do the same on this occasion. Indeed, some years prior to the installation in St. Paul's Cathedral a version of *Wish Tree* had been effectively shown in Portsmouth Cathedral in 2004 (along with *Morning Beams* and *Cleaning Piece*), where it was placed in St. Thomas's Chapel. This time, however, the artist's intentions were overruled. In the end the cathedral authorities preferred it to remain outside on the by-now-familiar grounds of health and safety. It was thus placed on the other side of the North Transept

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[8] Morgan in Francis. 1996: 40.

door. A rather different situation would have applied to the tree had it been allowed inside the cathedral as had been planned. It is no great feat to produce a blossoming tree in a churchyard garden, but a very different matter to bring it into the sanctuary itself. What patterns of ritual or sociability might it have inspired there, as that earlier incarnation of *Wish Tree* had been permitted to do in another ecclesiastical space? As a concession, it was proposed that people might be allowed to move between the two spaces via the door, or at the very least to allow transit from the inside to the outside, to retain a strong conceptual link between the works inside and outside the cathedral. Again this also proved to be unworkable since the authorities were unhappy with the prospect of the door opening and closing, with the concomitant problem of visitors entering without paying an entrance fee. There are, of course, conceptual reasons why the tree *should* appear outside, not least of which is Ono's own evocation of prayer trees in Japan. However, it was felt that an aesthetic decision had been imposed upon, rather than negotiated with, the artist.

Figure 81 Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*, 1647-1652; Paolo Veronese, *Adoration of the Kings*, 1573; Jan van Eyck, *The Annunciation*, c. 1435

The etymology of the sacred in Emile Benveniste, *Indo-European Language and Society* (1973)

The emphasis given to a sacred/profane dichotomy by Durkheim and his followers, and more specifically an ambiguity of the sacred itself, finds parallels in Emile Benveniste's account of the sacred's linguistic origins, in which we can discern contradictory elements in the etymology of the sacred. Building upon Durkheim's studies, Benveniste's exhaustive work reveals a lack of any specific single term adequate to a definition of the sacred within Indo-European languages, but instead a commonly encountered two-fold definition, which he refers to as positive and negative. The former can be stated as that which 'is charged with divine presence'; the latter 'what is forbidden for men to contact' (p. 445). What is most striking, says Benveniste, is that in almost every language studied the sacred resists any single defining term but instead rests upon two distinct qualities, as though insisting upon an inherently paradoxical duality (p. 446). The richness of terms encountered in definitions of the sacred is only matched by its protean quality, the array of differences it manifests from language to language. Benveniste readily acknowledges that the sacred presents us with a concept constantly subject to slippages of meaning, an object of study in danger of 'gradually dissolving before our eyes' (p. 445). Nonetheless, he isolates two distinct poles of meaning broadly comparable between languages. In Germanic he identifies *weihs* and *heilig*, in Latin *sacer* and *sanctus*, and in Greek *hágios* and *hierós* (p. 451).[1] From the Latin, above all, we find both the clearest formulations of the sacred, the starkest distinctions between it and the profane, and gain a sense of its internal ambiguities. 'The Latin word *sacer*,' writes Benveniste, 'includes the idea of what is most precise and specific about the "sacred",' that is, a polarity of meaning which the accompanying term *sanctus*, its more familiar partner, does not in any way display: *sacer* signifies 'consecrated to god and affected with an ineradicable pollution, august and accursed, worthy of veneration and evoking horror' (p. 452).[2] With *sacer*, then, we encounter an idea of the sacred as that which both attracts and repels, that speaks of impurity as much as purity, that can destroy as well as elevate life. *Sanctus*, on the other hand, is inviolable, separated and protected, unscathed by the profane world. What emerges from *sanctus* is a sense that, unlike

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[1] We will focus on the latter two pairs. But, briefly stated, in the Germanic the sacred is associated, through *weihen*, with consecration and of the consecrated object, dedicated to the gods, whereas from *heilig* comes a sense of the holy with connotations of safety, health, and integrity. In Icelandic it has more of a sense of 'good omen,' and from English it appears as 'holy,' related to 'whole,' corresponding to the Gothic *hails* meaning 'hale and hearty' (p. 452).

[2] In recent years the sacred as *sacer* has perhaps been most insightfully theorised by Giorgio Agamben in his analysis of a paradoxical figure he calls *homo sacer*. We have no space to digress into a discussion of this figure, other than to note the important place it occupies in a discourse of sacred ambiguity.

sacer it is not 'consecrated to the gods' but is protected *by* the gods. It is affirmed by a *sanctio*, protected from every kind of assault (pp. 453, 454). Where *sacer* provides us with a negative and ambiguous concept of the sacred, *sanctus* signifies a positive and monovalent one. Most significantly, *sacer* is defined according to its relation to whatever is not *sacer*, that is, to whatever is profane (*profanus*: outside or before the *fanum*, literally at its gates, hence not so distant, at the threshold, in close proximity or association) where *sanctus* needs no such distinction. What has been lost in our understanding of the sacred is an awareness of this difference. Gradually this sense of *sanctus* has expanded to envelop everything that is in contact with the divine world, and gives its name to holiness (sanctity), to holy places (sanctuary), to the attribution of holiness (sanctification), to holy people (saint), to sacred law (sanction). In other words, an understanding of sacredness becomes indebted to the clarity and consistency of holiness offered by *sanctus*, while its ambiguous other has slipped into relative obscurity. Yet its shadowy presence still haunts the edges and contaminates the purity of its more illustrious and ubiquitous partner. The term sacrosanct (*sacrosanctus*), for instance, in uniting them registers these hidden differences.

If the Latin derivation of the sacred aids our understanding of Durkheim's version of the sacred, Benveniste's third couplet draws closer to Eliade's. The Greek *hierós* is the root for Eliade's concept of *hierophany*, appended to anything that discloses the sacred. It is an epithet of veneration, applied according to circumstances rather than something essential. A closely related term to *hierós* is *hósios*, sometimes described as 'hallowed,' that is, sanctioned or allowed by the law of God or of nature. This definition gives a paradoxical inflection to *hósios* because it could be applied to the profane as well as to the sacred. However, Benveniste suggests that a more precise reading of this term would show that its application is limited to what is prescribed and permitted by divine law, with reference to human relations. If *hierós* is reserved for the gods, the domain of *hósios* is conceded to man by the gods. Or to put it another way, 'this opposition of *hierós* "forbidden to men", and *hósios* "permitted to men" is later reduced to an opposition *hierós* "sacred": *hósios* "profane"' (pp. 461-2). *Hósios* in this sense can also be considered an act of deconsecration: 'it is *the act which makes the "sacred" accessible*, which transforms flesh consecrated to the gods into food which men may consume…' (p. 463). Between the Greek and the Latin terms, then, Benveniste notes a distinct correspondence:

> The relationship between *hierós* and *hagiós* in Greek seems to be roughly equivalent to that between *sacer* and *sanctus* in Latin. *Sacer* and *hierós*, 'sacred' or 'divine,' are used of a person or a thing consecrated to the gods, whereas *hagiós*, like *sanctus*, indicates that the object is defended against all violation, a negative concept, and not, positively, what is charged with the divine presence, which is the specific sense of *hierós* (p. 467).

In essence *hierós* and *hagiós* show the positive and negative aspects of the sacred – one is 'what is animated by a sacred power and force,' and the other, 'what is forbidden and placed out of bounds to human beings' (p. 469). The enmity of sacred and profane, following Benveniste's inquiry, is thus complicated by a tension of terms within definitions of the sacred. It is this latter that is of far more conceptual value to our project than the more commonplace division of sacred and profane.

Robert Hertz, *The Pre-eminence of the Right Hand: A Study in Religious Polarity* (1960, French edition 1909)

Until relatively recently being right-handed was an ideal to which all were expected to conform and which society respected by positive sanctions. Those unfortunate enough to show a preference for the left suffered at best society's disapproval and at worst often punitive discrimination: 'Organic asymmetry in man is at once a fact and an ideal,' says Hertz, proscriptive against the left and prescriptive in its valorisation of the right (p. 93). Thus the child suffers reproof for the use of its left-hand, while language itself teaches us to treat the left as sinister, clumsy, unsocial, or gauche. Despite the predominance of right-handedness, whether attributable to biology, heredity or education, its historical pre-eminence may be accounted a form of repressive symbolic violence. These days, of course, left-handedness enjoys the emancipation meted out to many other similarly inhibited, prohibited, excluded or subordinated social and cultural phenomena. In Hertz's time, however, it was subject to a definite stigma. Superiority, and thus privilege, was added to ubiquity. If in so-called primitive cultures the left hand is associated with unclean or inauspicious tasks, in the West its role has been more symbolically assigned, in the name of uniformity and conformity.[1] As Hertz says,

> The fact is that right-handedness is not simply accepted, submitted to, like a natural necessity: it is obligatory, an ideal to which everybody must conform and which society forces us to respect by positive sanctions. Contrarily, a veritable prohibition weighs on the left hand and paralyses it. Being left-handed is an offence which draws on the offender a more or less explicit social reproof (p. 93).

