

Post-Secular Space:  
On the Strange Place of Contemporary Art in Old Active Churches in  
Germany, 1987–2017

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- Von Franz Marc ist der Ausspruch bekannt, daß er hoffe, die Bilder der neuen Kunst würden einmal auf den Altären der Zukunft ihren Platz haben.
- Franz Marc hat selbstverständlich recht, Herr Schreyer. Aber ich bin nüchterner als Franz Marc. Die Zukunft hat bereits begonnen. Sie ist schon heute da. Und es bedarf nur eines kleinen Mutes einiges einsichtiger geistlicher Herrn, um der Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts in den Kirchen Raum zu geben. Die Kunst [dieses] Jahrhunderts aber bestimmen wir.
- There is a well-known claim by Franz Marc, that he hoped for the examples of new art to be one day placed at the altars of the future.
- Franz Marc was indeed right, Mr. Schreyer. But I am more prosaic than he was. The future has already begun. It is already here today. And what is needed in order to set the art of the twentieth century in a church space is merely a bit of courage in a single insightful spiritual man. The art of [this] century, though let us specify.

Conversation between Lothar Schreyer and Wassily Kandinsky, Weimar, 1922  
from Lothar Schreyer, *Erinnerungen an Sturm und Bauhaus* (1956).

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# 1. Introduction

Thirty years ago two West German churches, Saint Peter in Cologne and Hospital Church in Stuttgart separately from each other commenced series of contemporary art exhibitions within their sacred spaces. Today, in addition to their ongoing activities, over 3000 religious institutions across Germany welcome non-traditional art forms to their ritual spaces.<sup>1</sup> While the early developments of the 1980s were met with criticism and even opposition, today one can almost take for granted the presence of abstract painting or sculpture inside of an urban church, and be mildly astonished by similar objects in a rural parish. Indeed when contemporary art seems to be ubiquitous, a Christian place of worship becomes yet another location for its public appearance. However, one's encounter with art in a hotel lobby or a train station cannot be accurately compared to experiencing art in a space of worship. In the case of Christianity, the relationship between art and religion has historically ranged from entwined partnership to extreme animosity. The character of such relations has usually reflected the social and cultural situation at a certain time and place. Likewise, the current tendency to engage with non-religious and non-sacramental examples of contemporary art among German churches can provide insights into the socio-cultural situation in Germany at the turn of the twenty-first century. By investigating prominent exhibitions and installations of contemporary art in ecclesiastical settings of Cologne, Stuttgart, and ensuing cases elsewhere in the country, this thesis deliberates emergence of a new type of space in old active churches in the twenty-first century and phenomenological meanings of this process.

The title, "Post-Secular Space: On the Strange Place of Contemporary Art in Old Active Churches in Germany," comprises two key aspects of the current thesis. Its second part refers to

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<sup>1</sup> "Daten und Fakten zum Kulturengagement der Kirchen," in Olaf Zimmermann and Theo Geissler, eds., *Die Kirchen, die unbekannte kulturpolitische Macht* (Berlin: Deutscher Kulturrat e.V., 2007), 97–105.

the book by an American art historian and art critic, James Elkins, *On the Strange Place of Religion in Contemporary Art* (2004), in which he expresses a concern about the inability of art historians and art critics to acknowledge the religious dimension of modern and contemporary art because such interpretations go against the grain of artistic progress and prevailing definitions of modernity and postmodernity.<sup>2</sup> The problem is namely that “a certain kind of academic art historical writing treats religion as an interloper, something that just has no place in serious scholarship.”<sup>3</sup> A decade down the road this trend gave way to a growing interest in the field of “contemporary-art-and-religion.” Among some of the topics covered by art historians are visual studies and religion, global perspective and non-Western religions, blasphemous art, religious aesthetics, and religious popular culture. The study of contemporary art exhibitions in sacred spaces adds to this conversation. The current thesis is therefore a micro-discourse that focuses on case studies limited to a single country and a short span of time. It denies being either a cognitive paradigm of or a meta-discourse about the relationship between an institutionalized religion and contemporary forms of art.

The first part of the title, “Post-Secular Space,” has to do with the theoretical framework undertaken for this project. The consequences of the thirty-year coexistence of Christian sacred spaces and contemporary art in Germany can be viewed through a *post-secular* lens. This term, advanced over the past decade primarily by Charles Taylor and Jürgen Habermas describes the situation in which the so-claimed “return of religion” disperses the illusion of our culture being utterly secular. On the other side, the increasing significance of the spatial turn in the humanities suggests that a close look at specific qualities of ecclesiastical space can provide the researcher with high explicative values. Since this thesis focuses on *old* church buildings the question of

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<sup>2</sup> James Elkins, *On the Strange Place of Religion in Contemporary Art* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., xi.



historical architecture and its distinctive character is necessarily addressed; it is analyzed by means of Gernot Böhme's theory of architectural atmospheres. By consulting two recent discourses, a synthesizing concept "post-secular space" serves to describe a contemporary person's experience of encountering profane art in active sacred settings. The notion can thus become a valuable tool for an interdisciplinary conversation about contemporary art in churches. Ultimately, post-secular space responds to the main question that has arisen during the research stage of the thesis: "What happens to a person in the space where living Christian religion meets secular artistic expression?"

## **1.1. Subject of investigation**

In order to effectively pursue the inquiry, clear definitions of the subject matter and principal terms are needed. The broad phrase "German churches," even specified to those that engage with contemporary arts, embraces multiple buildings, institutions, and denominations. The thesis reduces such multitude to old and active examples. Here, "old" refers to the church architecture prior to the twentieth century, thus excluding modern and contemporary church designs that arguably lack the tension found between a traditional Christian space and new art. Instead, an example of a more powerful confrontation would be a medieval altarpiece installed in a modern church building. Such juxtaposition is in itself a fascinating topic, one worth of a separate research undertaking. "Active" denotes Christian institutions that regularly hold god services and are attended by either individual worshippers or members of a community. This additionally implies the presence of an altar and, in case of the Roman Catholic and certain Protestant churches, the use of ritual objects during religious ceremonies. Insertion of extrinsic, non-

devotional, art into a living ritual environment results in acute meetings or even collisions that, under scrutiny, can say a lot about both art and religion of the day. On the other hand, when art is displayed in a former church, which no longer houses an altar and where prayers are uttered by no one, its architectural space turns merely into a gallery. To name a few examples, this applies to exhibitions in the Old Church of the Brethren (*Alte Bräderkirche*) in Kassel, organized to accompany the *documenta* editions of 1982, 1987, and 1992, as well as several former sacred spaces in Berlin such as Saint Elisabeth and Friedrichswerder Church. As for the question of denominations both Catholic and Protestant examples are included and compared in the study.<sup>4</sup> What is interesting is that the two branches demonstrate a number of commonalities in their approaches to contemporary art; therefore it is important to investigate the phenomenon through the case studies that represent both denominations.

Another phrase from the title that requires precision is “contemporary art.” As mentioned above, the art explored by this thesis is non-religious or, to use a better term, non-sacramental. The distinction is significant because the discussion about what qualities of either form or content constitute “religious art” can sidetrack the central line of inquiry and, more likely than not, remain unresolved.<sup>5</sup> At this point, suffice it to say that the religious art as art that expresses ideas or teachings of a specific institutionalized religion, such as Christianity, does not appear in this research. “Sacramental,” or “devotional” art indicates that a work of art was produced for

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<sup>4</sup> Thus, the Eastern Orthodox branch of Christianity is set aside for several reasons. Firstly and most conspicuously, Catholic and Protestant Churches have the weightiest presence in Germany. Secondly, since the fifth century A.D. the role of images, viz. icons, in Eastern Orthodoxy has maintained a highly idiosyncratic character that was based on the notion of *hypostasis*, the divine aspect of depicted figures inherent in the material surface of icons. Strong theological grounds for the veneration of icons and preservation of established visual canons preclude the Eastern Orthodox Church from incorporating innovative types of images into its practice. Thirdly, as partially suggested in the second point, it is under the umbrellas of Catholicism and Protestantism where we witness the distinct openness towards new forms of art.

<sup>5</sup> An example of such unresolved categorization is Paul Tillich’s set of wavering descriptions of religious, non-religious, or quasi-religious art. See Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University press, 1959), and *On Art and Architecture*, edited by John Dillenberger (New York: Crossroad, 1987).

religious contemplation and use in a religious service. Conversely, the type of art that the thesis concentrates on does not mean to supply a religious experience to a believer. Rather the focus is on autonomous art, the production of which is conditioned neither by an artist's faith nor an outside commission.<sup>6</sup> In turn, autonomous art encompasses the entire spectrum of art practices: from art-making by self-taught artists, with minimal public exposure, to that by big-name personae who belong to the art world driven by critical attention and market values. As case studies show, both ends of the range are relevant to contemporary art exhibitions in German churches. Finally, the emphasis is given to the visual arts, i.e. two- and three-dimensional works as well as installations. Contemporary expressions of other arts—dance, performance, theatre, music, literature, video, and film—have likewise been embraced by many Christian institutions in the country. Beyond the scope of this thesis, each of these disciplines deserves to be explored on its own merits.

Windows and architecture play their own significant roles in the topic. Stained glass window is the earliest form of modern art allowed in a Christian sacred space: in the early 1920s a French Catholic priest, Pierre-Marie-Alain Couturier, was responsible for the introduction of the first abstract stained glass window, designed by Maurice Denis, into the Church of Notre Dame du Raincy.<sup>7</sup> While some modern stained glass windows were created in Germany between 1928 and 1931, the trend could not gain ground under the Nazi regime.<sup>8</sup> Later, the bombings of the Second World War caused unprecedented destruction of the country's cities and towns, its cathedrals and

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<sup>6</sup> While the term "autonomous art" is problematic in itself, it is used here to underline art's independence from institutionalized religion and, specifically Christianity. It is understandable that art depends on other constituents of its environment, foremost on the art market, and for this reason, arguably, can never claim absolute autonomy.

<sup>7</sup> See Antoine Lion "Art sacré et modernité en France: Le rôle du P. Marie-Alain Couturier," in *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 227, no. 1 (2010): 109-26; and Lai-Kent Chew Orenduff, *The Transformation of Catholic Religious Art in the Twentieth Century: Father Marie-Alain Couturier and the Church at Assy, France* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> Lecture by Dr. Iris Nestler, "Für moderne Kirchen geschaffen: Kunstwerke aus Licht und Glas," 5 December 2016, Domforum, Cologne.

churches. The second half of the twentieth century was Germany's age of renewal and reconstruction. As the church walls were rising, the need for new windows provided an opportunity for the German churches to enliven old spaces through the work by living artists. Thus, a tremendous boom in stained glass window production took place in the 1950s and 1960s, arguably influenced by Ludwig Gies' *Angel Window* for the chapel of the Madonna of the Ruins, newly built on the site of former Church of Saint Kolumba in Cologne.<sup>9</sup> In fact, the church commissions for new window designs have not ceased in either France or Germany ever since. In the former, such world renowned artists as Imi Knoebel, Robert Morris, or Christopher Wool contributed their compositions to both active and inactive Christian spaces in Paris and across the country. In Germany, the vibrant postwar production of church windows is marked with the cosmic images by Georg Meistermann, at times controversial work by Johannes Schreiter, painterly pictures by Markus Lüpertz, and the illustrious abstract grid in the south transept of Cologne Cathedral by Gerhard Richter. This history has been sufficiently documented.<sup>10</sup> Recently Sigmar Polke, who had already realized the window designs for the Grossmünster Cathedral in Zürich, was commissioned to create a window for the Romanesque Church of Saint Kunibert in Cologne. The artist passed away in 2010, leaving the project unfinished. These and other multiple cases show that, through the commissioning of design for their stained glass windows, European churches have by now absorbed modern and contemporary images as

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<sup>9</sup> Erich Widder, *Europäische Kirchenkunst der Gegenwart: Architektur, Malerei und Plastik* (Linz: Oberösterreichischer Landesverlag, 1968), 26. The architect of the chapel is Gottfried Böhm.

<sup>10</sup> The most comprehensive source on modern stained glass windows in Germany, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands, is the twelve-year research project *Forschungsstelle Glasmalerei des 20. Jh. e.V.*, funded by the German Ministry of Family, Children, Youth, Culture and Sport. Its results and photographs are fully available online: <http://www.glasmalerei-ev.net/> (accessed February 13, 2017). See also Iris Nestler, *Meisterwerke der Glasmalerei des 20. Jahrhunderts im Rheinland* (Mönchengladbach: B. Kühlen Verlag, 2015); Peter Bergthaller, *Glasmalerei in Kölner Kirchen: Künstler und Werke 1945–2012* (Mönchengladbach: B. Kühlen Verlag, 2013); Sigmar Polke: *Windows–Fenster, Grossmünster Zürich* (Zurich: Parkett Verlag, 2010); Wilhelm Derix, ed., *Lüpertz, Richter, Schreiter: Große Glasmalereiprojekte 2007 in Köln und Mainz* (Taunusstein-Wehen: Derix Glasstudios GmbH, 2008); Hans Körner, *Frömmigkeit und Moderne* (Essen: Klartext Verlag, 2008); Karin L. Mulder, "Heidelberg's Window Controversy: A Cautionary Tale," in *Material Religion* 1, no. 1 (2005): 125-38.

permanent elements of their interiors.<sup>11</sup> While the connection between new windows and exhibitions of new art inside German churches cannot be overlooked, this thesis does not aim to draw an analytical comparison between the two due to the following factors. First, a window is part of the architectural structure—a permanent and functional fixture. Second, stained glass has historically been and continues to be primarily associated with sacred spaces. As such, this medium cannot create the sharp polarity that exists between other forms of contemporary art and old sacred architecture. It is likewise important to point out that the diverse visual vocabularies of stained glass and other media, e.g. painting, should not be placed side by side for comparison but studied as separate entities. Lastly, the abundance of literature on the modern and contemporary stained glass windows makes it unnecessary to reiterate other scholars.

To complete the outline of the subject, it is left to delineate the role of a church building. As already mentioned, this thesis does not explore modern or contemporary architecture, giving the forestage to, primarily, Gothic churches. This means that the deconstructive analysis of floor plans and tectonic details would carry the given discussion several centuries back. To desist from thus moving astray from the main subject, descriptions of only most significant architectural elements of a particular church are given. On the other hand, critical emphasis is placed on atmospheric perception of old churches. Architectural atmospheres of old sacred buildings deserve greatest attention because they impress distinctive qualities upon the experience of art that is exhibited in Christian houses of worship. That is why Gernot Böhme's theory is a germane framework for speaking about human experience of old ecclesiastical architecture and, subsequently, the importance of architectural atmospheres in reception of contemporary art.

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<sup>11</sup> At the time of writing, David Hockney is working on a stained glass window for Westminster Abbey in London.

## **1.2. The state of research**

The interdisciplinary nature of this project makes it necessary to summarize the “two sides of the story,” that is to present the existing relevant material in the fields of theology/religious studies and art history/art criticism. On both sides, the interest in the area “Christianity and contemporary arts” has shown rapid growth in the past thirty years. Such parallel trend between the two fields can be a sign of reciprocal communication and, at the same time, a reflection of the contemporary situation and cultural shifts in the Western society. While distinctions should be made between the English-speaking and the German-speaking academic worlds, enough commonalities between their approaches and perspectives allow us to speak of the two in the same context. The following review serves, first, to introduce the reader to the topics treated by the current scholarship and, second, to show what type of literature is missing in the existing discourse.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, a place and value of the current thesis can be determined.

### **1.2.1. In the fields of theology and religious studies**

To anyone who takes interest in the subject, it soon becomes evident that the sources written by theologians and clerics outnumber those written by the scholars of modern and contemporary art. This corresponds with the fact that, wherever new art entered Christian sacred spaces over the course of the twentieth century, the initiative for that was most of the time taken by a priest and not the artist. The man whose ideas have had the most influence on the religious thinkers of nearly the past hundred years is Paul Tillich. Both a theologian and art enthusiast, he repeatedly

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<sup>12</sup> This review is by no means meant to be comprehensive, rather representative of the multiple perspectives on the central questions of the thesis.

wrote and gave talks about the relationship between Christianity and modern art and, specifically, about the need to redefine the kind of art that can be appropriately deemed as religious.<sup>13</sup> Spending half of his life in Germany and the other in the United States, Tillich extended his impact to both countries. In America, the first publications dedicated to the subject of new art and Christianity are directly indebted to Tillich via the works by his disciples—John Dillenberger and Jane Dillenberger. The authors of *Theology of Artistic Sensibilities* and *Style and Content in Christian Art*, respectively, they discuss what types of understanding sacred art could provide in the twentieth century and by what means Christianity could interact with the available forms of new art.<sup>14</sup> The former publication borders on the study of theological aesthetics, a sub-discipline of theology that speculates upon the role of senses in man's perception of God and contemplates such terms as the aesthetic moment or beauty in order to gain knowledge of the divine.<sup>15</sup> One can trace the origins of theological aesthetics to Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas but, to establish its presence in the twentieth century, it is worth to cite the single most comprehensive source on the subject—seven volumes of *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics* by Hans Urs von Balthasar.<sup>16</sup> A Swiss Catholic priest and

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<sup>13</sup> Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, and *On Art and Architecture*.

<sup>14</sup> John Dillenberger, *A Theology of Artistic Sensibilities: The Visual Arts and the Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1986) and Jane Dillenberger, *Style and Content in Christian Art* (New York: Crossroad, 1986).

<sup>15</sup> Gesa Elsbeth Thiessen, ed., *Theological Aesthetics: A Reader Paperback* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2004).

<sup>16</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics* (first published 1961–9). The volumes from one to seven are titled as follows: *Seeing the Form*; *Clerical Styles*; *Lay Styles*; *The Realm of Metaphysics in Antiquity*; *The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age*; *Theology: The Old Covenant*; *Theology: The New Covenant*. For more recent texts, see Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art in Action: Toward a Christian Aesthetic* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980); Frank Burch Brown, *Religious Aesthetics: A Theological Study of Making and Meaning* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); Jeremy Begbie, *Voicing Creation's Praise: Towards a Theology of the Arts* (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1991); Richard Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics: God in Imagination, Beauty and Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); John W. De Gruchy, *Christianity, Art, and Transformation: Theological Aesthetics in the Struggle for Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Graham Howes, *The Art of the Sacred: An Introduction to the Aesthetics of Art and Belief* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007); and Bruno Forte, *The Portal of Beauty: Towards a Theology of Aesthetics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008). In the German language, consult Jörg Herrmann, Andreas Martin, and Eveline Valtink, eds., *Die Gegenwart der Kunst: Ästhetische und Religiöse Erfahrung Heute* (Munich: Fink, 1998); Peter B. Steiner, *Glaubensästhetik: Wie Sieht Unser Glaube Aus? 99 Beispiele und Einige Regeln* (Regensburg: Schnell und Steiner, 2008); and Friedhelm

philosopher, von Balthasar criticized modern Christian thinkers for denying the significance of aesthetic experience in the life of a believer. In his own theology, based on the principles of the good, the beautiful, and the true, he argued that works of art could radiate God's glory and communicate God's truth. In other words, art was not to serve religion as a didactic tool through which Christian dogmas could be delivered to the worshippers. Instead art, in its own right as independent from either word or a sacred ritual, was a powerful agent of divine revelation. The role of aesthetics in man's faith, as proposed by von Balthasar, has underpinned the Catholic attitude to the contemporary visual arts. On the other hand, the resonance of Tillichian existential theology and open interpretation of art is traceable in the Protestant religious thought of the last few decades.

The described concepts help to understand why German churches decide to interact with contemporary art today. These concepts do not support the historically established postulates, either Roman Catholic or Protestant, as to the inclusion or prohibition of the visual arts in a church. Rather they represent the theoretical groundwork of, on the one hand, most Catholic and Protestant ministers who decide to include new art into their church buildings and, on the other hand, those scholars who write about such phenomena as outside observers. These are the two groups of religious authors who participate in the discourse on the placement of new art into German ecclesiastical settings. The first group, the writing priests, comprises the founders, or pioneers, of the church art centers—Friedhelm Mennekes at Saint Peter in Cologne and Helmut Müller at Hospital Church in Stuttgart. Texts by and conversations with Mennekes and Müller are discussed below.<sup>17</sup> Following them and representing the second- and third-wave generations of pastors-curators are such writers as Hans-Ulrich Wiese, Frank Hiddemann, and Markus

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Hofmann, ed., *Zeichnung als Zwiesprache: Die Künstlerische Gestaltung des Neuen Gotteslob* (Würzburg: Echter, 2015).

<sup>17</sup> See chapter four, sections 4.1.3.4. and 4.2.3.4., in this thesis.



Zink.<sup>18</sup> To a great extent, their interests converge on such topics as strategies and guidelines for churches, the Christian stand towards arts; identity of the church and its community; educational possibilities of art; spatial and conceptual distances between god services and contemporary art. The question that spurs the most debate is whether non-sacramental art can be a part of Christian liturgy, and the answers, as demonstrated below, determine the range of art engagements in German churches. The second group, scholars of religion, includes largely evangelical theologians who, under the auspices of German Evangelical Churches (*Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland*, or EKD) have been publishing an ample body of literature since 1961. Rainer Volp and Horst Schwebel stand at the origins of theological writing on contemporary, i.e. postmodern art, in Germany.<sup>19</sup> Both served as directors of the Institute for Contemporary Church Building and Art (*Institut für Kirchenbau und kirchliche Kunst der Gegenwart*)—an EKD research institute located at the Department of Evangelical Theology at Philipps University in Marburg. Its location and objectives are illustrative of the Protestant engagement with the contemporary visual arts at large; namely of the emphasis on education and art’s contribution thereto. “[The institute] accompanies the cultural practice of the church through close appreciation of contemporary art and architecture, and carries out scholarly reflection of religion and aesthetics, church and art. The focus is on the transformation in the church structure and the functions of a church building function.”<sup>20</sup> This mission statement underlines cognitive treatment of art and

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<sup>18</sup> For in-depth discussion about exhibitions of contemporary art inside active churches, see Hans-Ulrich Wiese, *Karsamstagsexistenz: Auseinandersetzung mit dem Karsamstag in Liturgie und Moderner Kunst* (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2002); Frank Hiddemann, *Site-Specific Art im Kirchenraum: Eine Praxistheorie* (Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2007); Markus Zink, *Siehe! Zeitgenössische Kunst in Evangelischen Kirchen*, (Frankfurt: Zentrum Verkündigung der EKHN, 2007), and Zink, *Lebensräume: Den Kirchenraum Erfahren mit Aktionen, Liturgie und Kunst* (Frankfurt: Zentrum Verkündigung, 2011).

<sup>19</sup> Rainer Volp, *Das Kunstwerk als Symbol: Ein Theologischer Beitrag zur Interpretation der Bildenden Kunst* (Gütersloh: Mohn 1966), and Volp, and Rainer Beck, *Die Kunst und die Kirchen. Der Streit um die Bilder Heute* (Munich: Bruckmann, 1984). Horst Schwebel, *Autonome Kunst im Raum der Kirche* (Hamburg: Furche-Verlag, 1968), and *Glaubwürdig: Fünf Gespräche über heutige Kunst und Religion* (Munich: Kaiser, 1979).

<sup>20</sup> See the mission statement under the tab “Das Institut,” at Institut für Kirchenbau und kirchliche Kunst der Gegenwart, <http://www.kirchbautag.de/kirchbauinstitut.html> (accessed February 15, 2017). The original reads, “Es

interest in the pragmatic questions, or precisely the two main aspects reflected in the German evangelical literature. For example, volumes on religious instruction and Christian pedagogy include an early *Bildende Kunst und Religionsunterricht. Theoretische Grundlagen der Praxis* by Folkert Doedens (1972) and a more recent *Mit Zeitgenössischer Kunst Unterrichten* by Andreas Mertin and Karin Wendt (2004).<sup>21</sup> The questions regarding the practical use of Christian space have prompted a compilation of guidelines for pastors and curators into regular manuals.<sup>22</sup> These handbooks include procedures for interaction with contemporary art, theatre, music, literature, and film; provide solutions for possible conflicts inside of a community; suggest funding plans; and even offer checklists and contract forms. Aside from counsel on practice, evangelical literature frequently refers to the prohibition of images and Martin Luther's perspective on the visual arts.<sup>23</sup> The latter might signal the process of rapprochement between the arts and those postulates of the Protestant religion that during the Reformation caused a breach of the relationship in question.<sup>24</sup>

It is important to acknowledge one periodical on ecumenical studies, *Kunst und Kirche*, which was founded in 1924 and, since 1971, is affiliated simultaneously with the Institute for Contemporary Church Building and Art in Marburg and the Institute for Art Studies and

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begleitet die kulturelle Praxis der Kirche durch genaue Wahrnehmung der zeitgenössischen Kunst und Architektur und es organisiert die wissenschaftliche Reflexion von Religion und Ästhetik, Kirche und Kunst. Ein Schwerpunkt ist der Strukturwandel der Kirche und der Funktionswandel kirchlicher Gebäude." Here and below the translation from German into is by the author of this thesis, unless otherwise stated.

<sup>21</sup> Folkert Doedens, *Bildende Kunst und Religionsunterricht: Theoretische Grundlagen der Praxis* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1972); Andreas Mertin and Karin Wendt, *Mit Zeitgenössischer Kunst Unterrichten: Religion-Ethik-Philosophie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004).

<sup>22</sup> Helmut Donner, ed., *Kirche und Kultur in der Gegenwart: Beiträge aus der Evangelischen Kirche* (Frankfurt am Main: Gemeinschaftswerk der Evangelischen Publizistik, 1996); Zentrum für Medien Kunst Kultur im Amt für Gemeindedienst der Ev.-Luth. Landeskirche Hannovers, Kunstdienst der Evangelischen Kirche Berlin, ed., *Kirchenräume-Kunsträume: Hintergründe, Erfahrungsberichte, Praxisanleitungen für den Umgang mit zeitgenössischer Kunst in Kirchen. Ein Handbuch* (Münster: Lit, 2002).

<sup>23</sup> For example, Bernhard Dressler, ed., *Bilder zur Sprache Bringen: Aspekte zum Bilderverbot und zur Bilddidaktik* (Rehburg-Loccum: Religionspädagogisches Institut Loccum, 1992).

<sup>24</sup> The idea is presented in the work by a prominent American theologian, William A. Dyrness. See Dyrness, *Reformed Theology and Visual Culture. The Protestant Imagination from Calvin to Edwards* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

Philosophy at the Catholic-Theological Private University in Linz, Austria.<sup>25</sup> Such formally established alliance between Protestants and Catholics in promotion of art is unique. Over the past forty years, this quarterly journal has specialized in reports on the important art exhibitions and events, information about notable reconfigurations of church space, and building of a discussion forum concerned with the intersection of art, architecture, and religion.<sup>26</sup> The central questions raised by the editors and authors address the relationships between traditions and newest church architecture, between contemporary art and Christian heritage, as well as the role of arts in intercultural and interreligious dialogues. Another journal of note is *Tà katoptrizómena*, an online magazine run and edited by Andreas Mertin since 1997.<sup>27</sup> The title, plural of *katoptrizómenoi*, refers to the word from the Greek New Testament and can be translated as “beholding as in a mirror.” With six issues per year, the journal deals with up-to-date cultural developments such as new media, internet and popular arts, from a theological, i.e. evangelical, angle. Overall, the abundant publishing activity on the issues of contemporary art by German Protestant theologians can be understood through the Protestant predilection for the power of the word and, by extension, education.

In comparison, the scope of today’s literature coming from the Catholic point of view might seem narrow but, upon investigation, its contents prove to be rich and thought-provoking. The main voice in the Roman Catholic Church is that of the Pope. The gradual acceptance of contemporary arts by the Catholics in the twentieth century started with the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), when Pope Paul VI named the fine arts “among the noblest activities of

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<sup>25</sup> For the latest and archived issues visit “kunst und kirche,” <http://www.kunstundkirche.com/> (accessed February 15, 2017).

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> *Tà katoptrizómena-Magazin für Theologie und Ästhetik*, <https://www.theomag.de/> (accessed February 15, 2017).

man's genius" and declared the Church to be "a friend of the arts."<sup>28</sup> In the conclusion of the Council in December 1965, he dedicated one of the letters to the artists, "This world in which we live needs beauty in order not to sink into despair. It is beauty, like truth, which brings joy to the heart of man and is that precious fruit which resists the wear and tear of time, which unites generations and makes them share things in admiration." The role of beauty is conspicuous here. As conducive to the experience of rapture, beauty starts the thematic list of Catholic writing on the arts in the second half of the twentieth century. The notions of metaphysics, epiphany, the aesthetic moment, the numinous are similarly applied to describe the spiritual potential of the visual arts. While the evangelical religious thinkers have devoted books to the arts' educational value, the Catholic writers have prioritized the visual aspects of the works of art. The pioneer is Günter Rombold, an Austrian theologian, priest, art historian, collector, the founder of the Institute for Art and Church Architecture at the Catholic-Theological Private University Linz (1984), and the editor of *Kunst und Kirche* between 1970 and 1990. Inspired by the activities of a Viennese gallerist Otto Mauer, who had advocated the religious essence of modern art in writing and in choice of art for his *Galerie nächst St. Stephan*, Rombold recognized the kinship between Christianity and art of the day and called the Christians to recognize it.<sup>29</sup> Late in his life, he worked out a summary of his experiences and thought on the relationship between the Church and the visual arts in a comprehensive book *Ästhetik und Spiritualität: Bilder, Rituale, Theorien*

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<sup>28</sup> Pope Paul VI, "Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy Sacrosanctum Concilium" (December 4, 1963), Documents of the Second Vatican Council, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/index.htm](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/index.htm) (accessed February 15, 2017). Throughout the next decades, the Vatican continuously confirmed the value of contemporary art and declared its support to the visual artists. See Albert Burkart, *Kirchenraum nach dem Konzil* (Munich: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Christliche Kunst e.V., 1969), and Mauro Mantovani, "Church and Art: From the Second Vatican Council to Today," in *Conservation Science in Cultural Heritage* 14 (2014): 127–43. Furthermore, in 1973 the Vatican Museums extended their grandiose art collection with the museum wing for modern and contemporary art. During the Venice Biennale of 2013 and 2015, the Vatican State presented its own pavilions.

<sup>29</sup> Günter Rombold, *Der Streit um das Bild: Zum Verhältnis von Moderner Kunst und Religion* (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1988).

and published an autobiography that revolved around the same issue.<sup>30</sup> Rombold's writing on the importance of contemporary and autonomous art for Christianity, not exclusively Catholicism, proved to have great influence in the German-speaking world. Alex Stock's *Zwischen Tempel und Museum: Theologische Kunstkritik/Positionen der Moderne* is a later example of such Catholic perspective that, upon the meeting of church and contemporary art, supports the full autonomy of the latter.<sup>31</sup> By the beginning of the twenty-first century, this position has been established in the Catholic milieu, promoting complete trust in the contemporary artist.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, the German Catholic churches have come to favor non-Christian and unbelieving artists for the sake of positive outcome of art's full freedom. In the words of Friedhelm Hofmann, "The presence of [the] transcendent Other can be perceived in that 'More' which is located beyond the artist's personality."<sup>33</sup> On the whole, the Catholic academic writing on the subject is observably less programmatic and more theoretical. It often relies on the notions of the spiritual and the aesthetic, without tying the works of art with limiting interpretations.

Today the representatives of the Christian religion—whether Protestant or Catholic writers, members of the academia or clergy—readily engage in a conversation about contemporary art, even when it may threaten the historically established dogmas or appear to be blasphemous. As we will see in the following section, art historians and critics prefer not to mingle with the issues of institutionalized religions. Moreover, it might appear that the theologians' argument is not

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<sup>30</sup> Günter Rombold, *Ästhetik und Spiritualität: Bilder, Rituale, Theorien* (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1998), and *Im Spannungsfeld zwischen Kunst und Kirche. Ein außergewöhnliches Leben, Autobiographie* (Linz: Wagner Verlag, 2008). Also see Rombold, *Bilder–Sprache der Religion* (Münster: Lit, 2004).

<sup>31</sup> Alex Stock, *Zwischen Tempel und Museum: Theologische Kunstkritik/Positionen der Moderne* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1991). See also Stock, *Durchblicke: Bildtheologische Perspektiven* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2011), and Josef Meyer, *Intervention. Bild + Theologie, Autonome Gegenwartskunst in Sakralen Räumen* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2007).

<sup>32</sup> For a most recent example, see Friedhelm Hofmann, *Freude, Trauer, Angst, Hoffnung: Das Kunstprojekt der Katholischen Kirche* (Würzburg: Echter, 2015).

<sup>33</sup> Hofmann, "Church Art and Faith of Our Times," in *The Furrow* 63, no. 11 (2012), 526.

without a specific latent agenda. In the German printed word, one may notice an indirect debate between the Protestants and the Catholics as to whose approach to the visual arts is more truthful to the essence of Christian faith. This is, however, the domain that is foreign to the path of this thesis and the one in which proper attention to art is at risk to be lost.

### **1.2.1. In the fields of art history and art criticism**

The academic discipline of art history is young: it has existed since the second half of the nineteenth century and, therefore, takes its origins in the period we know as modernism and the moments leading up to it. At the time characterized by the advancement of science, rapid urbanization, labor mechanization, rationalism, and materialism, church held little to no power and the society triumphantly proclaimed itself to be secular. The field of art history followed the day by establishing its own narrative as a movement from the sacred to the secular. In the early twentieth century, the story of art lauded complete autonomy; that is liberation from any restrictive forces, including religion. Thus, the idea of secularization dominated the art historical scholarship throughout most of the twentieth century, with voices like that of Clement Greenberg leading the discussion on art away from the matters of content. A word that describes the age of modernism and its consequences for the field of art history is *disenchantment*, a term that Max Weber borrowed from Friedrich Schiller in order to label the processes of the twentieth century. It means the rationalization of social life and the move away from any mystical beliefs. Initially triggered by the Reformation, disenchantment grew strong through man's scientific and

economic pursuits, resulting in the loss of individualism and subjective choice of (un)belief.<sup>34</sup>

One of the outcomes of this long process is that the questions of personal and religious belief became irrelevant for members of “serious” academia.

The slow change of art historical attitude towards religion could be partially witnessed in the 1970s and 1980s. The watershed moment of 1971 was when a place of worship—a chapel in Houston—was completed with contributions by two of the most prominent painters of the time, Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman.<sup>35</sup> Regarding these and other contemporary artists, Robert Rosenblum’s renowned book was published a few years later and soon promoted the discourse on the spiritual and the sublime in modern and contemporary art.<sup>36</sup> Wassily Kandinsky’s *On the Spiritual in Art* (1911) was reread, and new literature came out in which the terms “spiritual,” “sublime” or “transcendental” were both openly and less directly linked to the religious qualities of artistic expression.<sup>37</sup> The search for spiritual and religious dimensions in the visual arts continually pertains to contemporary art production, with more major titles appearing every two to five years.<sup>38</sup> Museum curators all over the world responded to the new themes deliberated in

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<sup>34</sup> Basit Bilal Koshul, *The Postmodern Significance of Max Weber's Legacy: Disenchanting Disenchantment* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 9–39. Koshul summarizes Max Weber’s *The Sociology of Religion* (the first English translation is published by Beacon Press, Boston in 1963).

<sup>35</sup> See Susan Barnes, *The Rothko Chapel: An Act of Faith* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1989).

<sup>36</sup> Robert Rosenblum, *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition: Friedrich to Rothko* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975). Rosenblum coined the term “abstract sublime” yet in 1961, when he referred with it to the enigmatic color fields of Mark Rothko, transcendental boundlessness of Barnett Newman, and overpowering storms by Jackson Pollock. See Rosenblum, “Abstract Sublime,” in *Art News* (February 1961), 38–41.

<sup>37</sup> Horton Davies, and Hugh Davies, *Sacred Art in a Secular Century* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1978); Roger Lipsey, *An Art of Our Own: The Spiritual in Twentieth-Century Art* (Boston and Shaftesbury: Shambhala, 1988); Jane Dillenberger, *Image and Spirit in Sacred and Secular Art* (New York: Crossroad, 1990); Doug Adams, *Transcendence with the Human Body in Art: George Segal, Stephen De Staebler, Jasper Johns, and Christo* (New York: Crossroad, 1991).

<sup>38</sup> Earle J. Coleman, *Creativity and Spirituality: Bonds Between Art and Religion* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1998); Stephen Newton, and Brandon Taylor, eds. *Painting, Sculpture and the Spiritual Dimension* (London: Oneiros Books, 2003); Karen Stone, *Image and Spirit: Finding Meaning in Visual Art* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2003); Demetrio Paparoni, ed., *Eretica: The Transcendent and the Profane in Contemporary Art* (Milan: Skira, 2007); Hetty Zock, ed., *At the Crossroads of Art and Religion: Imagination, Commitment, Transcendence* (Leuven: Peeters, 2008); Jungu Yoon, *Spirituality in Contemporary Art: The Ideas of the Numinous* (London: Zidane Press, 2010), and Aaron Rosen, *Art + Religion in the 21st Century* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2015). In 2010 the art journal *Frieze* dedicated an entire issue to the discussion of the spiritual and the

academic circles, and a number of large-scale exhibitions, accompanied by text-heavy catalogs, made their mark in the past decades: *Prophecy and Vision: Expressions of the Spirit in Contemporary Art* at the Arnolfini in Bristol (1982); *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985* at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (1985/86); *The Journey: A Search for the Role of Contemporary Art in Religious and Spiritual Life* at the Usher Gallery in Lincoln (1990); *Negotiating Rapture: The Power of Art to Transform Lives* as the inaugural show of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago (1996); *Beyond Belief: Modern Art and the Religious Imagination* at the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne (1998); *100 Artists See God* organized by Independent Curators International in London and several venues in the United States (2004/05); *Traces du Sacré* at the Centre Pompidou in Paris (2008), and *The Problem of God* at Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen in Düsseldorf (2015/16).<sup>39</sup> In Germany, the thematic exhibitions took place across the country's art scene in the 1980s and had a profound impact on the relationship between churches and contemporary artists. For their significance, several of them are treated individually later in the thesis.<sup>40</sup>

With the seeming ubiquity of the terms “spiritual” and “sublime,” the writers on contemporary art, and culture in general, proposed a reconsideration of the secularization narrative and a new idea of re-enchantment, or reenchantment, entered the scholarly discourse. After Morris Berman challenged the supremacy of scientific consciousness in modern society in 1981, various

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religious in art, see *Frieze* 135 (2010). Two other articles of interest from art periodicals are Glen R. Brown's “Toward a Topography of the Spiritual in Contemporary Art,” in *New Art Examiner* 26, no. 6 (1999), 23–7; and Donald Kuspit's “Reconsidering the Spiritual in Art,” in *Art Criticism* 17, no. 2 (2002), 55–69.

<sup>39</sup> In addition to corresponding catalogs, it is worth pointing out how the field of museum and curatorial studies treated the new development. See Ivan Gaskell, “Sacred to Profane and Back Again,” in Andrew McClellan, ed., *Art and Its Publics: Museum Studies at the Millennium* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), and Anja Schöne, *Dinge–Räume–Zeiten: Religion und Frömmigkeit als Ausstellungsthema* (Münster: Waxmann, 2009).

<sup>40</sup> See pages 50–65 in chapter three of this thesis.



academic fields tried a theory of re-enchantment within their own parameters.<sup>41</sup> Among art critics, Suzi Gablik, who had first questioned the underlying principles of modernism by asking “Has modernism failed?” wrote a book on re-enchantment specifically in the production and reception art.<sup>42</sup> Herself an artist, she did not argue for the return of art associated with institutionalized religions but rather saw the possibility of spiritual enrichment through contemporary art. Gablik’s words, “Human beings have a very deep sense of magic. We are part of the mysterious. . .” discarded irony and skepticism of the mainstream postmodernism.<sup>43</sup> Now art could become, as it was in the past, a spiritual good. While art historians did not rush to follow Gablik’s inspired ideas, the re-enchantment supposition was heeded.<sup>44</sup> Most notably, James Elkins and David Morgan organized a seminar at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago under the title “Re-Enchantment,” to which an interdisciplinary circle of scholars was invited to talk about the role of religion in contemporary discourse on art.<sup>45</sup> The interlocutors started with a premise that professional art and religion are incompatible in “serious” examination of modern and contemporary art. Then, they proceeded from the genealogy of religion, art, and “religion plus art” to define the key terms—belief and faith. By distinguishing belief as superstition and faith as an ethical act, Theiry de Guve notes that the essence of the latter is not in fact religious but ethical, and, on the other hand, it is the ethical issue of religion that remains pertinent today, stripped of the superstitions and rituals.<sup>46</sup> Suggesting that the

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<sup>41</sup> Morris Berman, *The Reenchantment of the World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981). For further reading, see Mark A. Schneider, *Culture and Enchantment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), and Stewart M. Hoover and Knut Lundby, eds., *Rethinking Media, Religion, and Culture* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage, 1997).