What are the origins for such a social prejudice? This bias may have its roots in some natural phenomenon, or in a predilection for the single-handed use of tools and weapons, may have resulted from witchcraft associated with mirror images, mirror writing and reversed incantations, may have developed from a 'natural' inclination to divide clean and dirty tasks between the two hands, which in turn would have

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[1] In the modern, Western world these essentially religious categories have been transformed into a hierarchical status that legitimates the one and denigrates the other. If right-handedness represents a social institution to which the left-hander conforms lest they find themselves excluded, it may be seen as representative of conformity of belief and practice, authorized versions of behaviour and being, to the detriment of difference, nonconformity or alternative practices. Although we should avoid thinking in overtly political terms, conservatism is traditionally associated with the right as opposed to a dangerous radicalism historically associated with the left.

encouraged social agreement between which hand takes which role for the sake of communal living. Perhaps being right-handed has always tended to be more naturally common, or perhaps its ubiquity has been developed through social engineering and imitation, to which superiority, and thus privilege, has been added. Unsurprisingly, as an anthropologist of comparative religion, it is to religion in its 'primitive' forms as the root of all socio-cultural behaviour that Hertz turns for an explanation. Equally predictably, Hertz situates this dualism within the religious polarity of sacred and profane, which he says, following Durkheim's lead, dominates the spiritual world of purportedly 'primitive' peoples. Right and left, then, for Hertz, are considered respectively analogous to a sacred and profane distinction. Social polarity, he argues, is reflected in a religious polarity that underwrites all aspects of experience:

> The whole universe is divided up into two contrasted spheres: things, beings and powers attract or repel each other, implicate or exclude each other, according to whether they gravitate towards one or the other of the two poles (p. 96).

Prohibitions and taboos maintain a distance between these spheres, any contact or confusion of the two subjecting both to contamination. Though the sacred encompasses both auspicious and inauspicious powers, some worthy of veneration, others more liable to provoke fear and aversion, in all cases it is set apart from, and situated in opposition to, the profane, for which all are equally dangerous and forbidden. It is clear that not only a difference pertains to sacred and profane, but a hierarchy too. Hertz's rather simplistic cosmology is reproduced in the pre-eminence shown to the sacred over the profane, and all that is associated with the former as the 'pole of strength' or the latter as the 'pole of weakness' (p. 96). The sacred world is experienced in positive terms; the profane is both mundane (of the world and thus inferior) and cast in negative terms, as the lowly other of sacredness. Where superiority, bravery, power and virility are embodied in the right hand, lowliness, inferiority, death, destruction and burial are all, in various contexts, held by the left. Though contested by later research in this field that has revealed less dichotomous, even opposing, values assigned to right and left, the ideal of right-handedness within Hertz's text remains intrinsically sacred, while the left is indissociably aligned with the profane.

However, by locating this polarity within a sacred and profane dichotomy Hertz presents us with a problem. Many later anthropologists almost entirely dismissed any such division. Evans-Pritchard, for example, though an admirer and leading advocate of Hertz's work, was quite clear in stating that, in his fieldwork experience, no such absolute

polarity of sacred and profane could be found in the societies he studied. Consequently, it cannot be called upon as proof for some further inference. Neither can it be stated unequivocally that, historically or culturally, deference has always been given to the right hand over the left (as other fieldwork testifies, notably Granet's work in China[2]). Even within Hertz's own endorsement of this division one soon finds contradictions creeping in which rather undermine his argument. The question of right and left inevitably introduces notions of impurity and profanity into sacrality. On the one hand, he agrees with Durkheim that an impure sacred (evident, for example, in taboos forbidding contact with a corpse) exists alongside a pure sacred. On the other, Hertz notes a 'natural affinity' and 'equivalence' between the profane and the impure. In opposition to the sacred they form, he suggests, 'the negative pole of the spiritual universe' (p. 95). Of course, we could argue that there is an impure sacred and an impure profane, and that these two belong to different or opposing aspects of experience. However, his repeated references to the 'religious universe' or 'spiritual universe' diminish this absolute sense of separation and difference. Thus, where he sometimes speaks of poles, at other times he refers to transition; in speaking, for example, of 'an imperceptible transition between the lack of sacred powers and the possession of sinister powers' (p. 95). The polarity he identifies is that absolute duality that must be preserved between sacred and profane; the transition is that between the profane and impure sacred. But here's the rub. The fear of contagion, and the implied existence of an impure sacred, as we have seen in the work of Durkheim, among others, seems bound to a denial of polarity and an acceptance of a continuum that places the sacred at one extreme and the profane at the other. There is transition, but of a different order to that envisaged by Hertz. As Evans-Pritchard and others have pointed out, if such a scale pertains to so-called primitive peoples it can only be measured in levels of intensity, rather than absolute difference. How can there be contagion without contact? If, as Hertz argues, '[the profane] appears as the antagonistic element which by its very contact degrades, diminishes, and changes the essence of things that are sacred' (p. 95) then the polarity underpinning his essay seems doomed to founder.[3] If a polarity exists, then the profane poses no real threat to the sacred; but if

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[2] Granet's researches revealed a preferential treatment for the left over the right, but although reversing the poles, a comparable cosmology and hierarchy of values reiterates Hertz's findings.

[3] This becomes clear when later Hertz takes as an example of natural polarities the distinction of night and day and light and dark, ignoring the gradations that separate them, accrediting nature with fundamental dualisms that would be more properly recognised as properties of the human social world (p. 96). The natural world, as Bergson and Whitehead would undoubtedly argue, is continuous; only the human world exhibits discontinuous polarities. It is difficult to see the value of arguing this

transition, pollution and porosity are the order of both the natural and cultural world the threat of contamination remains an ever-present possibility.

Hertz's position on the sacred and profane sets him somewhat apart from his *Année Sociologique* colleagues, with an ambiguity ascribed to the profane rather than to a 'pure' sacred. As Robert Parkin has shown, in his monograph on Hertz, profane is not the equivalent to mundane in Hertz's lexicon, but rather, to impure, against a sacred pure:

> Hertz accepts both [the dichotomy between sacred and profane] and Durkheim's further division of the sacred into pure and impure, which put together, can be represented thus: sacred (pure + impure)/profane; or, pure sacred > profane < impure sacred, in which the profane is threatened by both the pure sacred and the impure sacred (the arrows represent ritual danger). Hertz wants to relativize this, because he regards it as representing the perspective of the profane only. For the *pure* sacred, he argues, not only the profane but also the impure sacred is dangerous and must be kept at arm's length. However, he regards the impure sacred and the profane as virtually identical. In this way dichotomy is restored, but refocused: we do not end up with a triple distinction between pure sacred, impure sacred and profane. […] His modification therefore takes the form: pure sacred/impure sacred + profane.[4]

As Parkin goes on to show, Hertz's understanding of profane as an equivalent to an impure sacred muddies the waters concerning what is properly sacred and what profane, hinging around the question of pure and impure. In this reading, Leiris's embracing of a left-handed sacred fits well with the idea of an impure sacred that is, at the same time, profane, accompanied by 'sinister powers,' where the mundane world exterior to conventional *topoi* of the sacred comes instead to inhabit and expand the field of inclusion of what is properly sacred. If Hertz insists on the absolute separation of sacred and profane then his notion of an impure sacred aligned with the profane cannot properly be called 'sacred' at all. If, on the other hand, we dismiss this tendency to dichotomise, rather than a 'refocused' conceptual system the notion of transition comes to the fore.

Ultimately Hertz raises a dualistic view of the world to a status verging on the ludicrous, thoroughly confusing nature and society, exhibiting an unashamedly chauvinistic Enlightenment anthropocentrism and, I would imagine, going far beyond

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point – Hertz's own study from the start has been frank in attributing right and left hierarchies to social forces, not natural instincts – unless his argument is that, for those societies he deemed 'primitive' such polarities informed their worldview.

[4] Parkin. 1996: 62

anything of which his teacher would have approved. Man is inherently a double being, says Hertz, describing him as *homo duplex*, but could it be that this doubling is a relatively modern phenomenon lacking the ancient foundations upon which he insists? Hertz's analysis exposes the preponderance of a certain viewpoint rather than a natural truth of the universe. Yet this polarity of sacred and profane, and consequential hierarchisation, which, as Hertz says, 'dominates religious life and is imposed on the body itself,' has carved its seemingly indelible mark upon the surface of our thinking. The aphorism which he offers in support of his argument is as inverted in its logic as it is ingenuous: 'If organic asymmetry had not existed, it would have had to be invented.' Since man is at the centre of creation, he continues, a lack of organic asymmetry 'would ruin the entire economy of the spiritual world' (p. 98). Yet it is precisely this economy, as envisaged by Hertz, that a left-handed sacred allows us to put into question. If Hertz's analysis is outdated and misleading, his insistence upon an asymmetricality biased towards the right may be a useful hinge upon which to turn our thinking towards the left.
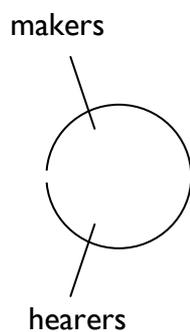
Appendix 7

John Harper on liturgy and music[1]

In Harper's diagrammatic visualisation of liturgical experience as it relates to music he outlines three scenarios: integrative experience describes a scenario in which all those present share a participative role of some form or another; makers and hearers describes a splitting of tasks between performers and listeners, but still retains a strong sense of cohesive integration amongst all those present; with participants and observers this split consolidates itself into two distinct groups, one active and one passive, the latter outside the space of participation.
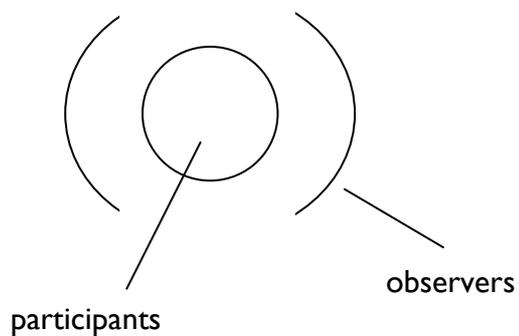
Integrative experience

shared
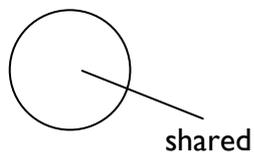
Makers and hearers

makers

hearers

Participants and observers

participants

observers

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[1] Conference. *Theology, Liturgy and the Arts*. Sarum College, Salisbury. 2009