<sup>42</sup> Suzi Gablik, *Has Modernism Failed* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1984) and Gablik, *Reenchantment in Art* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1992).

<sup>43</sup> Gablik, *Reenchantment in Art*, 42.

<sup>44</sup> A brief overview of the socio-cultural processes of enchantment, disenchantment, and re-enchantment is succinctly presented in Kristina Karin Schull’s “Is the Magic Gone? Weber’s ‘Disenchantment of the World’ and its Implications for Art in Today’s World,” in *Anamesa* 11 (2005): 61–73. See also Gordon Graham, *The Re-Enchantment of the World: Art versus Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>45</sup> James Elkins, and David Morgan, eds., *Re-Enchantment* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 131–3.

notions of belief and faith provide the only methods to build bridges between religion and art in contemporary world (without clarifying why this must be the case),<sup>47</sup> the participants devote the last third of the seminar to the discussion of art. While the degree of consensus remains low throughout the day, towards its end the speakers seem to agree on the idea that religious elements are often camouflaged in the secular writing on art under such terms as aura, aesthetics of fragment, and the postmodern sublime.<sup>48</sup> That should mean, despite the signs of categorical dissent and at times heated debate, that the religious relevance in contemporary art is demonstrated and the theory of re-enchantment is reinforced. Along the same lines, the ostensible return of religion in the world of art became the topic of the recent tripartite project by BAK (basis voor actuele kunst): exhibition *The Art of Iconoclasm*, discourse “On Post-Secularism,” and a reader *The Return of Religion and Other Myths*.<sup>49</sup> Similarly to the Chicago seminar, the voices at BAK were sharply divided between those who admit the existence or at least possibility of religious dimension in contemporary artistic expressions,<sup>50</sup> and others who vehemently oppose any mentioning of lofty spiritualism or soul-searching functions of art.<sup>51</sup> The title of the BAK discourse points to yet another term that can be regarded as synonymous with re-enchantment: post-secularism. Advanced by Jürgen Habermas since 2008, the post-secular refers to the social situation, in which the so-claimed “return of religion” disperses the illusion of our culture as utterly secular.<sup>52</sup> Accordingly, our understanding of the relationship between art

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 143,

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>49</sup> Maria Hlavajova, Sven Lütticken, and Jill Winder, eds. *The Return of Religion and Other Myths: A Critical Reader in Contemporary Art* (Utrecht and Rotterdam: BAK and Post Editions, 2009).

<sup>50</sup> See Marc De Kesel “The Image as Crime. On the Monotheistic Ban on Images and the ‘Criminal’ Nature of Art,” in *ibid.*, 106–13.

<sup>51</sup> Dieter Roelstraete, “Great Transformations: On the Spiritual in Art, Again,” in *ibid.*, 160–71.

<sup>52</sup> Jürgen Habermas, “Notes On a Post-secular Society” (original German text in *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik*, April 2008), *Politics and Society*, <http://www.signandsight.com/features/1714.html> (accessed October 12, 2016).

and religion has to be reevaluated under the new conditions—this task has been most recently under the radar of art historians and critics and is likewise on the agenda of the current thesis.<sup>53</sup>

Apart from strictly theological or art historical writing, in the past two to three decades there seems to have emerged a separate field that one may designate as “art and religion.” To this group belong those scholars who show an interdisciplinary treatment of the subject and, thus, cannot be identified as representatives of solely one discipline. Naturally overlapping between the two sides of the conversation occurs; e.g. one may read John Dillenberger and Jane Dillenberger equally out of interest in theology or inquiry into art. Here, we should start with Diane Apostolos-Cappadona and the aforementioned Doug Adams, who have specifically analyzed Judeo-Christian references in modern art.<sup>54</sup> Apostolos-Cappadona went on to edit the most cited publication on the intersection between theology and art criticism, *Art, Creativity, and the Sacred*.<sup>55</sup> Its merits come from, on the one hand, inclusion of the primary issues such as religion and art in the modernist project, the artist’s vocation, aesthetic and religious experiences; church commissions; and the symbols in art, and, on the other hand, balanced amount of attention given to theory and works of art. In the early 1990s, George Pattison further called for the dialogue between art and religion and, just as Adams and Apostolos-Cappadona, contributed to the development of “art and religion” as more titles appeared at the turn of the millennium.<sup>56</sup>

Another attempt to add to this field of “art and religion” is Ena Giurescu Heller’s *Reluctant*

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<sup>53</sup> A helpful starting point for the exploration of post-secular conflation of art and religion, which includes conversations with artists and theologians, is *Kunst und Religion im Zeitalter des Postsäkularen: Ein Kritischer Reader*, edited by Silvia Henke (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2012.) Also see Wilhelm Gräb, “The Transformation of Religious Culture within Modern Societies: From Secularization to Postsecularism,” in A. Molendijk, J. Beaumont, and C. Jedan, eds., *Exploring the Postsecular: The Religious, the Political and the Urban* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010), 113–30. In June 2016, the University of Warwick held a three-day international conference “(Post)secular: Imagining Faith in Contemporary Cultures,” with John Milbank (professor of religion, politics and ethics at the University of Nottingham) as the keynote speaker. For further discussion of post-secularism see pages 264–72 in chapter six in this thesis.

<sup>54</sup> Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, and Doug Adams, eds., *Art as Religious Studies* (New York, Crossroad, 1990).

<sup>55</sup> Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, ed., *Art, Creativity, and the Sacred* (New York, Continuum, 1995).

<sup>56</sup> George Pattison, *Art, Modernity, and Faith: Towards a Theology of Art* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1991), and the revised edition *Art, Modernity and Faith: Restoring the Image* (London: SCM Press, 1998).

*Partners*.<sup>57</sup> The title, the texts, and, explicitly, the foreword by David Morgan suggest that at the beginning of the twenty-first century the rapprochement between art and religion scholarship is far out of reach or even outside of the realm of the plausible. The authors acknowledge that certain categories have been developed to speak about “art and religion” in one context. However, the book makes it evident that the philosophy of such field is lacking. Namely, the discourse on the relationship between art and religion in this day and age still requires a theoretical framework, within which it could evolve and produce meaning.

In addition to the sublime and the spiritual, the categories and terms that have recently expanded the discourse include artist’s identity, creativity, visual studies and theology, non-Western religions and global perspective, art of the new religious movements (NRMs), religious aesthetics and theo-aesthetics, blasphemy, contemporary iconoclasm or *Bilderstreit*, ritual practices, and contemporary art in sacred spaces. The last category on the list, with an emphasis on contemporary,<sup>58</sup> remains fairly unexamined by art historical academic writing, despite the profusion of examples that show non-devotional art in places of worship in Western Europe, Great Britain, and the United States. Perhaps, the church threshold is regarded as the literal border between the secular and sacred domains; one that must not be trespassed. While the topic has been popular among theologians for decades, the first art historical sources are conspicuously younger. Over the past few years, three significant books appeared in the English language.

*Contemporary Art in British Churches* (2010) aims to understand the growing number of new art

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<sup>57</sup> Ena Giurescu Heller, ed., *Reluctant Partners: Art and Religion in Dialogue* (New York: Gallery at the American Bible Society, 2004). The volume is reminiscent of Samuel Laeuchli’s *Religion and Art in Conflict* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), in which the author theorizes the simultaneous attraction and repulsion between the Judeo-Christian traditions and modern art. To add one last title to this list, it is worth noting the collection of essays edited by Kimberly Vrudny and Wilson Yates, *Arts, Theology, and the Church: New Intersections* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2005). In this volume, the authors offer justification of “art and religion” as a field and methods for efficient interaction between churches and contemporary art.

<sup>58</sup> With the necessary distance in time modern artworks in churches, e.g. Couturier’s project at Plateau d’Assy (1938–1949) or Matisse’s chapel at Vence (1948–1951), are today widely discussed without reservations about their religious connection. Here, the word “contemporary” implies art produced after the 1970s.

commissions and the wide acceptance of such movement in the United Kingdom.<sup>59</sup> Looking at the question from two angles, the contributors attempt to explicate what impels church officials and artists to cooperate. This short source is an excellent introduction to this phenomenon, viz. abundance of contemporary art in Christian spaces of worship. A rigorous investigation of the topic, strengthened by an innovative conceptual framework, is Jonathan Koestlé-Cate's dissertation (2011), published by Routledge in 2016.<sup>60</sup> Without trying to bring to consensus institutionalized religion and contemporary art, Koestlé-Cate seeks to understand the "fractious embrace" between the two by formulating an effective vocabulary and suitable theoretical methods. His main question challenges the reader to consider the future of the phenomenon: "What are the prevailing and potential conditions of possibility for art in ecclesiastical spaces?"<sup>61</sup> Similarly to the objectives of this thesis, Koestlé-Cate's intention is far from surveying the history of debate between religion and new art and, instead, is to suggest methods for addressing and mediating the experience of contemporary art in ecclesiastical settings. Another publication of interest is a collection of essays edited by Aaron Rosen, *Religion and Art in the Heart of Modern Manhattan* (2016), dedicated to the study of St. Peter's Lutheran Church in New York City.<sup>62</sup> In the 1970s, the church went through a drastic transformation from a neo-Gothic building to a modern structure, and thus blended with the glass pane and geometrical shapes of the surrounding skyscrapers. Louise Nevelson designed the sculptural interior of the chapel, works by Willem de Kooning and Kiki Smith have been exhibited in the sanctuary, and changing art installations can be regularly found in this space. The authors closely examine the moment of

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<sup>59</sup> Laura Moffatt and Eileen Daly, eds., *Contemporary Art in British Churches* (London: Art & Christianity Enquiry, 2010). Art and Christianity Enquiry is the British organization that is active in the field of visual art and religion: in addition to publications, ACE organizes conferences and offers professional advice.

<sup>60</sup> Jonathan Koestlé-Cate, *Art and the Church: A Fractious Embrace: Ecclesiastical Encounters with Contemporary Art* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>62</sup> Aaron Rosen, *Religion and Art in the Heart of Modern Manhattan: Saint Peter's Church and the Louise Nevelson Chapel* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2016).

the church modernization, contemplate the integration of new art and liturgy, and discuss what the changes mean for both the worshipping community and the city of New York. A recent Ph.D. thesis by Rebecca Faulkner (2015) adds to the discourse from a perspective of urban studies.<sup>63</sup> Faulkner's case studies include former and active synagogues and churches in London, New York, and Cape Town, while her primary interest concerns the dialogue between these buildings and local communities. She writes about former houses of worship in terms of the continuation of spiritual legacy handed down from past generations. Particularly fascinating is Faulkner's discussion of active religious spaces, or "multi-use buildings," in which she distinguishes a potential "to respond to the disparate needs of a multi/non-faith, 'multicentred' society."<sup>64</sup> She also investigates "multi-use buildings" within the framework of museum studies and expands on notion of "participatory museum."<sup>65</sup> Where Koestlé-Cate concentrates his attention on the works of art and their experience inside mainly Anglican churches, Faulkner looks beyond the church and synagogue walls and analyzes what happens in the multicultural and multi-religious fabric of the Western urban environment.

In Germany examples of contemporary art placed in sacred spaces are just as widespread as in Great Britain or the United States. Most literature on our subject produced in this country comes directly from those involved in organizing art exhibitions in churches. In other words, church representatives and pastors-curators are responsible for the majority of catalogs, books, essays, and articles, foremost for *Kunst und Kirche*; with Mennekes and Müller being by far the most prolific writers. Apart from the two, Guido Schlimbach, who overtook the organization of art exhibitions at Saint Peter after Mennekes' retirement in 2008, has recently published the

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<sup>63</sup> Rebecca Faulkner, "For Whom Was Built This Special Shell? Exploring the Adaptive Use of Religious Buildings as Museums, Galleries and Cultural Centres" (Ph.D. thesis, Birkbeck, University of London, 2015).

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 107–11.

outcome of a substantial study on the relationship between German churches and contemporary art.<sup>66</sup> Even though Schlimbach focuses on the art center founded by his predecessor in Cologne, his book includes all the milestones in the historical development that has led to the current embrace of new art by Christian institutions in Germany. The largest group of authors outside of specific churches, as outlined above, is that of theologians; either Catholic or Protestant. As for art historical scholarship, the need for its expansion in the study of contemporary art exhibitions in sacred spaces is evident.<sup>67</sup> On the other hand, German curators have long showed interest in, first, religious associations as themes for exhibitions and, second, using church interiors as majestic settings for art display.<sup>68</sup> In the latter case, Jürgen Doppelstein's project in Hanover is so far without an analogue. In 2000 he presented an expansive exhibition with works by thirty prominent twentieth-century artists in thirteen city churches, each with an affiliated active Protestant community.<sup>69</sup> The title, *Lost Paradise Lost*, can be understood as the regained paradise, the age of re-enchantment, or the coming of post-secularity. Another example is the use of ecclesiastical spaces for exhibitions accompanying the world-class art exhibition *documenta* in Kassel. The first of such shows took place in the former Old Church of the Brethren (1982, 1987, 1992). However, subsequently active Christian settings were chosen—Protestant church

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<sup>66</sup> Guido Schlimbach, *Für einen lange währenden Augenblick: Die Kunst-Station Sankt Peter Köln im Spannungsfeld von Religion und Kunst* (Regensburg: Verlag Schnell & Steiner, 2009). See also Schlimbach, ed., *Für Friedhelm Mennekes* (Cologne: Wienand, 2008). He later edited the volume on theological aesthetics: Schlimbach, ed., *Der Gottesdienst als Privilegierter Ort der Ästhetik: Zeit-Kunst-Liturgie* (Aachen: Einhard, 2011).

<sup>67</sup> As noted earlier in the thesis, the literature on modern and contemporary stained glass windows is sufficient.

<sup>68</sup> In addition to the thematic exhibitions of the 1980s (see chapter three), the following shows in Germany tackled the religious and spiritual dimensions of contemporary art: *Museum and Kirche: Religiöse Aspekte moderner Kunst* at Wilhelm-Lehmbruck Museum, Duisburg (1991); *Altäre: Kunst zum Niederknien* at Museum Kunstpallast, Düsseldorf (2001); *Iconoclash* at The Center for New Art and Media, Karlsruhe (2002); *warum! Bilder diesseits und jenseits des Menschen* at Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin (2003); *Triptychon in der Moderne* at Kunstmuseum Stuttgart (2009); *The Problem of God* at Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf (2015/16). An informative source for further investigation is Schöne, *Dinge-Räume-Zeiten* (2009). Most recently, Johannes Rauchenberger created an imaginary museum in the form of a massive printed volume dedicated to the religious aspects in contemporary art: Rauchenberger, *Gott hat kein Museum. No Museum Has God: Religion in der Kunst des Beginnenden XXI. Jahrhunderts. Religion in Art in the Early 21st Century* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2015).

<sup>69</sup> Jürgen Doppelstein, ed., *Lost Paradise Lost: Kunst und Sakraler Raum*, exh. cat. (Hanover: Evangelisch-Lutherischer Stadtkirchenverband, 2000). An earlier example from Hanover, while on a smaller scale, is an exhibition *Kunst in Kirchen Raum Geben: Eine Installation in der Reformierten Kirche* (1993).

Saint Martin (1997, 2002, 2007) and Catholic church Saint Elisabeth (2012). Despite disputes over assumed associations of *documenta* with Christian institutions—undesired by some organizers of the art exhibition—two churches in Kassel, Karlskirche and Saint Elisabeth, displayed exhibitions of contemporary art concurrently with *documenta 14* in 2017.<sup>70</sup> Such big projects understandably attract curiosity of art critics and historians, who nevertheless do not readily show attention to regularly occurring and no less stimulating exhibitions in church spaces. In cases when they do so, the resulting essays and articles do not become more than sporadic incidents. What is missing is a synthetic exploration of the subject, devoid of theological agenda or interest in particular institutions.

This thesis aims to address the phenomenon at the time when its roots have firmed and the branches abound in fruit at a high pace. Following the steps of Jonathan Koestlé-Cate, the present research project seeks an appropriate theoretical framework for facilitating discourse on contemporary art in active churches. Writing from the perspective of art studies, the author of this thesis is at risk, on the one hand, to be cast down “into a dubious category of fallen and marginal historians who somehow don’t get modernism or postmodernism.”<sup>71</sup> On the other hand, by eschewing theology and the history of Christian attitudes towards art in order to prioritize the visual objects and their reception, this project can be scorned by the scholars of religion for

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<sup>70</sup> *documenta 13* (2012) witnessed a debate between the *documenta* artistic director, Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, and the artist Gregor Schneider, who planned to exhibit his work in Karlskirche during the exhibition. Further conflict of interest concerned Stephan Balkenhol’s installation at Saint Elisabeth. See “German Exhibition *documenta* Accused of Censoring Art,” *Artsfreedom*, <https://artsfreedom.org/german-exhibition-documenta-accused-of-censoring-art/> (accessed February 23, 2017); and Josef Meyer zu Schlochtern, ed., *Kunst, Kirche, Kontroversen: Der Streit um die Kirchlichen Begleitausstellungen zur documenta* (Paderborn and Munich: Schöningh, 2014). The 2017 *documenta* coincides with the World Reformation Exhibition that celebrates the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. Within this event, an exhibition of work by seventy international contemporary artists, *Luther and the Avant-Garde*, takes place in Wittenberg, Berlin, and Kassel. Among them are the installations by Shilpa Gupta and Thomas Kilpper for Karlskirche in Kassel and by Gilbert & George for Sankt Matthäus in Berlin. See Walter Smerling, ed., *Luther und die Avantgarde: Zeitgenössische Kunst im alten Gefängnis in Wittenberg mit Sonderpräsentationen in Berlin und Kassel*, exh. cat. (Cologne: Wienand Verlag, 2017).

<sup>71</sup> Elkins, *On the Strange Place of Religion in Contemporary Art*, xi.



lacking insight into the matters of faith. The first risk is accepted with optimism about the growing interest in the field of “art and religion” and a hope to enrich the evolving conversation with a perceptive micro-discourse. The second risk is taken with the determination to improve the understanding of and illuminating new possibilities for the intersections of faith and experience of contemporary art. Ultimately, the described gap in existing literature shows that this venture is worth the effort.

## 2. Preliminary questions

At this point the reader may wonder what particular worth is to be reached at the scope of this research. One could argue that the groundwork for investigation is too broad, given the multitude of both churches and types of artistic expression even within the geographical borders of a single country and the time frame of merely three decades. When it is not possible to provide analyses of all the cases, how can one justify a selection of specific places and exhibitions? What can those spaces and artworks tell us? Then, a long row of questions follows. Is there a difference between viewing the same art object in a gallery and a church, or has the latter merely become another exhibition venue? Can an artwork be integrated into a sacred space, or does it remain an alien oddity? How is it relevant to the life of a community and the celebration of liturgy? How does contemporary art interact with traditional visual elements of a church? Does it disturb the Christian tradition, is it blasphemous? If so, why would a church engage with contemporary non-Christian art? On the other hand, is the autonomy of secular art threatened when an artist is creating his or her work for display in a religious space? If the answer is affirmative, why would an artist accept the risk? What is the whole enterprise for and why study it? These questions are addressed throughout the thesis but without any conclusive statements. Rather than closing the discussion, the thesis invites its future reflection and expansion along both theological and art historical lines. What immediately follows is consideration of problematic aspects of the subject matter, the objectives and purposes of the thesis, and the methodology to be applied in the analyses of case studies.

## 2.1. Problems

### 2.1.1. Catholic and Protestant approaches to church arts

As the literature review has shown, the presence of contemporary art in specific German churches is approached either from a Catholic or a Protestant standpoint. One reason for that is an author's adherence to one of these branches of Christianity. Another is the historically established difference between Catholic and Protestant attitudes towards the visual arts, the look at which takes us back to the Reformation and Counter-Reformation of the sixteenth century.

The question of church art was among the central issues that radically divided the reformers and the Vatican. While the father of the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther, did not come to develop a consistent doctrine of images and their use in the church; his followers, in particular Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin, instigated the process of iconoclasm that spread across Northern Europe and England.<sup>72</sup> The motifs for that were manifold. First, iconoclasm was a response to the abuse of power by the Roman Catholic Church. Second, the reformers argued that adoration of images was nothing less than idolatry. Pictures were seen as dangerous because they could move worshippers' emotions and thus divert their attention from the message of the gospel. Third, it was only the Bible that could lead to understanding of God, as neither Christ nor the Holy Father could be comprehended through physical sight. It was also the word of God that condemned the use of images in the Second Commandment, "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth."<sup>73</sup> From its foundation, Protestantism privileged the ear over the eye and the mind over the senses. Therefore, the suspicion towards images,

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<sup>72</sup> For explanation of Luther's indeterminacy about the visual arts, see Dyrness, *Reformed Theology and Visual Culture*, 51–7.

<sup>73</sup> Exod. 20:4–6.

accompanied by iconoclasm in act and writing, has been inherited and manifested by Protestants throughout the past five centuries. This does not mean that either the first nor subsequent generations of reformers entirely abandoned religious pictures. On the contrary, they found an excellent use for them in propagandistic and educational efforts. In particular, the reformers employed printed image in the pamphlets that they distributed in large editions.<sup>74</sup> Of course, a small format of a black-and-white print could not be compared to lavish paintings and sculpture found at altars inside churches; hence, there was no risk of wrongly swaying the common believer. Nevertheless, there were cases of altarpieces created for the first Lutheran churches, with significant examples appearing in Wittenberg, Dessau, Weimar, and Schneeberg.<sup>75</sup> The artist Lucas Cranach was befriended by Luther himself, so that the painter produced most famous portraits of the father of the Reformation. Both content and form of first Protestant altarpieces were very precise in their qualities. The content was limited to what was either once seen or could be seen at the present moment—histories and events that could teach about the Christian past and thus illustrate the word of God.<sup>76</sup> The form was to be as naturalistic as possible lest the worshipper's imagination is stirred or the feeling of wonder is provoked. Figures of the reformers could be added to compositions in order to emphasize the virtue of Protestantism, as in *Wittenberg Altarpiece: The Last Supper and Scenes from the Life of Martin Luther* by Cranach (1547).<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, Luther's German Bible, printed in 1534, contained numerous illustrations that were meant to reinforce the power of the written word and, according to Luther, "for the sake of remembrance and better understanding."<sup>78</sup> Another type of semi-religious painting accepted by the Protestants was portraiture. Representations of the reformers, spiritual leaders,

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<sup>74</sup> Margaret R. Miles, *Image as Insight: Visual Understanding in Western Christianity and Secular Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 115.

<sup>75</sup> Dyrness, *Reformed Theology and Visual Culture*, 55.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 55–6.

<sup>78</sup> Quoted in Miles, *Image as Insight*, 115.

and scholars became widespread in the Protestant regions from the sixteenth century on. Such portraits did not merely serve to commemorate significant men and women but, as William Dyrness points out, “ought to be seen then as actual images of God’s grace [...and] as allegories of virtue”<sup>79</sup> That is, the Protestants acknowledged that the spiritual could be captured in a picture; however in a specific type of picture executed in an obligatorily plain style. A human being, created by God in his own image was Calvin’s argument for seeing God’s splendor in one’s neighbour instead of in painting or sculpture.<sup>80</sup> Dyrness emphasizes how such thinking resulted in the new importance of the world outside church walls for the Protestant believers. On this premise, in addition to portraiture we could proceed to witness the prevalence of landscape and genre scene paintings in the Protestant regions of Northern Europe and England. However, the development of Protestant art production is not the primary concern here. For our purposes, what we can take away from the brief history of the Protestant view on the visual arts is an understanding of a specific type of Christian culture, one that can be characterized as language-dominated and education-oriented. In Protestant worship services, these characteristics are manifested through the strong emphasis on the preaching of the word; in Protestant lifestyle—in the cultivation of intellect through the study of God’s word and the creation of God in the world around.

In the Catholic Church, the image has historically been an essential element of individual and communal faith and worship. The earliest sites of Christian worship prove that religious imagery played a central role in the believer’s communication with God. Despite early cautionary texts on the danger of being attached to an image and the Iconoclastic Controversy in the Byzantine

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<sup>79</sup> Dyrness, *Reformed Theology and Visual Culture*, 306–7.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 76 and 84.

Empire in the eighth and ninth centuries, images were inseparable from Christian tradition throughout the Middle Ages. The reliance on visual objects in medieval worship was rooted in the thought of Augustine of Hippo, whose theological writings of the late fourth and early fifth centuries shaped the development of Western Christianity. According to Augustine, physical objects of this world ought to be seen as signs of the invisible reality, or the realm of the divine.<sup>81</sup> By looking at an image, the believer could contemplate the eternal and experience the spiritual. The significance of vision in the Early Church was reinforced by the display of relics, in order to behold which Christians were willing to go on long pilgrimages; and later in the thirteenth century, when the host was raised in the celebration of the Eucharist so that each worshipper could participate in communion by the process of viewing the consecrated bread. Vision was indispensable for exercising devotion; congregations would kneel and bow in front of depictions of Christ, Mary, and the saints, kiss them, burn candles before them, deliver their prayers to them, and confess their sins in front of them. Street processions with statuettes or pictures of sacred figures were likewise common. In addition, depictions of biblical stories were meant to teach the illiterate who neither comprehended the priest's citing of the Scripture in the Latin language nor were capable of reading on their own. Medieval churches were filled with visual stimuli, causing later generations to speak of "the great religious art of the Middle Ages." Margaret Miles observes how shortly before the Reformation the liturgy was "a minimally verbal experience" and "the engagement of vision had never been stronger."<sup>82</sup> Even though such abundance of religious imagery was condemned by the reformers and contributed to the split of the Western Church, the Catholics did not relinquish their predilection for pictures. While Protestant iconoclasm propelled the Catholic counter-reformers to rethink their heavy reliance on

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>82</sup> Miles, *Image as Insight*, 97 and 98.

images, in the long run the production of church art and architecture was only intensified. In one of its last sessions (1563), the Council of Trent proscribed some subjects as leading to dogmatic errors but, overall, confirmed the importance and value of church art: "... not that any divinity or virtue is believed to be in them [...] but because the honor which is showed in them is referred to their prototypes which they represent, so that by means of the images which we kiss [...] we adore Christ and venerate the saints whose likeness they bear."<sup>83</sup> In addition to the affirmation of the importance of the saints, martyrs, and Mary, the Council of Trent called for artists to create pictures that would move emotions and inspire devotion. The Roman Church explicitly censured iconoclastic activism of the reformers and advocated not only the legitimacy but also the great virtue of religious art. As a consequence, new churches were built and painted with images that would appeal to the believer's senses. Founded by St. Ignatius Loyola in 1534, the Society of Jesus set its goals to promote the Catholic faith around the world. While the Jesuits employed effective preaching and religious instruction to convert people into Catholicism, they also strongly believed in the possibility of spiritual experience through physical sight. The importance of senses was outlined in St. Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises*, a treatise of Christian prayers and meditations based on the author's personal spiritual experiences and contemplation.<sup>84</sup> The Jesuits taught their members to concentrate all the senses in order to reach the state of meditation of God's truth. By and large the Society's mother church, Church of the Gesù in Rome, exemplified the post-Tridentine attitude towards decoration of Catholic churches: "Wherein is inserted all possible inventions, to catch men's affections and to ravish their understanding: at first, the gloriousness of their Altars, infinite number of images, priestly ornaments, and the divers actions

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<sup>83</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, 119.

<sup>84</sup> Marcia B. Hall, and Tracey E. Cooper, eds., *The Sensuous in the Counter-Reformation Church* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 10.

they use in that service...”<sup>85</sup> What the Jesuits, and Catholics on the whole, were after was a total visual environment, upon entering which believers would be immediately captivated and their bond to the Church and to God would be strengthened through emotion.<sup>86</sup> The celebration of the Mass in a Catholic church was and arguably remains the exaltation of the senses and their superiority over reason. However, as a theologian John O’Malley points out, the decoration of post-Tridentine churches did not respond to one singular pattern but varied from pope to pope, bishop to bishop.<sup>87</sup> That is, the choice of visual objects introduced in sacred spaces depended on idiosyncratic tastes of religious leaders. Therefore, O’Malley cautions us against speaking of a singular Catholic type of church arts. The certain takeaway here is that images in Catholic churches and precisely the process of viewing them are conducive to profound religious experiences. Moreover, all visual elements in a Catholic building matter and, combined, they produce a unique, purportedly spiritual, atmosphere.

Closer to our day, in the mid-twentieth century, one could still hear claims reminiscent of Calvin’s animosity against the visual arts in a church: in the words of a great theologian, Karl Barth, “Images and symbols have no place *at all* in a building designed for Protestant worship.”<sup>88</sup> Around the same time, Paul Tillich pronounces the possibility of modern art to elicit religious experience and invites Protestants to see art as a source of the divine truth.<sup>89</sup> What this

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<sup>85</sup> Impression of an English visitor to the Church of the Gesù in 1620, quoted in Miles, *Image as Insight*, 109. There were, nonetheless, exceptional Jesuit churches that in their appearance maintained the spirit of poverty and simplicity. See *ibid.*, 110 and 182, n.61.

<sup>86</sup> The subjects believed to evoke the most powerful emotions were scenes of heavenly bliss, ecstasy of the saints, tortures of the martyrs, and the death of Christ. For the discussion of particular artworks, see essays in *The Sensuous in the Counter-Reformation Church*.

<sup>87</sup> John W. O’Malley, “Trent, Sacred Images, and Catholic’ Senses of the Sensuous,” in Hall and Cooper, *The Sensuous in the Counter-Reformation Church*, 28–48.

<sup>88</sup> Karl Barth, “The Architectural Problem of Protestant Places of Worship,” in Andre Bieler, *Architecture and Worship: The Christian Place of Worship*, transl. by Donald and Odette Elliott (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965). Emphasis in italics is by the author of this thesis.

<sup>89</sup> Tillich, *On Art and Architecture*, 15–6, 100–1, 180.



shows is the lack of unanimity regarding the subject in Protestantism. Given its numerous ramifications, even the term “Protestantism” at times seems to be an inadequate generalization of many worldviews. As we will see later, the use of the visual arts in contemporary Protestant churches in Germany both reflect and contradict the principles of the sixteenth-century reformers. It is especially interesting to observe how a language-dominated form of Christianity is challenged in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, i.e. at the moment when the quantity of images overwhelm people’s daily lives and the level of verbal literacy might seem to decline. On the other hand, one may claim that Catholicism is entitled to boast a united view on church arts via the voice of the Pope. It is true that the principles of the Roman Church, expressed in the statements of the Vatican Councils and the papal letters to the international Catholic community, are accepted as guidelines for Catholic churches all over the world. Nonetheless, there are no clear-cut instructions on what constitutes appropriate church art and, consequently, disagreements occur as individual priests make decisions based on their own tastes. The case studies discussed below exemplify such diversity of tastes but also disclose what remains constant in the relationship between the visual arts and contemporary German churches.

In the end, the generalization about either a Protestant or Catholic attitude towards the visual arts is neither possible nor desirable. There can be as many attitudes as there are pastors and priests in this country or elsewhere. In this case, how do we speak about contemporary art housed in churches that represent different denominations and, hence, different positions on the subject? The solution is twofold. First, the discussion must privilege the art object and its reception. While it is important to ask the church officials about their purposes for introducing new art in a sacred space, the answer should not predispose final effects of art in question. Second, when it is necessary to reflect on the religious ideas, those common to Catholicism and Protestantism, or to

the most of their branches, should be selected. While a theologian may disapprove of such procedure, it is important to note that a secular public notion, and often a believer's notion, of some of the Christian tenets does not always distinguish between them as originally Protestant or Catholic, not to speak of particular beliefs of Calvinists, Methodists, Jesuits, etc.. The combination of these two methods promises to solve the problem of addressing diverse stances and policies taken by German churches in the same context.

### **2.1.2. Urban and rural churches**

Another problematic issue that should be commented upon before further arguments can be made is the research discrimination between urban and rural churches. The two categories represent disparate milieus and the relationship between them is not always apparent. Cities are the centers of cultural activities and transformation; they give birth to the avant-garde phenomena and progress in most, if not all, spheres of human life. A change initiated in an urban environment reaches smaller towns and villages only subsequently; even though today's connectivity in the Western world has tremendously shortened this time interval in comparison to what it was merely twenty years ago. Novelty usually takes places in large cities, and this model applies to the introduction of contemporary art into German churches. Cologne and Stuttgart were the first urban centers that witnessed the recurring inclusion of contemporary art into active Christian spaces, with other cities to be next.

There are some exceptions to this "rule." In 1990, an unprecedented altarpiece created by a German artist Hermann Buss (Hermann Buß, b. 1951) was installed at Inselkirche (literally, "island church") in Langeoog, an island in the southern North Sea with the population of around

2000 people (fig. 1). A photorealistic painting depicts a stranded ship leaning to the side in front of the group of people with their luggage, who might have gathered at the pier in order to board the vessel. In the foreground stands a table; cropped by the frame it leaves the viewer guessing as to its purpose. All but one chair have been abruptly left by their seaters, who stood up in a hurry, some forgetting their jackets. While only the hands of the last seating figure can be seen, leaving the identity and even the gender of the person unclear, they manage to give an impression of a patient demeanor. With their back towards the viewer, most of the passengers are gazing at either the massive and palpably heavy ship or the dark and cold waters. The sea is momentarily still but its overpowering potential is unmistakably present in the position of the ship. Through his photorealistic technique, the artist provided a number of opportunities for the viewer to relate to the scene: the passengers' contemporary clothing, the vessel's visual similarity to the Langeoog ferry, and the shore landscape akin to that of the island. However, the painting's placement at an altar, combined with the neo-Gothic retable of 1889 that frames the canvas, is bound to raise eyebrows. The only detail that conspicuously refers to Christian faith is the mast: its cross shape, albeit falling to the side, towers above the gathering and, piercing the sky, scatters the stormy clouds. One familiar with European Romanticism could connect Buss' aerial expanses, which occupy almost the whole upper half of the canvas, minute scale of human figures, and the subject of nature's uncontrollable forces to the compositions by Caspar David Friedrich and other German painters of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In this case, we could argue for the religious quality of the sky and the idea of God being in charge of human lives. But overall the painting is strikingly foreign to the simple and unadorned interior of this rural evangelical church and must have appeared even more so in the year 1990.

What this example shows is a moment of artistic innovation away from metropolitan areas. It presents a unique perspective on the subject of this thesis and is a telling episode in the story of contemporary art in German churches. Furthermore, Buss' painting for Inselkirche and a few other works have become permanent altarpieces for active Christian communities.<sup>90</sup> As such, they are discussed alongside further examples of contemporary artworks that have been permanently integrated into sacred spaces. The main attention, however, is given to urban churches. The cases in Cologne, Stuttgart, and other cities lead the investigation not only because this is where we find most artistic innovation, but also because of the level of public awareness and influences that is only possible in urban environments. Where relevant, the relationship between examples from both settings is to be drawn and employed for addressing the questions of the thesis.

## 2.2. Objectives

This thesis confronts a great number of questions that range from the artist's creative process in the studio to the acceptance or criticism of art by congregations, from iconoclasts' postulates to the idea of *Gesamtkunstwerk* in a Christian liturgy. Indeed, the subject encompasses plentiful aspects that are beyond the scope of a single research project but worth proper scholarly attention in their own right. One question repeatedly arose during the research stage of this work, growing into the thesis' main objective: *is it possible to define a specific experience that church visitors are subjected to when they encounter secular art in worship spaces?* By tracing the developments of the phenomenon since the introduction of non-sacramental contemporary art

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<sup>90</sup> Buss went on to create polyptych altarpieces for the village churches of Ardorf (1998), Warzen (1999), and Adenstedt (2005); as well as a pulpit altar for the convent church Oldenstadt (2006). See Detlef Klahr, and Annette Kanzenbach, eds., *Horizonte: Bilderwelten von Hermann Buß* (Berlin and Munich: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2015).

into active Christian spaces in the 1980s, the thesis arrives at the present day—when contemporary art is widely accepted in ecclesiastical settings and can even be taken for granted. This quasi-accustomedness is precisely the source of the central question. What is taken for granted is what has been accepted as a norm, or as a bordering on the norm reality. On the other hand, what has not been accepted is also indicative of the emerging art experience, i.e. of the selective process of such emergence. By looking into the exhibitions in a chronological order, it is possible to discover those tendencies that are carried on through the years. Either earlier exhibitions exert influence and give inspiration to those that follow, or once exhibited works of art become assimilated into church interiors as permanent pieces. In the opening chapter of his book, Koestlé-Cate warns us that this process “has the negative potential to create new visual orthodoxies.”<sup>91</sup> One of his main arguments is for fewer, more intensive, and, hence, more effective exhibitions in sacred Christian spaces. This thesis, however, aims neither to critique the current state of affairs nor to look for most efficient ways to present new art in old churches. Instead, it intends to observe, document, and analyze why certain “new visual orthodoxies” have emerged or seem to be emerging at the present moment. Moreover, if a new type of art experience in old German churches can be defined, its definition has the potential not only to assist in organization of future effective exhibitions but to improve the understanding of our own selves.

Another objective to be pursued by the thesis is to distinguish between different paradigms of coexistence of contemporary art and Christian communities in Germany. This goal does not imply discerning between current attitudes of Catholics and Protestants, which would mean engaging in a theological debate. Types of engagement are based not on the motives but on results and effects of art exhibitions in active churches. Lastly, among the goals is an innovative

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<sup>91</sup> Koestlé-Cate, *A Fractious Embrace*, 1.

theoretical framework that can help, one, to answer the main question, and, two, to advance the academic discourse on the subject of presence of non-traditional visual arts in ecclesiastical settings.

## **2.3. Methods**

### **2.3.1. Case studies, 1980s–2010s**

In order to proceed coherently and transparently in view of the problems and objectives outlined above, the thesis proposes the following methodology. The first and core component of the research is a collection of case studies. One case study is an exhibition or installation of contemporary art within architectural fabric of an active church. The selection of cases spans a time period from the 1980s, when the process in question showed its springs in Germany, to the present day. It takes into account the scale of public renown, calibers of popular and critical response, and influence on subsequent events of similar nature. Two religious institutions, Saint Peter in Cologne and Hospital Church in Stuttgart, are subjected to an in-depth study for several reasons. First, the two were the earliest in this country to commence continual series of contemporary art exhibitions. Their simultaneous start is therefore a justified point of departure for our discussion. Second, their affiliations—Catholic of Saint Peter and Protestant of Hospital Church—provide a propitious balance for the structure of this thesis and an opportunity for an accordant comparison. Third, the major urban settings of these institutions, combined with an ample supply of catalogs and media reviews, have made them well-noted across the country and even abroad. Moreover, both Saint Peter and Hospital Church rose to prominence due to their bold, sometimes radical, art projects and the strong public resonance that followed. Finally, both

churches continue to exhibit contemporary art today and, thus, allow for an insight into the course of full thirty years within the proposed time frame.

In addition to activities in Cologne and Stuttgart, the thesis examines cases in Berlin, Munich, Frankfurt, and elsewhere in the country. Parallels are drawn based on the exhibited artists, mediums of artworks, and the qualities of the used space. Visual analyses are applied in order to make sense of common characteristics of form and content. In addition, newspaper and online reviews pertaining to given case studies are scrutinized in order to gain understanding of public response. The viewer's experience of contemporary artworks in ecclesiastical settings is explored and compared to the encounters with similar objects in museums and galleries. As it is not possible to give a comprehensive account of every art-related project in all of German churches, the thesis attempts the most representative selection of sample case studies. Still, limitations are inevitable and, that is why, the thesis does not claim to speak for the general principles and patterns existing in this country. The purpose of this method is to understand the nature of individual cases and search for shared attributes. Since no comparable study currently exists, the collection of cases and their discussion in this thesis sketch out the profile of the relationship between contemporary art and old German churches that can be an impetus for further research.