Appendix 8

The cathedral and the art museum

At a certain level there are many resonances between a cathedral and an art museum. In her study of art museum practices, Carol Duncan is clearly not the first to see them as comparable nor to draw out their mutually ritualistic nature (obvious precedents come from such diverse sources as Goethe, Malraux and Bataille). The art museum, established for the sacred purposes of art, exudes a solemnity not unlike a church, and similarly demands a special quality of attention. Furthermore, it has become commonplace to describe art museums as our modern cathedrals. In large part this has been regarded as evidence of a shift in cathedrals from places of religious devotion to sites of architectural and historical interest or national heritage, and art museums as repositories of works to places of 'spiritual transformation and restoration' as Sir Kenneth Clark so memorably described them, with their own icons, rituals, and sites of pilgrimage.[1] Kenneth Ames explores these themes in his review of Duncan's *Civilizing Rituals*:

> Duncan argues, first, that museums have long been consciously designed to enable and encourage ritual and, second, that exhibits within them constitute scripts for rituals that visitors may enact. It is no accident that until well into the twentieth century art museums were modeled after temples and palaces. Both building types exploited monumentality, formality and grandeur to induce the heightened awareness associated with ritual. Duncan moves beyond this obvious observation, however, to the more subtle proposition that art museums constitute liminal spaces, environments deliberately set apart from the concerns and conditions of everyday life to encourage contemplation and reflection. The distinctive architecture and settings of art museums and the restrained behavior considered appropriate within them encourage visitors to 'move beyond the psychic constraints of mundane existence, step out of time, and attain new, larger perspectives.'[2]

Duncan notes a striking resemblance between religious ritual or ritualistic behaviour within religious buildings and the rituals associated with the museum experience. Not only do art museums present an iconographic programme in the structure of their collection, but encourage a form of ritualised experience. Indeed, she argues that it is the ritual that structures their central meanings, rather than their role as educational or as aesthetic experience. The art museum is, she says, 'a profoundly symbolic cultural object

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[1] Duncan. 1995: 13

[2] Ames. 1996: 14

as well as a social, political, and ideological instrument.'[3] Crucially, however, she contends that the art museum excels at producing a 'ritual self' that is ill-defined in terms of adherence to a community or wider history.[4] The ritual practices encouraged, even officiated, by art museums (the thrust of Duncan's argument) as a form of pilgrimage or ambulatory procession, are rarely if ever communally-defined, but more typically individual, requiring an individualised response. In a much earlier publication on the same subject Duncan had suggested that the kind of response produced depends upon the particular institutional context. She argued that older institutions like the Metropolitan Museum of Art or the National Gallery *can* invite a degree of communal rite, as though the architecture is home to a community (or at the very least encourages the individual's sense of affiliation to a larger social body), whereas the Museum of Modern Art is structured in such a way as to inhibit speech and communality: 'If you speak at all, you speak in low tones and only to those who have come with you.' It is, she says, 'an intensely private place.'[5] Generally speaking, it is easier to see evidence of her assertion of the latter's privatised experience than the former's purportedly communal character although, conversely, the drive towards communal experience has appeared in the latter rather more than the former through Relational Art practices. Approaches opposing a purely individualised response to art have gained greater prominence since the late 1990s, offering instead a model of art as communal and collectively mediated, although critics have frequently dismissed the quality of community produced as insubstantial, barely deserving the name of community at all, even if a level of sociability is undoubtedly evident. For some, like art historian Irit Rogoff, the particular value of such practices lies in their frank admission of art's ritualistic aspects, in lieu of which strategies of art participation may be developed that seek to avoid a perceived soft enslavement to institutionalised patterns of behaviour.[6] Rogoff calls for strategies of engagement that, firstly, require us to renegotiate our relation to the institutional context in which we find ourselves, and secondly, to consider our relation to those others with whom we contingently share that space. Consequently, Rogoff defines the agency of the viewer as a kind of 'looking away,' a shift in focus from the passivity of observing to the activity of observance. Abandoning the roles allocated to us as cultural consumers, this

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[3] Duncan. 1995: 5

[4] Ibid: 9

[5] Duncan and Wallach. 1978: 43

[6] Rogoff. 2005. The thrust of Rogoff's notion of participatory practices is motivated by resistance to ritual practices instigated by the art museum and followed, often unreflectively, by the art audience.

religious vernacular of observance draws us closer, as Rogoff puts it, to 'becoming the subject of the work itself,' at the same time reworking the conditions of possibility for engagement or participation.[7] The arena for this engagement is broad, encompassing not only cultural but also political and social spheres. Appositely, we find a concrete example of this movement from observation to observance in Maggie Kast's exploration of dance in the church. Taking inspiration from Turner's work, Kast noticed how the audience changes during her performances, ceasing in the end to be an audience, thus moving from the passivity of observation to the activity of observance. Its pre-performance and post-performance constitution changes through the experience of the event:

> The audience, which came prepared to view a performance, was drawn into the somewhat ritualised nature of the performance, both by its use of sacred space and through participation at the end. The audience became more like an assembly, a gathered community.[8]

Kast's experience underlines an assumption of ritual (and, by inference, liturgy) in ecclesiastical contexts as necessarily social. But Duncan argues that public rituals may also be an individual and private affair, that ritual may be invoked as a mode of production of singular as well as plural subjectivities:

> It may be something an individual enacts alone by following a prescribed route, by repeating a prayer, by recalling a narrative, or by engaging in some other *structured* experience that relates to the history or meaning of the site (or to some object or objects on the site).[9]

This describes rather well what appeared to be at work in the Ono installation, but may be more generally true of the experiential possibilities offered by churches and cathedrals. At a conference on the relation of theology, liturgy and art, Martin Stancliffe, Architect and Surveyor to the Fabric of St. Paul's Cathedral, suggested that participation need not necessarily be communal but can signify a private form of participation with a work of art.[10] Icons were mentioned, but although this is certainly a private form of relation it cannot properly be called one between work and viewer. The icon in this sense cannot properly be thought of as a work of art at all; it is a device for prayer. There is a

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[7] Ibid: 121

[8] Kast. 2000: 223

[9] Duncan. 1995: 12 (emphasis in original)

[10] Conference. *Theology, Liturgy and the Arts*. Sarum College, Salisbury. 2009

relation, certainly, but of a non-aesthetic, strictly sacramental kind, as Jean-Luc Marion describes so well in *The Crossing of the Visible*.

Museum and cathedral communities

As is true of an ecclesiastical space, it has become a given within art discourses that an art museum is not a 'transparent medium' for art, exhibiting autonomous works to a common or neutral subject, however much the museum's primary function is still often taken to be the presentation of objects for private contemplation within a neutral or symbolically empty space. The museum comes ready-equipped with cultural-historical baggage, presents works inevitably coloured by their context to an audience bringing multiple subjectivities with them. However, unlike the art museum or gallery, whose disparate 'congregation' changes from day to day, the church operates with more particular communities in mind. We could go so far as to say that a relational communality is an intrinsic factor of ecclesiastical life, even if, alongside its congregation of regular or occasional communicants and its incumbent clerical community (whose active role in the life of the cathedral is quite different to those who officiate in the museums), it too has its share of transient visitors.

More significantly for our inquiry, Duncan's study of museum practices hinges upon the question of how ritualised experience affects individual and communal experience, and effects individual and communal response. To that end it is interesting to note that she identifies a number of different communities with some claim to the museum as the locus for their expression.[11] There are, for example, the 'academic and critical communities,' those whom we could call the mediators of meaning, alongside the curatorial staff, as central to the production of art museum narratives. She also acknowledges the pressures brought to bear upon these academic or curatorial communities to appeal to 'a broader community,' the public at large, which in a time of decreasing public spending and arts subsidies often results in an increase in the number of 'blockbuster' exhibitions, designed to appeal to a much broader base than would traditionally have been seen as the audience for art. Thirdly, Duncan recognises the role of art museums as repositories of a national consciousness, as representative of the values and truths of 'a national community.' Shifting our attention to ecclesiastical contexts it is clear that these broad categories are reflected there. The church too has its

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[11] Duncan. 1995

academic and priestly mediators of meaning, it has its wider community of church-goers, and it has its national and international community for whom it represents history and heritage, their own or somebody else's, as well as its role in representing national consciousness, particularly evident in times of mourning for tragedies felt at a national and not just personal level. Throughout, Duncan's text problematically assumes a certain understanding of community as given. As the sociologist Gerd Baumann has pointed out, this is always an assumption to be treated with suspicion, since it is so often employed in the service of dubious social or political ends.[12] We do not claim such a motivation for Duncan, only that her use of 'community' lacks the inflection or nuance that for other thinkers of community is indispensable. Community suggests consensus, but not without its antagonisms and disputes; it suggests sociability, but not at the expense of individuality; it suggests commonality, but not a lack of difference.

Early in her text, Duncan makes the pertinent observation that with any institution we should ask 'who constitutes the community and who defines its identity.'[13] Her meaning refracts upon the constitutive, community-creating potential of the institutions themselves, the technologies of power and knowledge that decide the parameters and shape of the community or communities for which they stand. Thus, her penultimate sentence states, as a kind of axiom, that it is the institutional structures themselves that define the parameters of communal identities: 'Above all, [art museums] are spaces in which communities can work out the values that identify them as communities.'[14] This would seem to hold for the museum as a repository of some form of social consciousness, whether local, national or perhaps even international, or as a forum for the presentation and discussion of canonical artefacts representative of a particular culture, but seems ill-suited to the individualised experience one tends to associate with the art museum. If we replace 'art museums' with 'churches and cathedrals' in Duncan's sentence then we arrive at something which seems closer to experienced reality: the constitutive power of the church to establish specific doctrinal, liturgical and social communities. Our enquiry moves in the other direction, troubling the assumptions implicit in Duncan's reading of community, but asking the same question, this time from the position of the constituting subject rather than the institution: who

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[12] Baumann. 1999

[13] Duncan. 1995: 9

[14] Ibid: 131

constitutes the community and who defines its identity? In other words, of whom and by whom is this community formed and defined?

A second axiom draws closer to our thesis. A few sentences prior to that above she argues that '[art museums] constitute an arena in which a community may test, examine, and imaginatively live both older truths and possibilities for new ones.'[15] Notwithstanding our criticisms of her arrogation of communitarian identities, this question is just as relevant, perhaps even more so, if again we change the sentence to replace art museums with cathedrals. Cathedrals may then 'constitute an arena in which a community may test, examine and imaginatively live both older truths and possibilities for new ones.' In turning to the cathedral or church as an arena for art, the evidence of the past decade or so has shown that such places do indeed seem to offer contexts for the testing, examining and living out of 'older truths,' and potential for experimentation with 'new ones,' even if it often seems that living out older truths tends to predominate. In either case, in such contexts the thought of imaginative living accentuates a social rather than private response. In communal terms, however, in a cathedral setting, unlike the art museum, it is not usually the art that forms the primary focus for this testing, examining and imaginative living. It is more typically an engagement with the space itself, as a ritualistic rather more than an aesthetic forum (although aesthetic experience inevitably intrudes), and with the ritualistic practices that take place there, around creeds, sacraments, processions and seasonal occasions.[16] Even when the music takes a particularly beautiful form it is in the service of a particular end rather than an end in itself. Clearly the same is true for the use of icons as tools for prayer or worship. All around there are statues that commemorate, windows that beautify and induce that ambience so peculiar to churches, paintings or sculptures that teach, decorate or direct the viewer towards cognitive, aesthetic or civic responses. It is rare that art be allowed in its own voice and on its own terms to operate as that testing, examining and imaginative living seen by Duncan to be integral to a community's response to the art museum and, we could argue, to the living ecclesiastical space. This is one of the corrective possibilities taken up by this thesis.

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[15] Ibid.

[16] For example, the drive towards the re-ordering of churches to allow more diverse possibilities for worship, in part a response to Vatican II, is both a testing of old truths and traditions and an experimentation with new ideas, even if the process is often slow and sometimes only reluctantly accepted. Only rarely are such changes augmented for the sake of a more central role for art. William Pye's font in Salisbury Cathedral, and Stephen Cox's altar in Canterbury Cathedral, come closer to that realisation.

Appendix 9

A God-shaped hole

The theologian, Rudolf Bultmann, once remarked that modern secular culture has at its heart a hollow 'God-shaped hole,' equating the decline of religious belief with the loss of meaning.[1] Bultmann's supposition is that our so-called post-Christian age is marked by the lack of a truly spiritual quality to modern life. In an essay responding to Bultmann's thesis, Langdon Gilkey argued for art's potential to fill that absence, by implication reiterating the commonly-voiced appeal for the museum of art to act as a site of spiritual sustenance.[2] More interesting perhaps is a related but tangential response to Bultmann from the respected church historian, Alan Doig, who some years ago asked the question, 'is there a God-shaped hole in the middle of modern art?'[3] Here the emphasis is rather more on whether there is a spiritual vacuum specific to art itself. Doig thinks not. His argument is essentially a defence of the use of modern art in churches, using as examples several canonical works by Moore, Sutherland, Chagall and Matisse, as well as more recent works, thereby disavowing the notion of modern art's besetting godlessness. His argument has two main thrusts: modern art, especially that produced by non-believing artists, need not be feared nor disdained as intrinsically godless, nor should the church, in choosing to patronise it, presume to fill art's 'God-shaped hole' with its own system of thought and interpretation. Art is, and should remain, another way of expressing truths rather than a vehicle for the church to express its own values. However, Doig's disavowal of a God-shaped hole masks a fundamental misperception. Badiou would no doubt argue that it is exactly this void or hole that makes meaningful art, and indeed philosophy, possible, not only within secular culture but also within the culture of the church. Indeed, we could argue that the artists mentioned above attempted to tap the riches of that void, articulating a visual, expressive language that was to some extent illegible within the religious iconography of its time. If the history of ecclesiastical art has unfolded within what we could call a series of representations of the pivotal Christian event (and its prior or consequential events), from the annunciation to the crucifixion, the event itself is strictly inimical to representation. Badiou's argument is that the event

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[1] Fuller. 1985: 192. It is a thought originally attributed to the French philosopher Blaise Pascal, who wrote 'Il y a dans le cœur de tout homme un vide qui a la forme de Dieu' ('There is a vacuum in the heart of every man in the shape of God').

[2] Gilkey. 1995

[3] Doig. 1999

itself perpetually withdraws, distancing itself from any form of representation, and the art that remains (almost the entirety of Christian representative art) is merely a shadow play, a vacancy temporarily filled with hollow representations, or a series of content-less attempts to bring objectively closer by pictorial means what can only ever be known as subjective experience, encounter, or revelation. As Caravaggio's depiction of Paul's evental encounter clearly shows, in not showing, the event itself remains categorically outside the frame (figure 82).

From the perspective of the God-shaped hole thesis, what is usually signified is the absence, loss or lack of reference to God in contemporary culture. In another sense it is the loss of God within a modern secular culture governed by the Nietzschean proclamation of God's death. From Badiou's Lacanian perspective, of course, the exact opposite is the case. Wouldn't it be true to say that it is the unrepresentability of God itself that is the hole or void that artists over the centuries have attempted to fill with art (hence the iconoclastic destruction of images as idolatrous)? The Lacanian void, the unrecognisable, unsymbolisable place from which event emerges, becomes in this sense another name for God. When some descry a God-shaped hole in today's Western culture, and imagine that a renewed dedication to religious belief will plug this gap, are they not forgetting that God is precisely the name of this void? A God-shaped hole testifies precisely to the evental existence of God, whose presence, as the ultimate Real, can only be felt as the not-known in contemporary culture, as a hole puncturing reality. Against the assumption that God is the shape that fills the void, in strictly Badiouian terms it would be better to say that God is the very site of the void. And in fact Doig gets closer to this idea when he refers to the God-shaped hole central to the Non-Realist theological *Weltanschauung*: the radical unknowability of God as wholly other.

Amongst contemporary theologians, this image of the Badiouian void has found its champions, most prominently John D. Caputo. As one of the few theologians to have developed a theology of the event along Badiouian lines, he presents the hypothesis that one way of understanding postmodernism philosophically is in its capacity as a philosophy of the event and that, consequently, postmodern theology is a theology of the event, where event comes to denote above all (if any denotation is possible) a sense or experience of the sacred:

> In thinking of radical theology as a theology of the event, the stress is on the event as an irreducible possibility, a potentiality that can assume various forms of expression and instantiation. The event is not reducible to the actual, but stirs as a simmering potentiality within the name or the state of affairs, incessantly

seeking an outlet, constantly pressing for expression in words and things. The event is irreducible; indeed, I am inclined to say that it is the very form of irreducibility itself. For what is irreducible is what resists contraction into some finite form or other, what seeks to twist free from the finite containers in which it finds itself deposited, what cannot be contained – which is what we *mean* by the event.[4]

For Caputo, as for Badiou, it is the void that makes meaningful theology and philosophy possible, here signified by the irreducibility of the event to what *is* (being or the actual). The potentiality that this implies for a theology of the event finds its equivalent in Badiou's hopes for art. Briefly stated, one of the key theses of his *Manifesto of Affirmationist Art* states that art 'operates outside the framework of the recognisably existing. It renders visible this putative non-existence.'[5] In other words, although it appears in material form, any art that is worth the name operates out of what Badiou refers to as 'the situated void,' meaning whatever remains invisible to, or unthought within, the milieu in which it appears. Here the void of the God-shaped hole is turned to Badiou's materialist conception of one of the four conditions of truth: the creative potentiality of art. Rather than a state of affairs to be lamented, therefore, this vacuum at the centre of contemporary Western culture, this veritable absence of God, is in effect the site of the real, where artist and theologian find themselves on common ground.

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[4] Caputo. 2007b: 51-2

[5] Badiou and Winter. 2006: 133-148, and Badiou. 2005c

Figure 82 Caravaggio, *Conversion on the Way to Damascus*, 1601

Appendix 10

Notes on Arts Policies of major English cathedrals

In 2007 the Chapter of St. Paul's Cathedral produced and adopted an official arts policy. Coming from the symbolic centre of ecclesiastical life in this country, this policy is a further sign of the church's commitment to new art generally and clearly calculated to support the cathedral's ongoing art's programme in particular. It professes a role for art that encompasses many of the acknowledged activities currently expected of the cathedral: to enrich the liturgy, to enable education and reflection, to encourage dialogue within its London context (with Tate Modern, for example) and to recognise its decisive status as a national site of heritage and tourism. Since then a number of other British cathedrals have followed suit in producing their own policies. Let us highlight a number of clauses in the arts policies of the cathedrals of St. Paul's, Canterbury, Winchester, Liverpool, Durham and Salisbury, all renowned for their active engagement with contemporary art, and which we might take as typical considering their national importance.[1] All six policies are written with the aim of encouraging an effective ongoing relationship between the church and the arts (and we must bear in mind that each location has hosted a number of highly praised artistic installations, both temporary and permanent). However, certain problematic aspects to this end are evident.