### **2.3.2. "Image as insight"**

When confronting a diversity of Christian views on church art, the thesis avoids theological argumentation in order to privilege the art object and its reception. Justification for this omission seems necessary. Part of the motivation is to stay close to the field of art history because of the relative neutrality it offers in addressing selected church spaces. Mainly, however, the thesis is

inspired by Margaret R. Miles' ideas expressed in *Image as Insight: Visual Understanding in Western Christianity and Secular Culture* (1985). Miles notes that all types of histories, including the history of Christianity, are shaped by "language users," or those members of society who are skilled in language and hence can record events and ideas in writing.<sup>92</sup> As a result, the lives of non-language users, who are always the majority, are not adequately represented. To correct such discrepancies, we must acknowledge non-linguistic sources of information. One of them, which are especially promising for the study of any culture, is an image. Miles claims that understanding through the eyes is possible and that imagery can disclose ideas and values just as powerfully as words.<sup>93</sup> Even though the author speaks of the study of the past, her thesis is directly applicable to the study of our own day and age. In this thesis, the idea that visual form holds the potential to reveal knowledge is tested in an extensive discussion.<sup>94</sup>

About the contemporary culture Miles writes: "It is likely that our capacity for vision is—or will shortly be—congenitally fatigued by omnipresence of images with which most modern people cope."<sup>95</sup> Her answer to the problem is a responsible training of vision that can help us to critically appreciate images and acquire knowledge from them. While Miles' proposition sounds similar to the principles of visual studies, or *Bildwissenschaft* in the German-speaking academia, one of the distinct merits of her thesis is an emphasis on the subjectivity of experiencing and making sense of art. "The viewer chooses, often not consciously, from the range of interpretations permitted by the image one or several interpretations that relate, negatively or

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<sup>92</sup> Miles, *Image as Insight*, 18–9.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 2–3 and 152.

<sup>94</sup> See chapters 4 and 5 in this thesis.

<sup>95</sup> Miles, *Image as Insight*, 9.



positively, to his interest.”<sup>96</sup> Miles continues to point out that the chosen interpretation depends on personal interest to a greater degree than on, in an example of a religious image, a biblical or theological text. This description is appropriate to the viewer’s experience of non-traditional forms of art in living church spaces: the surroundings of an artwork refer to Christian faith and thus suggest a certain range of interpretations but it is personal interest, or “life baggage,” that affects the viewer’s experience most of all. Miles applies the method “image as insight” to the discussion of Christian works of art and architecture produced between the fourth and sixteenth centuries and, towards the end of her book, theorizes the key aspects of the role of image and language in Christian worship. Here, she presents what might be the key to unlocking some truths about the relationship between contemporary art and churches today: “As long as images played a prominent role in christian [sic.] worship, a wide variety of individual interpretations not only was tolerated by necessity but was accepted in christian communities. Images form by attraction those who are drawn to some particular feature by interests determined by their life situation.”<sup>97</sup> Precisely such personal reading of art is the second idea borrowed from Miles’ book for the purposes of this research. Together, the capacity of images—here works of contemporary non-sacramental art exhibited in sacred Christian spaces—to provide insight into a particular culture at a particular time and the subjective indistinctiveness of meanings that these artworks tend to impose, are two of the building blocks that form the methodology of the thesis.

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 144.

### 2.3.3. Theoretical framework

In order to relate the German churches' engagement with contemporary art to the pertinent socio-cultural context and to answer the thesis' main question—"Is there a new type of art experience that transpires in spaces of old active churches?"—a set of selected theories follows the discussion of case studies. Firstly, the thesis argues for uniqueness of old active churches as venues for exhibiting art and as experiential spaces. To support this claim, chapter six first elaborates upon the element of the "old" in old church architecture with the thought of a German art historian Otto von Simson and second consults Gernot Böhme's phenomenology of architectural atmospheres in connection with the individual's experience of historical ecclesiastical settings.

Secondly, in order to understand how a living religion can influence the experience of art in an active church the thesis turns to the notion of post-secularism. This method helps to reveal the impact of present-day social significance of traditional religions upon human disposition towards both a locus of living faith and contemporary secular art in its midst. In other words, the post-secular discourse allows us to conceptually approach the intersection between belief and non-belief—the junction that we eventually call post-secular space. Thus, the twofold theoretical framework conduces to the proposition and construction of the synthesizing concept which has given the title to this work. The post-secular space is a term that regards both *old* ecclesiastical architecture and *living* Christian faith as importantly contributive to the person's encounter with contemporary non-sacramental art inside old active churches. While answering the thesis' main question, it also distinguishes religious edifices from the myriad of other public places where the visual arts can be found today. Lastly, it is the hope of the author that the term post-secular space becomes a helpful contribution to the evolving discourse on the relationship between Christianity and the visual arts in the twenty-first century.

## 2.3.4. Sources

Any study of contemporary phenomena is bound to face difficulties in locating the proper sources of required information. For one, printed material compiled by experts in a certain field is scarce; given that the field as such exists at all. Similarly, much needed archives are rare. Secondly, academic inquiry in the twenty-first century can no longer be sustained within a single scholarly field: interdisciplinarity has become essential for research in both natural sciences and humanities. That is why one must equip oneself with sufficient knowledge in more than one field. Thirdly, a substantial amount of information is available only on the internet, the main problem of which is dubitable authorship. The World Wide Web can overwhelm the researcher with profusion of statements that must be systematically filtered through and then compared to those opinions that exist outside of the online world. Moreover, with today's speed of social and cultural changes much of information is not always up-to-date, which forces the scholar to step away from the existent sources and delve into the field on his or her own—observe, document, and produce a source that becomes primary in its own right. As a consequence, in-the-field work counts for a high percentage of an entire research project; though it should be balanced by theory. Finally, because the lack of temporal distance from the subject of study makes it impossible to obtain “the big picture” one must be ready to participate in an open-ended discussion.

This thesis posits its main questions and arguments as an addition to the body of literature, discussed above, on the topic of “art and religion” from the past thirty to forty years. This is the first grouping of the consulted texts. Then, it finds the factual data about German churches and art exhibitions from the major articles and books, official websites of concerned Christian institutions, and online texts such as exhibition reviews, interviews, brochures, and social media.

This is the second grouping of sources. The concluding chapter of the thesis deals with concepts and theory that are applied to the given case studies in order to decipher commonalities, facilitate understanding, and construct meaning of what has been studied in the preceding sections. That part refers to both thinkers of the past (Otto von Simson, Rudolf Schwarz), and contemporary minds (Gernot Böhme, Charles Taylor, Mike King, Mark Taylor). Their writings make up the last grouping of the thesis bibliography.

In-the-field research is an important component of this project, which is hardly conceivable without direct, on-site investigation. The aspect includes visiting exhibitions, attending openings and other related events, speaking with guests, interviewing priests, curators, artists, and viewers. The value of in-the-field work is twofold: firstly, getting first-hand experience of stepping into a given architectural fabric and looking and/or interacting with a given artwork; secondly, gathering the opinions and impressions of other participants. In-person conversations allow comprehending the perspectives of those involved in an immediate and hence more truthful way; i.e. without an intervening agent of the edited written word. Particularly significant is an opportunity to simply observe and/or speak with the viewer, whose opinion, with rare exceptions, is barely present in newspaper reviews or academic literature. In order to analyze responses from more viewers, this thesis also relies on the guest- and comment-books inserted into the places of exhibitions. Still and all, it is the experience of the spectator that determines the effectiveness of art exhibitions. One of the characteristics of the post-secular age is a growing role of the subjective and the personal in social transformations; hence one of the approaches employed by this thesis is to describe and analyze what happens in the space of encounter between a work of art and a human being.

### 3. Towards the contemporary situation

#### 3.1. Approaching the 1980s

In the history of Christianity, the relationship between the Church and the visual arts can be characterized as programmatic patronage and shifting attitudes. The former refers to the Western pre-Renaissance period, in which the society was dominated by religion; the latter to the diverse theological and artistic perspectives in Europe after the Reformation. From the sixteenth to the middle of the nineteenth century, the production of Christian art, though subsided by the gradual secularization of culture, was unceasing in Catholic and Protestant regions alike. In the age of modernism, however, the break between art and religion appeared to be final and irreversible. The story of the great divorce between Christianity and modern art is well-known and written about in abundance, so that it would be redundant to survey it in full where a couple of the following remarks serve better. A British philosophical theologian George Pattison points out that no matter when “modern art” began—Renaissance, Enlightenment, Romanticism, or post-Romanticism—or who the first “modern artist” was, we can agree that modernism involves breaking away from established norms and authorities.<sup>98</sup> Thus, the foremost pursuit of modern art was the pursuit of artistic autonomy. The striving for the new necessarily left behind any institutional orders of the past, including that of the Christian faith. Consequently, such conclusion was reiterated by art historians and critics throughout the twentieth century, despite the appearance of overtly religious themes in the works by major avant-garde artists and even direct references to Christian God by a number of prominent figures from Vincent van Gogh to

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<sup>98</sup> Pattison, *Art, Modernity, and Faith*, 1–3.

Wassily Kandinsky.<sup>99</sup> Moreover, rare but incisive instances of conjunction between European churches and modern artists occurred in the twentieth century.

Wherever avant-garde artists designed stained glass windows or created two- and three-dimensional works for a church, the initiative for such a project would come from a forward-looking individual or, more precisely, a progressive religious leader. Yet in the 1930s, a French Catholic priest, Pierre-Marie-Alain Couturier, brought together such representatives of the avant-garde stardom as Henri Matisse, Fernand Leger, George Braque, Georges Rouault, Marc Chagall, and Jacque Lipchitz for decorating the Notre-Dame de Toute Grâce at Plateau d'Assy.<sup>100</sup> Five hundred kilometers south of that alpine church, another example of cooperation between a modern artist and Christianity has by now become a pilgrimage destination for art enthusiasts from all over the world. La Chapelle du Rosaire is a Dominican chapel in the town of Vence fully designed and executed by Matisse between 1949 and 1951: every detail from architecture to the priests' vestments.<sup>101</sup> Around the same time in England, a priest John Walter Hussey introduced the works of, among others, Henry Moore, Graham Sutherland, John Piper, and Jacob Epstein to St. Matthew's Church at Northampton and the Chichester Cathedral.<sup>102</sup> All of these pioneers saw the need to enliven the old and ineffectual interiors of their churches through the invigorating power of new art. The modern artist's creative gift was not to be burdened by precise church regulations but, on the contrary, to be allowed a freedom conducive to the production of truly great and spiritually stirring art. To the public of their time the projects were

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<sup>99</sup> Lilia Sokolova, "Sacred Image in a New Form: Eastern Orthodoxy at the Core of Wassily Kandinsky's Art and Theory" (M.A. thesis, SCAD University, 2015).

<sup>100</sup> Dillenberger, *A Theology of Artistic Sensibilities*, 192–9.

<sup>101</sup> Marcel Billot, ed., *Henri Matisse: The Vence Chapel, The Archive of a Creation. Conversations and Correspondence with Marie-Alain Couturier and Louis-Bertrand Rayssiguier* (Milan: Skira, 1999).

<sup>102</sup> Walter Hussey, *Patron of Art: The Revival of a Great Tradition Among Modern Artists* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1985). See also chapter four in Howes, *The Art of the Sacred*, 59–74.

disconcerting and met with criticism and opposition.<sup>103</sup> However, they opened up exciting possibilities for ecclesiastical art of the future and should therefore be acknowledged as the revolutionary points in the history of both the Church and the visual arts.

In Germany, the socio-political circumstances of the twentieth century caused the relationship between Christian institutions and the visual arts to develop in a manner different from that of its neighbours. For a short time, from 1928 to 1932, an institution inspired by Paul Tillich's theology of culture—*Kunstdienst der Evangelischen Kirche*, or KD,—set its agenda to modernize the arts in the German Protestant churches according to the spirit of the time.<sup>104</sup> In 1933, KD was organizationally and politically integrated into the Nazi Regime, which understandably ceased any attempts to promote modern art. After the Second World War, new regional branches of KD were instituted. They became responsible for, first, building of new and re-composition of restored old churches and, second, including discussions and exhibitions of religious art into educational programs of the German Protestant Church.<sup>105</sup> While aspects of the KD activities are discussed below, to delve into its initiatives in detail is to be diverted into the question of specifically Protestant cultural policy and to lose the thread of our path towards the timeframe of the main subject.<sup>106</sup> The more encompassing issue from the postwar period in Germany is the recovery and rebuilding of a devastated country and its annihilated cities. The process was long and arduous.<sup>107</sup> It was delayed in East Germany as the atheist socialist government of the

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<sup>103</sup> Koestlé-Cate and Pattison discuss the reasons and outcomes of public hostility to those projects. See *Fractious Embrace*, 76–9 and *Art, Modernity, and Faith*, 4–5.

<sup>104</sup> Hiddemann, *Site-Specific Art im Kirchenraum*, 70–87.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 88–9.

<sup>106</sup> For the postwar history of Kunstdienst, consult Regine Hess, Martin Papenbrock, and Norbert Schneider, eds., *Kirche und Kunst: Kunstpolitik und Kunstförderung der Kirchen nach 1945* (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2012), and Dorothea Körner, ed., *Zwischen allen Stühlen: zur Geschichte des Kunstdienstes der Evangelischen Kirche in Berlin 1961–1989* (Berlin: Hentrich & Hentrich, 2005).

<sup>107</sup> Jeffrey M. Diefendorf, *In the Wake of War: The Reconstruction of German Cities after World War II* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Jürgen Paul, *Neue Städte aus Ruinen. Deutscher Städtebau der Nachkriegszeit* (Munich: Prestel, 1992); and Iain Wilson, “Church Reconstruction in Germany: 1945–48—some recollections,” in *Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte* 2, no. 1, “Die Kirchen Europas in der Nachkriegszeit” (1989), 53–8. The

German Democratic Republic was not particularly interested in restoring old religious architecture. In the Federal Republic of Germany, in contrast, the rebuilding of churches was prioritized and heavily supported by financial means of both the state and parish collections. Consequently, churches had risen all over West Germany and affirmed their positions in the renewed urban landscapes by the 1980s. The questions followed: what do we do with our churches now? How do we keep them alive, meaningful, and relevant to a contemporary man? At that particular point in history, one of the answers seemed to be suggested by a combination of, on the one hand, the necessary minimum degree of openness to contemporary culture in both Catholic and Protestant circles and, on the other hand, the “spiritual current” in contemporary art exhibitions. The emergence of the latter in the history of twentieth-century art has already been discussed. Now it is time to examine the drift of the spiritual at the German art arena.

## 3.2. The 1980s: thematic exhibitions in Germany

### 3.2.1. *Zeichen des Glaubens*, 1980

The pivotal decade of the 1980s made its entrance to the German art world with a revolutionary exhibition organized by *Epochdiagnostiker* Wieland Schmied (1929–2014).<sup>108</sup> On the occasion of 86th German Catholic Day in the summer of 1980, the Austrian art historian and literary scholar curated an exhibition at the Schloss Charlottenburg in Berlin. Schmied gave it the title *Tokens of Faith–Spirit of The Avant-Garde: Religious Tendencies in the Art of the 20th*

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last is an essay written based on the first-hand experiences of the British official who was involved in the efforts to put German churches back on their feet. For the case of Cologne, see Ulrich Krings, and Otmar Schwab. *Köln: Die Romanischen Kirchen. Zerstörung und Wiederaufbau* (Cologne: J. P. Bachem Verlag, 2007).

<sup>108</sup> I am borrowing the epithet “*Epochdiagnostiker*” from Johannes Rauchenberger’s eulogy, “Zur Spiritualität der Avantgarde. Ein Erinnerungsruf zum Verhältnis von Kunst und Religion nach dem Tod von Wieland Schmied,” in *Kunst und Kirche* 2 (2014): 76–7.



Century.<sup>109</sup> With 225 works by 89 artists, spanning the period from 1890 to 1980, the exhibition did not offer a survey of modern Christian or religious art, and despite the Catholic affiliation of the project, its goal was not to proclaim important works of art as illustrations of religious convictions. Instead the question was raised, “In this secular century, to what extent are the different avant-gardes of modernism still borne out of the spiritual, which is rooted in the religious and the numinous?”<sup>110</sup> The curator sought to understand the motives and impulses behind the creative artistic production. What moved the Expressionist painting? What compelled the birth of abstract art? Setting to answer such questions, Schmied sensed that, in the process, the connections between Christianity and the avant-garde could come to surface. He expected to reveal, at least partially, what united and what differentiated faith and modern art. The word that proved to be most apposite and conducive to a better understanding of the ties between religion and art was *transcendence*. Both realms—Christianity and the avant-garde—are concerned with the act of transcending the material, earthly world and strive, if not to reach then to point to, for what remains invisible to the physical eye. On this common ground, Schmied argued that the religious tendencies in modern art were not expressed through traditional iconography or the use of old Christian symbols but rather through spirituality inherent in the image. Therefore, the exhibition included a great number of purely abstract compositions from works by Wassily Kandinsky and Paul Klee to those by Mark Tobey and Antoni Tàpies. And even though the paintings that depicted Christ, saints, or biblical episodes were hung side by side with secular subjects, they were as far away from the conventional church art as could be deemed possible, e.g. crucifixion scenes by Max Ernst or Francis Bacon. In the 1980s, Schmied was neither the first nor the only

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<sup>109</sup> The exhibition catalog in German, supplied with a large number of essays, appeared under the same title. See Wieland Schmied, *Zeichen des Glaubens—Geist der Avantgarde: Religiöse Tendenzen in der Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: Electa/Klett-Cotta, 1980).

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 7. The original reads, “Wie weit sind die verschiedenen Avantgarden der Moderne in diesem säkularisierten Jahrhundert noch von einer Spiritualität getragen, die im Religiösen, im Numinosen wurzelt?”

person who recognized the spiritual origins of modern art: he pays the foremost tribute to the Austrian Catholic priest and patron of the arts, Otto Mauer (1907–1973), who himself criticized the European churches for failing to engage with profane, autonomous contemporary art and made it his lifetime mission to bring Christianity and art together in his Galerie nächst St. Stephan in Vienna (1954–1973). A part of Mauer’s 1972 lecture, with a famous call for churches to be “a little creative,” was included in Schmied’s catalog.<sup>111</sup> In addition, the aforementioned evangelical theologians Horst Schwebel and Rainer Volp contributed their essays, proposing the possibility of theological reflection of modern art and, through it, of man’s biggest struggles and meaning of human life. Among the total of twenty authors, Paul Tillich and Robert Rosenblum should be noted. The former’s theory of religious style and the latter’s definition of the sublime in modern art suggest that genuine spirituality can be found in both figurative images with non-religious subjects and purely non-objective painting or sculpture. Most significantly, the grand exhibition altered two formerly reigning assumptions. First, it dismissed the misconception that the art of the twentieth century belonged entirely to the secular realm, was thus free of any spiritual meanings and complete in its formalistic self. Second, they erased the idea of art being the modern antidote to the organized religion. In Germany, this was the first clear and loud statement that presented modern and contemporary art as not unrelated to religious faith. The scale of the exhibition and its public exposure disseminated Wieland Schmied’s key argument of the transcendental in art, which was to have a major influence on the newly evolving relationship between Christianity and contemporary art in the country. Indeed, the following decade teemed with exhibitions of twentieth-century art that called forth the notions of the spiritual, the transcendent, and, less readily, the straightforward religious. The most prominent of them are *The Images Are Not Forbidden* (*Bilder sind nicht verboten*, Düsseldorf 1982); *The Last Supper*:

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<sup>111</sup> Otto Mauer, “Christentum muß doch etwas Kreatives sein,” in *ibid.*, 11–3.

*Contemporary Pictures of the Eucharist (Abendmahl: Zeitgenössische Abendmahlsdarstellungen*, Kassel 1982); *Luther and The Consequences for the Art (Luther und die Folgen für die Kunst*, Hamburg 1983); *Imago* (Nurnberg 1983); *Image of Man–Image of Christ (Menschenbild–Christusbild*, Frankfurt 1984); *Space–Time–Silence (Raum–Zeit–Stille*, Cologne 1985); *Ecce Homo: From the Image of Man to the Image of Christ (Ecce Homo: Vom Christusbild zum Menschenbild*, Kassel 1987); *The Human Oppressed (Der geschundene Mensch*, Frankfurt 1989); and another momentous exhibition by Schmied *PresenceEternity (GegenwartEwigkeit*, Berlin 1990). Three of them had particularly far-reaching effects and, thus, demand closer attention.

### **3.2.2. Menschenbild–Christusbild, 1984/85**

With the new definition and characteristics of contemporary art, laid out in Berlin, the range of possibilities for art exhibitions in Germany was broadened. That is not to say that the churches were not skeptical about the content of the Berlin event, particularly about the representations of Christ, or that the general public unanimously embraced Schmied's perspective. Nevertheless, the courageous initial step was taken in the art world towards an open dialogue with the Christian religion. A positively zealous response from the church side soon followed. In 1984 and 1985, then a pastor at Saint Mark Church in Frankfurt, Friedhelm Mennekes coordinated a series of eighteen exhibitions in his own parish church and two other city venues. In cooperation with an art historian and author Franz Joseph van der Grinten, Mennekes gave this project a laconic but precisely articulated name "*Image of Man–Image of Christ*" (*Menschenbild–Christusbild*).

Notwithstanding the latter part of the title, similarly to the case with *Zeichen des Glaubens*, the curators were not interested showing the devotional art necessarily produced by believing or even merely spiritual artists. The outspoken purpose of the exhibition was to encourage a new type of relationship between church and artists, and therefore to break the walls raised and upheld especially by the former during the course of the twentieth century: “to lead men away from the realm of the church to an encounter with contemporary art.”<sup>112</sup> The point of such encounter was the inner being of man; more exactly man’s suffering—fears, estrangement, loneliness, and moral conflict. This complex of existential themes, write the two authors, is in the center of both contemporary art and the Christian religion. The traumatic condition of man in one repeats the contours of Christ’s suffering in another. This convergence is an invitation for the two to join in the dialogue about the human being so that, together, they can help men in their individual struggles, search for truth, and confrontation of doubts. Their ideas are not unlike those uttered by Schmied, who pointed out that the artist was capable of reminding us “of man’s creatureliness, frailty, and suffering.”<sup>113</sup> Thus, one of the themes expressed in art at *Zeichen des Glaubens* took the central stage in Frankfurt. Mennekes and van der Grinten invited sixteen artists to contribute to the series, five of whom had earlier appeared in Schmied’s exhibition in Berlin: Joseph Beuys, Herbert Falken, Gotthard Graubner, Alfred Hrdlicka, and Arnulf Rainer. Importantly, the artists engaged in extensive conversations with the curators in regard to the most current state of relationship between religion and art.<sup>114</sup> Another enhancement to the discourse was a program of round-tables and talks under the title *Menschenbild–Christusbild*, which took

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<sup>112</sup> Friedhelm Mennekes, and Franz Joseph van der Grinten, *Menschenbild–Christusbild: Auseinandersetzung mit einem Thema der Gegenwartskunst* (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1984), 14. The original reads, “Menschen aus dem Bereich der Kirche und dem von ihr geprägten Umfeld an eine Begegnung mit Werken der zeitgenössischen Kunst heranzuführen, ist das Ziel einer Reihe von Ausstellungen, die während des Winterhalbjahres 1984/85 im Frankfurter Raum zu sehen sind.”

<sup>113</sup> Schmied, *Zeichen des Glaubens*, 9. The original reads, “Bacon und Rainer erinnern uns—wie vor ihnen Corinthus oder Beckmann—an die Kreatürlichkeit des Menschen, seine Hinfälligkeit, seine Leidenserfahrung.”

<sup>114</sup> Reproduced in the catalog *Menschenbild–Christusbild*.

place at several academic institutions in Frankfurt during the winter semester 1984/85. There theologians, artists, and cultural scholars received a chance to share their opinions and ultimately came to reach certain agreements on the common goals of Christian churches and the arts.<sup>115</sup> The principal moment of consensus concerned the transformation in the meaning of Jesus Christ for the contemporary society. Namely, in the secular public mind the figure of Christ no longer stood for either preaching of salvation or concrete biblical parables. Rather, by the end of the twentieth century Christ had transformed into the epitome of existential matters pertinent to entire humankind. Therefore when portrayed by contemporary artists, Christ did not unalterably represent one institutionalized religion but could instead personify the essence of human existence.<sup>116</sup> Importantly it was the voice coming from the church, that of Mennekes, who emphasized the non-dogmatic character of the Christian Savior: “I think that the issue of Christ is so large that it simply cannot be contained by theology or within a single church; but rather it is an issue that belongs to the whole of humanity and the whole of human culture.”<sup>117</sup> What those conclusions represented was an acceptance from the church side of independence and autonomous power of non-sacramental contemporary art, even when the latter engaged with the subjects that concerned the very core of Christian faith.

In accordance with the exhibitions’ collective title, a number of artworks directly comprised the theme of Christ. That is the case with, for example, cross-shaped objects in varied mediums by Beuys, “overpaintings” on icons and devotional pictures by Rainer, or crucified nudes in the drawings by Hrdlicka. One can hardly say that the curators were playing it safe: many attributes of these artworks, such as explicit physicality in Hrdlicka’s images, could and were deemed

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<sup>115</sup> Friedhelm Mennekes, *Zwischen Kunst und Kirche: Beiträge zum Thema Das Christusbild im Menschenbild* (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1985).

<sup>116</sup> See Gitta Marnach, “Menschenbild–Christusbild: Ein neues Verhältnis von Kunst und Kirche,” in *ibid.*, 180.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 188. The original reads, “Aber ich denke, das Thema Christus ist so groß, das kann gar kein theologisches oder allein innerkirchliches Thema sein, sondern es ist ein Thema, das gehört der ganzen Menschheit und der ganzen Kultur.”

blasphemous by some believers. However, the disruptive nature of art and its stirring potential was important to Mennekes.<sup>118</sup> The shocking act of art can result in a striking and meaningful experience for the viewer, who is first caught off guard by an image and then prompted to grapple with it. Another means with which the art in the Frankfurt exhibitions could stir the viewers and lead them to the state of nonplus is its initial incomprehensibility; e.g. color clouds by Gotthard Graubner, or smears of coal by Werner Knaupp. In the abstract paper cuttings by René Acht, for example, van der Grinten found “all the riches in the curtailment.”<sup>119</sup> Frequent examples of minimalistic abstract art were to produce concentrated experience of looking, in the value of which the curators strongly believed. Undoubtedly, “experience” (*Erfahrung*) was one of the keywords that defined *Menschenbild–Christusbild*: the curators not only promoted the experiential value of autonomous art but also argued that the new relationship between church and art was to be based on the potential of an art object as a source of profound individual experiences. Overall this discloses the primary message of the exhibition series put together by van der Grinten and Mennekes: contemporary art is a powerful agent of existential questions and, as such, most relevant to the life of every church that cares for the well-being of human souls.

Even though regional branches of KD organized church exhibitions of contemporary art with religious themes prior to *Menschenbild–Christusbild*, this was an early case when the images and objects were not subjected to religious interpretation, arguably escaping it altogether and instead allowed full autonomy in a sacred space. In other words, they did not mean to illustrate or comply with an aspect of Christian faith or dogma, but were introduced into a church in order to

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<sup>118</sup> Mennekes, and van der Grinten, *Menschenbild–Christusbild*, 287. For further discussion of Mennekes’ theory of art, see section 4.1.3.4. in chapter four of this thesis.

<sup>119</sup> Franz Joseph van der Grinten, “Abstrakt und konkret: Die Scherenschnitte von René Acht,” in Mennekes, *Zwischen Kunst und Kirche*, 169. The original reads, “aller Reichtum liegt in der Beschränkung.”

disrupt the established tradition and provoke a new perception of the possibilities of art.<sup>120</sup> What makes the exhibition series more prominent is the discussion that was held at the opening of Joseph Beuys' show at Saint Mark's. This was an in-depth two-hour conversation between the curators and the artist, with Beuys openly speaking about spiritual, religious, and Christian aspects of his work.<sup>121</sup> In particular, the artist elaborated on the Christian roots of his early works: he started with certain traditional subjects, such as the figure of Christ, but soon came to realize that those symbols had already exhausted themselves and in order to express the Christian interests that strongly occupied him he had to search for new compelling forms.<sup>122</sup> In pursuing the modern notion of what was truly Christian, the artist moved away from traditional themes of the religion and discovered that the Christian element in his art was "connected with the powers of nature."<sup>123</sup> Moreover, Beuys gradually grew convinced in the idea that Jesus Christ was not a historical event but rather a real ever-present energy which was relevant to every contemporary man. According to the artist, Christ as presence could not be seen with the physical eye: in the troubled materialist world of the twentieth century only the inner eye could connect one with this energy and, through it, with one's spiritual self. In Beuys' extended concept of art, it is conducive to the movement towards the spiritual and serves "to transform the old structure, which dies or stagnates [here traditional Christian subjects], into a vital, vibrant, life-enhancing,

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<sup>120</sup> An example of the opposite would be a KD exhibition of works by contemporary artists, mostly believers, shown at Saint Elisabeth Church in Marburg in 1983. The artworks were selected by a jury committee via a competition, in which the participants were to submit their representations of Saint Elisabeth. Although some of the submissions showed originality of form, the artists' creative process was nonetheless limited to a certain task—not unlike the procedure in, for example, Italian churches before the Renaissance. See Uwe Bredehorn, ed., *St. Elisabeth—Kult, Kirche, Konfessionen* (Marburg: Elwert, 1983). For another example, exhibition *Abendmahl*, see pages 58–60 below.

<sup>121</sup> The text of the discussion, with minor stylistic changes made by the artist, was published by Mennekes after Beuys' death. See Friedhelm Mennekes, *Beuys zu Christus: Eine Position im Gespräch* (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1989). The following quotations from this book are translated into English by Lesa Mason and Jon Boles.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 13–4.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 17.

and soul- and spirit-promoting form.”<sup>124</sup> The latter implies the potential of the contemporary artist and contemporary art to help people form and develop their individual relationship with the spiritual energy. And even though Beuys positioned himself as an opponent to, and even a censurer of, the official institution of the church, he nonetheless called for a closer collaboration between church and art in the “business of humanity”; that is, the question of the human condition.<sup>125</sup>

The crucial outcomes to draw from the conversation and the exhibition are the statements that placed Christianity and contemporary art on the same side of one’s personal life—opposed to the material shallowness of the contemporary society. Without being united, both collaborated on the spiritual development of individual human souls. The role of *Menschenbild–Christusbild* in the subsequent relationship between churches and artists in Germany is of great significance because the raised statements clearly echoed on both sides: through Mennekes among Christian churches and through Beuys in the contemporary art world.

### **3.2.3. *Ecce Homo: Vom Christusbild zum Menschenbild, 1987***

The project in Frankfurt was soon to reverberate in the Old Church of the Brethren (*Alte Brüderkirche*) in Kassel. Yet in 1982 the Institute for Contemporary Church Building and Art, part of the Department of Evangelical Theology at Philipps University in Marburg, had already employed a former church for the exhibition *The Last Supper: Contemporary Interpretations of the Eucharist* (*Abendmahl: Zeitgenössische Abendmahlsdarstellungen*), which accompanied the

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 114. The question of human condition became the central theme of another exhibition in Frankfurt, *The Human Oppressed* (1989). See the catalog Sabine Bier, ed., *Der geschundene Mensch* (Darmstadt: Verlag Das Beispiel, 1989).



world-renowned art exhibition *documenta* in its seventh edition.<sup>126</sup> Without either cooperation or correspondence with the *documenta* executives, the Marburg curators—Horst Schwebel and Heinz-Ulrich Schmidt—conceived the 1982 show relying on the iconographical principle of the Last Supper. They raised a question whether the topic of the Eucharist was to any degree relevant in the contemporary art scene and, as a response, included in the exhibition such famous paintings on the subject by Harald Duwe and Ben Willikens.<sup>127</sup> In 1987, once again running their project alongside *documenta*, Schwebel and Schmidt put together another exhibition at the former Old Church of the Brethren: *Ecce Homo: From the Image of Man to the Image of Christ*. Works by thirty contemporary artists were shown, including those by Herbert Falken, Alfred Hrdlicka, Arnulf Rainer, and Günther Uecker—artists appearing in Schmied’s *Zeichen des Glaubens* and, aside from Uecker, in Mennekes and van der Grinten’s exhibition series. Sculptures by Jürgen Brodwolf and Werner Knaupp—names featured in *Menschenbild—Christusbild*—further linked the Kassel event to that organized in Frankfurt three years earlier. The subtitle *Vom Menschenbild zum Christusbild* reinforces the connection and, in addition to that, underlines the common issues lying at the core of both exhibition projects. The suffering of a contemporary man, grasped by the sensitivity of the artist and expressed through the contemporary visual signs, was once more the central concern of the curatorial team. Likewise human existential struggles were compared to the suffering of Christ, while a number of the exhibited artworks suggested not only parallels but also possibilities of identifying human pain with that of Jesus. For example, in the notes on Knaupp’s *Crucifixion 11.3.1978*, Schwebel discussed how the artist’s nursing experience at the mental hospital in a Bavarian town Bayreuth

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<sup>126</sup> See the catalog Horst Schwebel, and Heinz-Ulrich Schmidt, eds., *Abendmahl: Zeitgenössische Abendmahlsdarstellungen* (Marburg: Institut für Kirchenbau und Kirchliche Kunst der Gegenwart, 1982).

<sup>127</sup> Harald Duwe, *Abendmahl*, oil on canvas, 160 x 200 cm (1978); Ben Willikens, *Last Supper*, acrylic on canvas, 300 x 200 cm (1976–1979).

had compelled him to draw a black figure that, after some reworking touches but without Knaupp's intention, transformed into a crucifixion shape.<sup>128</sup> Schwebel ruminated on the emergence of the image and in conclusion saw it as a result of the artist's subjective, deeply personal experiences in the hospital. The theologian-curator suggested that the story of Knaupp's painting revealed the formative processes in the contemporary perception of Christ. For Schwebel, it also pointed out the theological value of autonomous art, or one of the key premises of the two Kassel exhibitions.

The purpose of both *Abendmahl* and *Ecce Homo* was to reduce the deplorable distance between the institutionalized Christianity and autonomous art.<sup>129</sup> While the first attempt to decrease the gap in 1982 sprang from an evidently parochial approach and ultimately failed to produce a desired effect, the later exhibition stepped away from necessarily figurative content and showed strong examples of the current tendencies in the contemporary art world. Among such examples was an immense, 4,6 by 3,8-meter, painting on cloth by a German action artist, sculptor, and painter, Peter Gilles: *Circle (Kreis)*, 1986), created with the artist's own blood, coal, and graphite. Gilles, following the tradition of, on the one hand, Yves Klein and, on the other, Viennese Actionism, used his own blood and body to leave imprints on large-scale canvases. The presence of his work within the 1987 exhibition is undoubtedly a courageous step from the subject-bound paintings in the conventional medium of oil paint that comprised *Abendmahl* in 1982. The preceding *Menschenbild–Christusbild*, with its fair portion of cutting edge art, arguably provided an impulse for more audacious curatorial decisions. At the same time, the neighbourhood to *documenta 8* was a meaningful factor: the parallel running of the exhibition with an internationally acclaimed status posed a challenge to which Schwebel and Schmidt bravely

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<sup>128</sup> Horst Schwebel, "Vom Menschenbild zum Christusbild: Zu Werner Knaupps 'Kreuzigung 11.3.1978,'" in Schwebel, ed., *Ecce Homo: Vom Christusbild zum Menschenbild* (Menden: Trapez-Verlag, 1987), 32.

<sup>129</sup> Schwebel, *Ecce Homo*, 4.

responded, albeit to a distress and indignation of the local Christian community.<sup>130</sup> What's more, the *documenta* executives saw *Ecce Homo* as an opposition to their own work and protested against the opening of the exhibition in brief correspondence with the Marburg Institute. They could have perceived, as one fairly might in retrospective, the curators' choice of time and place as an opportunistic pursuit of increased attendance and considerable publicity, made possible due to *documenta*-related reviews and discussions.<sup>131</sup> Notwithstanding the motives behind the project, it promoted the art of the time as a source of spiritual knowledge and confrontation with the humanity's existential concerns. Similarly to Schmied and Mennekes before them, the curators pled with the churches for engagement with contemporary artists who produced non-Christian art.

Before discontinuing the project series, The Institute for Contemporary Church Building and Art ran another art exhibition at the Old Church of the Brethren one last time in 1992.<sup>132</sup> To assign a specific theme to participating artists was a rather retrogressive choice, which resulted in a conflict with the two of them whose works "could not be integrated" under the title *Liebe und Eros: Metamorphosen biblischer Tradition*.<sup>133</sup> Out of the three exhibitions organized by Schwebel and Schmidt, the 1987 project proved to have the most ramifications in both theory and practice.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Andreas Mertin, "Zwischen Ikonographie und Autonomie: Die Evangelischen Begleitausstellungen zur *documenta* 7–12 (1982–2007)," in Josef Meyer zu Schlochtern, ed., *Kunst, Kirche, Kontroversen: Der Streit um die Kirchlichen Begleitausstellungen zur documenta* (Paderborn and Munich: Schöningh, 2014), 51.

<sup>131</sup> *Abendmahl* welcomed around 11,000 guests, *Ecce Homo*—circa 12,500. See *ibid.*, 50–1.

<sup>132</sup> During the following four editions of *documenta*, Andreas Mertin was responsible for introducing art shows in active churches in Kassel. The novelty of his approach relied on site-specific installations and integration of art with the life of active communities of believers.

<sup>133</sup> Horst Schwebel quoted in Meyer zu Schlochtern, *Kunst, Kirche, Kontroversen*, 53. The original reads, "Als der Veranstalter einem Künstler und einer Künstlerin mitteilte, ihre Werke seien bei einer Ausstellung unter dem Thema ... nicht zu integrieren, kam es zum Konflikt, der dazu führte, dass die Vorschläge der beiden Personen letztlich nicht realisiert werden konnten."

<sup>134</sup> See chapter five in this thesis.

### 3.2.4. *GegenwartEwigkeit*, 1990

Ten years after *Zeichen des Glaubens*, the celebration of the German Catholic Day returned to Berlin. Once again an art exhibition was to accompany the occasion and, once again, it was sponsored by the Romano Guardini Foundation and executed by Wieland Schmied, now cooperating with a German art historian Jürgen Schilling. Instead of Schloss Charlottenburg, the more modern and more central Martin-Gropius-Bau was selected as the new exhibition venue. Reflecting on the decade-long ramifications of *Zeichen des Glaubens*, the chief curator acknowledged that the definition of “religious art” had been broadened beyond the accustomed devotional or church art.<sup>135</sup> To support the statement, he mentioned the ensuing thematic exhibitions in Germany, Joseph Beuys’ engagement in the dialogue between churches and autonomous profane art, initiatives by Friedhelm Mennekes and a number of evangelical church leaders, and the ongoing publication of the journal *Kunst und Kirche*. However, Schmied argued that the overall attitude of the two fields towards each other remained largely antagonistic.<sup>136</sup> This time the curators chose to concentrate their attention on the most current and up-to-date language of contemporary art and, hence, selected the artworks spanning the narrow time period from 1945 to 1990. The foremost question shifted from the relationship between contemporary art and faith to the relationship between contemporary art and spirituality.<sup>137</sup> The keyword “transcendence” was reemphasized and even latently contained in the title: the visual signals of the present (*Gegenwart*) as tokens of the eternity (*Ewigkeit*). Importantly, the multitude of signals was widened beyond the content or contextual references of either figurative or abstract

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<sup>135</sup> Wieland Schmied, “GegenwartEwigkeit. Gedanken zu Konzept, Sinn und Problematik dieser Ausstellung,” in Wieland Schmied, and Jürgen Schilling, eds., *GegenwartEwigkeit: Spuren des Transzendenten in der Kunst Unserer Zeit*, exh. cat. (Stuttgart: Edition Cantz, 1990), 11–26.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 7.

works of art. Schmied expressed his belief that contemporary visual language could lead a contemporary man to “the experience of glimpsing into the eternity,” but also admitted that the causes of such experience were inevitably elusive and therefore impossible to pin down.<sup>138</sup> In other words, the viewer at the exhibition was offered a chance to experience the absolute but without any guidelines—each person as a free individual sailor.

The ensemble of the artists in *GegenwartEwigkeit* resembled the thematic exhibitions mentioned and discussed above. Joseph Beuys, who passed away in 1986, was represented by forty-five works, more than any other participating artist. The name of Beuys appeared in almost every discussion on the topic of the church/art relationship since 1980 and, indeed, he was among the few individuals who persistently drove the development of this relationship forward. In the catalog accompanying *GegenwartEwigkeit*, an excerpt from the 1984 conversation between Mennekes and Beuys was included; namely, the part in which the artist identified the extended concept of art as his most important contribution to the contemporary image of Christ.<sup>139</sup> Mennekes, by now one of the principal voices in the discourse, contributed with the essay “The Doubt in the Image: On a New Togetherness between Religion and Art,” in which he expanded on doubt and existential search as moving forces in the art of Francis Bacon and Arnulf Rainer.<sup>140</sup> The former’s monumental triptych *Crucifixion* (1965) was shown at the Martin-Gropius-Bau, while the latter was represented by nine works in different mediums. Other artists who had been previously included in the thematic exhibitions were Francis Bacon, Georg Baselitz, Jürgen Brodwolf, Salvador Dalí, Walter De Maria, Herbert Falken, Alberto Giacometti, Gotthard Graubner, Markus Lüpertz, Josef Mikl, Nam June Paik, Arnulf Rainer, Emil Schumacher, Graham Sutherland, Antoni Tàpies, Mark Tobey, Wolf Vostell, and Ben Willikens.

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 16–7. The German original on page 16 reads, “Erfahrung des Augenblicks Ewigkeit.”

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>140</sup> Friedhelm Mennekes, “Der Zweifel im Bild: Über ein neues Zueinander von Religion und Kunst,” in *ibid.*, 41–6.

Many of these names came to form a quasi-canonical list of artists who were repeatedly exhibited in German churches during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.<sup>141</sup> Among the newly invited artists, the American James Lee Byars and the Austrian Hermann Nitsch introduced installations that equally reflected the growing interest in myth and ritual at the international art scene. The French sculptor, photographer, and filmmaker, Christian Boltanski and the American artist Joseph Kosuth spoke for the currents in the conceptual art of the time. One of the founders of video art, a Korean-American artist Nam June Paik showed *My Faust-Channel 2* (1989), a Gothic wooden altar frame that enclosed a television screen with images hovering between a human face and an obstructing blue surface. Exemplifying the trend in new media art, Paik made a statement on the transformative power of technology and the role of media in both mundane and spiritual aspects of human life. The idea of art as a source of the sublime, an attribute of several thematic exhibitions of the 1980s, was reiterated through color-fields by Raimund Girke, Gotthard Graubner, and three abstract oil paintings by Gerhard Richter. In summary, the visual heterogeneity of *GegenwartEwigkeit* distinctly corresponded to the latest tendencies of not only German but also international art world, while Schmied's proposition of experiencing the absolute through the language of contemporary art served as justification for such striking disparity.

Viewed in tandem *Zeichen des Glaubens*, *Menschenbild–Christusbild*, *Ecce Homo: Vom Christusbild zum Menschenbild*, and *GegenwartEwigkeit* are landmark exhibitions that altogether built the conceptual foundation on which the earliest exhibitions in old active German churches—particularly Catholic after Frankfurt and Protestant after Kassel—were to take their beginnings. At the core of this foundation stand the issues of human condition and art's capability of

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<sup>141</sup> For examples thereof, see chapters four and five in this thesis.

communicating the existential questions raised by contemporary human being. These projects demonstrated that autonomous non-devotional art could be the source of both genuine spiritual experience and profound spiritual knowledge and, therefore, ought to be relevant to the concerns of Christian institutions. In the course of the 1980s these and smaller thematic exhibitions managed to reinvigorate the dialogue between churches and contemporary art: the relationship between the two was effectively changed, offering new possibilities and promising further progress.

### **3.3. The 1980s: Krefeld and Lübeck**

In addition to a row of exhibitions that brought together Christianity and art, the decade generated several art centers within active churches in various parts of the country. Two of them—Saint Peter in Cologne and Hospital Church in Stuttgart—the foci of this thesis—are discussed in depth in chapter four. Here, two other cases from the 1980s are presented: they exemplify the early church commitments to contemporary art with either permanent or temporary types of exhibitions.

Since 1981 permanent installations of art have entered the church of a local Catholic community Pax Christi. Located in a suburban district of Krefeld, this worship center was consecrated in 1979, newly constructed by architect Heinz Döhmen. The complex of the church space, a chapel, foyer, and church offices are housed in a low red brick building with an asymmetrical roof and an irregular floor plan. This modern architectural structure falls out of line with the subject of old sacred spaces treated by the thesis. Nevertheless, the approach and, accordingly, the art objects that found their permanent home in Krefeld are connected to, on the one hand, the exhibitions

outlined above and, on the other hand, the course of the relationship between Christianity and art in Germany in the late twentieth century. Similarly to other church art centers, the story of contemporary art in Pax Christi is connected to a progressive thinker who was at once a pastor and an art aficionado. Karl Josef Massen (1932–2017) helped found the local Catholic community “Peace of Christ” in 1972 and remained its priest until 2007. Prior to his arrival in Krefeld, Massen had already experienced an encounter that would kindle his lifelong admiration for contemporary art. As a military Düsseldorf chaplain Massen visited the 1969 Cologne Art Fair, where he was puzzled and intrigued by Joseph Beuys’ installation *The Pack (Das Rudel)*, (1969). Massen observed the old Volkswagen bus hauling a chain of sleighs, each equipped with felt blankets, fat, belts, and torchlights, and thought, “this [includes] the most important human needs. Now 32 quite unassuming objects wend their way forward, with all the necessities on board: fat as nourishment; felt as something that provides safety and warmth; light for one to see at least the nearest few meters. Who knows how many get lost on the road, how many reach their destination.” He commented on the experience, “This is how I saw then, among other things, the situation of the church.”<sup>142</sup> The episode reveals not simply an instance of Beuys’ as a point of interaction between a church and autonomous non-devotional art, but also the beginning of commitment to this interaction by an individual Christian leader. It was solely the enthused efforts of Massen that gradually grew into an impressive permanent collection at his parish church. First, a bronze cross by Ewald Mataré and a crude stone altar table by Ulrich Rückriem defined the pointed apse of the inner space. In comparison, most of the artworks that subsequently filled the church interior and exterior had no liturgical purpose. Following a visit to

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<sup>142</sup> *Im Dialog: Zeitgenössische Kunst in Pax Christi Krefeld* (Krefeld: Pax-Christi-Gemeinde Krefeld, 2004), 63. The original reads, “Ich dachte: das ist so das Wichtigste, was man braucht. Jetzt begeben sich da ganz bescheiden 32 Einheiten auf den Weg, und sie haben das Notwendigste bei sich: Fett als Nahrung; Filz, als etwas, was Geborgenheit, Wärme gibt; Licht, um wenigstens die ersten, nächsten Meter zu sehen. Wer weiß, wie viele unterwegs verlorengelassen, irgendwelche kommen an. So sah ich damals unter anderem die Situation der Kirche.”



*Zeichen des Glaubens*, Massen acquired Günther Uecker's sculptural installation *Chichicastenango* as a permanent loan from the artist.<sup>143</sup> After the Kassel exhibition *Abendmahl*, the collection of Pax Christi was enriched by Klaus Staeck's assemblage *Last Supper* (1982).<sup>144</sup> Without inviting artists to create specifically for the church, Massen continuously explored contemporary art museums, galleries, and fairs, and in the following years brought to the church artworks by Joseph Beuys, Niels Dietrich, Felix Droese, Marlene Dumas, Magdalena Jetelová, Klaus Rinke, Dorothee von Windheim, and a dozen more artists.

The tenet on which Massen relied for introducing extraneous art into the life of the parish is that works of art “open up the existential concerns of human life.”<sup>145</sup> Thus, similarly to the Schmied, Mennekes, and Schwebel, he positions the man in the center of the dialogue between art and Christianity. The dialogue itself, Massen argued, did not need to be dolorous and the chasm between the two realms could and had to be bridged. The priest believed that, instead of framing the opposition between religion and art, the discussion should revolve around two other confrontations: art and reality; religion and reality.<sup>146</sup> Pax Christi and other churches could benefit from engaging with contemporary secular art because the latter was capable of saying those things about the reality of the time that could not be communicated in any other way. Moreover, art could express in its own unique way the spirit of the time—*Zeitgeist*—and hence help the viewers to understand their own day and age. A contradiction between such approach and a decision to permanently install works of art in a church can be noted: *Zeitgeist* is not rigid but a fluctuating notion.<sup>147</sup> Viewed from a different perspective, the thirty-year period of

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>145</sup> Tilman Urbach, “Vorhalle,” in *ibid.*, 12. The original reads, “Alle Werke in Pax Christi öffnen die existentielle Tragweite des menschlichen Daseins.”

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>147</sup> Since Massen's retirement in 2007, the community leaders have been cooperating with local and regional museums and artists in organizing temporary art shows in Pax Christi.

contemporary art in Pax Christi is but an iota on the grand historical scale. In either case, the artworks assimilated into Pax Christi are strong representatives of the art world of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. In particular, the depiction of human figure, central in *Menschenbild–Christusbild*, *Ecce Homo* and other exhibitions of the 1980s, is prominent in Krefeld. It features in Enrique Asensi's outdoor stone and steel sculpture, Droese's three-meter cloth painting *Mutter/Hungertuch* in the church atrium, and von Windheim's work *Salve Sancta Facies* in the immediate proximity of the altar. A number of non-figurative objects and gestural abstract paintings remind one of the affective power of abstraction, proclaimed by Schmied in *Zeichen des Glaubens*: Klaus Rinke's *Tor zur Ewigkeit* to the right of Mataré's crucifix and Rückriem's altar table, two groups of Klaus Simon's sculptures in the churchyard, Jürgen Paatz's *Rundes Tuch* in the baptistery, and paintings by Barbara Heinisch and Helmut Schober that are displayed during Easter and Pentecost respectively. Apart from a few artworks that are hung in Pax Christi specifically on feast days, the permanent character of the church visual composition, comprised of outstanding examples of contemporary art, is an early testimony to the openness of the Christian religion to autonomous secular art of from its own epoch.

Today when the visitors walk through the narthex of Pax Christi, they can find a lectern with a curious edition of the Bible. Called *The Great Bible of Modernity* (*Die Große Bibel der Moderne*), it is the German ecumenical translation in a volume lavishly illustrated by almost two hundred works of art by eighty-two modern and contemporary artists, which altogether span the time period between 1888 and 1990.<sup>148</sup> While the inclusion of Christian, religious, and spiritual subjects by such modernists as Marc Chagall, Emil Nolde, Georges Rouault, Alexei Jawlensky, Franz Marc, Wassily Kandinsky, or Paul Klee might not be surprising, images by Egon Schiele

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<sup>148</sup> Christoph Wetzel, ed., *Die Große Bibel der Moderne: Einheitsübersetzung der Heiligen Schrift* (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1999).

and René Magritte are less expectable. However, what can perplex an unaware reader even more is the presence of artworks by Francis Bacon, Georg Baselitz, Joseph Beuys, Herbert Falken, Alfred Hrdlicka, Horst Egon Kalinowski, Roland Peter Litzenburger, Markus Lüpertz, McDermott & McGough, Antoni Tàpies, or Ben Willikens. This discloses one of the long-term consequences of the initiatives undertaken by the priest Karl Josef Massen in the early 1980s: an acceptance of foreign—previously regarded inimical—contemporary art into a sacred—previously restricted—space of an active church.

In contrast to a small community church in Krefeld, Sankt Petri in Lübeck has no parish of its own and positions itself as a church belonging to the entire city.<sup>149</sup> The first mentioning of Sankt Petri goes back to the twelfth century. Initially a late Romanesque building, the church was expanded in several stages before its structure—a five-aisled late Gothic church—took its final shape in the fifteenth century. After the demolition in the Second World War, Sankt Petri was slowly reconstructed between 1982 and 1987.<sup>150</sup> The composition of the new interior emerged remarkably empty and gave “the impression of an endless expanse”: whitewashed walls, clear glass of high windows, absent altar.<sup>151</sup> Following the re-consecration in 1987, the church did not return to regular liturgical services but incorporated a new program of cultural and religious events. While worship and celebration meetings took place in Sankt Petri on irregular basis, the church profile was vividly characterized by continual programs of concerts, literary evenings, political discussions, and art exhibitions. The last were directed by Roswitha Siewert, who between 1987 and 1992 organized twenty exhibitions by young and established contemporary artists under the series title *Kunst pro St. Petri*. The first of these, dedicated to the reopening of

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<sup>149</sup> Petra Bahr, Klaus-Martin Bresgott, and Hannes Langbein, *Kulturkirchen: Eine Reise durch Deutschland* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2011), 174.

<sup>150</sup> Roswitha Siewert, *Raumdialoge: Gegenwartskunst und Kirchenarchitektur: Kunst pro St. Petri* (Lübeck: Weiland, 1993), 11.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 128. The original reads, “den Eindruck eines unendlichen Raumes.”

the church, was a group of Arnulf Rainer's images of Christ (*Christusbilder*).<sup>152</sup> In the words of Rudi Fuchs, then the director of Gemeentemuseum Den Haag, Rainer's art "release[d] the old [church] building from its historical isolation and pull[ed] it after itself into the present age."<sup>153</sup> Thus the first exhibition claimed an agenda for the "city church" Sankt Petri; viz. to stride along with contemporary culture. As an art historian and curator, Siewert must have been familiar with recent inclusion of Rainer's works in thematic exhibitions discussed above. Likely for the same reason, Günther Uecker was invited to create a site-specific work for Sankt Petri in 1990. Upon his visit to Lübeck, the artist described the empty sacred space as spiritually agitating, and possessing a very strong effect.<sup>154</sup> For an introduction to the exhibition opening Siewert gave the floor to Friedhelm Mennekes, who at the time was curating the exhibitions of triptych series in Saint Peter.<sup>155</sup> The Jesuit priest's undertakings in Cologne echoed Siewert's projects in Lübeck, most notably in the triptych format employed in the church apse. She also heeded Wieland Schmied's 1990 exhibition in Martin-Gropius-Bau. Immediately after the Berlin show, two artists from *GegenwartEwigkeit* were invited to Sankt Petri: the Hungarian painter Ákos Birkás and the aforementioned Hermann Nitsch. However, it is noteworthy that compared with museum shows and art projects in other churches of the same time period Siewert's exhibitions featured a higher percentage of female artists. Among those who brought their work to the Lübeck church were Elsbeth Arlt, Lili Fischer, Hanna Jäger, Rune Mields, Helga Moehrke, Edith Schaar, Ingrid M. Schmeck, and Sigrid Sigurdsson. Moreover, Siewert arranged shows by local artists (Jan-Peter Sonntag, Uwe Rieckhoff) and the younger generation of international artists (Manuel Ludeña, Santiago Sierra). Her background in art history set her apart from pastors-curators such

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<sup>152</sup> See "Arnulf Rainer: Christusbilder 18.9–9.10.1987. Ausstellung zur Wiedereröffnung," in *ibid.*, 55–63.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 60. The original reads, "Sie [Kunst] entläßt das alte Bauwerk aus seiner geschichtlichen Isolation und zieht es mit sich in die heutige Zeit."

<sup>154</sup> Interview with Günther Uecker, 21.7.1990, in *ibid.*, 242.

<sup>155</sup> Friedhelm Mennekes, introduction to the exhibition by Günther Uecker, in *ibid.*, 248–52.

as Mennekes and Müller, and resulted in a more varied approach to church exhibitions; namely with site-specific art installations produced for Sankt Petri. On the other hand, such separation from clerical responsibilities could have been among the factors that brought *Kunst pro St. Petri* to its end in 1992. In the curator's own explanation, "The closure [...] was a necessary progression. The targeted concept could not persist in its puristic statement amidst the mixture of diverse activities. [...] The priority has been given to the multifunctionality. The Art-Church withdraws itself, the City-Church remains."<sup>156</sup> Even though the exhibition series at Sankt Petri was short-run, it counts among the earliest art centers that emerged within active churches in the country.<sup>157</sup> Furthermore, the purpose of engaging with contemporary culture in its various manifestations had a potent influence on German churches in the decades to follow, especially in the Protestant circle. The ongoing activities at Sankt Petri—presentations, performances, lectures, discussions—and a creative approach to Christian services, e.g. night worship, have spread to contribute to a new profile of churches throughout the country. In 2008 the Sankt Petri team incorporated art exhibitions into the range of cultural events known as *PetriVisionen*. The current mission statement of the Lübeck church resounds that of *Kunst pro St. Petri*: "We know our traditions. But we also know how faith has changed. How its contents have been and continue to be criticized and transformed by society and culture. How the influence and relevance of churches is waning. And we are in the thick of it. Therefore, in Sankt Petri we always approach out work as if we ponder life and its meaning for the very first time."<sup>158</sup> As discussed later in

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<sup>156</sup> Siewert, *Raumdialoge*, 43. The original reads, "Der Abbruch und damit das Ende der Ausstellungsreihe 'Kunst pro St. Petri' war notwendige Entwicklung. Das anvisierte Konzept konnte in der puristischen Aussage nicht mit dem Gemisch aus unterschiedlichen Aktivitäten bestehen. Die hochversicherten Ausstellungsstücke waren nicht mehr sicher. Die Priorität wurde zugunsten des multifunktionalen gelegt. Die Kunst-Kirche zog sich zurück, die City-Kirche blieb erhalten."

<sup>157</sup> Despite the absence of its defined community, Christian worship services have been conducted at Sankt Petri since 1987, and therefore the church is regarded here as an active religious space.

<sup>158</sup> Pastor Dr. Bernd Schwarze, "Konzept: St. Petri zu Lübeck ist die Kirche am Nullpunkt der Religion," St. Petri zu Lübeck, <http://www.st-petri-luebeck.de/index.php/home/konzept> (accessed April 28, 2017). The original reads, "Wir

chapter five, similar attitudes underlie the relationship between churches and contemporary art in the twenty-first century.

The two examples—one Catholic parish church in Krefeld and one, earlier non-denominational and now Protestant, city church in Lübeck—are important starting points as they help to understand the early cases of committed interaction between Christianity and autonomous secular art in Germany.

### **3.4. The 1980s: art's arrival into public space**

While the preceding pages illuminate the reasons why church officials took a step towards the contemporary visual arts, it is necessary to analyze the cause of interest from the side of the artist who decided to create a work for a religious institution. It is true that in many cases artists did not know that those works would make their way into Christian sacred spaces. However let us give our attention to the opposite and not infrequent situation in which an artist either produced an art object specifically for a church or gave an already existing artwork for a temporary or permanent display in a church. To this end, the following two sources are consulted. First, Brian O'Doherty's celebrated *Inside the White Cube. The Ideology of the Gallery Space* helps to understand the context of museum and gallery spaces that dominated presentation of art throughout the twentieth century. The second volume that throws light on the problem of the "white cube" specifically in Germany is a collection of essays edited by Volker Plagemann,

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kennen unsere Tradition. Aber wir wissen auch, wie sich der Glaube verändert hat. Wie seine Inhalte kritisiert und transformiert wurden und werden in Gesellschaft und Kultur. Wie der Einfluss und die Bedeutung der Kirchen schwinden. Und wir sind mittendrin. Darum beginnen wir in St. Petri unsere Arbeit stets so, als würden wir zum ersten Mal über das Leben und den Sinn nachdenken."

*Kunst im öffentlichen Raum: Anstöße der 80er Jahre*, published at the very end of the decade that is pivotal for this thesis.

As a sequence of three articles, O'Doherty's treatise first appeared in *Artforum* in 1976 and was published as a whole book only a decade later.<sup>159</sup> The art critic and theorist looked into the recent history of exhibiting art and asked how the newest context of museum and gallery space had impinged on artistic production. He argued that throughout the progression of modernism, the importance of the pristine white gallery space had grown. Finally, it came to establish itself as a model for twentieth-century art because it was an ideal environment for a consumerist, or capitalist, attitude to art appreciation. O'Doherty's main idea maintains that, despite "the white cube" being conceived as a context-free place with an emphasis on the truly aesthetic value of art, in actuality it is a historical and ideological construct that directly affects the objects that it contains. Moreover, the white gallery space often dominates the artwork and in itself becomes the center of the viewer's experience: "We have now reached a point where we see not the art but the space first."<sup>160</sup> The second of O'Doherty's criticisms against the modern exhibition space is its market function and the serving of "the bourgeois desire for possession."<sup>161</sup> Thus, the white cube conditions and, with that, restricts the artistic production. Such imposition of materialistic values on art became the target of certain radical artistic gestures of the 1970s, which asked "How does the artist find another audience, or a context in which his or her minority view will not be forced to witness its own co-optation?"<sup>162</sup> According to the author, some of the answers were offered by artists' projects characterized as "site-specific, temporary, nonpurchasable,

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<sup>159</sup> Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1986). The titles of the 1976 essays are "Notes on the Gallery Space," "Context as Content," and "The Eye and the Spectator." The book additionally includes a later article, "The Gallery as Gesture."

<sup>160</sup> O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube*, 14.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

outside the museum, directed towards a nonart audience, retreating from object to body to idea—even to invisibility.” O’Doherty’s examples included Daniel Buren’s sealing off the Galleria Apollinaire during his own show at that gallery (Milan 1968), and Christo and Jeanne-Claude’s *Museum of Contemporary Art, Wrapped* (Chicago 1969). Ten years after the essays came out in *Artforum*, their author reflected on the relevance of the white cube and most recent changes in the art world.<sup>163</sup> In hindsight, he inferred that the white space of galleries and museums had remained “the unchallenged arena of discourse” on the contemporary art practice. Notwithstanding such pessimistic remark, O’Doherty did not fail to notice that the recent internal development of art could “press against several conventional boundaries, inviting contextual readings.”<sup>164</sup> Although the white cube had been partially successful in its efforts to swallow and assimilate “anti-white cube”<sup>165</sup> works of art, valuable lessons from the 1960s and 1970s persisted. The artist stood up against the dominance of commercial exhibition space and, furthermore, stepped outside of it. This singularly crucial insight begins to summarize the far-reaching worth of O’Doherty’s treatise: it promoted discourse on the issues of space, postmodern relationship between art and politics, and role of curatorial practices for the experience of art. Importantly for this thesis, the 1976 essays and the subsequent book help to understand the earliest examples of installation art, emergence of land art, and the changing notion of public art between the 1960s and 1980s.

In the English-speaking world, O’Doherty’s work gained immediate recognition and had a lasting prodigious impact as one of the most read books on art in the late twentieth century. Already in 1982 it was translated into the German language, which makes *In der weissen Zelle*

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<sup>163</sup> Brian O’Doherty, Afterword (New York City, 1986) in *ibid.*, 109–13.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>165</sup> The term “anti-white cube” is my description of related artworks.



the earliest foreign-language edition of *Inside the White Cube*.<sup>166</sup> In Germany, O'Doherty's ideas widely resonated among artists, art historians, and curators, and gave impetus to the spread of publicly installed art. The latter reached its apex in the late 1988, when an international symposium under the title "Art in Public Space—Impulses of the 1980s" took place in Hamburg. Artists, art historians, critics, and curators gathered to discuss purposes, functions, and experiences of art in the open spaces of Hamburg. The following year the collection of the symposium papers, together with additional texts by invited authors and statements by thirteen artists, was published under the editorial direction of Volker Plagemann.<sup>167</sup> Thirty-five contributions offered diverse perspectives on the subject, including both practice- and theory-based essays. The chief editor dexterously introduced the medley of opinions and art projects in his historical overview "Art outside of the Museums."<sup>168</sup> Similarly to O'Doherty, Plagemann questioned the seeming independence of modern art from external commissions and, to uncover the illusionary nature of such independence, he presented his argument for the market control of art production.<sup>169</sup> Another factor that held restraint over the twentieth-century artist is a pursuit of museality (*Musealität*)—a set of qualities in an artwork that would assure its placement inside a museum. Plagemann traced the recent history of art that existed outside of the established exhibition space and discussed the specifics of cultural politics during the 1920s, the Nazi regime, and the immediate postwar period. The author demonstrated that state and city commissioning of art was the only passage of art into public space up until the 1970s; then a shift

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<sup>166</sup> Brian O'Doherty, *In der weissen Zelle: Anmerkungen zum Galerie-Raum* (Kassel: Gesamthochschul-Bibliothek, 1982). The second German edition was published by Wolfgang Kemp in 1996, see Wolfgang Kemp, ed., *In der weissen Zelle = Inside the White Cube* (Berlin: Merve, 1996).

<sup>167</sup> Volker Plagemann, ed., *Kunst im öffentlichen Raum: Anstöße der 80er Jahre* (Cologne: DuMont Buchverlag, 1989).

<sup>168</sup> Plagemann, "Kunst außerhalb der Museen," in *ibid.*, 10–9.

<sup>169</sup> Supporting Plagemann's view, the recent book by the senior director of Impressionist and Modern art at Sotheby's reveals noteworthy dependence of modern artists on the consumerist demand of the market. See Philip Hook, *Rogues' Gallery: A History of Art and its Dealers* (London: Profile Books, 2017).

of attitudes occurred. While earlier the tasks and places for public art were selected by authorities, in the 1970s artists started to make their own proposals for city projects.<sup>170</sup> Moreover, they were increasingly producing works to be shown outside museum or gallery walls: happenings, Fluxus, performances, conceptual art, mail-art, “art in the countryside,” and land art. The artist wanted to overcome the confinement that museality superimposed on the autonomy of art.<sup>171</sup> At the same time, a number of museum events and grand exhibitions, such as quinquennial *documenta* and decennial Sculpture Projects Münster (since 1977), evidenced the need for public presentation of art and, specifically, for artists’ own exploration of public space. As a result, art in public space was no longer under the order of authorities, art jury committees, or even museum faculty.<sup>172</sup> Instead public space was now where an artist could exercise his or her creativity and make own decisions as to what to do, or whether to do anything, with it.

The contributors to Plagemann’s volume built on the premises set forth in the editor’s text. They discuss the most prominent early projects of public art in Monschau (1970), Münster (since 1977), Bremen (1977–80), Berlin (1979–84), Hamburg (since 1981), Essen (1987), and Stuttgart (1988). Several individual cases in the city of Hamburg are the subjects of separate essays: Joseph Beuys’ *Gesamtkunstwerk* (planned in 1983, dismissed by the mayor Klaus von Dohnanyi in 1984), Ulrich Rückriem’s sculptures (1983–84), Felix Droese’s *Boot* (1985), Alfred Hrdlicka’s *Gegendenkmal* (1986), and Franz Erhard Walther’s *Sieben Orte für Hamburg* (1989). Beuys, the trailblazer in German postwar art scene, arguably led the way in public art; particularly in socially-oriented public art. During *documenta 7* (1982) the artist planted 7000 oaks in Kassel, raising the problems of urbanization and ecological awareness of the German public. His participation in the first Sculpture Projects Münster reinforced the eminence of the

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<sup>170</sup> Plagemann, “Kunst außerhalb der Museen,” 18.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 19.

decennial event, the second edition of which (1987) could already boast such names as Dennis Adams, Jenny Holzer, Jeff Koons, Sol LeWitt, Bruce Nauman, Nam June Paik, and Richard Serra.<sup>173</sup> The first edition of the Münster project that included works by nine artists was, in Plagemann's words, an inspiration to many examples of public art in the 1980s.<sup>174</sup> At the end of the decade Sculpture Projects Münster developed into the yardstick for the role of contemporary art in open public spaces in Germany. Sixty-four artists participated in 1987, seven-times more than the number of the 1977 exhibition. The sheer number, the renown of artists, and four artworks acquired by the city as permanent pieces are all cogent indicators of the artists' interest in working outside of museums and reaching wider and new audiences.

Whether the artist wanted to escape the white cube in O'Doherty's sense or museality described by Plagemann, the outcome witnessed at the German as well as international art scenes of the 1970s–1980s was the exit of autonomous artworks through museums doors into the open public space. New opportunities presented themselves to contemporary artists who could now choose sites for their works among endless city, suburban, or rural locations. A church, whether active or not, was one of such locations. It was one of the free public spaces that promised an artist's work an encounter with people other than those who have a habit of visiting conventional exhibition venues. That is not to say that a church appeared as an unproblematic space for the artist to enter. On the contrary, Christian buildings are charged with history, dogma, worship, and spirituality that many artists deliberately eschew. Paradoxically though, churches can offer a certain type of freedom—freedom from commercial interest and market demands. Similarly to other public spaces, churches were also the places where art could communicate and deliver messages, instead of being art-historically analyzed, critically estimated, or stylistically

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<sup>173</sup> See Friedrich Meschede, "Skulptur 1977 und Skulptur Projekte Münster 1987," in *ibid.*, 132–48.

<sup>174</sup> Plagemann, "Kunst außerhalb der Museen," 18.

compared—as was the case with museums, galleries, or fairs. For these reasons, artists were more open to exhibiting their works in churches in the 1980s than at any previous point in the twentieth century. As discussed above, it was precisely the time when German churches started opening their doors to non-sacramental contemporary art. Thus, it was the decade marked by the mutual rapprochement between the two sides; the decade decisive for the new relationship between Christianity and autonomous non-sacramental art in Germany.

## 4. The avant-garde establishments of 1987

Two churches opened their doors to contemporary secular art in May and October 1987, respectively: Saint Peter in Cologne and Hospital Church in Stuttgart. A number of salient parallels run between the churches. Both Saint Peter and Hospital Church boast rich hundreds-year-old histories, with their buildings representing the late Gothic architecture of the sixteenth and fifteenth centuries. Both buildings suffered great damages in the last years of the Second World War, were subsequently rebuilt with some changes in their historical architectural plans, and reopened for active worship services almost simultaneously in 1960. Both churches are located in the urban centers and, more exactly, in the very hearts of their respective cities. The urban setting is undoubtedly a contributing aspect to the fact that the two churches were among the first to organize contemporary art exhibitions in their spaces. Of more significance, however, are the two individuals who were responsible for those exhibitions to take place in 1987 and carry on under their leadership for over twenty years each: Friedhelm Mennekes in Cologne and Helmut Müller in Stuttgart. Both had enthusiasm for the visual arts and were ready to commit to the integration of autonomous art into the life of their churches. Moreover, they both had the antennae necessary for detecting the present issues in contemporary secular art and its relevance to the concerns of humankind. The particular situation of the 1980s was therefore critical to the origins of art centers at both Saint Peter and Hospital Church, with the thematic exhibitions proving to play a significant role in the matter. While one could add the aforementioned Sankt Petri to this study, the Lübeck church ceased to exhibit art for a long time between 1992 and 2008 and, thus, cannot be adequately juxtaposed to Saint Peter and Hospital Church. Because the latter two have continued their art initiatives to this day, this is a unique opportunity to trace and compare the evolving relationship between autonomous art and Christian spaces, and to see

where the three-decade-long dialogue have brought them today. Given that one of the churches is Catholic and the other one is Protestant, such auspicious balance offers an additional advantage to the inquiry that follows. The goal is to explore the thirty-year course of art exhibitions in both spaces—the earliest and longest examples of church engagement with contemporary secular art—in order to understand the phenomenon at large and its current state in Germany and to address the objectives of the thesis.

## 4.1. Saint Peter, Cologne

### 4.1.1. Early history of the church

While the late Gothic building of Saint Peter was constructed in the first half of the sixteenth century, the history of the church reaches back to the Middle Ages.<sup>175</sup> The location was occupied by thermal baths during the Late Antiquity and, according to one hypothesis, by the first Bishop Church of Cologne from the early Middle Ages to the ninth century.<sup>176</sup> While the exact dates of the first construction of Saint Peter are unknown, a three-aisled gallery basilica was raised some time in the tenth century.<sup>177</sup> In 1170, a Romanesque tower was attached to the west end of the building and, a few years later, the side aisles were extended. In the mid-twelfth century, Saint Peter is first mentioned in writing as the parish church of the convent Saint Cecilia (*Sankt Cäcilien*). However, according to the archaeologist Hugo Border, it is likely that the two had

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<sup>175</sup> Guido Schlimbach, *Sankt Cäcilien–Museum Schnütgen und Sankt Peter Köln* (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2005), 21. For a detailed account of the church history from the Middle Ages to the mid-twentieth century, see Alois Schuh, *Sankt Peter in Köln in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart* (Cologne: Pfarrei Sankt Peter, 1961).

<sup>176</sup> Schuh, *Sankt Peter*, 4–6. Also see Nicolas T. Weiser, *Offenes Zueinander: Räumliche Dimensionen von Religion und Kunst in der Kunst-Station Sankt Peter Köln* (Regensburg: Schnell und Steiner, 2002), 80; and Schlimbach, *Für einen lange währenden Augenblick*, 237–8.

<sup>177</sup> Schlimbach, *Sankt Cäcilien und Sankt Peter Köln*, 21.

been already associated since as early as 941.<sup>178</sup> Today, a twin-church plant formed by Saint Peter and the neighbouring Romanesque building of Saint Cecilia is the only surviving example of this kind in Cologne. Moreover, before the destruction of the Second World War the two churches were connected through a covered cross-vault corridor.<sup>179</sup> From the fourteenth century comes the documentation of a chapel inside Saint Peter that contained the altar of Saint Barbara, although without indication of either its site or size.<sup>180</sup> Between ca. 1515 and 1530, the building with its present architectural plan was erected under the pastor Peter von Nassau. Its fully preserved composition is now the single extant illustration of the late Gothic church architecture in Cologne.

The bombings of 1943 caused virtually a complete destruction of both Saint Peter and Saint Cecilia.<sup>181</sup> Their subsequent reconstruction was led by Karl Band (1900–1995), who contributed to the rebuilding of several churches and civil buildings in Cologne during the postwar years. From the ruins of Saint Peter—remnants of foundation walls, pillar bases, and net vaults—the architect commenced the reconstruction process in 1946. In May 1960, the implementation of the historical composition after the Renaissance stained glass windows completed the interior.<sup>182</sup> In the same summer Saint Peter was passed onto the Jesuit community, with Father Alois Schuh as its pastor, and from September 1960 regular divine services have been taking place at the church. The Catholic parish of Cologne starkly diminished during the Second World War from 8000 to 50 members, gradually augmented afterwards and rose to 750 believers at the time of the church reopening in 1960.<sup>183</sup> Fifty-five years later this number is reported at 386,100, while the latest

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 3 and 21. See also Schlimbach, *Für einen lange währenden Augenblick*, 238–9.

<sup>179</sup> Weiser, *Offenes Zueinander*, 85.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 80 and Schlimbach, *Sankt Cäcilien und Sankt Peter Köln*, 21.

<sup>181</sup> In 1956 the church Saint Cecilia was rededicated as the Schnütgen Museum dedicated to Christian religious art.

<sup>182</sup> Schlimbach, *Für einen lange währenden Augenblick*, 247.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 245 and 247.

count of Jesuits in Germany equals 356 members.<sup>184</sup> These statistics are reflected in the growing levels of worshipping activity in the church in the later twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. They also propose an understanding of the millennium-old church of Saint Peter and, specifically, its return to life after the Second World War. Prior to examining the newest history of Saint Peter and its embrace of contemporary art, it is necessary to give an account of the visual composition of the church.

#### **4.1.2. Church space and its art objects after the reconstruction**

After the reconstruction of the church, the interior of Saint Peter regained the prewar spatial arrangement but lost its opulent Baroque décor (fig. 2). The three aisles defined the main space, the length of which measured 37,5 meters and width 21 meters. The values are approximate because the ground plan deviates from perfect geometry and its east end is wider than the west end.<sup>185</sup> Opposite the altar area—at the west end—the church baptistery was rebuilt to occupy the room several steps lower than the main space. It contained a baptismal font made of brass and a standing candle holder. The Sacraments Chapel, known in German as *Gitterkapelle* (“grille chapel”) for its decorative wrought-iron grating barrier, met the visitors immediately as they entered the church through the south-west doors. Also in the south-west corner, a long spiral staircase led to the upper-level of the building. There, the church galleries with ornate, late Gothic tracery ran along the north, south, and west walls. Above the church aisles, the historical rib vaults could not be rebuilt for static reasons and, thus, were replaced with a flat coffered

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<sup>184</sup> Archdiocese Cologne, “Das Erzbistum Köln in Zahlen,” Erzbistum Köln, [http://www.erzbistum-koeln.de/erzbistum/erzbistum\\_im\\_ueberblick/daten\\_und\\_fakten](http://www.erzbistum-koeln.de/erzbistum/erzbistum_im_ueberblick/daten_und_fakten); Jesuits in Germany, “Mitglieder weltweit,” Jesuiten IHS, <http://www.jesuiten.org/wir-jesuiten/zahlen.html> (both accessed May 12, 2017).

<sup>185</sup> Weiser, *Offenes Zueinander*, 84.



wooden ceiling; the solution that, according to Weiser, deprived the original space of its vertical accent.<sup>186</sup> With the loss of the vaults, colorful ceiling frescos likewise disappeared. As a result, the scarce postwar decoration primarily consisted of the Renaissance stained glass windows depicting Catholic saints above side aisles and scenes of Jesus Christ's Passion Week above the chancel. Between 1960 and 1970 the latter were complemented with contemporary glass panes by the artists Hermann Gottfried, Hans Lünenborg und Franz Pauli.<sup>187</sup> They remained in the church until the renovation works of 1997–2000. Below those windows, the chancel area had been significantly emptied. Instead of painted or sculpted imagery and a lavishly-carved raised wooden pulpit, all that the chancel contained after the reconstruction was a plain altar table made of austere blue stone. The stark vacancy of the rebuilt interior prompted Weiser to describe it as “almost protestant.”<sup>188</sup> Thus, two key characteristics of Saint Peter's reconstructed space were its horizontal orientation and its conspicuous emptiness.

Nonetheless the postwar church was not entirely rid of its art: a fifteenth-century sculpture of Madonna with the Child, a sixteenth century Passion polyptych, and two seventeenth-century paintings by Peter Paul Rubens and Cornelis Schut returned to Saint Peter in the 1960s.<sup>189</sup> Following the Lower Rhine tradition of the depictions of Mary, the first sculpture was carved out of walnut in the early 1400s and lastly restored in 1844. It shows Saint Mary standing and supporting the child Christ, who holds the globe in his left hand and leans on his mother's chest with his right hand. The remnants of paint are visible in Mary's golden hair, rouge cheeks, and blue robes. This devotional sculpture stands at the entrance of the baptistery in Saint Peter, Another representation of Mary that belonged to the church was a fifteenth-century pieta made of

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Schlimbach, *Für einen lange währenden Augenblick*, 247.

<sup>188</sup> Weiser, *Offenes Zueinander*, 85. The original reads, “Der 1960 einfühlsam, aber letztlich nur als Fragment wiederhergestellte Kirchenraum erschien gegenüber seinem Vorkriegsstand durch seine Leere schon fast ‘protestantisch’.”

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 86–8.

bonded marble in the Lower Rhine region. It was lost during the Second World War and discovered only in 2000 in the depot of the Cologne Cathedral. The sculpture had been placed into the Cathedral bunker for protection in the early 1940s but, for unknown reasons, did not find its way back to the church of Saint Peter.<sup>190</sup> Today it greets the visitors on the left side of the *Gitterkapelle*. The Sacraments Chapel holds another art treasure—a polyptych with the scenes from the Passion Week of Christ, which was produced in Cologne around 1512. It originally consisted of three central panels with deeply carved wood, which depicted the story of the Holy Week from Christ’s Prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane to Christ’s Ascension into Heaven. The side wings were painted in oil and dedicated to the themes of *Ecce Homo* on the left and Resurrection on the right. In the 1860s the Passion polyptych was inserted into a neo-Gothic altar frame with a retable by the Mengelberg brothers.<sup>191</sup> While the Mengelberg high altar burned in the Second World War, the sixteenth-century polyptych was removed from the church for protection and, consequently, some of its carved figures got lost. Only in 2002 could Friedhelm Mennekes receive most of the missing pieces from private hands, whose owner wanted to return the figures to the church “out of bad conscience.”<sup>192</sup> Today the altar, still without eleven of the overall twenty-seven pieces, is protected behind the barrier of *Gitterkapelle*.