St. Paul's Cathedral

St. Paul's arts policy begins by establishing the foundations for any new art. Firstly, in satisfying a theological basis for the visual arts (particularly in the light of the iconoclastic tradition). Secondly, in arguing that there exist within the present form of the cathedral clear precedents for the use of art: in the geometry of its design, in its structural ornamentation, in its various decorative utilitarian objects. The policy states that 'it is in continuity with these strands of Christian tradition' that new art will be admitted; according to these criteria and this tradition. A second strand or demand is that the use of art 'must have some stated purpose that will, with outstanding distinction, illuminate and further our mission.' Both temporary and permanent works must fit not only devotional and evangelical expectations, but furthermore enrich the liturgy, provide opportunities for education and reflection (through structured events, symposia, etc),

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[1] All Arts Policies reviewed are available on request from the respective cathedral Chapters.

stimulate dialogue within the city (with its neighbour across the water for example) and beyond, and finally, add weight to or augment the heritage and tourism aspect of the cathedral's role. It is not suggested that a single work should fulfil all these criteria but that these should be its guiding parameters. Particular stress is laid upon the hope that a temporary work of art might be 'beneficial' to the liturgical life of the cathedral by, for example, corresponding to the liturgical calendar. The import of this wish is that art bend itself to the demands of the liturgy, though there is no corresponding compunction for the liturgy to mould itself to the possibilities offered by the work. Furthermore, any temporary work (and this must surely relate to permanent pieces too) must take account of other events and other demands on space made by other bookings (a concert, perhaps, or a civic occasion).

'Appropriateness' of location is considered, site-specificity clearly vital to any work placed in an ecclesiastical space, although the sites suggested as especially appropriate cannot but imply that by 'appropriate' it is the life of the rest of the cathedral that is prioritised. Peripheral, marginal or exterior spaces are recommended, with an extra proviso that the works might ideally bare a degree of specificity to the cathedral itself. If peripheral sites are preferred we should add, to be fair, that sometimes it is precisely such peripheral spaces that are most suited to the works chosen for them.[2]

Responsibility for the introduction of works of art into the cathedral is spread across a wide cross-section of the cathedral community, beginning with the Dean and Chapter, but including anyone involved in the cathedral's mission (as outlined above), those responsible for 'processes of permission and co-ordination,' an Art Advisory Panel drawing upon a pre-prepared list of art advisors, members of the Fabric Advisory Committee, and any others whose particular artistic expertise is considered pertinent to the case in point.[3] All are expected to make 'recommendations' on the inclusion or non-

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[2] Gormley's *Sound II*, a permanent feature of Winchester Cathedral's crypt, is often described as extraordinarily appropriate for that peripheral location. The scale and simplicity of the space is sympathetic to the stillness and quiet of its meditating form, and dramatically responsive to its conceptual character as a figure intended to be in or near water, since it finds itself knee-deep every winter in the flooded crypt.

[3] In several recent commissions, most notably Chichester Cathedral's current plans to install a permanent work of contemporary art above the Arundel screen in the nave, a further level of consultation has been added through the use of Modus Operandi, an arts advisory body. This group was also brought in to oversee the new window by Shirazeh Houshiary commissioned for St. Martin-in-the-Fields (2008) and the redevelopment of Lumen United Reform Church (2008). As is becoming one of the standard methods of commissioning, Chichester Cathedral's bid to commission a new permanent work has gone through a process of invited competition, short-listed from a list of artists provided by Modus Operandi, a selection panel, an ecclesiastical committee and public opinion following public display of the short-listed proposals, suggesting a formally democratic art. Perhaps

inclusion of a particular work of art. This does not rely solely upon the work itself but also upon the reputation of the artist, for which a selection criteria is provided: a unique ability to present aspects of the Christian faith, or to reflect the distinct character of London, or to identify moral and ethical concerns of universal significance. Artists will be preferred who have a national and/or international status, or are especially gifted early-career artists. Although this appears to be a very wide brief it effectively narrows down the field by over-stipulation.

In terms of media, all works in St. Paul's are expected to 'offer some distinctive and possibly new account of the space' through a 'sympathetic and imaginative' relationship with their environment. This seems to be a reasonable hope for art although it is not clear how the media employed, as opposed to the content of the work, might achieve this. A projected piece like *The Messenger* clearly fulfils this criterion but what about a more conventional form like a painting? The emphasis on a 'new account of the space,' though laudably expanding the field of proposed works to accommodate new media, could also be read as a discouragement to more conventional means. Of greater concern is the necessity for all works of art to be accompanied by interpretative material, and the right of the Dean and Chapter to exercise some degree of hermeneutic control.

The ubiquitous demands of health and safety are raised, along with questions of tactility, familiar to any space for the presentation of art. Sound installations must be locally manageable, such controls typically deployed whenever a service is in progress. Although this is an understandable precaution against the artwork's disruption of other, more central, aspects of the cathedral's life it inevitably raises questions concerning the role art plays in the cathedral, lending it a more peripheral presence. More puzzling is the demand that 'intangible works' based on sound or light, or both, 'must have identifiable boundaries.' One cannot help but wonder how such boundaries will be managed and, more pertinently, why it is felt to be imperative that they should be.

One final demand is that temporary works must have limited impact, that the cathedral be returned to its condition prior to the installation of the work. From the

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unfairly the process was described in *Church Times* as 'a kind of artistic X Factor' (Paveley. 2009). The commission is timed to be part of the celebrations of the centenary of the former Dean of Chichester, Walter Hussey, who was responsible for several of Chichester's remarkable works of modern art, and who, tellingly, was described by Kenneth Clark as the last great patron of art in the Church of England. Today it would seem instead of patrons commissions are overseen by committees. The reliance upon a selection panel, arts consultancy firm, public opinion as well as the key input from the Cathedrals Fabric Commission and the Dean and Chapter, though all admirably modern ways of doing things, also implies the lack of a key visionary figure like Hussey, who was equally at home in the world of art as in his ecclesiastical incumbency.

point of view of the fabric of the building this is a sensible precaution. Those responsible for the great cathedrals of this country no doubt feel the burden of their charge, which should not be dismissed lightly. It would be unfair to read into this prescription anything other than this concern, even if works of art sometimes have a tendency to linger long after their departure (Yoko Ono's installation left a residue of its presence long after it had been removed, while a clearer example of such artistic after-life may be seen in the floor of Tate Modern's turbine hall, which still bears the imprint of Salcedo's *Shibboleth*, a work that would be unthinkable, though immensely powerful, in a cathedral). But in the light of the policy's prior prescriptions one cannot help but feel an effort to manage or even neutralise the impact of art behind every good intention to promote it.

Finally, in line with today's target-driven need to assess impact, there is a hope, even insistence, to determine quantifiable outcomes following any installation, regarding the extent to which it satisfied all the criteria for inclusion mentioned above, the public interest or response it aroused, the quality of theological, intellectual and aesthetic reflection it engendered, the devotional, liturgical and homiletic opportunities it enabled, and the precedents it sets for future projects. Such quantifiable outcomes, one presumes, if in any way achievable, would govern future projects, even though the qualitative impact of art remains largely immune to capture by such means.[4]

Winchester Cathedral

From Winchester comes the desire to achieve a 'measured' programme of visual arts, by which we suppose is meant thoughtful and considered, 'to complement and enhance' the cultural life of the cathedral. Measured can, of course, also suggest modest ambitions, a possibility only encouraged by certain other phrases: 'a standard deemed acceptable' by the group that decides, 'wide appeal' is requested, the need to challenge and engage in 'appropriate ways,' non-confrontational work is demanded, 'open to theological interpretation that is not antipathetic to the Christian faith.' Furthermore, art exhibitions 'should' (a demand or a suggestion?) engage creatively with the space and the faith it embodies, enrich visitors' experience, connect with secular culture, promote learning through the arts for all ages, enhance the cathedral's national profile, and increase visitor numbers. It is not clear if all the above criteria must be met, or if these are simply desirable, although the 'should' suggests the former. To my mind these are heavy

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[4] Future research into the effectiveness of art in churches and cathedrals would no doubt benefit from such qualitative inquiry, but it is perhaps a mark of its difficulty that very few reports have appeared.

demands, drastically limiting the potential for dramatic artistic projects. In a sense an artist cannot guarantee any of these results, and to some degree the commissioning body must simply put their trust in the artist and their work. The first criteria for any work of art should be truth to itself, which may mean an allusive, difficult relationship with the space and its ideologies, it may be entirely divorced from contemporary culture, it may have little to do with education or learning, being simply experiential perhaps, it may speak to a very small number of people and leave others baffled, it may be little interested in the reputation of the building itself, it may have no impact upon visitor numbers, or might even deter visitors for one reason or another. All of these demands are surely peripheral to the purpose of art, unless it is decided that art itself is a peripheral part of the life of the cathedral.