The artwork that has brought many visitors to Saint Peter over the course of almost four centuries is the painting of the crucifixion of Peter by Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640). Although born in Siegen, the artist spent his childhood in Cologne where his family belonged to the parish of Saint Peter.<sup>193</sup> When the head of the Cologne city council, Everhard III, died in 1636, in the

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<sup>190</sup> Schlimbach, *Sankt Cäcilien und Sankt Peter Köln*, 24. Hence it was not a part of Saint Peter’s interior in the 80s.

<sup>191</sup> Schlimbach, *Für einen lange währenden Augenblick*, 245; see the image on page 243.

<sup>192</sup> “Aus schlechtem Gewissen gestand [eine Dame] ihm [Mennekes], dass sie die aus dem Bestand von Sankt Peter stammenden Tonfiguren vor vielen Jahren nicht ganz legal ‘in Obhut’ genommen hätte, nun aber wieder ihrem ursprünglichen Ort zurückführen wolle.” See Schlimbach, “Gesucht wird—Aus Pater Mennekes wurde Pater Brown,” in Schlimbach, *Für Friedhelm Mennekes*, 155. The story continues through page 158.

<sup>193</sup> Schlimbach, *Für einen lange währenden Augenblick*, 142.

sign of remembrance his family decided to donate an altarpiece to the church. Their choice of the artist for the task was the internationally renowned Rubens, who by then resided in Antwerp. After some negotiations Rubens agreed to produce a painting for the high altar of Saint Peter, on the condition that he could freely choose the subject.<sup>194</sup> *Crucifixion of Saint Peter* became the last major work by Rubens, who died shortly after completing the painting. Two years after the artist's death, in 1642, the work arrived to Cologne and was placed at the high altar of Saint Peter. According to Schlimbach, that was the first Baroque painting made for a Cologne church and, for that reason, it introduced modernity to the city.<sup>195</sup> In the Christian tradition, Peter is believed to have requested being crucified upside down because he could not regard himself worthy to be crucified in the same manner as the Son of God. While this is the position in which Rubens portrayed the saint, other elements of the paintings are much less conventional. The physicality and brutality of the unfolding crucifixion are terrifying: human bodies are palpably heavy and every single joint is realistically rendered; hard nails piercing Peter's feet and right hand force the streams of blood that seem to burn on the saint's pale skin; the eyes of his executors gleam with violence and hatred. Rubens created an image that meant to stir its viewers, horrify and move them. The painting served as the high altar of Saint Peter for almost two centuries, spending the years between 1784 and 1815 in the Louvre due to the Napoleonic occupation of Germany. It left the church twice again: in 1941 for a period of twenty years, and in 1997 for a period of five years.<sup>196</sup>

Along *Crucifixion of Saint Peter* runs the story of another artwork, *Conversion of Saint Paul* by a Flemish painter and draughtsman Cornelis Schut (1597–1655). In 1643 the pastor of Saint Peter,

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<sup>194</sup> The subject nevertheless had to be related to the life of Peter. Ibid., 143.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 149–50. During the latest renovation, Rubens' painting was hung in the Cologne Cathedral. For more information about the painting and its history see Gudrun Gersmann, ed., *Rubens in St. Peter* (Cologne: Kölnische Bibliotheksgesellschaft, 2015); and Guido Schlimbach, ed., "*Eines der besten Bilder, die meine Hand geschaffen hat*": *Die Kreuzigung Petri von Peter Paul Rubens* (Cologne: Kunst-Station Sankt Peter, 2015).

Arnold Meshoven, commissioned the artist to produce an image of Paul in the Baroque style. Schut masterfully filled his picture with dynamism and energy comparable to those in Rubens' image. Both subjects captured specific, down to the second, moments in their respective narratives, and both artists emphasized the bodily weight of equally earthly and heavenly figures. However, Schut's work appears significantly less intense in force and disgust—here any physical pain is soothed by the gift of grace. Moreover the presence of God, who reaches out his hand towards Paul, and the divine illumination of the conversion scene are more reassuring than the dominance of Peter's executors in Rubens' image. Schut's painting was meant to complement the Baroque composition of the altar area, together with Rubens' picture and additional paintings of the saints Mary, Nicolaus and Barbara, executed by other artists.<sup>197</sup> The last three were dismantled in the late nineteenth century by the pastor Leopold Neuhöfer, who set to transform the Baroque interior into the trending neo-Gothic style. *Crucifixion of Saint Peter*, replaced by the Passion polyptych as the high altar, was moved to a side altar, and *Conversion of Saint Paul* was to be hung in the upper gallery until the arrival of the Second World War.<sup>198</sup> In 1961, after a sojourn at the Wallraf-Richartz Museum, both paintings returned to Saint Peter and were hung at the front walls of the side aisles. Likewise together, the two images took temporary home in the Cologne Cathedral between 1997 and 2002. Afterwards, they were positioned on either side of a movable three-meter-high wall that allowed for a rotation of these paintings at the center of the chancel several times a year, namely according to the Catholic calendar.<sup>199</sup> The mechanism was later discarded and the works by Rubens and Schut were finally allotted their current sites. Today the visitor finds *Crucifixion of Saint Peter* in the south aisle, to the right from the chancel, and *Conversion of Saint Paul* on the side wall of the north aisle.

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<sup>197</sup> Schlimbach, *Für einen lange währenden Augenblick*, 140.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 148–49.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 151.

For anyone familiar with Catholic churches, such minimal inclusion of decorative and art objects in the postwar church of Saint Peter is striking. After the reconstruction, its interior became unusually bare and even empty. As discussed below, such perception of emptiness has often played a significant role in the interaction between the church space and contemporary artworks. For now, the description of the visual environment introduces us to the interior of the Jesuit church in Cologne as it opened itself to exhibitions of contemporary secular art at the end of the 1980s.

### **4.1.3. Friedhelm Mennekes at Saint Peter, 1987–2008**

By the 1980s, the city of Cologne had established its reputation as the center of not only the German but the European art scene. Among the reasons one can count numerous high-profile galleries, the dynamic art market, tied connections to the American collectors and artists; plus the combination of excellent museums of old art and the newly opened Museum Ludwig. To name a few artists who were active in Cologne at the time, Martin Kippenberger, Sigmar Polke, and Gerhard Richter may just suffice. In other words, this location was the perfect, fertile soil, on which one's enthusiasm about and commitment to contemporary art could flourish. A Jesuit theologian and priest, Friedhelm Mennekes, was a man with precisely these qualities.

Born in 1940 in Bottrop, a city in the Ruhr industrial area of North Rhine-Westphalia, Mennekes grew up without religious inclinations and went on to study the profession of a tailor.<sup>200</sup> Only after turning 21, he resolved to join the Jesuit order and dedicate his life to priesthood. Mennekes pursued education in theology, philosophy, political science, and sociology in Bonn, Munich and

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 71. Also see Mennekes, "Vita," Art & Religion, <http://www.artandreligion.de/index.php?idcatside=14> (accessed May 23, 2017).

Frankfurt, receiving the title of the Doctor of Philosophy in 1972 and being ordained a priest in 1974. After serving as a chaplain at the Saint Mauritius Community in Frankfurt, he became the pastor of the Saint Mark Community in the district Frankfurt-Nied.<sup>201</sup> There Mennekes was primarily involved in youth ministry, as part of which he organized in 1979 a stage production of the rock opera “Franz von Assisi” by Peter Janssens. Looking for a poster for the event, the pastor contacted Roland Peter Litzenburger and, in a sign of gratitude for the artist’s work, organized an exhibition of Litzenburger’s works in Saint Mark’s Church.<sup>202</sup> The show became the beginning of a row of art exhibitions, including those of Josef Albers and Emil Schumacher and the aforementioned project *Menschenbild–Christusbild*.<sup>203</sup> Appointed the professor of Pastoral Theology and Sociology of Religion at St. Georgen University in Frankfurt, Mennekes gave up pastoral but not curatorial activities. In 1986, he founded the Art-Station at the Frankfurt Main Railroad Station (Kunst-Station Frankfurt Hbf) and inaugurated it with a sensational exhibition *Faces–Christ–Faces (Gesichter–Christus–Gesichter)* of overpaintings by Arnulf Rainer.<sup>204</sup> Further projects ran at the train terminal without its founder: in 1987 the Provincial Superior of the North-German Jesuit Brotherhood, Father Alfons Höfer, called Mennekes to serve as the priest of the Jesuit church Saint Peter in Cologne. With that, Höfer encouraged Mennekes to develop the rudiments of the church engagement with art undertaken in Frankfurt.<sup>205</sup> In this new role, the pastor-curator founded an internationally renowned hub of contemporary art, Saint Peter Art-Station, or Kunst-Station Sankt Peter Köln.

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<sup>201</sup> August Heuser, “Das Brot der Frühen Jahre oder Lehrjahre sind keine Herrenjahre: Pater Mennekes’ Frankfurter Lehr- und Wanderjahre,” in Schlimbach, *Für Friedhelm Mennekes*, 23–6.

<sup>202</sup> Friedhelm Mennekes, “Ich will Systeme zusammenbringen, Räume öffnen, Welte öffnen,” in *Kunst und Kirche* 4 (2014): 28.

<sup>203</sup> See pages 53–8 in chapter three of this thesis.

<sup>204</sup> Arnulf Rainer, *Gesichter Christus Gesichter: Kunst Station Frankfurt (M) Hbf* (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1986). For the account of Mennekes’ idea of showing art at the train station see “Pater Mennekes im Gespräch mit Georg Imdahl,” in Schlimbach, *Für Friedhelm Mennekes*, 221.

<sup>205</sup> Schlimbach, *Für einen lange währenden Augenblick*, 77–8.

#### 4.1.3.1. The beginnings, 1987–1994

In 1987 first exhibitions took place inside Saint Peter's walls. The two artists who opened the history of Kunst-Station were Josef Mikl and Markus Lüpertz. Both artists were represented in Wieland Schmied's *Zeichen des Glaubens* (1980) and were later to be shown in *GegenwartEwigkeit* (1990). Moreover, the Austrian painter Mikl had created a number of prominent stained glass windows for, among others, the Parsch Parish Church in Salzburg (1956), Memorial Cathedral of World Peace in Hiroshima (1959–1961), the Lehen Parish Church in Salzburg (1963–1964), St. Margarethen in Burgenland (1966, 1970), and Marienkapelle in Asten (1982). In Saint Peter, his abstract, abounding with color, paintings filled the upper galleries.<sup>206</sup> Simultaneously, three large-scale panels by the Czech-German artist Lüpertz were hung in the apse of the church, immediately above the blue-stone altar table. Outside the church walls, Mennekes also utilized the church yard for sculpture shows, which began with those by Arne-Bernd Rhaue and Ansgar Nierhoff.<sup>207</sup> Thus, the pastor's early curatorial approach was to hold three concurrent exhibitions: a show of paintings or installations in the upper galleries, a sculpture project outside of the church, and a trifold work of art in the altar area.<sup>208</sup> The first two of these spaces were fitting for exhibiting art—the galleries with their long running monochromatic walls and the open court with its natural light. Both of them also escaped the direct interaction with the celebration of the Mass. The third site was more problematic as its location coincided with the heart of any Catholic church—the representation of Jesus Christ in the Holy Altar. Thus, it attracted the most attention and, at times, criticism.

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<sup>206</sup> Friedhelm Mennekes, *Josef Mikl: Bilder; Köln, Kunst-Station Sankt Peter, 17.9.–19.10.1987; Essen, Galerie Heimeshoff, 20.12.1987–15.1.1988* (Essen: Galerie Heimeshoff, 1987).

<sup>207</sup> Friedhelm Mennekes, ed., *Arne-Bernd Rhaue: Kunst-Station Sankt Peter Köln, 10.12.1987–11.1.1988* (Cologne: Kunst-Station Sankt Peter, 1987).

<sup>208</sup> Friedhelm Mennekes, *Künstlerisches Sehen und Spiritualität* (Zurich and Düsseldorf: Artemis & Winkler, 1995). See also Schlimbach, *Für einen lange währenden Augenblick*, 169.

From 1987 to 1995 nearly fifty tripartite artworks were displayed in the chancel of Saint Peter.<sup>209</sup> On the one hand, the trifold architectonic structure of the chancel invites a triptych format: their interaction promises spatial agreement and compositional harmony. On the other hand, the format brings to mind the centuries-old tradition of altarpieces that have defined the Christian worship spaces since the Middle Ages.<sup>210</sup> In the mind of the believer, the tripartite objects would also bring the association with the Holy Trinity. Consequently, the main questions that Mennekes posed for the triptych series were: can tradition and modernity exist side by side? can the foregone unity between the church altar and picture be renewed at the contemporary moment?<sup>211</sup> It was not only the tradition that motivated Mennekes to conceive the project but also “the fascination of the tripartite pictorial form” expressed by the artists throughout the ages, including the twentieth century. He recognized that the modern artist “studied the problems of art history” and, upon that, expanded the creative possibilities according to the urges of his own contemporary situation.<sup>212</sup> Therefore, it was important for the pastor-curator to provide the invited artists with complete creative freedom, an aspect that would remain central to Kunst-Station over the following decades. For Mennekes the criteria for the selection of artists, but not for their commissions, were (1) innovation; (2) independence; and (3) the way an artwork responded to the altar space.<sup>213</sup> Reflecting on the early years of Kunst-Station, Guido Schlimbach added to this list a necessarily non-traditional, non-Christian character of an artwork and the way an artwork could integrate into the celebration of Christ’s suffering, death, and resurrection.<sup>214</sup> Importantly, the last aspect did not assume art as a server of religion but, rather, a communicator

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<sup>209</sup> Friedhelm Mennekes, *Triptychon: Moderne Altarbilder in St. Peter, Köln* (Frankfurt and Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1995). The German text is accompanied by its translation into English by David Galloway.

<sup>210</sup> For the history of origins and development of Christian altarpieces see chapter “Das Triptychon: Zur Entwicklung eines Bildformats” in *ibid.*, 11–28.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>214</sup> Schlimbach, *Für einen lange währenden Augenblick*, 169.



of big questions.<sup>215</sup> The questions implied were those that concerned “the sublime, the numinous, the spiritual” and were addressed by the artists who “create[d] forms that transcended inherited perceptions.”<sup>216</sup> These were precisely the issues brought to light by the 1980 exhibition in Berlin and, indeed, Mennekes pays tribute to both *Zeichen des Glaubens* and *GegenwartEwigkeit* for their initiatives to bring art and religion into a mutually fruitful conversation.<sup>217</sup> Furthermore, it is noteworthy that fourteen artists who contributed to the triptych series at Kunst Station had been earlier featured in one or both of the Berlin exhibitions. However, it would be wrong to say that Mennekes blindly appropriated Schmied’s vision. The pastor’s own enthusiasm for art regularly drove him to galleries in Cologne, Germany, and abroad. He visited artists’ studios and participated with them in long and often intensive conversations, among which was the famous discussion with Joseph Beuys.<sup>218</sup> From the beginning, Mennekes introduced the artist-in-residence program at Kunst Station. Every year the parish house of Saint Peter—the annex of its Romanesque tower—was converted into an up-and-coming artist’s studio, which could be visited by the members of the community as well as the general public.<sup>219</sup> In addition to the German artists such as Volker Saul and Arne-Bernd Rhaue, international artists were invited: Peter Drake from New-York (1989/90), Chieo Senzaki from Japan (1990/91), and Ewa Kulasek from Poland (1991/92). One of the aspirations behind the idea was a close contact between the artists and the community of believers, or the convergence of the two split worlds: art and religion. Facilitation of such open relationship between art and church was the principal goal behind Mennekes’ decades-long initiatives at Saint Peter.<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 170; and Mennekes, *Künstlerisches Sehen und Spiritualität*, 214.

<sup>216</sup> Mennekes, *Triptychon*, 7.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> See pages 57–8 above. For the review of Mennekes’ dialogues with artists and an account of common questions and topics, see Mennekes, *Künstlerisches Sehen und Spiritualität*, 216–44.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 205. Parallel to this a musician-in-residence program was established.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 189.

To return to the triptych series, it is evident that the pastor's objective could be most successfully achieved, or at the minimum approached, in the apse of the Jesuit church. The above-mentioned criteria of innovation, independence, and response to the space (the high quality of art was required as a matter of course) resulted in an array of arresting works in different mediums, exhibited in Saint Peter over the course of eight years. The third of all triptychs could be described as purely abstract two-dimensional images—be it dynamic expressionism, meditational color fields, or geometric construction. Another large body of artworks swayed on the border between abstraction and figuration. The subject of human body was likewise prevalent: the threatened nude figures by Luis Cruz Azaceta, the intense rendering of starving children by Felix Droese, the portrait of a deceased friend by Francis Bacon, the female representation challenged by Cindy Sherman, the psychological *en face* of everyman and everywoman (sic.) by Marlene Dumas, the disintegrating marionettes by Gerhard Altenbourg, the narrative of a hospital patient dying by Darío Villalba, the discomfiting countenances by Marwan Kassab-Bachi, body wrappings smeared with the artist's own blood by Peter Gilles, and the black standing mummies by Jürgen Brodwolf. In addition to dealing with the subject of human image, these descriptions additionally reveal death and suffering as common themes among many of the triptychs. Closer study of the artworks, artists' explanations, and the art historical texts prove that the themes of death, pain, and human misery dominated the triptych series at Kunst-Station. In addition to the names mentioned above, the following artists chose to address these issues with the works exhibited in Saint Peter: Gregory Amenoff, Herbert Falken, Jenny Holzer, Markus Lüpertz, Rune Mields, Hermann Nitsch, Arnulf Rainer, Antonio Saura, Volker Stelzmann, Rosemarie Trockel, and Günther Uecker.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> See the catalog edited by Friedhelm Mennekes, *Triptychon: Moderne Altarbilder in St. Peter, Köln*.

Selected from the triptychs series, the following examples are inevitably idiosyncratic but at the same time reflecting larger tendencies of the project. The work *Three Figures for a Chancel* (*Drei Figuren für einen Altarraum*, 1987) by Swiss sculptor and object artist Jürgen Brodwolf featured in the first year of Kunst-Station (fig. 3). Three black mummies, enclosed in Plexiglas tubes, circumscribed the altar in the church apse, the position that connotes the three crucified at Golgotha. However, the artist did not intend such Christian references as the death of Christ or the martyrs. For him the mummies turned death into something normal and even familiar, helping to think about it without being afraid. Mennekes saw Brodwolf's figures as "impulses from which the viewer who is affected by them is thrown back upon himself and his own premonitions."<sup>222</sup> In other words, the bent postures of the brittle figures could become mirrors for the viewers' existential concerns, for their inner selves. The two-dimensional triptych *Palenque* '78 by Fred Thieler, a representative of the German Art Informel, defined the apse of Saint Peter in the fall of 1978 (fig. 4). Three equally sized canvases, attached and formed into one horizontally-oriented painting, show gestural application of white and red paint that explodes and illuminates the background gradated in black and blue. Again, no specifically religious content is given. The title pragmatically refers to the name of a Mexican village with the ruins of an ancient Mayan city, which the artist visited and with which he was profoundly impressed.<sup>223</sup> And yet, Mennekes argues that Thieler's work is open towards the religious because in the church apse it is able to become charged with the aura of the space.<sup>224</sup> The paintings and specifically the explosion of their colors, he explains further, bring forward the dimensions that preside over the reality of Christ's death and resurrection. For the viewer, the color metamorphoses in Thieler's triptych compel to first lose and then rediscover their inner selves. Thus, these two examples

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<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>224</sup> Mennekes, *Künstlerisches Sehen und Spiritualität*, 212.

show that the question of art's reception and its capacity to stir, move, and motivate the observer were crucial in the earliest exhibitions of contemporary art shown in Saint Peter.

The second question that prevailed in the concept of Kunst-Station is that of the relationship between the church space, laden with the great meanings of Christian faith, and secular autonomous non-sacramental art, daring and disturbing. On one level, a merely aesthetic dialogue occurs between the church architecture and exhibited works of art. For example, Thieler's paintings find an echo in the analogous color palette of the overhead stained glass windows, so that both come to "the free play among themselves."<sup>225</sup> However on a deeper level, the sacred aura of the space divulges the corresponding spirits that are intrinsic to the Thieler's non-objective images.<sup>226</sup> In case of figurative art, such as Brodwolf's mummies, the active sacred space broadens the existential character of human figure towards the religious.<sup>227</sup> To reciprocate, the artwork animates the altar and adds poignancy to its sacred atmosphere by confronting the issue of *conditio humana* with its own methods, its unique visual language. Significantly, in neither case is the autonomy of either art nor the church is violated by the other. Instead the two come to complement each other, to punctuate and enhance the character of one another.

To sum up the earliest exhibitions at Kunst-Station, the two aspects guided the pastor-curator: the stirring effect of contemporary art on the viewer and the communication between art and the space of active Christian worship. Among other notable works, the series brought to the church Joseph Beuys' documentary triptych *für MANRESA* (1991), Dörte Eißfeldt's cold photographic prints of a knife blade (1991), Rosemarie Trockel's black-lettered triptych *Ich Habe Angst* (1993), and Jenny Holzer's political triptych *War, Work in Progress* (1993). This shows that in addition to two-dimensional canvases, panels, boards and three-dimensional mixed-media

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<sup>225</sup> Mennekes, *Triptychon*, 166.

<sup>226</sup> Mennekes, *Künstlerisches Sehen und Spiritualität*, 202.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

sculptures, the scope of artworks included conceptualism, photography, and new media art. Such formal breadth resulted from Mennekes' acceptance of art's full autonomy and independence from any Christian content or beliefs.<sup>228</sup> Taking into account the prevalence of flat wall images shown in the upper galleries and voluminous sculpture in the church yard, it can be argued that the particularity of the chancel was another contributing factor to the multifariousness of art forms represented in almost fifty triptychs. After eight years of gripping exhibitions, the series came to an end with a conflict over Alfred Hrdlicka's *Crucified Man, Torso* (*Gekreuzigter, Torso*, 1959).<sup>229</sup> Although the sculpture was earlier shown within the project *Menschenbild–Christusbild* and at the Art-Station at the Frankfurt Main Railroad Station, it aroused most anger in Cologne in 1994.<sup>230</sup> What visitors found offensive in Hrdlicka's marble figure was the explicit rendering of male genitalia. For a number of believers, it was unacceptable to see such a sexually-charged image immediately behind the altar table. Letters of protest were written to Joachim Cardinal Meisner, the Archbishop of Cologne, who from his own point of view shared Mennekes' belief in art's ability to challenge and move the human being.<sup>231</sup> Still, Meisner and Mennekes could not ignore the believers' resentment. So they decided that the following art exhibitions would no longer take place in the apse of Saint Peter but instead in the side aisles, upper galleries, and the church yard. Interestingly, the public discussions organized by Mennekes proved that only a minority of Christians opposed to contemporary art in Saint Peter and, by 1995, the church attendance had tripled since the founding of Kunst-Station.<sup>232</sup> Hence the art projects continued, even if with a shift in direction.

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<sup>228</sup> Mennekes, *Triptychon*, 9.

<sup>229</sup> Schlimbach, *Für einen lange währenden Augenblick*, 214–26.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, 222–3.

<sup>232</sup> Mennekes, *Künstlerisches Sehen und Spiritualität*, 213–5.

### 4.1.3.2. New approach, 1994–1997

According to a new agreement between Friedhelm Mennekes and the Archbishop of Cologne, Rubens' *Crucifixion of Saint Peter* assumed its position as the high altar of the church in 1995. This precluded further realization of the triptych project. Consequently, a new approach was necessary to proceed with the exhibitions of contemporary art at Kunst-Station. Mennekes' solution was to step across the bordered space that was initially allotted for displaying art and, with that, to give art more room and freedom of engagement with the space of the late Gothic building. Now the pastor-curator resolved to ask artists to produce site-specific works for the church. The awareness that secular art could transform the atmosphere in a church played a great role. It is likely that an earlier exhibition by one of the artists-in-residence, Chieo Senzaki, also contributed to the development of the new approach. The young artist from Hiroshima lived in the parish house of Saint Peter during 1990 and at the end of the year showcased his work in the church galleries.<sup>233</sup> In contrast to any other exhibitions held inside Kunst-Station between 1987 and 1994, Senzaki's project went beyond the convention of displaying art as something that the viewers behold in front of themselves. Instead, he wove hundreds of branches into several overwhelming nests that filled the galleries from floor to ceiling in a spiral-bound way (fig. 5). Many branches were spread out from the nests onto the floor, thus taking hold of more space and claiming its presence in the room. By creating the illusion of a thick forest, Senzaki's installation actively interacted with the architectural attributes of the church and modified the visitor's experience of the space. Three of the most prominent post-triptych exhibitions at Kunst-Station, strove for the same effect: *The White Mass* by James Lee Byars (1995), *Projektion/Reflektion* by Mischa Kuball (1995), and *Changing Focuses* by Anish Kapoor (1996).

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<sup>233</sup> Friedhelm Mennekes and Johannes Röhrig, eds., *Chieo Senzaki: Installationen; Kunst-Station Sankt Peter Köln, 6. Dezember 1990 bis 13. Januar 1991* (Cologne: Kunst-Station Sankt Peter Köln, 1990).

To this day the most outstanding art project that took place in a German church remains *The White Mass* by an American James Lee Byars (1932–1997).<sup>234</sup> It is unique in its degree of integration with Christian liturgy: at the artist's request Father Mennekes celebrated the Eucharist standing inside the art installation. The work consisted of four pillars and a ring made of the most pure marble from Thasos, all fixed on the floor at the east end of the central nave (fig. 6). Above the marble pieces, a light bulb of 2000 watt hung in the precisely calculated center of the church building. Perfection of geometry—all points being equidistant to the center—and the marble testify to Byars' striving for the pure, the ideal, and the absolute. Hence are also the two key elements: the color white—the priest was to wear the whitest robe and white fabric was to cover windows and furnishings—and the brightest possible light that could not be looked at directly. Overall, *The White Mass* created an atmosphere that could agitate the observers and transfer them from the realm of the material to the realm of the spiritual. As contemplated by Mennekes, Byars' work was meant to fill the room with mystery, to provoke the observer to question life, and to achieve hopeful freedom from "constricting agitation of the answer."<sup>235</sup> An important and radical moment was Byars' wish to remove all the pews from the church in order to bring forward the character of the building. As the church windows and furnishings were mantled during the period of Lent, the overall effect was an extreme reduction of the interior composition. The enhanced impression of emptiness that followed proved to carry a lot of weight for the Jesuit church at the turn of the millennium.

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<sup>234</sup> Friedhelm Mennekes, ed., *The White Mass* (Cologne: Walther König, 2004). Also see Weiser, *Offenes Zueinander*, 116–38; and Schlimbach, *Für einen lange währenden Augenblick*, 248–60. For a theoretical discussion on *The White Mass*, consult Mennekes, "On the Spirituality of Questioning: James Lee Byars' *The White Mass* (1995) at the Kunst-Station Sankt Peter," in *Religion and the Arts* 13, no. 3 (2009): 358–75; and Koestlé-Cate, *A Fractious Embrace*, 98–102.

<sup>235</sup> Mennekes, *The White Mass*, 24.

While the installation by Byars transformed the inner space of Saint Peter, the church exterior walls became the focal stage for the project conceived by Mischa Kuball (b. 1959).<sup>236</sup> The Düsseldorf artist added scaffolds equipped with spotlights to the external facing of the church walls. The spotlights intensified the illumination of the interior space through the lower windows and, at the same time, immersed the exterior of the late Gothic building into a diffused light. During the day they generated varying values of brightness and color intensity inside Saint Peter, while at night they cloaked the church in a foggy substance that emitted rays of subdued light. Similarly to Byars but with less precision and more intuition, Kuball explored the architectural structure of the church. Moreover, via an intricate light installation, the latter built a bridge between the Jesuit church and the surrounding urban environment of Cologne. In case of both artists' works, the results of their creative exploration acquired metaphysical meaning due to the following two factors: the key role of light and the sacred function of the building.

Another site-specific art installation, which turned to be momentous for the history of Kunst-Station, was carried out in 1996 by an Indian-British artist from the forefront of the contemporary art world, Anish Kapoor (b. 1954).<sup>237</sup> Earlier that year he completed the stone altar for the Church of Our Lady in Dresden, which together with the work at Saint Peter are rare examples of Kapoor's cooperation with active religious institutions.<sup>238</sup> The artist visited the Cologne church numerous times during the planning stage of his project, so that he could discover and measure that particular space, find out how to react to it, and decide, in Nicolas

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<sup>236</sup> Mariana Hanstein and Kurt Danch, eds., *Mischa Kuball, Projektion-Reflektion: 7. September 1995 bis 12. November 1995, Kunst-Station Sankt Peter Köln* (Cologne and Berlin: Hanstein Verlag, 1995).

<sup>237</sup> Claudia von Blücher, ed., *Anish Kapoor: 16. November 1996 bis 2. Februar 1997 Kunst-Station Sankt Peter Köln* (Cologne: Wienand Verlag, 1996). Also see Weiser, *Offenes Zueinander*, 108–16; and Schlimbach, *Für einen lange währenden Augenblick*, 260–70.

<sup>238</sup> See Rainer Volp, "Ein Altar des Gedenkens und der Versöhnung. Anish Kapoor in Dresdens Frauenkirche," in *Kunst und Kirche* 59 (1996): 220–1.



Weiser's words, "how he could irritate the allegedly self-evident spatial structure."<sup>239</sup> Kapoor's solution was the intervention of space through four mirror objects and one sheet of cloth that he strategically placed throughout the church (fig. 7). The ruby-colored cloth, hung in the west end of the church, had an expressive cut slightly off its center—a cogent reference to the wound of the crucified Christ. Two large concave mirrors were hung opposite each other in the baptistery, creating a small closed space in which the viewer would inevitably confront the reflection of him- or herself. An identical mirror occupied the wall above the side altar in the south aisle. There, as Mennekes pointed out, the mirror served as an altar image in its own right and, thus, was important in connecting the viewer's self with the divine.<sup>240</sup> Lastly, Kapoor inserted the smallest mirror object into a hole in the floor, which he created in the center of the nave and in direct opposition to *Crucifixion of Saint Peter*. Rubens' painting was subjected to Kapoor's most radical gesture: the contemporary artist turned the altarpiece upside down. Now the image so familiar to the church visitor was presented in a new way. By reversing the painting Kapoor claimed that true seeing meant always seeing in a new way, gaining a new vision; he claimed that seeing was about change.<sup>241</sup> Same applied to the concave mirrors situated around the church: they reflected visible reality in the upside-down manner and challenged the viewer with yet new perspectives. Moreover, Kapoor was the first artist who expansively used the interior space of Saint Peter and exhibited several diverse artworks that altogether formed a coherent installation. In this way, he took a step further from the preceding site-specific projects undertaken by Byars and Kuball.

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<sup>239</sup> Weiser, *Offenes Zueinander*, 109–10. The original reads, "Er versuchte zunächst, den Raum für sich zu entdecken, maß ihn, ließ Ideen aufsteigen, verwarf sie wieder, um eine Lösung dafür zu finden, wie er adäquat auf die konkreten Raumbedingungen reagieren bzw. wie er die vermeintlich selbstverständliche Raumstruktur irritieren könnte."

<sup>240</sup> Friedhelm Mennekes in conversation with the author, Bonn, December 16, 2016.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

In summary, the possibilities of the new approach were brought out and advanced by the works of the three artists. Replacing the triptych series, site-specific art projects marked the new direction of Kunst-Station between March 1995 and February 1997. They were characterized by closer collaboration with and concentration on a singular artist; crossed borders between religious worship and experience of art; reduction and emptiness in the spatial composition of the church. Before the renovation of 1997–2000, the works by Byars, Kuball, and Kapoor signified an increased range of opportunities that the space of the Jesuit church Saint Peter offered to contemporary artists.

#### **4.1.3.3. Renovation and latest projects, 2000–2008**

During the period of 1997–2000 art exhibitions at Kunst-Station were suspended due to the renovation of the church building. The extensive dilapidations in the foundations and structure required a comprehensive repair that would equally involve the frontage and the interior of the church.<sup>242</sup> The task was carried out by the Cologne architect Ulrich Wiegmann (b. 1955) and his firm Wiegmann & Trübenbach. The ideas for the renovated space of Saint Peter were formulated in cooperation by Mennekes and Wiegmann.<sup>243</sup> It was essential to take into account the decade-long activities in the fields of contemporary art and music as well as to heed the most recent “space interventions” by Byars, Kuball, and Kapoor. Gradually, Mennekes and Wiegmann developed “the perception of the interior as the formative [*gestaltender*] aesthetic and architectural place.”<sup>244</sup> In other words, the composition of the interior space influenced one’s

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<sup>242</sup> Weiser, *Offenes Zueinander*, 140.

<sup>243</sup> Ulrich Wiegmann, “Begegnung mit Friedhelm Mennekes,” in Schlimbach, *Für Friedhelm Mennekes*, 143–5.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 143. Here *gestaltender* can likewise be understood as “creative” or “constitutive.” The original reads, “die Wahrnehmung des Innenraums als zu gestaltender ästhetischer und architektonischer Ort.”

sensuous experience. Emptiness was to become the decisive element of the new visual configuration of the church: it could offer clarity and simplicity that would not interfere with the visitor's perception of the given space.<sup>245</sup> Aiming for the holistic and harmonious reduction, Wiegmann picked the color scheme that corresponded to the warm-gray stone of the pillars and applied it in plaster to the inside walls, arches, and vaults, and in screed to the church floor. The vaulted gray ceiling replaced the flat coffered wooden ceiling that was implemented during the postwar reconstruction. At Mennekes' wish all the pews were removed; since then the chairs were to be brought in and set up in the nave for worship services and concerts. Likewise, all objects that were not indispensable were rid of: the pulpit, candle holders, decoration, flowers. When the church reopened in 2000 its previous spatial composition—already minimalistic for a Catholic church—appeared as yet barer than at the moment of its postwar consecration of 1961 (fig. 8). Although the radical transformation of space envisioned by Mennekes was achieved, the pastor wanted to have a *traditional* Catholic church.<sup>246</sup> This implied retaining certain visuals: a cross, an image of Madonna, a representation of pieta, a tabernacle, and most significantly the altar: "Church is where an altar is."<sup>247</sup> For the newly designed space and the new stage in Saint Peter's history, a properly new altar was necessary.

In 2000 a tripartite granite sculpture called *Gurutz Aldare* by the Basque sculptor Eduardo Chillida (1924–2002) arrived into the church to serve as its new altar table.<sup>248</sup> The artist conceived the design for *Gurutz Aldare* in the 1960s; it was proposed for a public square in the Swedish city of Lund in 1967 and for the Basque city of Durango in 1969. As both plans failed to be realized, Chillida modified the sculpture for the altar of a newly built church in the Basque

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<sup>245</sup> Ibid. For further discussion of the notion of emptiness and its role for Saint Peter, see pages 114–8 below.

<sup>246</sup> Friedhelm Mennekes in conversation with the author, Bonn, November 10, 2016.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

<sup>248</sup> For a detailed discussion of Chillida's sculpture and its placement in Saint Peter, see chapter "Altar oder Kunstwerk," in Schlimbach, *Für einen lange währenden Augenblick*, 351–71.

town of Aránzazu, but the project once again fell through for the lack of consensus between the artist and the commissioners.<sup>249</sup> When in 1992 Friedhelm Mennekes met with Chillida during the artist's show at the Miramar Palace in San Sebastián, the latter shared "Padre, I actually once made an altar, but no one wanted it. One of its versions [in alabaster] stands in the Vatican Museums."<sup>250</sup> The conversation about the sculpture continued between the two as the artist showed his work at Kunst Station in 1993/94 and later during the renovation of Saint Peter.<sup>251</sup> The refurbishment of the church provided an occasion for Chillida's sculpture to find its new home in Saint Peter; so in November 2000 the church community received *Gurutz Aldare* as a gift. From that point, with the approval of the Archdiocese of Cologne, the Holy Mass in Saint Peter was celebrated at the new altar table that consisted of the three cross-shaped blocks of white granite standing directly on the floor, without a base or an elevation (fig. 9). However, soon afterwards Chillida's altar spurred contention that came from the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments; that is, from the Vatican itself.<sup>252</sup> In the summer of 2002, Cardinal Meisner received a letter from the Congregation stating that *Gurutz Aldare* could not be "mensa domini," or the communion table, as long as it consisted of three disjoined parts. An altar table must consist of one piece "because Christ too is whole and undivided."<sup>253</sup> Meisner and Mennekes had to comply with the instructions given by the Holy See to remove Chillida's sculpture from the church apse. A plain concrete table designed by Wiegmann assumed the role at the altar. So that the artist's gift could remain with the community to which it

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<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 355–8.

<sup>250</sup> Quoted in German in *ibid.*, 359: "Padre, ich habe sogar einmal einen Altar gemacht, aber keiner wollte ihn. Eine Variante davon steht im Vatikanmuseum."

<sup>251</sup> See the catalog edited by Martina Schleppinghoff and Kurt Danch, *Chillida im geistlichen Raum: 13. November 1993 bis 6. Februar 1994 Kunst-Station Sankt Peter Köln* (Cologne: Kunst-Station Sankt Peter Köln, 1996), 52–5. Between 1969 and 1977 Chillida was also working on the public sculpture for the south square of the Cologne Cathedral. Its execution was canceled due to the cut in the city funding.

<sup>252</sup> Schlimbach, *Für einen lange währenden Augenblick*, 362–4.

<sup>253</sup> Quoted in German and Italian in *ibid.*, 363: "weil auch Christus einzig und ungeteilt ist," and "perché anche Christo è unico e indiviso."

was given, the sculpture was transferred to the north aisle. This is where *Gurutz Aldare* can be found today: not as a sacrament but as an aesthetic object, as a permanent piece of art.<sup>254</sup>

Chillida's work is one of merely two works of art that have been permanently assimilated into the church of Saint Peter. The other is an installation by a British artist and musician Martin Creed (b. 1968). To "document" and to announce the reopening of the church, the young artist created a neon sign for the Romanesque tower that was to glow from nightfall and be seen from many points in the city. Its message reads "DON'T WORRY" on the one side and three translations of that phrase—in Greek, Latin, and German—on the other sides of the tower ("Μη μεριμνᾷ," "Noli sollicitus esse," and "Sorge dich nicht"). To the believer, the phrase brings an association with the verse from Matthew 6:25, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?" To the secular mind, the neon text is more likely to ring a bell as a chorus to Bobby McFerrin's world-renowned song "Don't Worry, Be Happy" (1988). Thus, Creed's installation is a bridge between the sacred and secular realms within the same urban environment. Earlier Mischa Kuball's work for Kunst-Station had showed that light could be a suitable medium for connecting a singular church to its surroundings. After the renovation, the light installation by the British artist appeared as yet more powerful due to its use of verbal language. Emanating its presence over the city of Cologne, *Don't Worry* was a message concerning the embrace of secular contemporary art by a Christian community. It stood for the efficient dialogue between autonomous art and religion, and signaled the energetic relationship between the two, which by then had been firmly established at Kunst-Station Sankt Peter.

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<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 366–7. Also see Friedhelm Mennekes, and Brigitta Lentz, *Zwischen Freiheit und Bindung: Friedhelm Mennekes im Gespräch mit Brigitta Lentz über Kirche und Kunst* (Cologne: Wienand Verlag, 2008), 151–2.