Winchester is a particularly interesting case, its policy towards artistic acquisitions and promotion presided over for many years by Canon Keith Walker, heir to the legacy of George Bell and Walter Hussey, and responsible for, among other works, the permanent installation of Gormley's *Sound II* in the crypt. Yet despite this inspired and commendable achievement, that Walker has also succumbed to the restrictive and controlling parameters of arts agendas is clear from this statement concerning the place of art in the church, in which he affirms the policy of Bishop George Bell: 'The Church should dictate the subject matter, the artist the treatment.'[5] He also adds that 'due regard should be paid to what a congregation will accept.' Walker wrote this in 1996, around the same time that Canon Bill Hall, of Durham Cathedral, was overseeing the installation of Bill Viola's *The Messenger*. It is safe to say that a newer generation of clerics like Hall, with a desire to promote good ecclesiastical art, will tend to eschew such demands, granting the artist far greater autonomy and trust.

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[5] Walker. 1996: 50. In the same paragraph Walker cites Bell's determination to use artists 'fearlessly,' regardless of whether or not they can testify to personal convictions of faith. In the light of such a clearly contentious stance perhaps we can give a more sympathetic gloss to Walker's pronouncement. One can readily understand that a church willing to use non-believing artists might anticipate the need to act as a theological guide to their endeavours, as Couturier had with Matisse in the creation of the Dominican chapel at Vence, and the artists at Assy. Despite the guidance he offered, in the example of Vence Gabrielle Langdon holds that Couturier could, nonetheless, legitimately claim that Matisse's efforts to create a 'holy space' had been unhampered by any restrictive artistic censorship on the part of the church (Langdon. 1988: 572). A more common concern, one raised at a workshop on ecclesiastical commissioning, is that the commissioning process may include people with clerical responsibilities to the church but little or no knowledge of art (Commission4mission study day. *Perspectives on Commissioning Christian Art*. Chelmsford Cathedral, 07/11/09).

Canterbury Cathedral

On one level we can read the recommendations and requirements discussed so far in a positive light – all sensible precautions and considered advice – but taken another way they could be turned to highly prohibitive or prescriptive ends. Art in cathedrals is understandably but problematically subject to much stiffer regulations and greater restrictions than it would face in the art museum. Canterbury's approach in this respect is far more conciliatory in its demands, far less prescriptive, in general leaving more room for artistic possibilities. Guidance is couched in terms like 'may' rather than 'should.' Nonetheless, it expects the art on show to be 'consonant with the Cathedral's mission statement.' This statement demands 'good visual art,' meaning that which 'honours the material(s) from which it is made, engages the viewer and enhances his or her delight in the created world of line, colour and form, and is a vital aspect of a religion of the Incarnation.' The art employed is expected to be 'an integral part' of the cathedral, it 'can elicit wonder,' may 'unsettle and ask searching questions,' may explore 'new or forgotten horizons of meaning' and 'invites reflection.' Crucially, the statement expresses a desire to 'honour the integrity of the artistic process.'

In the case of temporary works, Canterbury's guidelines express an aim to be flexible but consideration must be given to both the fabric of the cathedral and the life of the cathedral, and the process subject to a committee rather than the jurisdiction of one or two members of the cathedral. The siting and lighting of temporary works is in the hands of Dean and Chapter, the Events Coordinator and the Vesturer, who will inform the artist of their decisions. The artist thus appears to have limited agency in the work's inception but is expected to take full responsibility for it once it is in place. In the case of commissions the fullest mutual dialogue between artist and cathedral is expected, with due consideration given to the whole process, including the 'interpretation' of the work with considerable thought being given at an early stage to the 'reception' of the artwork by the cathedral community – a not unreasonable but perhaps rather programmatic hermeneutic, for which the Chapter will provide 'a full liturgical and theological written brief.' The Dean is considered to have singular responsibility (positive if progressive, negative if conservative) although the full involvement of the Chapter is presumed along with the Fabric Advisory Committee.

Liverpool Cathedral

Liverpool's Anglican Cathedral has produced a brief, open and non-prescriptive arts policy. Its only stated aim is that the art employed should 'enhance the building' and facilitate a meaningful relationship between the cathedral and its worshippers and visitors; a material as much as a spiritual request. As well as considering the placement of permanent or long-term commissions the policy denotes the importance of setting aside spaces for temporary works, for which the architecture of the building provides ample possibilities, replete as it is with numerous nooks and crannies, chapels and aisles, suitable for this purpose. Lin Holland and Jane Poulton's residency, and more recent collaborative work in the cathedral, has, in a series of highly effective installations, put this aspect of the policy to the test, with positive results (figure 83).

It concludes by directing a series of questions towards any prospective artwork: does the work of art lend itself to involvement in the liturgical life of the cathedral? Can it educate or stimulate reflective thought? Is it of a quality to invite serious or searching contemplation? Is it able to draw the viewer closer to the Christian faith? How fitting is it to the space, in terms of scale, materials and appropriateness? Finally, has it an integrity and quality in itself, commensurate with the building? Although certain terms ('appropriateness,' 'commensurate with the building,' and so on) imply a degree of restraint, they are perfectly valid criteria, applicable to many a work of art in non-ecclesiastical spaces. Perhaps the only question we might raise is who makes this assessment of what counts as appropriate or commensurate? Between the artist, church and congregation, how much is stipulated, how much negotiated? Even if, in general, the policy seems to be weighted towards a desire to guide rather than to impose, whilst acknowledging certain expectations for art in an ecclesiastical space, in the past qualifications such as 'appropriateness' have often been applied to art in a proscriptive rather than enabling capacity.

Durham Cathedral

The Chapter at Durham has developed a detailed and comprehensive approach, which presupposes the potential of art to contribute significantly to the Cathedral's mission. To that end art's many possible roles are mooted: to aid worship, to inspire reflection, to stimulate theological thought, to engage with contemporary issues, to challenge and comfort, and to reframe ideas and repose questions. There is an explicit expectation that art will at times be incorporated into the liturgy, and a tacit sense that the liturgy may take

its cue from the art (Lawson's *Pieta* is directly mentioned as an obvious candidate). The model of commissioning presented by the policy is more troubling. Although it encourages a 'collaborative approach' it clearly states that 'the Chapter leads and has clear aims in mind,' that it is to be 'advised by experts' with the artist providing 'the majority of the creative input' but with the participation of the whole community. For many years Durham has had the good fortune to be guided in its arts projects by Canon Bill Hall, whose experience of working with artists and, more importantly, his trust in their creative vision, has led to a number of effective installations and commissions, not least of which was, of course, Bill Viola's *The Messenger*. In less capable hands, however, this model might well be turned to more heavily managed ends. Indeed, one of the later clauses states that art in the cathedral '*must* accord with the Cathedral's mission' (my emphasis), repeating the afore-mentioned roles for art but now under the proviso of compulsion. Whether intentional or not, those roles now read as mandatory criteria for art's inclusion.

The practical functioning and liturgical life of the cathedral is naturally prioritised, but with an emphasis on the non-intrusive nature of the art. On the one hand, this is a reasonable compliance with the policy's statement that the cathedral should not be treated as an art gallery; on the other hand, it leaves little scope for any work of art seeking to engage in any substantial way with the cathedral's spaces. Curiously, considering the history of Durham Cathedral's pioneering use of contemporary media, audio-visual work is virtually prohibited.

Salisbury Cathedral

Salisbury's arts policy begins by underlining the valued place of the visual arts as a source of spiritual insight, regardless of whether or not an artist is a professed Christian. Nevertheless, its arts policy is unusual in that it appears to promote secular as much as spiritual values. For example, it describes the objectives of its arts policy as threefold: to build a more diverse congregation through links to the wider community, to promote discovery, learning and education, and to enhance visitor experience. Furthermore, it seeks to gain recognition as 'a venue for high quality exhibitions.' Specific aims are to increase visitor numbers, to facilitate its programme of education, to increase and develop the profile of the cathedral, and to improve issues of equal access. Partnerships with arts organisations and other cathedrals are actively encouraged, along with wider community outreach.

Salisbury's policy includes the following as obligatory criteria: the work of art *must* be of an appropriate subject matter and an appropriate form, the artist *must* be willing to supply interpretative material, and to participate in educational events (my emphasis). An arts proposal must also address at least one of the following: a spiritual or theological dimension, the architectural setting of the cathedral, questions of social justice, the educational objectives of the cathedral, improving links with the local community and attracting visitors who would not normally visit the cathedral. It also underlines the benefits of using high quality artists, but principally in order to attract greater numbers of visitors and improve the profile of the cathedral. Once again the notion of appropriateness is highlighted, along with a hermeneutical agenda for the sake of accessibility. A heightened profile and increase in the number of visitors are also clearly uppermost. Entirely missing is any sense of art's value in itself.[6] Rather, the emphasis seems to be almost entirely on what supplementary benefits may be derived from a work of art.

In many respects, these policy statements do not generally reflect the high quality of work shown over the years, whether as single installations or as part of larger exhibition formats. Nonetheless, criticisms can be made of Salisbury's policy at times in the actual results produced. Well before this policy was drafted Salisbury's 1999 *The Shape of the Century* exhibition of sculpture came in for a fair amount of criticism, for failings which this policy would do little to address. In his derogatory review of the exhibition, for example, John McEwen felt that many of the pieces made a 'wretched showing…when placed beside the collective achievement of the cathedral itself.'[7] Even if McEwen's derisive remarks were motivated by an antipathy towards contemporary art of any form in places of worship (as was the conclusion of Annette Ratuszniak, the curator), at the time I concurred with his view, although conceding that a few works were more successful. My chief criticism was that in many instances *The Shape of the Century* did little more than utilise the cathedral as a grand and elaborate exhibition space, which benefited neither the work nor the space, and is a perennial problem for large-scale exhibitions in cathedrals. Gloucester Cathedral's *Crucible*, an exhibition of sculpture

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[6] Once again we come up against a common difficulty for art produced for churches and cathedrals: the need to fulfil ecclesiastical criteria takes precedence over artistic decisions, a complaint voiced by numerous artists. Jeremy Begbie notes, for example, that a Christian painter of his acquaintance has said that 'once the pressure is there to make a painting "message-orientated" there is a strong tendency to undervalue or ignore the reality of a painting as a painting.' (Peter Smith, cited in Begbie. 1991: 248).

[7] McEwen. 1999: 9

in 2010, was on a similar scale to Salisbury's earlier exhibition, but was, on the whole, far more satisfying. It was clear that a considerable amount of attention had been paid to the choice and placement of the artworks, as was noted in a review for *Art and Christianity*:

> One's overwhelming impression is of a sensitive discernment directing the curating process, effectively balancing particular works against particular places, thereby forming more integral, dialogic relations with the cathedral. To that end good use has been made of Gloucester's many curious niches, chapels and corners. Antony Gormley's prostrate figure, *Close V*, for example, was well placed within a sunken, cold and gloomy antechamber [while] A startling contrast was achieved with the setting for Ralph Brown's naked, abject and pitiful *Clochard*, cowering on the floor within a few yards of a magnificently-robed marble effigy for a well-heeled Bishop's tomb.[8]

Gloucester also scores over Salisbury in another, seemingly insignificant, aspect: the question of signage. For Salisbury's 2010 exhibition of sculpture, entitled *Liminality*, press photographs show the works in their context, prior to the opening of the exhibition (figure 86). My own images depict a slightly different story (figure 87). Here we see the addition of descriptive plaques in close proximity to the works, such that each is subject to a visual disruption that interferes with one's aesthetic and contextual appreciation. This may be thought a minor complaint, but it palpably reduces the dynamism of an artwork and its context to a museum exhibit. Although this was not the case at Salisbury, in many cathedrals signage offering detailed information about an artwork is frequently placed in close proximity to the work in question where a judicious distance would be preferable, thereby assailing the viewer with an immediate presentation of meaning, and thus, it could be claimed, delivering a hermeneutic disruption too.[9] Signage is one of the aspects of exhibiting artworks which hardly, if ever, appears in any arts policy, and yet it is clearly an important consideration. My own supposition is that Salisbury's emphasis on accessibility, increased numbers and high profile (media? cultural?) reflected in its policy, alongside its relative silence on matters of the intrinsic merit of the artwork itself, is likely to encourage the kind of compromises evident in this exhibition. By contrast, *Crucible*, showing at the same time at Gloucester, had deliberately introduced a discreet means of identifying the works on show (nothing more than a number), thus interfering as little as

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[8] Koestlé-Cate. 2010: 3 (see figures 84 and 85)

[9] Durham Cathedral is particularly culpable in this respect, placing interpretative material close to many of its permanently-displayed works (as can be seen in figure 88).

possible in the viewer's reception and interpretation of them.[10] This seems far preferable to the demand of several policies for interpretative material to accompany the art on display, which can all too easily become overly-didactic. There may, however, be a place for pre-empting problems of reception by preparation of a congregation through education or information, not at this stage to gauge an opinion, nor to risk diminishing the work's potential impact, but rather to maximise the potential for an audience receptive to the work.

The problematic issues around Salisbury's practice discussed above have been replicated elsewhere. For example, in Winchester Cathedral's exhibition, *Light*, other visual distractions were evident. Here once again the contrast between press photographs and the actual event are illuminating (figures 89 and 90). In the press image Whiteread's *Untitled (pair)* is shown to good effect in the space, whereas in actuality it was flanked by two intrusive and off-putting 'please do not touch' signs. Clearly the important issue of protecting the work must be raised, but one's experience of the work within its all-important context is likely to be diminished by such incursions. In these and other examples we could conclude that the institution of an arts policy can often be ineffectual where the actual conditions of installation and reception are concerned. Greater consideration must be extended to actual works of art and their effective conditions of appearing.

The humble descriptive panel that accompanies almost all publicly-exhibited works of art is an invariably overlooked source of categorisation. Treated in the main as an innocuous aspect of display – at best a benign and informative prop to enhance the viewing experience, at worst a necessary evil – it has major implications for contemporary art in the church. In example after example it is clear that signage is assumed (somewhat ironically) to function as a non-signifying supplement to the work towards which it directs our attention, or for which it offers a descriptive explanation, interpretation or even justification. Signage draws our attention to an issue central to debates around the uses of art in the church: the distinction made between religious image and nonreligious art (a differentiation generally attributed to Gotthold Lessing). The latter is taken to exist for its own sake and cannot become a religious image without

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[10] In figure 85 the numbering used throughout the exhibition to enable the viewer to access information about each particular sculpture can be seen just behind the recumbent figure's feet, corresponding to a numbered map, which included biographical information and detail about the specific works on the reverse. In addition a catalogue was available giving more extensive information. The temptation here, of course, would be to go one step further and remove even this minimal cipher, leaving the viewer with the work in its context and nothing more.

relinquishing its status as art; the former cannot be considered a work of art without losing its religious efficacy. If we accept the premise of this split then the conditions of display must be crucial to the reception of an artistic creation. But even if we do not, as this thesis has tended to argue, foreseeing possibilities for religious and aesthetic appreciation in the same object or event, the discerning use of signage remains important. Many of the works highlighted in this thesis straddle the contrary positions represented by Lessing's differentiation.[11] Nevertheless, in pursuing an agenda for art that abrogates the reduction of the ecclesiastical context to a grand exhibition space, signage is a physical reminder of this conflict of interests between image and art, constantly threatening to turn a liturgical object into an object of display.

Concluding remarks

In each of the six cases above I am being highly critical, many might justifiably say over-critical, and I am not insensible to the very difficult and varying demands made upon any Dean and Chapter valiantly attempting to engage with contemporary art in their respective cathedral roles, with all the responsibilities they entail. Clearly their remit extends far beyond the support of the arts. But I believe it is worthwhile to highlight the barriers and restrictions to art that accompany any institutionalised efforts to accommodate it, especially since underlying all such policies, unwritten but implied, is the need to contain the unruly, subversive or unmanageable potential of art. The conditions of possibility for art are, in each case, clearly defined, its parameters circumscribed by necessity. Yet it is the very nature of art to exceed definitions and overstep its boundaries. Art is risky; it has the potential to fail as well as the potential to exceed all expectations. Art is non-democratic, responding poorly to committees and consensus; if it is in any way universal this can only be an unintended consequence for a phenomenon

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[11] An example that, successfully in my view, resolves this dichotomy in an effective way is Sutherland's *Crucifixion* in the south transept of St. Matthew's, Northampton. A simple but judicious arrangement of elements specific to the work takes both possibilities into account at one and the same time, dependent for its interpretation as religious image or nonreligious art entirely on the viewer's response to it. As can be seen in figure 91 it is flanked by two candleholders, sympathetic in style to the work and the space, with a prayer stall set before it. Here it clearly operates as a religious image for liturgical or devotional use. Yet just outside the frame of this photograph, on either side of the transept are two sturdy chairs, also in keeping with the space, facilitating a more leisurely contemplation of the image as work of art. The final piece of the ensemble is a discreet stand with a brief description of the work, near enough to the work to be associated with it yet sufficiently distant to avoid becoming a visual distraction. Those charged with securing and maintaining Hussey's artistic legacy at St. Matthew's have clearly registered these significant but often overlooked aspects of art's presence in an ecclesiastical spaces (Moore's *Madonna and Child* in the opposite transept is equally well-served).

which must begin in each case with the particular and specific conditions of its appearing; it cannot flourish if overly-prescribed; it must be trusted. Otherwise, let us stick with the art we already have in the church and leave new works to find spaces more conducive to them. Our principal complaint is this: outlining the conditions of possibility, especially with regards to a policy recommendation, results in a delimitation of the possible. What is possible, in such instances, is what the criteria allow, compared to an as-yet unthought, non-definitive and undefined potential. An obvious objection will be made that we have paid no heed to the intractable practicalities of deploying art in ecclesiastical spaces, presenting hurdles, guidelines and restrictions from which the art gallery or museum has greater freedom, greater latitude of movement.[12] Yet what we often face are ready-made barriers and obstructions, presuppositions, seemingly insuperable objections, and a tendency for what Adorno would call a 'highly administered' approach to commissioning, typical of our highly regulated times. This thesis makes no attempt to enlarge upon the pragmatic facts of art installations. We direct the reader to other texts for such advice and guidance.[13] But equally we resist the

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[12] For example, it is clear a degree of democratic consensus is unavoidable in ecclesiastical projects, but that should not preclude us from raising critical awareness of its shortcomings. In recent years the decision-making entailed by commissions has extended beyond the nexus identified by Howes ('patron, artist, parish, community and society') to include the expert advice of other intermediaries. A ubiquitous element of any ecclesiastical commission these days is the arts consultancy group. In the context of today's dominant and highly visible culture industry the cultural intermediary has become an increasingly central and apparently indispensable figure, valued for the cultural capital and networked connections they bring with them. Modus Operandi is currently the most prominent working for British cathedrals. Clearly their expertise in facilitating and overseeing the creation of works should not be underestimated. As the ACE awards consistently show, excellent works of art have resulted from the closely monitored, often painstaking process, of turning approved ideas into effective works through the ministrations of groups like Modus Operandi. Their input is frequently described as 'invaluable,' particularly as a means to establish efficacious partnerships between all concerned (Hedley. 2010: 5). However, behind the scenes, reservations have been expressed regarding the degree of control they exercise over ecclesiastical projects. At the very least, reliance upon such groups, even in a purely advisory capacity, introduces a further degree of non-artistic, non-ecclesiastical interference into the process of decision-making. Paul Clemens's discussion of the role of cultural intermediaries, in an entirely non-ecclesiastical context (he takes as his example the Fourth Plinth Commissioning Group), reinforces this view. He expresses concerns about the degree of control exercised by cultural intermediaries, the liabilities for creativity associated with democratic processes, and criticises the tendency of both to reinforce 'acceptable tastes and art practices' (Clements. 2008: 25-6). Throughout the history of ecclesiastical art there has been a reliance upon what Clements terms 'negotiated patronage' between an artist and their ecclesiastical patron, with varying degrees of input from third parties (ibid: 27). But the pattern increasingly common today is one of consultation and committees. In the case of the Heidelberg debacle, a variation of this problem was revealed. Although entrenched conservative tastes were ultimately blamed for the failure of the project an allegedly contributory factor was the assumption of a democratic process, the conclusion being that, in the end, a more autocratic model would have produced an exciting commission where the recourse to democracy ultimately put an end to it (Mulder. 2005).