In this spirit the art exhibitions in Saint Peter took a fresh start after a three-year pause. In May 2001, a French sculptor, photographer, and conceptual artist Christian Boltanski (b. 1944) introduced his exhibition *Lichtmesz* that intervened simultaneously into several parts of the church.<sup>255</sup> The side aisles lured the visitor with thirty-one white frocks, arranged under the vaulted ceiling at various heights. A single black cloak characterized the front wall of the south aisle, fixed in a position with outstretched arms and its back to the viewer. The floor of the upper galleries was meticulously covered with hay, while each of the seven windows framed a photograph of a woman's face. Veiled with white transparent fabric, the portraits show seven young dancers from the school of Gret Palucca (1902–1993), a Jewish choreographer from Dresden who was a pioneer of modern dance in Germany.<sup>256</sup> The position in the windows is the one typically reserved for the stained-glass images of saints in a Catholic church, and Boltanski must have consciously worked with that tradition. As poignant mnemonic devices, two more photographic stations elaborated on the role of private memory in the exhibition. The artist hung photographs of his parents side by side at the rear wall of the north aisle, one of the darkest areas in Saint Peter. One other photograph could be found at the exterior wall of the church tower: here an image of a deceased person in a coffin was, similarly to the dancers' faces, concealed under a light white fabric. A different artistic strategy was chosen by Boltanski for producing a situation in the baptistery. In contrast to anonymous imagery and objects elsewhere in the church, the artist approached the semi-enclosed space of the baptistery through the medium of text. He produced 1713 individual labels, each inscribed with a name of a person who was christened in

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<sup>255</sup> Victoria Scheibler and Kurt Danch, eds., *Christian Boltanski: Lichtmesz* (Cologne: Kunst-Station Sankt Peter, 2001). The exhibition was not the first chance for the artist to work with an active church. Earlier he created site-specific installations for Chapelle Saint-Louis de la Salpêtrière in Paris (1986), Saint-Eustache in Paris (1994), Klein St. Martin in Cologne (1995), and Santo Domingo de Bonaval in Santiago de Compostela (1995/96).

<sup>256</sup> Ibid., unpaginated.

the baptistery of Saint Peter since 1941.<sup>257</sup> The result was a direct connection between the artistic act, the history of the site, and the sacred purpose of the space. Lastly, Boltanski unified the diverse elements of *Lichtmesz* by a sound installation: multiple speakers dispersed around the church delivered voices of twenty young men who, whispering in different languages, described personal moments of love and bliss.

Christian Boltanski's conceptual exhibition in Saint Peter was the result of the artist's comprehensive learning of and engagement with the church space. The selection of particular spots for diverse objects was informed by Boltanski's attention to two characteristics of the place—gradations of light across the rooms and liturgical purpose of the sacred space. Hence is the title “Lichtmesz,” an old German spelling of “Lichtmess” or Candlemas in the English translation. This Christian celebration commemorates the presentation of Christ in the Temple and includes blessing, lighting and bearing in a procession of candles. Historian Bernhard Jussen linked the artist's strategies to the Christian culture of remembrance, “Similar to Christian adoration of saints, Boltanski often exalts persons or groups of people by erecting an altar and presenting them in iconostases.”<sup>258</sup> The remembrance of the dead threaded *Lichtmesz*: either through visible representation in a photographic medium or through the absence of bodies detached from voices, frocks, and written names from the baptismal register. The artist believes that contemplation of art is akin to a religious prayer but, instead of leading one's thoughts to the transcendent, the former provokes the viewer to reflect on his- or herself.<sup>259</sup> In a conversation with Mennekes, Boltanski explicated his artistic methods in a church space, “For me this is about expressing my personal vision of liturgy, my subjective side of the religion. The visitor of my exhibition should strongly sense the spirit of the place and the mysteries of its religion. I would

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<sup>257</sup> Ibid., unpaginated. Boltanski consulted the latest baptismal register of the parish of Saint Peter.

<sup>258</sup> Bernhard Jussen, ed., *Signal—Christian Boltanski* (Göttingen: Wallstein-Verlag, 2004), 72.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid., 77.

like to make visible that of the religion, which touches me the most, and give to the spirituality of the place an additional resonating body.”<sup>260</sup> The emphases here are, on the one hand, on the subjective interpretation of religion and religious space and, where artistic practice is concerned, on the content of that space. In other words, Boltanski installed his works not simply in an architectural but also a sacred setting, according to what he believed was most profound about it. He perceived such space as defined by personal experiences of those who had entered it in the past, entered it in the present, and would enter it in the future. To such experiences the artist responded through, respectively, name signs in the baptistery, photographs of his deceased parents, and processual arrangement of suspended black and white frocks. The focus on one’s personal reflection was intensified in the voices of the sound installation and discrete, barely lit loci of photographic images. Two conclusions could be drawn here. First, Boltanski’s thorough engagement with the space of Saint Peter ultimately issued a total work of art, or *Gesamtkunstwerk*. The visitor was simultaneously exposed to visual, auditory, tactile, and olfactory stimuli.<sup>261</sup> Second, what specifically marked Boltanski’s work for Kunst-Station was his acute faculty of seeing into the experiential character of the church space. He understood the profoundly personal type of an encounter that was possible in an active house of worship and brought this awareness into the center of his exhibition. Moreover, the artist admitted to prefer exhibiting his works in churches because such sacred spaces were precisely where man could ask the most crucial to life questions.<sup>262</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> “Christian Boltanski: licht mesz. Ein Gespräch,” in Friedhelm Mennekes, *Begeisterung und Zweifel: Profane und Sakrale Kunst* (Regensburg: Lindinger + Schmid Verlag, 2003), 49. The original reads, “Worum es mir geht: meine persönliche Sicht der Liturgie, meine subjektive Seite der Religion zum Ausdruck zu bringen. Durch meine Ausstellung sollen die Menschen den Geist des Ortes und die Geheimnisse der Religion nachhaltiger erspüren können. Ich möchte das, was mich in der Religion zutiefst berührt, sichtbar machen und der Spiritualität des Ortes einen zusätzlichen Resonanzkörper geben.”

<sup>261</sup> The latter two refer to the touch and smell of hay in the upper galleries.

<sup>262</sup> “Christian Boltanski: licht mesz. Ein Gespräch,” in Mennekes, *Begeisterung und Zweifel*, 55.



The quality of the church space in raising questions, and precisely existential questions, triggered the work of many artists who have been invited to Kunst-Station Sankt Peter over the years. As discussed above, it was pivotal to a number of artists participating in the triptych series as well as James Lee Byars' *The White Mass*. At the same time, there were artists who preoccupied themselves with matters of social injustice and political turmoil. For them too, the idiosyncrasy of both form and content of Saint Peter's architecture provided a propitious environment for effective communication of the day's problems. In 1991, Cindy Sherman provoked awareness of gender bias through a self-portrait as Jean Fouquet's Madonna from *Melun Diptych* (1452).<sup>263</sup> In 1993, Jenny Holzer mounted ten LED-scrolls on the columns of the church nave and above the altar in the apse; the text running up the screens came from the monologues by perpetrators and victims of the Balkan war that broke over the peninsula in the early 1990s.<sup>264</sup> Another female artist from the United States who relies on the use of verbal language in her practice and who was invited by Friedhelm Mennekes to exhibit in his church was Barbara Kruger (b. 1945). The pop- and conceptual artist started her career as a graphic designer, working on magazine layouts and book covers. When she switched to fine arts, Kruger went through an interest in weaving to discover photography and text as most pertinent means to her growing political and social concerns. By the 1980s, the artist began to employ black-and-white images she would find in the mid-century print-media sources. One of the early examples of Kruger's works, *Perfect* (1980), showed woman's hands clasped in prayer before her torso and the word "perfect" layered in block letters along the lower frame. Kruger reused the image for the work *Be* (1985) and, decades later, for her large-scale installation in Saint Peter (2003). The artist enlarged the newspaper photograph to 24 by 8 meters and centered it on the floor of the nave (fig. 10). She

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<sup>263</sup> Cindy Sherman, *Untitled #216*, chromogenic color print, 221.3 x 142.5 cm, 1989.

<sup>264</sup> Jenny Holzer, *War (Work in Progress)*, 10 vertical LED-scrolls, each 325 x 17 x 10 cm, 1992.

manipulated the image by bringing the hands into sharp focus and blurring the background.<sup>265</sup>

Further the artist inserted four questions typed in white letters inside a rectangular red box:

*Wer salutiert  
am längsten?  
Wer betet am  
Lautesten?  
Wer stirbt  
zuerst? Wer  
lacht zuletzt?*

Both image and text offered commentary on the Iraq War (2003–2011) that erupted not long prior to Kruger’s work in Saint Peter. The beginning of the war was marked by two “prayer scenes”: Saddam Hussein instigating prayers in the Iraqi mosques and the U.S. Cabinet starting its sessions with prayers following George W. Bush’s assumption of the Oval Office.<sup>266</sup> With her four questions Kruger provoked the public to think critically about the images they receive through mass media: “Who salutes the longest? Who prays the loudest? Who dies first? Who laughs last?” The questions compelled their readers to compare the role of political leaders and that of regular people who get drawn into military conflicts without a say in their own fate; to consider methods implemented by power structures and victims of national governance. Moreover, the hands clasped in a prayer turned the worshippers’ attention onto themselves, their own prayers uttered in Saint Peter, and their own faith: “What does your prayer mean? Where do you position yourself in relation to this world?”

The scale of Kruger’s installation in Saint Peter’s nave obstructed a complete sight of the image and the words. One had to move through the space to form an idea of the full picture and read the questions stretched out in seven lines. Alternatively, the visitor could go to the upper galleries and observe the work from above. Before worship services, rows of chairs were set on top of

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<sup>265</sup> Victoria Scheibler, *Barbara Kruger: Wer salutiert am längsten? Wer betet am lautesten? Wer stirbt zuerst? Wer lacht zuletzt?* (Cologne: Kunst-Station Sankt Peter Köln, 2003), unpaginated.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid., unpaginated.

Kruger's image and, hence, everyone who sat down became situated within the parameters of the provoking subject matter. The chairs were removed after the liturgy and the sermon, thus exposing every attendant to the pressing social questions. Having participated in one of the services in Saint Peter, the artist called it "an extraordinary event: one that connected the spiritual beliefs of the church with both the social relations of everyday life and the visual possibilities of contemporary art."<sup>267</sup> Kruger suggested that a church as an exhibition space had a strong potential to communicate current social problems and build awareness with the united help of religion and art. One could argue that for such purposes churches are more effective than traditional exhibition spaces such as museums or galleries. In Saint Peter and other churches across Germany an imposing array of art projects that present some type of social critique and even call for action supports the argument and is to be investigated closer in chapter five. Meanwhile, it should be noted that Kruger's visual interrogation established a nexus between the spiritual life inside the church walls and the socio-political situation outside of them. Similarly to both Mischa Kuball's and Martin Creed's light installations, her work connected Saint Peter to its contemporary context.

During Friedhelm Mennekes' last years as the pastor-curator of the Jesuit church of Cologne, Kunst-Station Sankt Peter held four to seven art projects annually. Among those that received the most attention from press and scholars are exhibitions by Jannis Kounellis (2001), Magdalena Abakanowicz (2001), Francesco Clemente (2002), Fernando Prats (2003), a group of young Kurdish artists Shirwan Can, Sami H. Muemin, and Horèn Gharib Rauf (2005), and Gregor Schneider (2006). Mennekes invited the artists to see the church, providing them with time and freedom for becoming familiar with the space. According to the pastor's intentions, the artistic exploration of Saint Peter's space and the resultant site-specificity of art interventions have

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<sup>267</sup> Quoted in English in Schlimbach, *Für Friedhelm Mennekes*, 160.

grown to become key aspects of exhibitions at Kunst-Station. Furthermore, the priest welcomed artists to join communal events and thus facilitated exchange of perspectives between them and the parish members. In 2008, Friedhelm Mennekes retired at the age of sixty-eight and relocated to the city of Frankfurt.

#### 4.1.3.4. Theory and practice of Friedhelm Mennekes

Mennekes' encounter with art and beginning of curatorial career were coincidental, following an episode when he asked Roland Peter Litzenburger for a concert poster.<sup>268</sup> Since that moment in 1979, the pastor never stopped organizing exhibitions. The lack of art historical or art critical education was, according to Mennekes, a considerable advantage—the distance allowed him to be fascinated and touched by the power of art.<sup>269</sup> On the one hand, his gradual learning of art came directly from the conversations with artists he has led since the 1980s, over 150 of which have been subsequently published.<sup>270</sup> On the other hand, Mennekes immersed himself in the world of art by not only visiting artists' studios but also attending museums, galleries, and large international exhibitions as well as developing a network of relationships with curators, art historians, gallerists, and collectors across Germany, Europe, the United States, and Japan. Since the exhibition project *Menschenbild–Christusbild* that he co-organized with Franz Joseph van der Grinten in the mid-1980s, Mennekes has been continuously publishing his essays in catalogs, academic journals, and anthologies, and participated in scholarly conferences dedicated to the subject of Christianity and the arts in Germany, Austria, the United Kingdom, and the United States. An analysis of his writings, talks, and practices shows an unfaltering accent on the two

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<sup>268</sup> See page 88 in this thesis.

<sup>269</sup> “Pater Mennekes im Gespräch mit Georg Imdahl,” in Schlimbach, *Für Friedhelm Mennekes*, 224–5.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

terms that the pastor employs in his reflection on the relationship between contemporary art and the church: doubt (*der Zweifel*) and emptiness (*die Leere*).<sup>271</sup> By examining Mennekes' understanding of these two notions, we will reveal conceptual structures from which the terms arise, aim at the comprehension of his approach to organizing exhibitions, and conclude with the goals he has thereby pursued.

From the early interest in the visual arts, Mennekes laid his accent on art's ability to induce doubt and question. "What is it that [art] kindles always anew, makes me restless, hungry, as if obsessed? I think it is the doubt that it sparks, cultivates, and carries out."<sup>272</sup> In short, art puts everything into question. When meeting institutionalized religion such as Christianity, art robs it of the fabricated certitude and confronts religion with a row of questions.<sup>273</sup> This implies doubting one's beliefs or even faith and, by that, risking the integrity and life of the religion. Secondly, doubting means the opposite of being fixed—the state of movement and thus vitality. Doubts prompt questions, while the process of questioning symbolizes indefiniteness, openness, and freedom. According to the pastor, these qualities are indispensable to one's faith. At this point it is expedient to cite Mennekes' definition of faith, "I understand faith as the seeking, questioning, disbelieving, but precisely on these grounds liberating way to live my life." Apropos art experience, he immediately adds "The encounter with art can help men open up to living in accordance with this faith."<sup>274</sup> Mennekes argues that faith, as the essence of religion, is not any

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<sup>271</sup> In addition to the sources cited below, the author incorporates personal conversations with Friedhelm Mennekes that took place in Bonn and Cologne in 2016–2017.

<sup>272</sup> Mennekes, *Begeisterung und Zweifel*, 9. The original reads "Was aber entfacht sie [Kunst] ständig neu, ist unruhig in mir, macht mich hungrig, wie besessen? Ich glaube, es ist der Zweifel, den sie entfacht, kultiviert, ja organisiert."

<sup>273</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>274</sup> Mennekes and Lentz, *Zwischen Freiheit und Bindung*, 33–4. The original reads, "Ich verstehe den Glauben als eine suchende, fragende, bezweifelnde, aber gerade deshalb auch befreiende Weise, mich selbst zu leben. Die

given knowledge but a creative formation, not unlike art itself.<sup>275</sup> It is the constant state of movement that faith and art have in common. Consequently, the role of art in a church can be deduced as a stirring force that works against the stiffening of religion inside its own framework of credo and traditions; a force that by stimulating doubt stimulates the movement of faith.

Indeed, one can ask why it is necessary to invite contemporary non-religious art into a church space where other types of art have already been present and utilized. For Mennekes, art can be effective and truthful to itself only when it is free; that is, when it does not illustrate or serve any other entity outside of itself. Otherwise, conventional church art is “pathetic, weak, narcissistic, kitschy, inauthentic, illustrative; remote, inhumane, unworthy...”<sup>276</sup> Such art lacks the ability to provoke doubts because the power and value of art depend on its freedom, which entails its complete independence of religion. Even though Mennekes argues that religion and art share many attributes and functions in the life of mankind, he insists that the two are separate cultural forces and must remain that way.<sup>277</sup> When religion and art cross their paths, they should avoid imposing regulations on one another and allow for a reciprocal challenge. In this case, an encounter can result in an exhilarating moment and trigger the questioning processes that will ultimately lead to new perspectives on both sides.<sup>278</sup> The dichotomy advanced by Mennekes has found both followers and opponents. Jonathan Koestlé-Cate has recently documented the debate between Mennekes and Keith Walker, former Canon of Winchester Cathedral, whose views parted during the conference “Commissioning Art for Today’s Church” at the University

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Begegnung mit der Kunst kann es schaffen, die Menschen für diese Haltung eines Lebens aus dem Glauben zu öffnen.”

<sup>275</sup> Mennekes, “Räume öffnen, Welte öffnen,” 28.

<sup>276</sup> Mennekes, *Begeisterung und Zweifel*, 12. The original reads, “kläglich, schwach, selbstverliebt, kitschig, unglaublich, illustrativ; lebensfremd, unmenschlich, unwürdig...”

<sup>277</sup> “Pater Mennekes im Gespräch mit Georg Imdahl,” 230–1.

<sup>278</sup> Mennekes and Lentz, *Zwischen Freiheit und Bindung*, 116.

College, Chichester (1999).<sup>279</sup> Walker argued that contemporary art in churches should relate to the liturgy and the doctrines of Christianity, thus calling for unity rather than conflict between the two domains. His stance contrasts sharply with Mennekes' insistence on the beneficial nature of the opposition between religion and art. Koestlé-Cate himself criticizes the Jesuit's position, proposing that the pastor's advocating of free art is an attempt to "avoid all possibility of introducing mediocre religious art into St Peter's" and a deliberate effort "for the sake of his own radical programme."<sup>280</sup> The art historian suggests that Mennekes asserts "minimal difference" between art and religion in order to preserve the creative tension in the exhibitions; and follows up with the question "Isn't it important to convey the relation of art and religion as thoroughly interwoven rather than as separate magisteria?" What Koestlé-Cate misjudges is a role of contemporary art in relation to Mennekes' understanding of religion; namely, religion as a dynamic process rather than fixed and dogmatic reality. Likewise inaccurate is calling separation of art and religion a "minimal difference." Mennekes does not merely eschew the reconciliation of the two for the sake of "productive tension." Instead, the separation is central to the effectual experience of art in a church: only because of its "otherness" can contemporary non-devotional art agitate the doubt and trigger the movement of one's faith.

The dialectic coexistence of religion and contemporary art as distinct spheres remained important throughout Mennekes' years in Cologne, and is evident in the exhibitions at Kunst-Station Sankt Peter. On the one hand, the pastor gave the invited artists complete autonomy in preparing projects for the church. On the other, he never ceded the worship space to mere exhibition value so that liturgies, baptism, and congregational events continued to hold primary significance. Hence are his methods. On the one hand, Mennekes showed "a great trust in the free, creative

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<sup>279</sup> Koestlé-Cate, *A Fractious Embrace*, 207–9.

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.*, 208.

quality of [contemporary] art.”<sup>281</sup> On the other, he distinguished the church space as sacred, using the Christian sense of the word as the house of God, and therefore possessing a specific “aura.”<sup>282</sup> This last point introduces the new dimension into the argument: now the stirring force of free art situates itself in the *auratic* space. Thus, the coexistence of religion and art within a church inevitably exists in a distinctly charged environment.

Mennekes elaborated upon the question of space in his essay “Zur Sakralität der Leere,” which was published three times in the German language, and presented by the author in the English language at “Sacred Space Conference” at the Institute of Sacred Music, Yale University.<sup>283</sup> Written on the occasion of Saint Peter’s reopening after the renovation (1997–2000), it summarizes Mennekes’ view on the sacred architecture, ponders over James Lee Byars’ installation *The White Mass* (1995) and Eduardo Chillida’s *Gurutz Aldare* (2000), and proposes requisites for effective religious space. The essay begins with an account of three conceptual or spiritual dimensions of space: space of consciousness, space of representations, and artistic space. Mennekes describes the space of consciousness as a space built in a mind of an individual on momentary impressions and experiences through the senses of sight, hearing, and touch.<sup>284</sup> Borrowing a definition from a phenomenologist Hermann Schmitz, Mennekes also designates this type as a place of “inner experiences.” In contrast, the space of representations is constructed

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<sup>281</sup> Mennekes and Lentz, *Zwischen Freiheit und Bindung*, 113. The original reads, “Weil ich ein großes Vertrauen in die freie, kreative Kompetenz der [zeitgenössischen] Kunst habe.”

<sup>282</sup> “Pater Mennekes im Gespräch mit Georg Imdahl,” 230.

<sup>283</sup> Friedhelm Mennekes, “Zur Sakralität der Leere,” in *Kunst und Kirche* 65 (2002), 159–64; in Mennekes, *Begeisterung und Zweifel*, 17–29; and in Angelika Nollert, ed., *Kirchenbauten in der Gegenwart: Architektur zwischen Sakralität und sozialer Wirklichkeit* (Regensburg: Pustet, 2011), 235–44. Friedhelm Mennekes, “On the Spirituality of Spatial Emptiness: The Example of St. Peter’s in Cologne,” paper given at “Sacred Space Conference,” Institute of Sacred Music, Yale University (25–26 October 2007), <http://ism.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/On%20the%20Spirituality%20of%20Spatial%20Emptiness.pdf> (accessed July 20, 2017). Emptiness is the central subject in more recent essays by Mennekes, “ÜberRäume: Leere–Schweigen–Fragen,” and “Die Kraft des leeren Raums und das fotografische Bild,” both in Nicole Ahland, and Friedhelm Mennekes, *ÜberRäume: Sankt Cäcilien + Sankt Peter Köln* (Cologne: Wienand Verlag, 2014), respectively pages 13–7 and 33–5.

<sup>284</sup> In this discussion the references and quotes are taken from Mennekes’ paper given at Yale University in 2007. This English version corresponds to the German texts cited in note 283.



not out of feelings but knowledge. It consists of associated meanings, histories, and functions. The third type, artistic space is a category put forward by a philosopher Martin Heidegger. Here, a person can fulfill her creativity and choose how to inhabit this space in a self-developing way. Artistic space transcends the previous two dimensions and becomes the location for human freedom. However, before an individual can exercise her liberty and act in this space, it must be cleared of anything needless so that mere emptiness remains. At this point, Mennekes introduces another category, which encompasses all other dimensions: “sacred space,” or “holy space.” Reflecting on the ideas of sacred space by Schmitz and German philosophers Josef Pieper and Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel, the pastor respectively attributes to the church, first, a poignant force cultivated by the outpouring of feelings; second, a beyond-the-ordinary ambiance “where silence and real hearing are possible”; third, an enclosure that stirs “something sublime, celebratory, and unearthly.” For Mennekes these characteristics are accurate, albeit insufficient. He asserts that the word “sacred” as “a vague description of a special atmosphere of space” is better described as a subjective response to the set of spatial qualities. Therefore, the perception of space as sacred depends not only on the external attributes of the given church but also on the internal atmosphere that, through three dimensions described above, is born within an individual. Here Mennekes arrives at his central argument: the space that can facilitate the internal atmosphere and create a resonance within the visitor is specifically the *empty* space. When a church is filled with images and objects, its spatial clarity and character are hidden. As a result, the visitor’s gaze is overloaded and can neither come to rest nor concentrate on the light and architecture. To lift the burden of distracting pictorial layers, the church space should be emptied. Emptiness can provide peace of mind and “meet the inner needs of people,” while from a pastoral point of view emptiness can help experience a church as a sacred space.<sup>285</sup> The

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<sup>285</sup> Ibid., under the subtitle “The Power of the Empty Space.”

fulfillment of sacred space can be achieved in three steps: the space is purposed to alienate, to gather, and to stimulate. The emptiness is responsible for the steps one and two. First, it alienates the beholder from the mundane and the ordinary of the world that is left behind the church doors. Second, it helps the human mind to concentrate, the human being to be gathered together. The final step, to stimulate, is achieved by an area of energy. Mennekes underscores that in a Catholic church, however rid of images and objects, there must be present a strong dominating center—the altar. The stimulating energy can arise from such a center, which immediately after the three-year renovation found its seat in Chillida’s altar table. Another possible source of the energy is free art.<sup>286</sup> Not traditional religious or devotional art but rather new, uncomfortable, shocking, disconcerting, or even painful; alarming, staggering, and wakening art. Only such art is capable of echoing within the beholder, making the beholder doubt, and, returning to the rhetoric of Mennekes’ paper, filling the inner space of an individual. In conclusion to his argument, the pastor affirms the essential purpose of sacred space, “Sacred space is... an energy-charged space for seeking and questioning. Sacred space should provide individuals with the strength to awaken their belief within themselves, to doubt and to question, to be skeptical and to listen.” This summary includes two requisites for fulfilling the purpose: (1) emptiness, which provides openness, freedom, and clarity of architecture; and (2) temporary exhibitions of contemporary art, which challenge the visitor to see, to be moved, and to question.<sup>287</sup> These two “aesthetic efforts” allow the church architecture to become a multi-dimensional space—of consciousness, of

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<sup>286</sup> Mennekes’ example in the essay is *The White Mass* by James Lee Byars (Kunst-Station Sankt Peter, 1995).

<sup>287</sup> In the German religious thought of the twentieth century, a Catholic priest Romano Guardini, an acclaimed modern architect Rudolf Schwarz, and a Protestant theologian Paul Tillich extolled emptiness as sacred void, or as conducive to experiencing the presence of God. See Robert A. Krieg, “Romano Guardini’s Theology of the Human Person,” in *Theological Studies* 59 (1998), 457–74; Rudolf Schwarz, *The Church Incarnate: The Sacred Function of Christian Architecture* (Washington, D.C: Regnery Publishing, 1958); and Paul Tillich, *On Art and Architecture*, 40, 193, 217–28.

representations, of artistic act—and, ultimately, turn into an existential stage for personal experiences.

Experiential value is the common ground, on which Mennekes' keywords—"doubt" and "emptiness"—coincide. They are an outcome of and a precondition for a certain desired effect of contemporary art in the church space. At the same time, they are interwoven in the subjective processes of seeing, which always qualitatively vary from one church visitor to another. When encountering exhibitions at Saint Peter, believers experience contemporary art differently than atheists or agnostics: they have antennae for what is religious in art.<sup>288</sup> Likewise among non-religious visitors the reactions diverge according to everyone's individual predisposition, or everyone's unique "life baggage." When art touches the viewer, it provokes a subjective line of questioning and triggers the movement of personal inner self. Similarly, Mennekes understands faith not as a given set of beliefs or a life structure but as a personal process, a constant becoming: *fides qua* instead of *fides quae*.<sup>289</sup> The crucial commonality between religion and art is thus their ability to set man's inner self in motion.<sup>290</sup> Moreover, Mennekes presents the enrichment and development of the human being as their shared goal. That is why he believes that the coexistence of the two is conducive to achieving this goal. Particularly for the believer art in a church can intensify his or her faith, while for the non-religious public it opens up other possibilities. In addition to provoking questions, contemporary art in the church can teach one to develop a deeper and broader seeing.<sup>291</sup> It can become a source of "liberating, redeeming energy."<sup>292</sup> Or, it can speak about the contemporary moment and *conditio humana* that the

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<sup>288</sup> Friedhelm Mennekes in conversation with the author, Bonn, November 10, 2016.

<sup>289</sup> Mennekes, "On the Spirituality of Spatial Emptiness," under the subtitle "The Sacredness of Experience." From Latin *fides qua* is translated as "the faith which believes," *fides quae* as "the faith which is believed."

<sup>290</sup> Mennekes and Lentz, *Zwischen Freiheit und Bindung*, 110.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*, 103. The original reads, "Sie [Kunst] hat eine befreiende, erlösende Kraft."

viewer's life is surrounded by.<sup>293</sup> Ultimately, at the core of such experiential value is subjectivity: "Art supplies no certitudes. One must achieve them on one's own."<sup>294</sup>

From the earliest years of Kunst-Station Sankt Peter, the ideas presented above continuously informed the pastor-curator's approach to organizing exhibitions in his church. The preceding discussion of the triptych series (1987–1994) discloses Mennekes' accentuating of the stirring effect of contemporary art on the viewer and his resolution to bring art and liturgy in the immediate proximity to each other. However the tightest embrace of art and liturgy occurred already after the triptych series, when the pastor celebrated the Eucharist standing up inside James Lee Byars' installation (1995). This was also the time when, under Byars' influence, Mennekes promulgated his theory on the spirituality of questioning.<sup>295</sup> With the first instance of emptying the church for *The White Mass*, the role of the void gained significance and was brought to the forefront during the renovation work by Ulrich Wiegmann (1997–2000). The impetuses to site-specific projects, given in the mid-90s by Mischa Kuball and Anish Kapoor, were carried on into the new century by focused installations and Mennekes' increased emphasis on the purposeful qualities of Saint Peter's space. The potential of both the church space and contemporary art to raise questions, and precisely existential questions, underlined the pastor's curatorial practice. Precisely to strengthen such potential and facilitate effective experience, Mennekes emptied the church interior and shortened the time of each exhibition. To see and to be moved by seeing, each time anew, was ultimately Mennekes' guiding principle over his twenty-one years at Saint Peter.

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<sup>293</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>294</sup> Mennekes, *Begeisterung und Zweifel*, 45. The original reads, "Die Kunst liefert keine Sicherheiten. Die muss man sich schon selbst erringen."

<sup>295</sup> Friedhelm Mennekes, "On the Spirituality of Questioning," in Mennekes, ed., *The White Mass*, 17–42.

#### 4.1.4. Recent activities, 2008–2017

Friedhelm Mennekes' departure as both the pastor of Saint Peter and the director of Kunst-Station entailed a number of changes. First of all, the exceptionality of his achievements stemmed from the duality of his position as well as personal commitment to both the life of the parish and organization of contemporary art exhibitions. In 2008 Werner Holter SJ (b. 1946), appointed by Cardinal Joachim Meisner, became the new pastor of the Jesuit church and, accordingly, the new head of Kunst-Station. Simultaneously occupied as the head of Karl-Rahner Academy, city chaplain, and preceptor of spiritual exercises for the Jesuit order, he soon delegated the running of art related activities to Dr. Guido Schlimbach (b. 1966).<sup>296</sup> The latter was a member of Saint Peter's community since 1993 and assisted Mennekes with art exhibitions since 2000.<sup>297</sup> Schlimbach's dissertation dedicated to the history of Kunst-Station Sankt Peter under the leadership of Mennekes remains the most comprehensive account of the church and its engagement with contemporary art.<sup>298</sup> Yet in the beginning of his years in Cologne, Mennekes established a parish art council that would aid him on various advisory levels.<sup>299</sup> It usually consisted of art historians from both local or regional museums and universities. Since 2008, the role of the council became more prominent and, indicatively, more distanced from Holter's duties as a pastor. This growing separation has marked the most recent exhibitions in the church and contributed to the changing character of art shown in Saint Peter over the last decade.

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<sup>296</sup> Werner Holter, ed., *Erfüllte Leere: Sankt Peter Köln* (Annweiler: Plöger, 2014), 285. Holter remained the pastor of Saint Peter until September 1, 2017. His follower was Stephan Ch. Kessler SJ.

<sup>297</sup> Schlimbach, *Für einen lange währenden Augenblick*, 389.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid.

<sup>299</sup> Dr. Lesa Mason, art historian and former educator at Kunst-Station Sankt Peter (1987–1999), in email conversation with the author, June–July 2017.

In 2014, Holter edited and largely authored a book about the life and multifaceted work of the Cologne Jesuit church.<sup>300</sup> It included texts about the liturgical year and its relation to the space of Saint Peter as well as music and art that interacted with it. At times Holter's own writing appears opposed to the ideas of his predecessor. In particular the former's position regarding both doubt and emptiness deviate from Mennekes' reasoning of their liberating qualities. Holter contradicts the value of doubt and questioning:

Saint Peter, our church, is the space in which questions can be raised. We can leave [this debate] undecided whether questions are more important than answers. But to only propose questions—according to communicology—is not far-reaching. Pure questioning results in the stalemate of the dialogue. We rely on answers, even if provisional, which enable new, broader questions and closer examination.<sup>301</sup>

Correspondingly, his definition of religion differs from that of Mennekes and consists of “calling, challenge, and answer.”<sup>302</sup> As for the role of Saint Peter's space, Holter acknowledges the void as its foremost feature but simultaneously underlines that the church strives for an effect of “fulfilled emptiness” (“*erfüllte Leere*”).<sup>303</sup> For him, the church is first and foremost the place of the word of God, of the revelation (“*Offenbarung*”).<sup>304</sup> It is not surprising then that the discussion of artworks and installations is theologically colored; e.g. Berndnaut Smilde's *Nimbus* (2014) compared to a cloud in the Book of Exodus or the Mount of Transfiguration in the Gospel of Luke.<sup>305</sup> Even though Holter claims to embrace the freedom and sovereignty of contemporary art, he nonetheless subdues its voice to that of Christian teaching. Moreover, the contribution to

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<sup>300</sup> Holter, ed., *Erfüllte Leere*.

<sup>301</sup> Holter, “Der Dialog zwischen Kunst und Religion,” in *ibid.*, 237. The original reads, “Sankt Peter, unsere Kirche, ist der Raum, in der Fragen gestellt werden dürfen. Ob Fragen immer wichtiger sind als Antworten, lassen wir einmal dahingestellt sein. Nur Fragen zu stellen—so sagen Kommunikationswissenschaftler—führe nicht weiter. Reines Fragen führt zum Stillstand des Dialogs. Wir sind angewiesen auf Antworten, auch wenn sie vorläufig sind, die neues, weitergehendes Fragen und Hinterfragen ermöglichen.”

<sup>302</sup> “Angerufensein, Infragestellung und Antwort,” in *ibid.*, 240.

<sup>303</sup> Holter, “Erfüllte Leere: Oxymora,” in *ibid.*, 11–3.

<sup>304</sup> *Ibid.*, 240–1.

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*, 203–4.

the discussion of art in the volume by Schlimbach, who has adopted Mennekes' approach and argues for art's ability to provoke individual doubts and existential search, is conspicuously minimal. For example, his text about Simon Ungers' outdoor sculpture *Monolith* (2009) is strongly reminiscent of Mennekes' ideas outlined in *Begeisterung und Zweifel*: "[*Monolith*] mirrors the human doubt and questioning of one's life and place in the here and now. It binds together the big themes addressed by both religion and art: the fullness and finitude of life, the meaning of beauty and the longing for something that cannot be expressed in words."<sup>306</sup> It can be therefore noted that Schlimbach's resistance to definitive interpretation of an artwork presents a diametrical difference from Holter's rendering of the subject. Thus, this recent publication reveals the growing separation between the perspectives of the pastor on the one hand and the Art Council, represented by Schlimbach, on the other.

In praxis, a new character of art exhibitions in Saint Peter can be discerned along three directions. First, a number of installations have been realized that permit an overtly theological reflection on the use of light, white color, or high suspension of art objects. For example, Claire Morgan's *Act of God, Höhere Gewalt* (2015): a delicate sphere composed of minuscule polyethylene pieces and descending on shiny white threads from the church ceiling, as if from heaven. Or, *Ad Lucem* by Angela Glajcar (2009): an imposing white tunnel of translucent paper sheets hovering above the nave and directing the viewer's gaze towards the altar (fig. 11). The connotation with the divine is difficult to escape: the elevated objects hint at the presence and, therefore, existence of something pure and otherworldly. For the pastor and the community, Christ's words must resonate with power, "I am the Light of the world; the one who follows me

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<sup>306</sup> Guido Schlimbach, "Vertraut und doch Fremd," in *ibid.*, 176. The original reads, "[*Monolith*] spiegelt die Zweifel des Menschen und seine Fragen an das Leben, seine Verortung im hier und jetzt wieder. Er verbindet die großen Themen, mit denen sich Kunst und Religion gleichermaßen auseinandersetzen, die Fülle und Begrenztheit des Lebens, den Sinn für das Schöne und die Sehnsucht nach dem, wofür es keine Worte gibt."

will not walk in darkness, but will have light and life.”<sup>307</sup> Even in a secular mind the connection with the numinous persists; white color and light are typically linked to the ideas, albeit ambiguous, of the pure and the good, ranging from the sentiments of beauty to those of hope. Second, a number of art exhibitions since 2008 could be palpably linked to Christian spirituality. Here one can name a group of paintings *Gitterköpfe* by a Catholic priest Herbert Falken (2012); a project *katholisch* by Thomas Bayrle with a large-scale image of crucifixion filling the third of the east apse (2014); or a recent exhibition of woven abstractions by Sidival Fila, a friar from the Franciscan Convent of St. Bonaventure located on the Palatine Hill (2017). The last of these projects was organized together with the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome—a cooperation that is strikingly different from Mennekes’ work with galleries in New York and Los Angeles. Third, there has been a considerable increase of engagement with artists who tackled pressing social issues and called for public awareness. While earlier works by Holzer or Kruger are similar in this respect, the past activities at Saint Peter drew attention to the most immediate and local concerns of the Cologne public. In 2014–2015, Hermann Josef Hack transformed the interior of Sankt Peter into a refugee tent for his project *Base Camp*.<sup>308</sup> He sprayed or painted color on tarpaulins, the material used for the building of emergency shelters. The artist called the installation “a space for communication and above all as a mouthpiece for those affected” and conceived it not merely as a confrontation with a problem but also as a stimulus for action in the city and country that had recently accepted thousands of refugees from Syria and North Africa. Similar goal was pursued through a performance by Wolfgang Vetten in April 2017. With a long brush soaked in water he wrote on the floor of Saint Peter’s nave excerpts from the 2016 news report about the migrants drowned in the Mediterranean Sea. It started with “More than

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<sup>307</sup> John 8:12.

<sup>308</sup> Renate Goldmann, ed., *Hermann Josef Hack–Basislager*, exh. cat. (Cologne: Kunst-Station Sankt Peter Köln, 2015).



5000...”–a numbing phrase that in a matter of minutes vanished from sight, just as those news reports vanish from our memory (fig. 12). While these examples are inevitably idiosyncratic, they reflect larger tendencies appearing in activities at Kunst-Station Sankt Peter since 2008.

In summary it can be noted that after Mennekes’ retirement, the exhibitions at Saint Peter have been less subversive and less controversial. They have been conspicuously more concordant with expectations one might have of art in a sacred space. Indeed, contemporary art shown in the church over the past decade did not challenge Christian beliefs as it did between 1987 and 2008. This change, however, cannot be solely attributed to the attitudes of people responsible for organizing art interventions. In the first years of the twenty-first century, exhibitions of contemporary art in German churches are no longer rare phenomena but rather regularity. Hence, their ability to disturb or even surprise is significantly lessened. At the same time, the growing interest in and support for contemporary church music has been evident in thousands of Christian institutions across the country. At Saint Peter it is manifested annually in dozens of concerts of “free music” as well as the position of Dominik Susteck, the church composer since 2007, who is famous for his contemporary organ improvisations.<sup>309</sup> In a conversation with the author, Guido Schlimbach also noted that the number of people visiting Saint Peter specifically in order to see art is gradually reducing.<sup>310</sup> The tendency is reflected in fewer exhibitions taking place every year. While Kunst-Station Sankt Peter was once a place that attracted great critical attention and high non-parish attendance, at the moment its future seems uncertain.

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<sup>309</sup> “Freie[r] Musik,” in Holter, ed., *Erfüllte Leere*, 273 and 287.

<sup>310</sup> Dr. Guido Schlimbach in conversation with the author, Cologne, October 29, 2016.

## 4.2. Hospital Church, Stuttgart

### 4.2.1. Early history of the church

In the mid-fifteenth century, a church was commissioned by Ulrich V, Count of Württemberg, for a new monastery of the Dominican Order in the fast growing medieval town.<sup>311</sup> After Collegiate Church (*Stiftskirche*) and Leonard's Church (*Leonhardskirche*), this is now the third oldest church in Stuttgart. The three-aisled Gothic hall church was constructed between 1471 and 1493 by an eminent Württemberg architect, Aberlin Jörg. Its plain design, with a flat ceiling over the nave, was suitable for a mendicant cloister. However, in the chancel separated from the nave by an arch and a screen, the ceiling was marked by ornate rib vaults. In addition, Jörg made room in the north aisle for an elaborate princely pedestal in the late Gothic style, where seating would be reserved for Ulrich V and his family. Soon after the Reformation, in 1536, the singular monastery in Stuttgart was disbanded by Duke Ulrich of Württemberg and its building was utilized for a municipal hospital (*Bürgerhospital*).<sup>312</sup> The church was transformed into a parish church and, because of its new neighbouring establishment, became known as Hospital Church (*Hospitalkirche*). Over the following four centuries, the church underwent multiple architectural changes. Between 1730 and 1738, a small ridge turret on the roof was replaced with a tall belfry and a clock on the south side of the chancel. Less than a century later a substantial restoration of the building took place. In 1821–1822, the flat nave ceiling was substituted with wooden cross vaults; new galleries were raised; windows were installed into the north wall; and ceramic tiles adorned the sanctuary. The remains of the tiles were discovered during the latest reconstruction;

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<sup>311</sup> Albert A. Scholl, *Die Hospitalkirche in Stuttgart* (Munich: Schnell & Steiner, 1976), 2.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*, 3–4.

with their magnificent design providing a glimpse into the interior composition of the nineteenth-century church building.