[13] A recommended read would be Howes and Devonshire Jones, *English Cathedrals and the Visual Arts: Patronage, Policies & Provision 2005* (2005), especially their section on recommendations, pp. 46-9. At the time of writing a new set of guidelines for commissioning works of art in parish churches is under

idea that the pragmatic must always outweigh the conceivable, that probabilities should outweigh potentiality. Indeed, isn't this exactly the lesson of those works that continue to be favourably discussed and debated as exemplars of good practice?

discussion, chaired by the artist Mark Cazalet. This will presumably be a more generally applicable version of the bespoke arts policies analysed here, or may be a more practical guide to choosing and installing works. At this stage there is little point in speculating, but it will be interesting to see what results.

Figure 83 Lin Holland and Jane Poulton, Liverpool Cathedral: *Earth and Aether*, 2010 and *Three Vessels: Love's Labours*, 2008

Figure 84 Antony Gormley, *Close V*, in *Crucible*, Gloucester Cathedral, 2010

Figure 85 Ralph Brown, *Clochard*, in *Crucible*, Gloucester Cathedral, 2010

Figure 86 Press photographs of *Liminality*, Salisbury Cathedral, 2010

From left to right: Roger Stephens, *Cardo*; Benjamin Storch, *Liminality*; Jonathan Loxley, *Origin*

Figure 87 Roger Stephens, *Cardo*, and Jonathan Loxley, *Origin*, in *Liminality*, Salisbury Cathedral, 2010
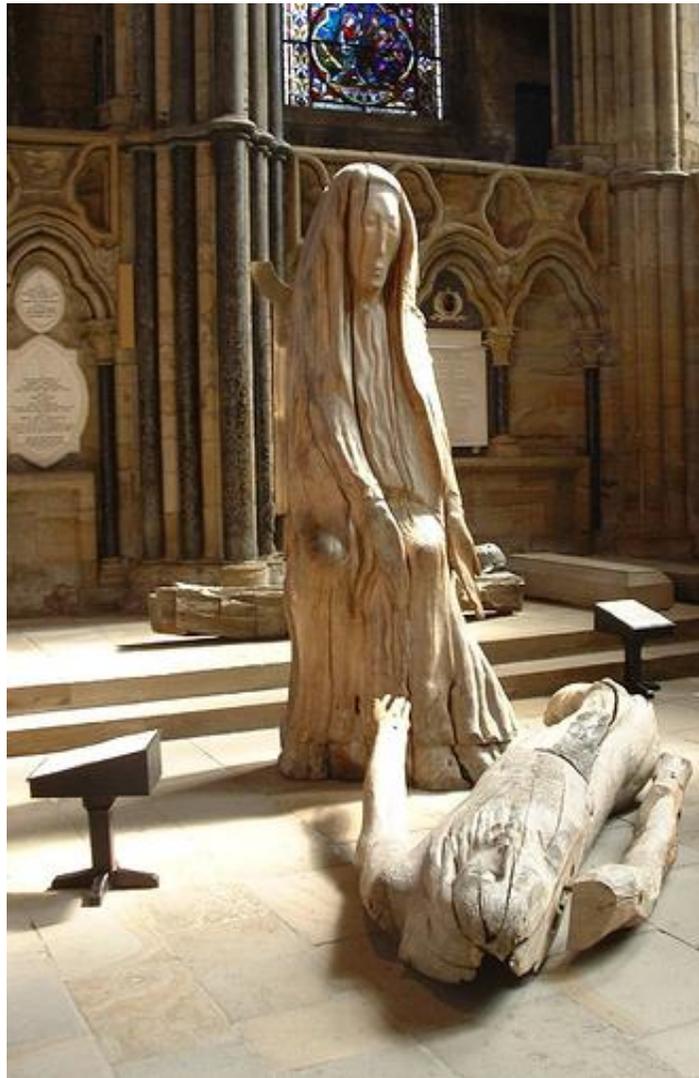
Figure 88 Two examples of the use of detailed informational and interpretative signage in Durham Cathedral: Fenwick Lawson's *Pieta* and Joseph Pyrz's *Annunciation*.

Figure 89 Rachel Whiteread, *Untitled (pair),* press photograph for *Light*, Winchester Cathedral, 2007

Figure 90 Rachel Whiteread, *Untitled (pair),* press photograph for *Light*, Winchester Cathedral, 2007, showing the 'Please do not touch' signs flanking the sculpture
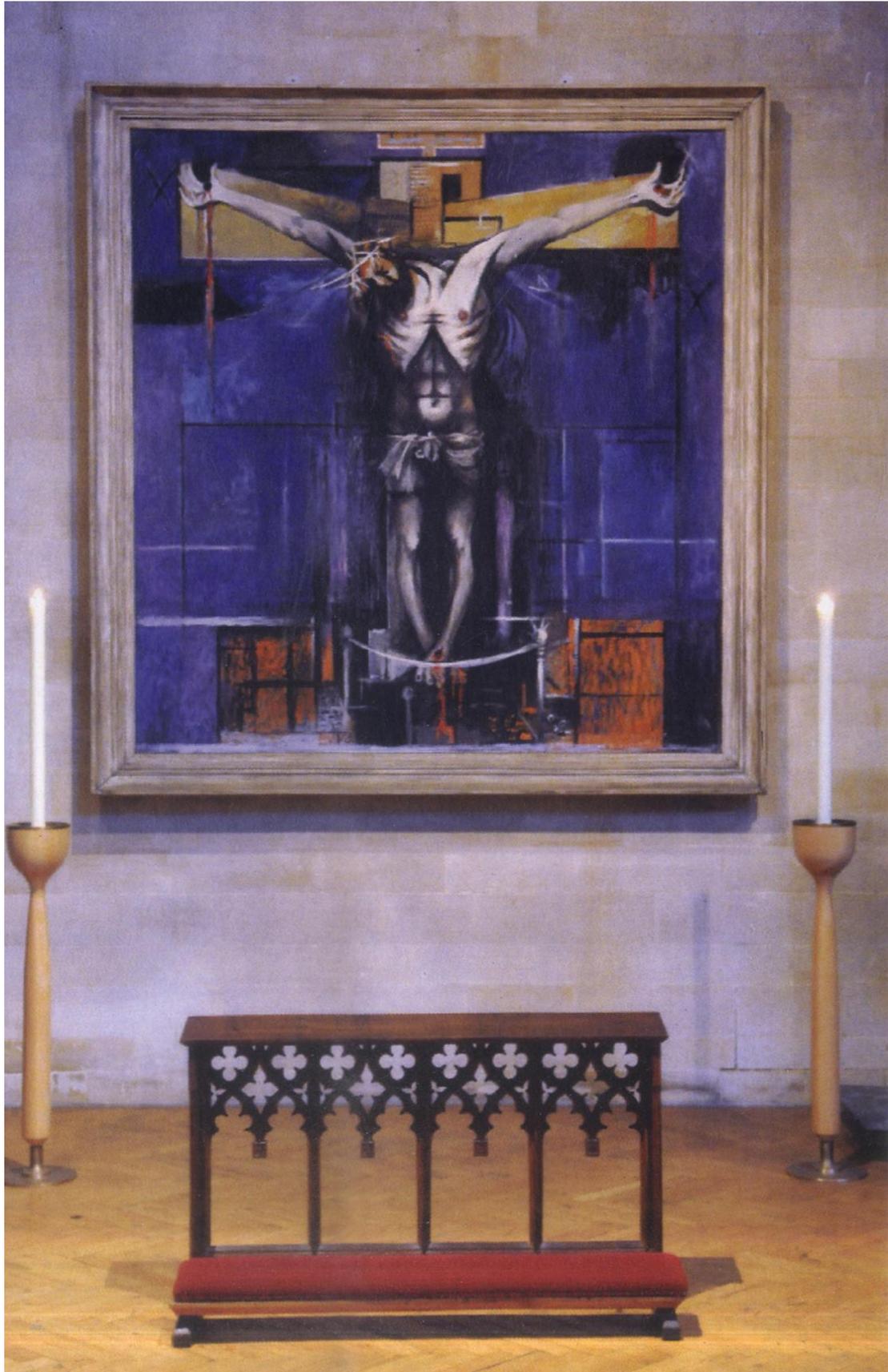
Figure 91 Graham Sutherland, *Crucifixion,* St. Matthew's Church, Northampton, 1946

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