Repeating the fate of many old churches across Germany, Hospital Church suffered massive demolition during the Second World War. Major destruction was caused by bombing raids of September 1944.<sup>313</sup> In the early 1950s, the parish council decided that the church would be reconstructed but not in its original size. The new plan was to depart from the extant foundations of the church choir and instead of accommodating 1710 seating and 800 standing places it was to contain 630 seats. Furthermore, it was proposed that the ruins of the south wall remain untouched and serve as a memorial against war and violence. German architect and professor at the Stuttgart Technology University of Applied Sciences, Rudolf Lempp led the rebuilding of the downsized church and its tower, which was completed by 1960. The reconstructed Hospital Church combined in itself the late Gothic style, the restored Baroque tower, and the architectural vocabulary of the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>314</sup> The main deviation from the previous appearance of the choir space occurred in its north part, where the prewar sacristy was broken open and a gallery-topped aisle was added to the floor plan. On February 21, 1960 the consecration ceremony opened a new chapter in the hundreds-year-old history of Hospital Church.<sup>315</sup> Having lost nearly fifteen thousand parishioners during the Second World War, the church congregation numbered around four thousand members at the moment of reopening.<sup>316</sup>

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<sup>313</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid.

<sup>315</sup> Evangelische Pfarramt der Hospitalkirche Stuttgart, “Festschrift zur Einweihung der wiedererbauten Hospitalkirche Stuttgart am 21. Februar 1960” (Stuttgart: Ev. Pfarramt der Hospitalkirche Stuttgart, 1960).

<sup>316</sup> Helmut Müller, ed., *Gesucht: Spirituelle Erfahrungsräume für Kunst und Religion: 25 Jahre Gegenwartskunst im Hospitalhof und in der Hospitalkirche Stuttgart; 1987–2012* (Stuttgart: Hospitalhof, 2012), 40–1.

#### 4.2.2. Church space and its art objects after the reconstruction

While the remnants of the south wall reminded one of the texture and tracery of the late Gothic architecture, the interior of the rebuilt church appeared plain and simple. Its reduced floor plan did not allow for the visual richness that characterized Hospital Church in the early twentieth century. The pulpit with its opulently carved wooden *abat voix*, the baptismal font, the sculptural assembly in the choir, and a collection of religious paintings were no longer part of the interior composition of Hospital Church. Previously ornamented ceiling vaults, although still profusely ribbed, lost their colors. Now the single nave unambiguously directed one's gaze and movement towards the main visual focus of the church interior—a crucifixion group placed in the middle of the chancel (fig. 13). It was created in 1501 for the graveyard of Leonard's Church by a prominent stone sculptor of the late Gothic style, Hans Seyfer (ca.1460–1509).<sup>317</sup> The sculptural group stood there until 1896 when, for protection against withering, it was relocated into Hospital Church and its replica was installed at Leonard's Church. However, it was not until the postwar reconstruction when all three of Seyfer's figures, evacuated from the church in the early 1940s, were arranged together behind the altar. Since then as a whole, four life-size figures are raised on stone plinths in front of the beholder. In the center, an emaciated image of crucified Jesus shows him nearing his death, his heavy eyelids almost completely fallen and the last gulps of breath swelling his lungs. Down on her knees, Saint Mary embraces the base of the crucifix, her mournful countenance lifted towards the dying son. With the great height of the cross, Seyfer separated the two figures so that, were Mary to stand up, she could hardly reach Christ's feet. Flanking the crucifix are two more grievers, Mary Magdalene and John the Evangelist. Their forlorn gazes and expressive hands communicate disbelief and despair. While traces of paint are

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<sup>317</sup> Also known as Hans Seyffer. Scholl, *Die Hospitalkirche*, 6.

visible in the garments of the saints, the sculptures are predominantly gray, in the raw color of the original stone. Since the 1960s, the austerity of Seyfer's figures has contrasted sharply with its background—vivid stained glass windows in the church apse. On bright days, the interplay of sunrays and colorful glass compositions results in fascinating light projections that cover the walls, the floor, and the crucifixion group. The three high windows were produced after the Second World War by Rudolf Yelin the Younger, and are dominated by the palette of gold, blue, and red.<sup>318</sup> They represent scenes from Christ's life—birth, baptism, Passion Week, and resurrection—as well as images of Easter and Pentecost. To the right of the altar, two south stained glass windows show designs by Wolf-Dieter Kohler. With less color intensity and greater use of brown, white, and gray tones, these windows show Ascension Day, Pentecost, St. Stephen, and Revelation of St. John. Below, a modest pulpit of stone and wood unobtrusively entered the altar area.

Even though the closely set rows of pews covered most of the floor space, one could wander through the rebuilt church to find a number of artworks, sculptural monuments, epitaphs, and headstones from the seventeenth century. The only painting to return to the postwar space of Hospital Church was a polyptych altarpiece by a German church artist and illustrator Rudolf Schäfer (1878–1961), created in 1927 in remembrance of the parish members fallen during the First World War.<sup>319</sup> Before the outbreak of the Second World War, it occupied the eastmost end of the church, under the windows of the chancel. In 1960, the painting returned to the church but to be hung at the upper level of the south wall, immediately next to the organ. The scene in central panel gave the name to Schäfer's work: *Resurrection Altarpiece*. Rendered with angular forms and sharp lines, Christ stretches his arms high towards the nocturnal sky, radiating light

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<sup>318</sup> "Festschrift zur Einweihung der wiedererbauten Hospitalkirche," 18.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid., 11 and 15.

and a rainbow-colored halo ring. The side panels portray grieving Mary and fleeing apostles, each yet unaware of the miracle of rebirth; the predella shows a desolate graveyard with dawn breaking on the horizon. Schäfer's altarpiece remained in Hospital Church until 2014, when it was removed for the restoration of the building. Among notable sculptural groups that survived the damages of the war bombings was the funerary stone monument to Baron Benjamin von Bouwinghausen-Wallmerode, which was initially located to the left of the altar area. It depicts the baron with both of his wives kneeling in front of the resurrected Christ. From the same time period, first half of the 1600s, come two sculptural epitaphs: one of the family of Niclas von Göllnitz in the chancel above the side sacristy door; another of Dr. Veit Breitschwert on the sacristy wall of the upstairs gallery. The latter includes a fine alabaster representation of the Entombment of Christ. Likewise on the sacristy wall is a gravestone to the wife of a Württembergian chancellor Jakob Löffler. These pieces are only a minor part in the collection of historic monuments that could be found in Hospital Church. While other examples can be now seen at the Lapidarium of the Stuttgart Municipal Museum (Stadtmuseum), a number of devotional sculpture figures and stone epitaphs were destroyed during the bombings of September 1944.<sup>320</sup> One such object of art historical significance is a plaster model of a large Christ figure, executed by a German neoclassicist Johann Heinrich von Dannecker (1758–1841). The artist used that model for the production of two marble statues: one sent to the tsar's court in St. Petersburg for the Russian Empress Maria Feodorovna, and another to St. Emmeram's Abbey in Regensburg.<sup>321</sup> To honor the church in which the artist received his confirmation, von Dannecker donated the plaster model to Hospital Church in 1834.<sup>322</sup> With the virtual demolition of the church during the Second World War, the figure suffered irreparable damage and only the

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<sup>320</sup> "Hospitalkirche: Kriegszerstörung, 1943–1950," Stadtarchiv Stuttgart, no. FM 107/88/1-24.

<sup>321</sup> Since the early nineteenth century, St. Emmeram's Abbey has been known as Schloss Thurn und Taxis.

<sup>322</sup> Scholl, *Die Hospitalkirche*, 8.

head of Christ could be subsequently recovered. After the reopening of Hospital Church in 1960, this fragment of von Dannecker's model was installed in the upstairs sacristy.

A number of sculptural remains, which were unearthed amidst the war ruins, would be reinstalled in the narthex and at the stairwell. For example, statuettes of an angel from a princely pedestal and of Madonna with the child from a late Gothic pillar in the former south portal were placed together in the north part of the narthex.<sup>323</sup> The small-scale pieces hung on plain walls of the reconstructed church created visual dialogues between the centuries from the church history. An object of interest that continued to define the character of Hospital Church after the war is a Reformation Memorial. It was introduced to the exterior south facade on the occasion of 400th anniversary of Martin Luther's 95 theses in 1917.<sup>324</sup> Prior to that, the competition took place and a design by a Swiss sculptor Jakob Brüllmann was selected among 71 submissions. The composition, measured 4,50 x 7,25 meters, included three figures on a stepped podium—Christ in the center flanked by Martin Luther and a Württemberg reformer Johannes Brenz—as well as low stone reliefs with scenes from peasant life. For the material, the sculptor chose coquina, a soft whitish rock formed with fragments of coral and marine shells. Christ is depicted in glory with a victory banner in his right hand, while Luther and Brenz are seated each with the Bible open in his lap, both approximately 40 centimeters shorter than the Son of God. The 1944 air raid caused extensive damage of the figure of Christ, which was nevertheless restored by the artist's son, Emil Brüllmann, and reinstalled at the original site in 1962.<sup>325</sup> Since then the sculptural group has continued to define the exterior image of Hospital Church, just as it did between 1917 and 1944. Apart from that, the overall outside appearance during the postwar reconstruction

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<sup>323</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>324</sup> Helmut Müller, ed., *500 Jahre Hospitalkirche Stuttgart: Vom Dominikanerkloster zur Kirche in der City* (Stuttgart: Hospitalkirchengemeinde, 1993), 44–5.

<sup>325</sup> R. Zanker, "Reformationsdenkmal wiederhergestellt: Christusfigur mußte erneuert werden," *Amtsblatt der Stadt Stuttgart* (8 November 1962).

underwent considerable changes, most conspicuously in the new church yard. As already mentioned, the ruins of the former south wall were left on the site. Together with the west facade of the church and an adjacent building, which was raised on the location of the former cloister, the wall presently encloses the inner courtyard.<sup>326</sup> Designed by an architect Wolf Irion, the new building for the evangelical administrative, congress, and community center adjoined Hospital Church in 1960. In 1979 on the same premises Martin Klumpp, then the church pastor, founded the Evangelical Education Center Hospitalhof (*Bildungszentrum Hospitalhof*) as a place for social learning. Soon afterwards, Klumpp stepped down and Helmut Albert Müller took the lead as both the pastor and the head of the Education Center Hospitalhof in Stuttgart.

### 4.2.3. Helmut Müller at Hospital Church, 1987–2014

Born in a quiet pastoral town in Baden-Württemberg called Nordheim in 1949, Müller grew up with a penchant for the arts and, as a youth, was exercising his creative talent in drawing.<sup>327</sup> However during his education in Tübingen und Mainz between 1968 and 1973, Müller chose evangelical theology as the primary field of study and complemented it with psychology, philosophy, and sociology. Subsequently he undertook the first pastorate at the Protestant collegiate church Sankt Pankratius in a town called Backnang, which belongs to the Stuttgart metropolitan area. In that position, Müller already utilized the white wall of the parish hall for running short art exhibitions of local artists.<sup>328</sup> In 1986, thanks to his specialty in adult education, Müller was invited as Klumpp's successor at Hospital Church and its young Education Center.

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<sup>326</sup> In 2015, the baptismal font from Hospital Church (1809) was discovered among the war ruins deposited in the Sindelfinger Forest. It was then delivered to its original location—formerly inside the central nave and currently outside in the inner courtyard—where it can be found today.

<sup>327</sup> Müller, *Gesucht: Spirituelle Erfahrungsräume*, 61 and 229.

<sup>328</sup> Sybille Neth, "Mentor für Künstler und Bildungshungrige," in *Stuttgarter Zeitung* (April 11, 2012).



Similarly to the development of Mennekes' career, it was a move to a bigger city and larger community that allowed Müller to apply his enthusiasm for the visual arts on a new level. While in the 1980s Stuttgart had a smaller population than Cologne, approximately five hundred compared to nine hundred thousand citizens, it was nevertheless an important political center with a growing cultural appeal. Most significantly, in 1984 an expansion of the Old State Gallery (*Alte Staatgalerie*) with the New State Gallery (*Neue Staatgalerie*) was celebrated in the building designed by a world-renowned British architect Sir James Frazer Stirling. Its postmodern irregular plan provided a pertinent home for the collection of the twentieth century avant-garde art, from Henri Matisse to Joseph Beuys. From the early years, the complex became one of the most popular museums in Germany. The event increased interest in modern and contemporary visual arts in Stuttgart and, as a consequence, made the conditions for Müller's first art projects more auspicious. So while Klumpp promoted Hospitalhof as the center for faith and science education with regular opportunities for the dialogue between representatives of church-related and academic fields; Helmut Müller reinforced the place "for personal development" with regular exhibitions of contemporary art.<sup>329</sup> Over the course of almost twenty seven years, the pastor-educator-curator organized around 140 exhibitions and founded the international Association for Contemporary Art and Church Artheon (*Gesellschaft für Gegenwartskunst und Kirche Artheon*).<sup>330</sup>

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<sup>329</sup> "Entwicklung der Persönlichkeit" in Monika Renninger, Rolf Ahlrichs, and Eberhard Schwarz, "Der Hospitalhof: Zentrum für Bildung, Kultur und Spiritualität," in *Der Neue Hospitalhof* (Stuttgart: Evangelische Gesamtkirchengemeinde, 2014), 44.

<sup>330</sup> Helmut Müller served as the pastor of Hospital Church until 1998, when he was succeeded by Eberhard Schwarz. Before passing the position over to Monika Renninger in 2013, Müller remained the head of the Education Center Hospitalhof; he stayed at Hospitalhof to help Renninger during her first year before finally retiring in 2014. Together with Gerda Strecker, Müller served as the co-president of the Association for Contemporary Art and Church Artheon between 1992 and 2012. After leaving Stuttgart in 2014, Müller has been curating contemporary art exhibitions at Nordheimer Scheune, art museum in Nordheim in the state of Baden-Württemberg, and writing for art catalogs and theological journals.

#### 4.2.3.1. The beginnings, 1987–1992

For conducting curatorial practice in Stuttgart, Müller had at his disposal two buildings, the restored Hospital Church and the premises of the multifunctional center Hospitalhof, or the total of circa 220 square meters of exhibition space.<sup>331</sup> Following his experience in Backnang, the pastor decided to use the parish building for showing contemporary artworks. Beginning in his first year, Müller invited fourteen European artists for a group show *But where Danger threatens, Redemption grows as well* (*Wo aber Gefahr ist, wächst das Rettende auch*).<sup>332</sup> The title comes from a work by a German Romanticist poet Friedrich Hölderlin, “Patmos,” which refers to the island where the Revelation of St. John was written.<sup>333</sup> The exhibition filled the wide, bright hallways of the community center and, therefore, did not interact with the church space and its liturgical activities. Nevertheless, this first project reflected aspects of Müller’s early sense of aesthetics; namely the exhibition consisted primarily of paintings and drawings, with three-dimensional art represented by a British sculptor Michael Sandle and a German object-artist HA Schult. Similarly to the earliest exhibitions at Saint Peter, the first years at Hospitalhof and Hospital Church echoed the thematic exhibitions that took place across Germany in the 1980s.<sup>334</sup> During a visit to *documenta 8*, Müller came into contact with theologians Rainer Volp, Horst Schwebel and artist Werner Knaupp.<sup>335</sup> In the long run, the encounter resulted in a decades-long cooperation with Volp and Schwebel. In the short run, it brought the second art event to Hospitalhof: an entire exhibition travelled to Stuttgart directly

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<sup>331</sup> Müller, *Gesucht: Spirituelle Erfahrungsräume*, 58.

<sup>332</sup> The opening lines of the poem read: “God is near/Yet hard to grasp./But where danger threatens,/Redemption grows as well”; “Nah ist/Und schwer zu fassen der Gott./Wo aber Gefahr ist, wächst/das Rettende auch.” (Translation into English is by the author of this thesis). The exhibitions could be realized with the help of the gallerist Hans-Jürgen Müller, see *ibid.*, 83.

<sup>333</sup> Werner Kirchner, “Hölderlins Patmos-Hymne. Dem Landgrafen zu Homburg überreichte Handschrift,” in Alfred Kellertat, ed., *Hölderlin, Aufsätze zu seiner Homburger Zeit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967), 57–68.

<sup>334</sup> See pages 50–65 in this thesis.

<sup>335</sup> Müller, *Gesucht: Spirituelle Erfahrungsräume*, 27–8.

from the former Old Church of the Brethren in Kassel. There in 1987 Horst Schwebel and Heinz-Ulrich Schmidt organized a group show *Ecce Homo: From the Image of Man to the Image of Christ* (*Ecce Homo: Vom Christusbild zum Menschenbild*).<sup>336</sup> Modifying the title to *Ecce Homo: Behold, the Human* (*Ecce Homo: Seht, der Mensch*), Müller introduced the exhibition in Stuttgart that, apart from works by Niels Dietrich and Günther Uecker, fully repeated the one from Kassel.<sup>337</sup> The pastor chose to place Knaupp's sculptural group *Lebensspur* not only inside the church but directly before the altar; this resulted in a harsh conflict with one of the longtime parish members.<sup>338</sup> For a few years after the incident, Müller did not venture to use the church space for exhibitions. In a number of ways the project set the course for Müller's future art initiatives. Firstly, cooperation with academic institutions and precisely with theologians, in case of *Ecce Homo*—with the Department of Evangelical Theology at Philipps University in Marburg, remained a key characteristic of exhibitions at both Hospitalhof and Hospital Church. Secondly, titles and themes that could be palpably associated with Christian stories and beliefs tenaciously recurred over the following thirty years of exhibitions. Thirdly, just as HA Schult, Peter Angermann, Heinz Josef Mess, and Lambert Maria Wintersberger from the show *Wo aber Gefahr ist*, a number of artists from *Ecce Homo*—Günter Maniewski, Herbert Falken, Johann Peter Reuter, Peter Gilles—would be repeatedly exhibited at either Hospitalhof or Hospital Church later on. Over his years in Stuttgart Müller regularly organized shows by the same artists—either international or local names, established or emerging talents; with an emphasis on the young and less known. Finally, the hesitation to bring artworks inside the worship space did

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<sup>336</sup> See pages 58–61 in this thesis.

<sup>337</sup> Compare Schwebel, *Ecce Homo*, 104–5, and Müller, *Jetzt, Neugierig, Präsent, Offen: 10 Jahre Gegenwartskunst und Kirche im Hospitalhof und in der Hospitalkirche 1987–1997* (Stuttgart: Hospitalhof, 1997), 106.

<sup>338</sup> Müller, *Gesucht: Spirituelle Erfahrungsräume*, 82–3. For the illustration of the artwork, see Schwebel, *Ecce Homo*, 82.

not entirely relinquish Müller's curatorial practice; although it gave way to first art interventions in Hospital Church in 1991.

It is reasonable to presume that the foyer, corridors, and event rooms of Hospitalhof are more suitable for the hanging of canvases and installation of sculptures. These spaces have brighter lighting and evenly sleek walls; allow for the visitor's passage without obstructions such as pews or pillars; and do not distract one's attention with manifold constituents of a worship environment. In other words, the community center provides a possibility of an art experience that is more akin to that provided in art galleries or museums. However, Müller did not intend to run a customary exhibition space. As early as 1987 he argued that old churches needed to encounter and get involved with contemporary art because "art, understood as praxis-dimension [sic.] of faith, concerns the entire spectrum of church activities and art, understood as the visual arts, is an essential indicator of *zeitgeist*; it asserts the roots of mankind and the world, deals with "transcendence" and, in this respect, is an indispensably important dialogue partner for the church."<sup>339</sup> Nonetheless, Müller's early propositions to open the worship space for art exhibitions found little support and were "fiercely contested" within the parish council of Hospital Church.<sup>340</sup> Only in 1991, after four years and around twenty exhibitions organized at Hospitalhof, the discussion concerning a possible art intervention in the sacred space led to a positive outcome.<sup>341</sup> The art project which the parish council approved of was that proposed by a young German sculptor from Regensburg, Immanuel Preuss (b. 1954). In the exhibition *Architettura–scultura–Niemandsländ* (1991), the artist chose not to add objects to an already

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<sup>339</sup> Quoted in Müller, *Jetzt, Neugierig, Präsent, Offen*, 11. The original reads, "...Kunst, verstanden als Praxisdimension des Glaubens, das Gesamt kirchlichen Handelns betrifft und Kunst, verstanden als Bildende Kunst, wesentlicher Indikator für Zeitströmungen ist, an die Wurzeln gehende Aussagen zu Mensch und Welt formuliert, sich auf "Transzendenz" einläßt und insofern ein für Kirche unaufgebar wichtiger Gesprächspartner ist."

<sup>340</sup> Helmut Müller, "Kunstvermittlung in der City," in *Kunst und Kirche* 3 (1991), 202. The original reads, "Erste Anträge auf Öffnungen des Kirchenraums für Ausstellungen waren 1987 heftig umstritten, erhielten nur knappe Mehrheiten und waren gleichsam 'auf Bewährung' ausgesprochen."

<sup>341</sup> Ibid.

busy environment but worked out site-specific treatment of the church walls. He pressed sculptural pieces of golden brass into the plaster walls of the side aisle and the nave, and additionally exposed the brickwork of the bay window in the vestibule. By battering the wall surface, Preuss attempted to draw closer to the sustaining essence of Hospital Church.<sup>342</sup> Müller embraced the artist's intention and supported it as a statement for the necessary and continuous regeneration of the church. Given the green light for bringing contemporary art into the worship space, the pastor-curator proceeded with four more exhibitions inside Hospital Church in 1991 and 1992. In stark contrast with the preceding projects at Hospitalhof and following the steps made by Preuss, each of the following four artists produced a site-specific work. Moreover, three of them engaged immediately with the altar space.

In the fall of 1991, one entering Hospital Church could come across gold-varnished auto parts scattered in between the pews and nearby the church walls.<sup>343</sup> The unusual heavy-looking objects were a part of the installation by HA Schult (Hans-Jürgen Schult, b. 1939), a conceptual and performance artist who earlier participated in the exhibition *Wo aber Gefahr ist*. In April 1989 Schult staged an action *Fetish Car (Fetisch Auto)*, in which several cars painted as clouds and hooked from a helicopter floated above the Old Town of Cologne and one golden winged automobile occupied the Cathedral Square.<sup>344</sup> Amidst the boom of the national automobile industry accompanied by the neglect of environmental issues, Schult expressed a harsh criticism of the German car fetish. In addition to the dismembered carcass of a Ford sedan, the exhibition in Hospital Church included photographic, graphic, textual, and video documentation of the action *Fetish Car*. In the context of a Christian worship space, Schult's installation drew a

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<sup>342</sup> Ibid. "Deshalb wolle er... dem tragenden Grund dieser Kirche näherkommen."

<sup>343</sup> The exhibition ran for one month, from September 13 to October 13, 1991.

<sup>344</sup> *HA Schult–Fetisch Auto* (Düsseldorf: Claassen, 1989). Since 1991, the golden winged car has been displayed on the roof of the Cologne City Museum (Kölnisches Stadtmuseum).

parallel to the biblical story of worshipping the golden calf from the Book of Exodus.<sup>345</sup> The artist referred to the scattered auto parts as “fallen angels,” an allusion likely to have been invoked by the church setting.<sup>346</sup> Despite the temporal brevity of the exhibition, two considerable inferences can be drawn. First, Schult’s intervention into Hospital Church expanded far beyond Preuss’ use of the same space. *Fetish Car* spread throughout the interior in the manner comparable to Anish Kapoor’s installation at Saint Peter. Second, the subject at the heart of Schult’s project—accumulation of trash and pollution of the environment—manifested a sharp social concern and called for collective public response. In the years to follow, more and more art exhibitions at Hospitalhof and Hospital Church would similarly address urgent social issues in a direct manner.

One artist, whose work has been widely exhibited in churches around Germany and in multiple cases assimilated into permanent church interiors and even commissioned as altar tables, is Madeleine Dietz (b. 1953).<sup>347</sup> A sculptor, video, and installation artist, Dietz primarily works with natural materials such as earth and water, while also integrating steel, brick, and, less frequently, wood. Preceding the international recognition and demand of her artworks, Dietz’s exhibition at Hospital Church (1991) was her first project for a sacred space. The artist arranged her minimal geometric sculptures of steel and dried earth in the vestibule, at the stairwell of the tower, and near the altar. The last of these stood to the side of Seyfer’s figure of Mary Magdalene so close that less than a meter separated the two artworks. Dietz placed a vertically oriented steel semi-cylinder with its convex side turned towards the altar table and its height reaching up to Mary Magdalene’s elbow (fig. 14). On the ground, Dietz set pieces of broken

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<sup>345</sup> Ex. 32–34; see Müller, *Jetzt, Neugierig, Präsent, Offen*, 67.

<sup>346</sup> “Gefallener Engel,” in *ibid.* Also see Müller, *Gesucht: Spirituelle Erfahrungsräume*, 59.

<sup>347</sup> For Dietz’s site-specific installations in German churches, see *Madeleine Dietz: Schichten in der Zeit* (Annweiler: Plöger, 1999), and Martin Benn, *Dein Plan für das Paradies: Madeleine Dietz—Sakrale Räume* (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2014).

dried soil in a low pile that repeated the convex semi-circular curve of the semi-cylinder. On the opposite, concave, side of the steel object the artist covered the floor with moist soil. Here, the smaller damp bits held together and created an even texture, visibly distinct from the fractured shards of the dried earth. Hans Gercke, former president of Heidelberger Kunstverein and contributor to many of Müller's projects in Stuttgart, notes how such earthworks

combine the ambivalent fragility and flexibility of earth, a paradox in itself—the material, from which according to the Bible 'Adam,' i.e. the 'man made of earth,' was created, and also the material that in the fertile landscape which is native land of Madeleine Dietz, the Palatine hills and vineyards, holds an important presence—with hard, cold, yet elastic sheet steel which forms that animated prime matter, where everything comes from and goes back to, into archetypal shapes such as circle, mandorla, cylinder, in a forcing, supporting, protecting, restrained, keeping way.<sup>348</sup>

Gercke goes on to interpret juxtaposition of earth and steel as the contrast between organic and technical substances, vulnerability and severity, male and female principles. Undoubtedly, Dietz's art is much subtler than that by Schult: it slows down the viewer's perception and avoids direct indication. But when placed in the sacred space of the church, installations by both artists tend to intimate biblical episodes, such as stories of the golden calf or the creation of Adam. In Hospital Church, where one of earth sculptures was situated directly next to the altar, a connotation of death may additionally come to mind: "All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again."<sup>349</sup> The 1991 exhibition in Stuttgart was a success for both the artist and the pastor-curator. The poetics of Dietz's combination of materials proved to be desirable for Christian spaces as she subsequently produced a great number of works for churches around Germany. For Müller, the nearness of a contemporary work of art to the altar opened up yet new

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<sup>348</sup> Hans Gercke, "Earth Bound: On the Relations of Material, Space, Form and Content in the Works of Madeleine Dietz," in *Schichten in der Zeit*, 10–1.

<sup>349</sup> Eccles. 3:20.

possibilities, and already the following art project invaded the immediate domain of the altar in the church.

In 1992, thus far the most radical art intervention took place in Hospital Church. Thomas Lehnerer (1955–1995) had previously participated in a group show at Hospitalhof in 1988, Wieland Schmied's *PresenceEternity (GegenwartEwigkeit)* in Berlin in 1990, and exhibition *Museum and Church: Religious Aspects of Modern Art (Museum and Kirche: Religiöse Aspekte moderner Kunst)* at Wilhelm-Lehmbruck Museum in Duisburg in 1991.<sup>350</sup> Moreover, Lehnerer was by occupation not only artist but also Doctor of Theology and professor at the University of Kassel (1992–1995). The intersection of his interests had already surfaced in a number of art projects prior to his work for Hospital Church, e.g. group exhibition *Ecce Homo* at All Saints Church in London (1985), or individual exhibitions *Aphrodite and Jesus Christ* at Villa Massimo in Rome and *Church Doesn't Own Religion (Die Religion gehört der Kirche nicht)* at Dany Keller Gallery in Munich (both 1992). In Stuttgart, Lehnerer raised a theodicean question with an extended exhibition title *Wenn Gott allmächtig ist und gut, Wenn er Gott ist, Warum läßt er dann die menschen elend sterben und leiden?*<sup>351</sup> Theodicy is a branch of theology that attempts to explain the question of why physical and moral evil exists, i.e. why the just and almighty God lets his children suffer.<sup>352</sup> Lehnerer's artistic decision inside an active Christian house of worship consisted of a vast black screen installed as a backdrop for the white-stone altar table. The screen filled the chancel from north to south, floor to the lowest tips of the vault ribs, concealing maximum of the apse architecture (fig. 15). Cast against the pitch-black curtain, a beam of spotlight illuminated a singular figure that Lehnerer centered on top of the altar table. In contrast

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<sup>350</sup> Schmied and Schilling, *GegenwartEwigkeit*, 228–31. Also see Hans Gercke, ed., *Figuren: Thomas Lehnerer* (Stuttgart: Edition Cantz, 1993), 101.

<sup>351</sup> Müller, *Jetzt, Neugierig, Präsent, Offen*, 35.

<sup>352</sup> Hannelore Paflik-Huber, "Denkräume," in Gercke, *Figuren*, 88–9.



to the lengthy exhibition title, he tersely named the figure *God (Gott)*. No more than twenty-five centimeters high, a diminutive bronze sculpture depicted a standing human body. The face startled the viewer with its deep-set eyes and beggarly countenance. By replacing Seyfer's large-scale sculptural group with an extremely reduced image of man, or God, the artist evoked "a new existential-religious interpretation" of the traditional devotional image of crucifixion.<sup>353</sup> In a sermon on September 27, 1992, Müller asked "Could it be that [Lehnerer's] figure, as well as the black screen, signify the irrefutability and the right of the theodicean question to find itself at the heart of the question of God [*Gottesfrage*]?" If so, the pastor continued, the question of God remained open and accordingly Lehnerer's installation avowed for "a God, who is more and other than the answer to our questions." In Müller's conclusion, the ultimate value of such art intervention at the altar is its potency "to raise the right questions, before God and before men."<sup>354</sup> This shows that the pastor justified bringing an art exhibition to the heart of the worship space with the means of theological interpretation. Lehnerer's qualification as a theologian further substantiated the first radical experiment that transformed the appearance of the altar area in Hospital Church. On more occasions over his years in Stuttgart, Müller invited artists who either studied religion, e.g. Bernd Zimmer, or were directly connected to the church, e.g. artist and priest Herbert Falken. So while the pastor argued for the full autonomy of contemporary art, he seldom digressed from overt Christian interpretations of his exhibitions.

Conspicuous Christian subjects constituted many of Müller's projects, especially group exhibitions that included works by multiple artists under the common thematic umbrella.

Following *Ecce Homo*, a vivid early example is a show *The Cross as Token in Contemporary Art*

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<sup>353</sup> "...eine neue existenziell-religiöse Deutung," in Martin Kümlehn, "Kunst und Gottesdienst," in Christian Grethlein, and Günter Ruddat, eds., *Liturgisches Kompendium* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), 116.

<sup>354</sup> Müller, *Jetzt, Neugierig, Präsent, Offen*, 38. The originals read, "Könnte es sein, daß auch die Figur [von Lehnerer], wie schon der schwarze Vorhang, für die Unabweisbarkeit und für das Recht der Theodizee-Frage im Kern der Gottesfrage steht"; "...Gott, der noch mehr und anderes ist als die Antwort auf unsere Fragen"; "...die richtigen Fragen zu stellen, vor Gott und vor den Menschen."

(*Das Kreuz als Zeichen in der Gegenwartskunst*, 1992).<sup>355</sup> Müller's thematic curatorial approach was clearly influenced by Schmied's and Schwebel's exhibitions of the 1980s. Even the artists invited to the 1992 show in Hospitalhof were those who had earlier featured in Berlin and/or Kassel: Franz Bernhard, Herbert Falken, Peter Gilles, Barbara Heinisch, Siegfried Kaden, Werner Knaupp, Arnulf Rainer, Johann Peter Reuter, and Antoni Tàpies. Such topic-based events offered certain advantages: they allowed for yielding theological reading of art, were less likely to be subjected to censure and more likely to gain financial and institutional support from outside of the parish.<sup>356</sup>

#### 4.2.3.2. Ten years in hindsight, 1997

After ten years of serving as both the pastor of Hospital Church and the head of the Education Center Hospitalhof, Müller stepped down from the former position and concentrated on directing art exhibitions as well as cultural and educational events. While his successor, Pastor Eberhard Schwarz, did not oppose art interventions into the worship space; it was inevitable that the dynamics of the art-liturgy relationship within Hospital Church was to change beginning in 1998. Before exploring the shift, it is necessary to assess Müller's first decade in Stuttgart. We will take a look at the initiative called Artheon, consider the publication edited by Müller on the occasion of the ten-year anniversary of engagement with contemporary art, and analyze exhibitions in the church while also paying attention to those in the community center. All in all, the development of the pastor's practice during the 1990s is observed.

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<sup>355</sup> Helmut Müller, ed., *Das Kreuz als Zeichen in der Gegenwartskunst* (Stuttgart: Hospitalhof, 1992).

<sup>356</sup> In the example of *The Cross as Token in Contemporary Art*, Müller secured such external support from the Evangelical Consortium for Adult Education in Württemberg). See *ibid.*, 5.

On February 26, 1992, the Association for Contemporary Art and Church Artheon was founded in Frankfurt by a group of like-minded individuals who wanted to promote the dialogue between Christianity on the one hand and contemporary art and culture on the other.<sup>357</sup> Helmut Müller and Gerda Strecker, a member of the Hospital Church parish council, were co-presidents of Artheon until 2012, when they were succeeded by Christhard-Georg Neubert. Among other founders of the association were Horst Schwebel, Rainer Volp, Madeleine Dietz, Andreas Hildmann, Manfred Richter, Paul Gräb, Eveline Valtink, und Ernst Wittekindt.<sup>358</sup> The heterogeneous network, which has gradually grown to more 180 members, has consistently included artists, curators, art historians, pastors, as well as scholars of religion, theology, and other disciplines.<sup>359</sup> Altogether they have worked on exhibitions, concerts, symposia, lectures, workshops, art excursions, and other communication channels for more than twenty-five years. As a consequence for activities at Hospital Church, a strong programmatic emphasis and collaboration with the representatives of academia exerted influence on Müller's work as a pastor-curator. The impact of Artheon is noticeable in the volume produced for a decennial anniversary of the exhibition series at Hospitalhof and Hospital Church, *Jetzt, Neugierig, Präsent, Offen: 10 Jahre Gegenwartskunst und Kirche im Hospitalhof und in der Hospitalkirche* (1997).<sup>360</sup> While most texts in the publication came from Müller himself, other contributors included a singular art historian Hans Gercke and a dominant group of theologians: Horst Schwebel, Rainer Volp, Wilhelm Gräb, Wolfgang Schoberth, Reinhard Lambert Auer. Such ensemble corresponds to the introduction by the Bishop of the Regional Church of Württemberg,

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<sup>357</sup> Helmut Müller, ed., *30 Jahre Bildungszentrum Hospitalhof Stuttgart: Ein Ort der Freiheit und des Lebens* (Stuttgart: Hospitalhof, 2010), 7–8. Also see Müller, "Artheon vor Artheon: 1980–1992," in Müller, *Gesucht: Spirituelle Erfahrungsräume*, 22–32.

<sup>358</sup> Christhard-Georg Neubert, "Freundschaft mit den Erkundern von Farbe und Form. 20 Jahre Artheon und was dann?" in *Artheon* 30 (2011), 1.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid.

<sup>360</sup> The cover of the publication is a black-and-white photograph of Thomas Lehnerer's installation *God* (1992).

Eberhardt Renz, “Art is theologically interpretable, furthermore, it virtually yearns after theological interpretation,”<sup>361</sup> as well as the row of transcribed “image-sermons” (*Bildpredigten*) by Müller. We will explore the latter in detail when we summarize the pastor’s theory and practice.<sup>362</sup> What is of immediate interest is a group of exhibitions that he selected for the retrospective documentation.

Following Lehnerer’s installation at the altar of Hospital Church, a number of subsequent art projects actively interacted with “the heart” of the worship space. In 1995, a duo exhibition by two German artists Klaus Illi and Bettina Bürkle occupied both the community center and the interior space of the church. For both, this was the first and up till now the only project conceptualized for a church. Titled *Atem-Raum*, their exhibition addressed the memory of Holocaust and its roots in specifically Protestant anti-Semitism.<sup>363</sup> While in Hospitalhof Bürkle arranged multiple red cans and boxes called “victim-objects” along the hallway and staircases, Illi brought several of his “breathing objects” into the worship space.<sup>364</sup> The latter created a bright red, disc-looking item and covered it with a membrane, which due to a compressing mechanism inflated with respiration sounds as if it was a breathing organ (fig. 16). Illi raised this object on top of the altar, positioning it directly in the center of the perceived plane that comprised Seyfer’s crucifixion group. Visually, the red disc became the center of the church. Similar “breathing” discs—only beige-colored, deflating inwards and therefore concave—hung on the side walls low above the pews; their proximity to seated worshippers seemed to have been the artist’s conscious choice. A small light box stood on the altar table, directly below the red “breathing object.” It contained a picture from a fifteenth-century illuminated psalm book that

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<sup>361</sup> “Grußworte” in Müller, *Jetzt, Neugierig, Präsent, Offen*, 15. The original reads, “Kunst wird theologisch interpretierbar, mehr noch, sie verlangt geradezu nach theologischer Interpretation.”

<sup>362</sup> See section 4.2.3.4. in this chapter.

<sup>363</sup> Helmut Müller, ed., *Atem-Raum: Klaus Illi, Bettina Bürkle* (Stuttgart: Hospitalhof, 1996), 6–13.

<sup>364</sup> “Opferobjekte” and “Atemobjekte,” in *ibid.*, 13 and 12. The allocation of space for the two artists was mutually agreed upon; Helmut Müller in email conversation with the author, September 2017.

showed strife between the Church and the Synagogue.<sup>365</sup> Initially drawn to an abstract shape at the east end of the nave, the viewer approached the altar and, discerning a figurative image, suddenly became confronted with a very precise historical event. Such experiential sequence represents Müller's idea about one of the functions of contemporary non-sacramental art in a sacred space: the purpose of thrusting the unimaginable into the church and inviting the visitor to be confronted with it.<sup>366</sup> Taking place simultaneously in two buildings, the exhibition *Atem-Raum* required the visitor to move between the church and the community center, and thus progressively engrossed the visitor in reflection on the problematic issue addressed by Illi and Bürkle.

In the same year, Müller curated a solo exhibition by a young artist, Claude Sui-Bellois.<sup>367</sup> In addition to paintings and drawings hung in Hospitalhof and on the church walls, a large canvas was installed behind the altar table, contiguous with Mary Magdalene and Saint John on the sides.<sup>368</sup> The black-and-white image showed back silhouettes of four human figures. The artist brought the group into sharp focus by delineating the figures against the contrasting background—a field of blinding white light emanating from an indeterminate source beyond the horizon. Writing about Sui-Bellois' exhibition at a secular art venue, Isabella Fehle understands the faceless representations as indicative of the anonymous contemporary man—one who feels isolated even amidst the mass, whose private and public spheres are blurred with one another.<sup>369</sup> At the exhibition opening in Stuttgart, Müller expanded on this idea and pointed out how the blurred boundaries between abstraction and figuration in Sui-Bellois' paintings spoke of “the

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<sup>365</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>366</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>367</sup> Helmut Müller, ed., *Claude Sui-Bellois: Torsi und Exterminationen* (Stuttgart: Hospitalhof, 1995).

<sup>368</sup> Claude Sui-Bellois, *Observation*, oil on canvas, 200 x 250 cm (1992), in Isabella Fehle, ed., *Claude Sui-Bellois: Finale Stationen* (Schwäbisch Hall: Städtische Galerie am Markt, 1994).

<sup>369</sup> Ibid., 48.

disappearance, dissolution, and obliteration of human.”<sup>370</sup> With that, he implied perturbing historical events such as the tragedies of Auschwitz and Hiroshima. Similarly, the pastor contemplated *Atem-Raum* along “the question of Christian co-responsibility in Holocaust and the question of sustainability of human culture during darkened times.”<sup>371</sup> Sui-Bellois expressed a surprise at the effect his images produced inside the church, specifically the painting in the altar area. Adjacent to Seyfer’s figures, *Observation* appeared to the artist as a part of some plot characterized coincidentally by “hopeful expectation” and “leaden silence.”<sup>372</sup> Such thoughts by Müller and Sui-Bellois demonstrate the contextual significance for reflection of art. Even though the painting *Observation* was not a site-specific production, such as Illi’s work for Hospital Church, what proved to equally unlock the force of the two artworks in the chancel is their relationship to the crucifixion group and the altar. Müller’s belief in the successful effect of contemporary art exhibitions within the altar area expressed itself in the following year, when consecutively three artists created site-specific installations for the chancel: Peter Bömmels, Robert Hartmann, and Jürgen Wols. Since 1996, to employ the very heart of the church for art interventions was no longer an exception but Müller’s favored method of introducing contemporary non-sacramental art into his church. Moreover, such juxtaposition of secular artworks with the altar table allowed for a more direct and therefore stronger application of *Bildpredigten*. Even after handing over the pastor position to Schwarz, Müller continued to deliver homilies in Hospital Church and the exhibited artworks often provided a wellspring for his sermons.

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<sup>370</sup> Müller, *Jetzt, Neugierig, Präsent, Offen*, 59. The original reads, “Das den figurativen und den abstrakten Teil der Malerei verbindende gemeinsame Thema ist das Verschwinden, die Auflösung und die Auslöschung des Menschen.”

<sup>371</sup> Müller, *Atem-Raum*, 13. The original reads, “...die Frage nach der christlichen Mitverantwortung am Holocaust und die Frage nach der Tragfähigkeit menschlicher Kultur in verdunkelter Zeit.”

<sup>372</sup> “Unter dem gekreuzigten Christus aus Stein, flankiert von den klagenden Figuren, wurden diese Schatten Bestandteil eines Szenario, das sowohl hoffnungsvolle Erwartung als auch bleiernes Schweigen ausdrücken kann.” See Müller, *Jetzt, Neugierig, Präsent, Offen*, 78.

#### 4.2.3.3. Twenty-five years in hindsight, 2012

By the turn of the century Hospital Church had gained momentum and reputation as a prominent center for contemporary art exhibitions. Müller, now concentrated on directing the Education Center Hospitalhof, proceeded with between five and nine art projects per year. Ever more young and emerging artists were invited for individual and group shows, while a few internationally known names such as Martin Assig, Heinz Breloh, Jonathan Meese, and Bernd Zimmer received their own exhibitions. In this section, we will bring into focus several events that were organized by Müller between 1998 and 2012, and consider the patterns that repeatedly appeared in art exhibitions. Besides, we will consult the collective retrospective reflection on his work presented in the anthology *Gesucht: Spirituelle Erfahrungsräume für Kunst und Religion* (2012), which came out on the occasion of Müller's twenty-five years at Hospitalhof.

Since the visit to *Ecce Homo* in Kassel and the first two exhibitions at Hospitalhof, Müller held thematic exhibitions in high regard and, despite the high demands of such endeavor, made an effort to realize eleven large-scale exhibitions during his time in Stuttgart. The earliest examples *Wo aber Gefahr ist, wächst das Rettende auch* (1987), *Ecce homo—Seht, der Mensch* (1988), *Lebensspuren: Eine Ausstellung zum Dialog zwischen zeitgenössischer Kunst und Kirche* (1991), and *Das Kreuz als Zeichen in der Gegenwartskunst* (1992) showed an expansive approach to unfolding deliberately Christian themes by the means of multiple artistic positions. The greatest in size group exhibition was curated by Müller in 1998; this time it included fifty-three artists, who proposed their works on the theme of resurrection.<sup>373</sup> *Rise. Arise: Resurrection in*

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<sup>373</sup> The above mentioned events of 1987–1992 included 14, 27, 36, and 50 artists, respectively. Over the years Helmut Müller built a network of gallerists and curators as well as personal connections with artists, many of whom he repeatedly invited for group shows and to whose individual exhibitions he gave space at Hospitalhof and Hospital Church. Hence are the increasing number of participants and the overall scope of thematic projects. The vast

*Contemporary Art (Aufstehen. Auferstehen: Auferstehung im Spiegel der Gegenwartskunst)* encompassed most of the available exhibition space in both the community center and the church interior.<sup>374</sup> The employed mediums ranged from oil to graphite to photographic prints, from wood reliefs to glass to quartz sand on canvas; all without a palpable conjunctive thread among the various contributions. One could rather differentiate between the pieces that directly and/or consciously embraced resurrection as the subject matter and those that did not consider the topic explicitly but were nevertheless submitted by the artists as pertinent to the exhibition. For example of the former, in his installation *Resurrection* in the corner of the church vestibule, artist Cosimo di Leo Ricatto (b. 1950) alluded to the Holy Light of the reborn Christ by creating the soft golden shimmer with eight aluminum panels layered on the two adjacent walls.<sup>375</sup> The artist also arranged twelve white rods suspended from the ceiling in a spiraling configuration and, as a result, brought associations with, simultaneously, ascending and descending movement. He imprinted barely visible letters on each rod that together read “RESURRECTION.” Inside the corner the golden glow enveloped hovering objects and, once the viewer approached for closer observation, it drew his or her abstracted reflection into the interplay of light. A different example is a work by an American conceptual artist Mary Ellen Carroll (b. 1961), who participated in the exhibition with a large-scale black-and-white print.<sup>376</sup> The minimalistic image showed two foot soles, focused in sharp light and set in a high-pitched outline against the blackness that swallowed the rest of the body. Carroll did not conceive the work for Müller’s project but, having earlier exhibited at Hospital Church, she found the photograph to be a fitting

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majority of artists (36 out of 53) who took part in *Aufstehen. Auferstehen: Auferstehung im Spiegel der Gegenwartskunst* (1998) had previously exhibited in either Hospitalhof or Hospital Church Stuttgart.

<sup>374</sup> Helmut Müller, ed., *Aufstehen: Auferstehung im Spiegel der Gegenwartskunst* (Stuttgart: Hospitalhof, 1998). After one month at Hospital Church, the exhibition traveled to Leonard’s Church in Stuttgart.

<sup>375</sup> Cosimo di Leo Ricatto, *Resurrection*, aluminium, plaster, cord and twelve rods, each 34 x 5,4 cm (1997), in Müller, *Gesucht: Spirituelle Erfahrungsräume*, 112; and Müller, *Auferstehung*, 74. The latter includes a photograph that was made before Ricatto completed the installation and therefore omits the wall panels.

<sup>376</sup> Mary Ellen Carroll, *Ascension*, photographic print, 116 x 131 cm (1995), in Müller, *Auferstehung*, 41.



contribution to *Auferstehung*.<sup>377</sup> Likewise, most artworks delivered by the invited artists were not conceived as site-specific; Ricatto's installation being a singular exception. Nevertheless, two of Müller's curatorial decisions showed an important role of site specificity for experiencing contemporary art in Hospital Church. First, the hanging of Heinz-Josef Mess' (b. 1955) series of abstract paintings along the south wall of the church suggested the notion of procession, which was intensified by the colors—nocturnal blue, black and chalk white—as well as straight vertical lines and eruption of paint that recurred from one panel to another (fig. 17). In their expressive non-objectivity, the paintings invited for meditation; while in their proximity to the attendant seated during a god service, they offered an enhanced allusion to the otherworldly. Klaus Berger, writing for the catalog, noted, “When Jesus says ‘I am the resurrection.’ he claims himself as a beacon... Much separates us from the light, dark waters and sheer untraversable morasses. But that light exists.”<sup>378</sup> Mess' works seemed to project the theologian's text and, therefore, correspond to a given theological interpretation despite the absence of any figurative or verbal elements. More examples of abstract two- and three-dimensional artworks were to be seen within *Auferstehung*: by Franz Bernhard, Isa Dahl, Herbert Falken, Martina Geist, Rudolf Schoofs, or Andrea Zaumseil, to name a few. However, the second site-specific curatorial choice made by Müller pointed out a different artistic perspective—text as form. From over fifty submissions, the (pastor)-curator selected a work by the Spanish artist Victor Mira (b. 1949) for displaying it on top of the altar table, between two votive candles.<sup>379</sup> The artist painted four pieces of yellow toast bread, arranged them in the shape of a cross against the black background, and spelled “BROT”

<sup>377</sup> For the artist's installation *Unheimlich. Ortlos: Glaube und Furcht*, see Andrea Küster and Helmut Müller, eds., *Mary Ellen Carroll: Blickwechsel* (Stuttgart: Hospitalhof, 1993).

<sup>378</sup> Klaus Berger, “Jesus, aus Toten auferstanden,” in Müller, *Auferstehung*, 12. The original reads, “Wenn Jesus sagt ‘Ich bin die Auferstehung’ dann bezeichnet er sich als einen Leuchtturm, der vielleicht abends in der Dunkelheit von ferne leuchtet. Vieles trennt uns vom Licht, dunkle Wasserläufe und schier unüberquerbare Moraste. Aber das Licht ist schon da.”

<sup>379</sup> For Mira's earlier exhibition at Hospitalhof, see Helmut Müller, ed., *Mira Victor. Stylliten und Bachkantaten* (Stuttgart: Hospitalhof, 1994).

(“bread”) with a letter per slice (fig. 18). Then he framed the image, covered it with a metal lattice, and attached a small tablet to the bottom right that read “*noli mi tangere*” and was perceptible to the eye only at a close distance. According to the Bible, resurrected Christ appeared in front of Mary Magdalene and, once she recognized and started to approach him, pronounced “touch me not.”<sup>380</sup> On the one hand, the parable prompted Müller to bring Mira’s work close to Seyfer’s figure of Mary Magdalene. On the other hand, the reference to bread gave him the reason to place an artwork on top of the Communion Table. In the largest exhibition undertaken by Müller, the multitude and diversity of artistic positions could overwhelm and bewilder the viewer. But the verbal language, encountered throughout the exhibition space, served to anchor the mind when one’s capacity to perceive seemed to waver. While the following years brought a number of meditative installations to Hospital Church, it was cognitive reflection on words that gained importance in art exhibitions after *Auferstehung*. Thus, cooperating with the artists who incorporated textual form in their practice was a new direction Müller began to pursue at the turn of the century.

Since Dadaists employed words as a tool for play and Cubists pasted newspaper clips onto their collages, text-based art has been an inherent part of modern and contemporary art throughout the twentieth century.<sup>381</sup> The interaction between visual image and verbal language can raise questions about authorship, the role of the reader-viewer, meaning and its arbitrary construction, critical acceptance of the written word, or the competence of communication in the world flooded with information. Art historian Tilman Osterwold argued that examples of text-based art in Hospitalhof and Hospital Church could, first, explicate Müller’s art- and church-philosophy

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<sup>380</sup> John 20:17.

<sup>381</sup> For a thorough survey, see Aimee Selby, ed., *Art and Text* (London: Black Dog, 2009).

and, second, reveal hermeneutic tendencies of “a specific verbal culture.”<sup>382</sup> His remark might hold a key to understanding cases of contemporary art exhibitions in German Protestant churches and will therefore be expanded upon in chapter five. At present, let us direct our attention to examples of germane projects curated by Müller. In 1999, a German conceptual artist Winfried Baumann (b. 1956) filled the hallways of Hospitalhof and the vestibule of the church with his objects titled *Instant Memorials*.<sup>383</sup> The artist earlier exhibited his work at Saint Lawrence Church in his hometown Nurnberg (1995) and Church of the Holy Cross in the Wurzburg district (1996). For Stuttgart Baumann built portable mockups from wood and ceramic tiles. These “memorial-systems” (*Gedenkstätten-systeme*), as the artist called them, looked like wheeled coffers with the doors open to 180 degrees. On the inside, seemingly random items represented a wide range of occasions for raising a memorial: commemoration of murdered Jews, exiled Serbian families, unprotected Palestinians, rejected political asylees, the first recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize Henry Dunant, or, more poetically, memorials for “brave hearts” and “one’s last adventure.”<sup>384</sup> In Hospital Church, a large wooden frame tiled with white ceramic square plates bore lettering:

nichts habe ich  
gesehen, gar nichts  
alles hast Du gesehen  
alles<sup>385</sup>

Viewed on its own, the piece could baffle the viewer. As a part of the exhibition but not one of the memorials, the tiled screen turned into either an introduction or conclusion (or both) to the experience of *Instant Memorials*. In this case, the text is a submissive confession: “nothing have

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<sup>382</sup> Tilman Osterwold, “Kirche und Kunst und Kirche—Eine gegenseitige Herausforderung” in Müller, *Gesucht: Spirituelle Erfahrungsräume*, 134. The original reads, “eine spezifische sprachliche Kultur.”

<sup>383</sup> Helmut Müller, ed., *Winfried Baumann, Instant Memorials: Anwendungen aus den Jahren 1997 bis 1999* (Münsterschwarzach: Benedict Press, 1999).

<sup>384</sup> Catalog entries in *ibid.*

<sup>385</sup> Illustration in Müller, *Gesucht: Spirituelle Erfahrungsräume*, 144.

I/seen, nothing at all/everything have You seen/everything.” This yielding of human finitude to God’s everlasting existence relates to the memorials, their inevitable evanescence, and consequently the oblivion of the commemorated persons and events. Elsewhere Baumann’s incorporation of text could merely suggest an additional meaning to the exhibited group of objects. In the church, his text appeared to reveal the purpose of the viewer’s presence at the given place and time.

In 2003 photographer Ketí Kapanadze and painter Alexander Esters cooperated on a duo exhibition at Hospitalhof and Hospital Church titled *Glorious Years (Wunderbare Jahre)*. Kapanadze (b. 1962) produced black-and-white photomontages with copies from magazine advertisements and centrally layered text in block letters. Among her composite photographs were zoomed-in image of a toothbrush with toothpaste on it, still of a water drop hanging low above the pool surface, and close-up of a female model’s face with sunglasses reflecting silhouettes of two deer halted in the middle of a driveway. Kapanadze inserted a singular typed word per each photo composition, respectively: BIRTH, EXIST, and GOD.<sup>386</sup> In a tradition of pop-art, these works appropriate images from mass media and elevate them to the status of fine arts. Similarly to Andy Warhol’s iconic pieces, Kapanadze’s photomontages with commercial pictures from glossy magazines can be viewed as commentary on consumerism and the popular appeal of market values. In this case, the combination of visual and verbal languages serves as an irony directed at the Western lifestyle and its capitalistic gods. However if we give primary importance to the content of the three words, the works can be read as more complex questions about human existence. Between the two inferences, the latter appears stronger specifically in the church context. In an image-sermon from the first week of *Glorious Years*, Müller discussed the

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<sup>386</sup> Ketí Kapanadze, *New Titles (Birth, Exist, God)*, black-and-white photographic prints, each 30 x 40 cm (1994–2002), in *ibid.*, 69–70.

three photomontages, whereby he favored their verbal over visual components.<sup>387</sup> “The world does not open up on the surface of what we see,” he affirmed and then suggested to his parish to understand Kapanadze’s works as metaphors that point towards the “other” (“*der anderen Welt*”) or invisible, side of the world.<sup>388</sup> Müller proceeded to construe the three words without at all linking them to the corresponding visual backgrounds: “birth” as “the secret of coming-into-being” (“*Geheimnis des Werdens*”) that united us with each human who ever lived, lives, or will live on the earth; “exist” as us entering the world and assuming our being (*Dasein*); “God” as “the mystery of the world” (“*Geheimnis der Welt*”) and the cause of all and everyone’s existence.<sup>389</sup> The pastor’s straightforward basis for such interpretations is the verbal rather than visual language, which was incorporated into the exhibition. While the church context tended to sway the viewer’s perception of Kapanadze’s photomontages towards existential concerns expressed in three words, in his image-sermon Müller relied on the available text to speak about the Christian God.

Several years later, a solo exhibition *Cold Comfort* by a German artist Rudolf Reiber (b. 1974) included large monochromatic lacquer paintings on aluminum sheets shown at Hospitalhof and Hospital Church.<sup>390</sup> The dull colors of the paintings corresponded exactly to the color shades that the British Royal Air Force used to camouflage their bombers during the Second World War: dark sea green, ocean grey, sky grey, sky blue, night black. In September 1944, one of such planes was to destroy most of the old city of Stuttgart, including Hospital Church, Reiber’s six abstract paintings, a black ink print, and a group of framed ink drawings appeared on the walls and the floor of the church as entirely mute and passive. As a decisive act in the exhibition, the

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<sup>387</sup> Helmut Müller, “Die Bildpredigt vom 12. Januar 2003 zu Ketī Kapanadze, New Titles,” in *ibid.*, 66–8.

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.*, 67. The original reads, “Die Welt geht nicht in der Oberfläche unseres Augenscheins auf.” Also see Müller’s statement in footnote 436 below.

<sup>389</sup> Müller, *Gesucht: Spirituelle Erfahrungsräume*, 68.

<sup>390</sup> Helmut Müller, *Rudolf Reiber*, exh. cat. (Stuttgart: Hospitalhof, 2010).

artist set up a video projector that produced a single sentence on the low pedestal underneath the altar table: “GLAUBEN SIE AN GOTT?” (“Do You [sic.] believe in God?”). Standing at the pulpit, immediately to the right of the video installation, Müller contemplated Reiber’s exhibition in his image-sermon.<sup>391</sup> He talked about the group of forty-nine drawings that were displayed in the church tower. The title *48085* represented the total sum of black ink dots on the white paper, or stars that the artist could observe in the night sky. Referring to the tremendous number, Müller followed with an inquiry: “Who created all of them? A chance? A physical necessity inherent in the matter itself? Or God? Do you believe in God? Do You believe in God? Do we believe in God?”<sup>392</sup> Similarly, Müller spoke of the ink print *Dark Matter*, exhibited in the foyer of Hospitalhof: “We see the stars. We do not see dark matter. The outweighing part of the universe remains concealed from us, even though it must exist. Do You believe in God? ...The night black of the universe as the cradle of doubt.”<sup>393</sup> Throughout the rest of the image-sermon Müller reiterated the question from Reiber’s video installation. In the pastor’s communication of it, the text-based artwork became the leitmotif of a homily. To correlate Müller’s homily with his curatorial approach, the work *Do You believe in God?* can be regarded as the Rosetta stone for the experience of the whole exhibition.

It would be incorrect to conjecture that the (pastor)-curator intentionally narrowed the scope of contemporary artistic positions that he was willing to include in his exhibitions—they continued to be heterogeneous and original. At the same time, the sheer row of examples of text-based artworks should not be overlooked. In addition to Mira, Baumann, Kapanadze, and Reiber, other artists extensively applied language in neon signs, mirror installations, carved wood, paint or

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<sup>391</sup> Ibid., unpaginated.

<sup>392</sup> Ibid. The original reads, “Wer hat das alles geschaffen? Der Zufall? Eine in der Materie selber liegende physikalische Notwendigkeit? Oder Gott? Glaubst du an Gott? Glauben Sie an Gott? Glauben wir an Gott?”

<sup>393</sup> Ibid. “Wir sehen die Sterne. Die dunkle Materie sehen wir nicht. Der überwiegende Teil des Weltalls bleibt uns verschlossen, obwohl es ihn geben muss. Glauben Sie an Gott? Glauben Sie wirklich an Gott? Das Nachtschwarz des Alls als Ursprung des Zweifels.”

other mediums (e.g. Olaf Probst, Rolf Giegold, Jonathan Meese, Siggi Hofer, Rainer Ganahl, or Andreas Geisselhardt). In the conclusion to his essay, Osterwold drew attention to Müller's strong emphasis on the dialogue between art and church as the issue of the relationship between sacrality and profanity.<sup>394</sup> It is indeed true that communication becomes easier and reciprocally fertile when the conversation is conducted on equal terms, i.e. in the same language. In order to understand whether Müller strove after the ease of communication, let us take into account drastically different cases of exhibitions; namely, projects characterized by nonrepresentational and space-filling qualities.

Internationally renowned German sculptor Heinz Breloh (1940–2001) was invited by Müller to exhibit in Hospital Church in 1998. In his memorable intervention *The Taste of Chastisement*, the artist produced eight terracotta figures, between 40 and 65 centimeters tall, and scattered them on pedestals amidst the church pews (fig. 19).<sup>395</sup> At first glance, the sculptures appeared non-objective but upon close viewing their molded shapes began to evoke human limbs, heads, and faces, while the light- and warm-beige colors produced an impression of bodily flesh. Overall however, the sculptures' foremost abstract qualities, their dependence on light and shadows inside the church, the intimate proximity to individual attendants seated for worship service, and the placement obstructing direct aesthetic contemplation resisted any common reading and brought about the conditions for highly subjective experience. On the one hand, the pieces were localized and few. On the other hand, such fragmentary intrusion into particular spots of the church interior managed to transform the entirety of the space and redefine its composition. The similar effect was reached seven years earlier by HA Schult and, towards the end of Müller's career at Hospitalhof, by Brigitte Stahl (b. 1964). The latter held a solo

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<sup>394</sup> Osterwold, "Kirche und Kunst und Kirche," 139.

<sup>395</sup> *Heinz Breloh: Der Geschmack der Züchtigung*, exh. cat. (Stuttgart: Hospitalkirche, 1998). For the illustration in *Gesucht: Spirituelle Erfahrungsräume*, see page 116.

exhibition *Responsorium*, which was equally rich in content and comprehensive in the use of space inside the church and the community center.<sup>396</sup> Stahl's repertoire includes a variety of found objects, which she deconstructs, reworks, and manipulates so that the final appearance is reminiscent of the original but stripped of previous functions and familiarity. Similarly to both Schult and Breloh, she did not regard church pews as limiting the potential exhibition space but employed them as the loci for the two largest reconfigured objects. The artist took two former kitchen cabinets from circa the 1960s and laid them down in a horizontal position, each on top of two separate rows of pews. Though recognizable, the cabinets had been partly pulled apart and placed on the side, with one of the open surfaces revealing the empty inner space. Directed towards the altar, the objects almost inevitably drew associations with caskets. Because the connotation arose from a mundane piece of furniture, it brought to mind the life of the people who once owned the cupboards, their everyday routines, the food that they stored, the kitchen they moved around in. Commonplace earthly life and a token of physical death coincided in the same object as well as in the place, where the believer would sit down, direct thoughts at God, worship, and pray. In Müller's words, Stahl's intervention outside of worship service created a conceptual space in which "the viewer can pause, breathe out and let his thoughts wander."<sup>397</sup> He further reflected on the exhibition title and pointed out that the individual pieces entered into contact with one another and the mutual context, producing continuous movement of questioning and response. Müller argued that the dialectic dynamics between objects and space produced precisely the atmosphere that allowed the visitor "to discard personal burdens, breathe out, and reconcile with what is," or the atmosphere of, borrowing a term from Immanuel Kant,

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<sup>396</sup> Helmut Müller, ed., *Brigitte Stahl: Responsorium* (Stuttgart: Hospitalhof, 2011).

<sup>397</sup> Ibid., 7. The original reads, "In der Begegnung mit diesen Denkräumen kann der Betrachter innehalten, aufatmen und seinen Gedanken freien Lauf lassen."



“indifferent delight.”<sup>398</sup> In this case, what matters to Müller is neither an edifying interpretation nor theological resonance of a contemporary artwork but the creation of ambiance by art’s intervention throughout the church space. Here, the purpose of an exhibition is not a delivery of a message via the means of a verbal language but rather profound and effective experience of a unique environment.

The exhibitions discussed above show the specific patterns that pervaded the curatorial, as well as pastoral, perspectives and strategies of Helmut Müller: poignant social and historical references (Klaus Illi, Claude Sui-Bellois), text as an art form (Baumann, Kapanadze, Reiber), creation of atmospheres in the worship space (Breloh, Stahl). This list, emblematic but not conclusive, does not represent Müller’s sequential transition from one viewpoint to another. Instead, it shows his acceptance of great diversity of contemporary art. Despite such widely embracing attitude, what prominently endured in Müller’s exhibitions since Lehnerer’s installation *God* (1992) is strong engagement with the altar area and specifically with Hans Seyfer’s *Crucifixion*. That is why by considering one of the latest examples of such engagement we will come full circle to Müller’s critical affirmation, “Art has its place at the heart of the church, in the space where the divine service is celebrated and also in the divine service itself,” and then proceed to the inquiry into the pastor-curator’s theory.<sup>399</sup> Philipp Haager (b. 1974) creates color fields that come across as clouds of interstellar dust. Comparable to works by Caspar David Friedrich or Mark Rothko, Haager’s paintings radiate outwards from their canvases, envelop the viewer in a metaphysical fog, and evoke the ideas of the sublime. The

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<sup>398</sup> Ibid., 8. The original reads, “Im Miteinander der Objekte und Räume entsteht eine schwer beschreibbare Leichtigkeit und ein schwebende Atmosphäre, die es erlaubt, Lasten abzulegen, aufzuatmen und sich mit dem zu versöhnen, was ist.” And, “Es ist eine Atmosphäre, in der sich das von Immanuel Kant der Kunst gegenüber geforderte ‘interesselose Wohlgefallen’ wie von selbst einstellt. Eine Atmosphäre der anteilnehmenden Aufmerksamkeit.”

<sup>399</sup> Müller, *Gesucht: Spirituelle Erfahrungsräume*, 62. The original reads, “Kunst hat ihren Ort nahe am Herzen der Kirche, in dem Raum, in dem Gottesdienst gefeiert wird und auch im Gottesdienst selbst.”

exhibition *Phasis* (2010), displayed in Hospitalhof and Hospital Church, included paintings from the artist's black-and-white series as well as more recent compositions with broad spectra of colors.<sup>400</sup> Close behind the crucifixion group in the altar area, Haager installed a large-scale triptych with side panels angled towards the inside, or a position reminiscent of traditional Christian altarpieces (fig. 20). The color palette of the paintings gradated from dark blue and green hues on the left to red and maroon shades on the right. Subtle black mist dispersed throughout the three panels, adding an illusion of light traveling within the inner pictorial space of the triptych. For Müller, Haager's works possess atmospheres that are able to breathe on their own and transcend the materiality of our world.<sup>401</sup> Moreover, they offer the possibility of transcendence to the viewer:

*Melting Memory* has become here a kind of last horizon or event horizon made up of color and space, one that potentially fuses within itself all the pictures that the evolution of the cosmos has produced. Up to his point, to this final horizon, we can still see with our 'outer' eyes. But after God's avowal of the Crucified Christ, our paschal, 'inner,' eyes also see through this event horizon of color and space and beyond it.<sup>402</sup>

In other words, the atmosphere and power of a contemporary artwork are intensified through its engagement with the heart of the church—its altar and the crucifix. The environment is jointly created by art and religion, and in the middle of it the visitor is the one who benefits.

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<sup>400</sup> Helmut Müller, ed., *Philipp Haager: Phasis*, exh. cat. (Heidelberg and Berlin: Kehrer Verlag, 2010). "Phasis, Greek for 'appearance, epiphany, manifestation,' and also used to describe the rising of a star, resembles the ancient Greek word *phaos* or *phos*—meaning light, brightness." Müller further discusses the meanings of the exhibition title in his image-sermon; see page 54 in the catalog. The catalog texts translated into English by Jennifer Taylor.

<sup>401</sup> Müller, *Phasis*, 6.

<sup>402</sup> *Ibid.*, 55–6. Translation into English by Jennifer Taylor.

#### 4.2.3.4. Theory and practice of Helmut Müller

Similarly to Mennekes' story, Müller's encounter with art came neither from a part of his upbringing nor from the subject of his courses at a university. The pastor's interest in the visual arts was a byproduct of the studies in evangelical theology in Tübingen and Mainz between 1968 and 1973. At the University of Tübingen Müller was influenced by the thought of Jürgen Moltmann, Professor of Systematic Theology, and specifically the theologian's openness on the issue of the Protestant prohibition of images (*Bilderverbot*). Moltmann superseded the conventional dispute between iconoclasts and iconophiles with neutrality that emphasized "the images, which opened for the humankind creative utopias and paved the way for the yet unexplored land."<sup>403</sup> In the early 1970s with Moltmann's teaching in mind, young Müller came across a lithograph *Rückgrat raus* (1951/1960) by a German graphic artist Andreas Paul Weber (1893–1980). The grim caricature left a lasting impression on the theology student by "boiling down the debates of one full semester to their essence."<sup>404</sup> After the experience Müller began to intermit the refined logical reasoning of his studying with "image-meditations" ("*Bildermeditationen*"), which he believed allowed to overstep the existing boundaries of the former.<sup>405</sup> Since then Müller has been dedicated to pursuit of the answers about the essence of art as a whole and the effect that a single image could produce on the beholder. In addition to praxis–exhibition activities first in Backnang and later in Stuttgart–Müller committed to learning about contemporary art through, on the one hand, regular visits to museum and gallery exhibitions and, on the other, in-depth reading of art theory. Moreover, he supplemented the

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<sup>403</sup> Müller, *Gesucht: Spirituelle Erfahrungsräume*, 74–5. The original reads, "Auf dem Weg in eine menschengerechtere Welt, in der es keine Tränen, kein Leid und keinen Tod mehr geben soll, kommt es nicht mehr auf Bilderfreundlichkeit oder Bilderfeindlichkeit, sondern auf die Bilder an, die Menschen schöpferische Utopien eröffnen und ihnen einen Weg in ein noch unbekanntes Land bahnen."

<sup>404</sup> Ibid., 75. The original reads, "Webers 'Rückgrat raus' hat mir in Tübingen eindrucklich vor Augen geführt, dass ein Bild ganze Semesterdebatten auf den Punkt bringen kann."

<sup>405</sup> Ibid., 75–6.

investigation of art with his own creative writing that early on found its expression in the form of image-sermons. The following inquiry into Müller's idiosyncratic preaching and concept of an image-sermon reveals his stance at the intersection of sacrality of the church and profanity of contemporary art. Secondly, directing of the educational program at Hospitalhof and close ties with academia reflect the pastor-curator's rootedness in theology. Thus we will explore Müller's understanding of the relationship between non-sacramental contemporary art and theology as well as between the arts and education in general. Lastly to complete the analysis of Müller's theory and practice, we will trace the pastor-curator's notion of "experiential space" (*Erfahrungsräume*) in relation to exhibitions in Hospital Church.

Helmut Müller's idea of image-sermon and its practical application as a part of Sunday worship service in Hospital Church are the focal points of his talk given at the conference "Intervention: Church spaces as realms of faith experience" at the Catholic Academy Franz-Hitze-Haus (2002).<sup>406</sup> Subsequently the revised text was included into the publication *Gesucht: Spirituelle Erfahrungsräume für Kunst und Religion* (2012).<sup>407</sup> Here Müller begins with a posit that art has its place at the heart of the church: where god services are celebrated and within god services themselves. He adds immediately that at the site shared by aesthetics and liturgy, the two are not left apart and do not exist on their own. Instead, Müller intertwines them through the medium of an image-sermon.<sup>408</sup> The pastor brings one or several artworks from a current exhibition and one or several biblical texts into a conversation with one another; with the intention of helping attendants acquire new insights and new awareness. In Hospital Church art, liturgy, organ

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<sup>406</sup> "Vermittlung: Kirchenräume als Erfahrungsorte des Glaubens," 2-6 September 2002, Catholic Academy Franz-Hitze-Haus, Münster.

<sup>407</sup> Müller, "Kunstpredigt als Mittel spiritueller Interpretation," in *Gesucht: Spirituelle Erfahrungsräume*, 61-6.

<sup>408</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

improvisation, and sermon coalesce into a total work of art, or *Gesamtkunstwerk*, in which, in Müller's words, "the real Present transpires."<sup>409</sup> So the beholder is given a chance to experience the here and now by engaging all of his or her senses. However, the successful united effect is only possible when neither religion nor art dominates the common site and the shared moment. Rather, on equal terms and each in its own particular way the two participate in "the symbolic communication" of life, world, and God.<sup>410</sup> Accordingly, an image-sermon is a quest for meaning that involves both aesthetic and religious experiences. For Müller, the quest starts with his process of own writing and culminates in its visual-acoustic arrival to the attendants gathered at the worship space. Briefly put, in an image-sermon religion and art become dialogue partners. In a surprisingly non-evangelical way Müller argues that such communication is effective and cogent because art is *the* language of religion. "Moreover, what is most crucial to religion, must be expressed in the language of art because it cannot be outspoken otherwise. Religion needs the language of poetry, images, symbols, if it wants to talk about God as the cause, mystery, and purpose of this world."<sup>411</sup> Thus, art is not merely a favorable but indispensable element of the Christian worship service, and Müller's continual practice of image-sermons is a testimony to that belief.

Inherent in Müller's image-sermons is the nexus between appreciation of art and theological thought. Earlier we brought in the examples of sermons that topically referred to exhibitions by

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<sup>409</sup> Ibid., 63. The original reads, "Im Gesamtkunstwerk Gottesdienst ereignet sich reale Gegenwart." See also Müller, "Bildung, Predigt, und Seelsorge in der City," in *ibid.*, 44.

<sup>410</sup> Ibid., 64. "Dabei bearbeiten sie beide das Feld der symbolischen Kommunikation. Kunst und Religion chiffrieren und symbolisieren auf je eigene Weise Komplexität und Kontingenz."

<sup>411</sup> Ibid. The original reads, "Dazu kommt, dass Religion, das, was ihr zentral wichtig ist, in der Sprache der Kunst aussagen muss, weil sie es gar nicht anders aussagen kann. Religion braucht die Sprache der Poesie, der Bilder, der Symbole, wenn sie von Gott als dem Grund, Geheimnis und Ziel der Welt reden will. Kunst ist die Sprache der Religion." Also see Müller, "Das Schöne im Gotteshaus: Zum Verhältnis von Kirche und Gegenwartskunst," in *ibid.*, 38.

Thomas Lehnerer, Ketí Kapanadze, and Rudolf Reiber.<sup>412</sup> The former two applied the word “God” to the titles of their artworks, forthright conducting Müller’s image-sermon to the pertaining subject. To a similar effect, Reiber posed a question “GLAUBEN SIE AN GOTT?” in his video projection at the altar of Hospital Church. Apart from these examples the pastor offered Christian interpretations of the exhibited artworks even when the latter did not provide palpable connections to any questions of faith or religion. In an image-sermon given on the occasion of Philipp Haager’s exhibition in Hospital Church, Müller referred to the tripartite structure of the abstract painting *Melting Memory* in terms of the Holy Trinity. We will quote parts of the homily at length and follow up with a critical analysis of the pastor’s interpretative tactics:

To me, this progression of color represents nothing less than Christian theology’s wrestling to find an appropriate concept of God... The tripartite triptych format is always a reference to the Holy Trinity... We might therefore be inclined to connect the green panel with the first person in the Holy trinity, reminded here also of the green and vital power... The red fields in the middle segue into dark blue and brown tones at the bottom. This panel might stand for God as he devotes his attention to Man. God who came down to Earth and became Man... Finally, the third panel with its crimson and blue hues seems to me to stand for the Holy Spirit, who here on earth already opens up to us the gates to Heaven.<sup>413</sup>

What immediately stands out is an association with theology that Müller proposes to the attendant. Theological background helps him to connect contemporary art with Christian faith, presenting exhibitions in the church as highly relevant to the believer. In contrast to Mennekes’ belief in the virtue of doubt and the absence of answers, the Stuttgart pastor sees the possibility of receiving answers at the junction of art and liturgy. Theology justifies art’s intrusion into the living worship space and supports art’s ability to provide answers to the fundamental questions of human existence. It is precisely the role of contemporary art as the channel to such answers

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<sup>412</sup> See pages 139, 150–1 and 152 in this thesis.

<sup>413</sup> Müller, *Phasis*, 56. Translation into English by Jennifer Taylor. For the discussion of Haager’s exhibition in Hospital Church (2010), see pages 155–6 in this thesis.

that makes it indispensable for the church and for theology. Art expresses Christian faith in a distinct form (*Gestalt*),<sup>414</sup> while in its turn theology represents the Christian religion in the linguistic form (*Sprachgestalt*).<sup>415</sup> The present excerpt from the image-sermon demonstrates how the latter can stem and develop from the former—references to divinity drawn from abstract constellations of gradated color. It is necessary to point out that the pastor’s intertwining of the painting’s visual qualities with theological interpretations does not determine one dominant side. Do crimson hues ascertain the association with the Holy Spirit? Or does the knowledge of the Holy Trinity serve as a prerequisite for understanding Haager’s artwork? Müller would answer both questions in the negative because he perceives both sides as fully independent from one another.<sup>416</sup> Mutual autonomy as the ground rule is a crucial precondition for the interaction between art and theology: only with such autonomy can Müller venture to read a contemporary painting as a symbol of God or decode an artwork via a biblical episode. Thus, the pastor’s view on the relationship between theology and contemporary art is largely manifested in his image-sermons and hinges upon ever-new interpretative possibilities offered by art of the day. Always longing for the new, contemporary art moves into unexplored areas, challenges thought with new possible meanings, and thus fights against ossification of human mind and spirit.<sup>417</sup> As such art is an essential element of church life, theology, and one’s individual education.

Since 1980 the Education Center Hospitalhof has been organizing lectures, seminars, workshops, and conversations, with an average attendance of circa fifty thousand visitors per year.<sup>418</sup> Parallel art exhibitions in both Hospitalhof and Hospital Church have been inevitably drawn into what

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<sup>414</sup> Müller, *Gesucht: Spirituelle Erfahrungsräume*, 38–9; and *Jetzt, Neugierig, Präsent, Offen*, 62–3.

<sup>415</sup> Müller, “Das Schöne im Gotteshaus,” 39.

<sup>416</sup> Müller, “Grenzgänge zwischen Kunst und Religion—Die Citykirche Stuttgart Hospital,” in *Zentrum für Medien Kunst Kultur, Kirchenräume—Kunsträume. Ein Handbuch*, 134–5.

<sup>417</sup> Müller, “Das Schöne im Gotteshaus,” 35. See also *Jetzt, Neugierig, Präsent, Offen*, 63.

<sup>418</sup> Müller, *30 Jahre Bildungszentrum Hospitalhof*, 9.

Hans-Peter Ehrlich called discourse culture (*Diskurskultur*) created by Klumpp and Müller.<sup>419</sup> As part of the educational program, exhibitions of contemporary art have been regularly accompanied by lectures and discussions, which have usually built upon the issues raised by the invited artists and related them to other areas of contemporary life. While for most people the term “education” rings a distinct schooling and academic bell, Müller finds it important to distinguish a specifically Protestant notion of education. In that sense, the religious aspect of education takes its roots in Christian mysticism: the believers hold a mental image of Christ in their hearts, while constantly ridding themselves of already familiar images.<sup>420</sup> Such continuous regeneration of the inner image of Christ causes the cultivation of one’s life, i.e. education in the Protestant sense. Müller emphasizes that this type of education is lifelong and holistic: the process does not stop once a person acquires an academic degree, nor is it limited to intellectual or technical skills. For the pastor, vital education is personal lifelong development that involves one’s soul as well as mind. One of his goals for the events at Hospitalhof is “to help men know what they do,” and he believes that profound encounters with contemporary art can lead to this end.<sup>421</sup> In addition to improved self-knowledge, Müller argues for better understanding of the world as another purpose of education. While natural sciences and philosophy contribute to our learning of the surrounding environment, art offers access to those aspects of reality that are unattainable through other types of human activities.<sup>422</sup> For example, Lehnerer’s installation in Hospital Church could respond to the existential concerns of the beholder through its own methods: ciphers, metaphors, images, and symbols. Lectures and seminars are informative and

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<sup>419</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>420</sup> Müller, “Zum Bildungsverständnis in der Arbeit des Evangelischen Bildungszentrums Hospitalhof Stuttgart,” in *ibid.*, 11.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid., 12. The original reads, “Zusammenfassend gesprochen versucht der Hospitalhof, Menschen dabei zu helfen, zu wissen, was sie tun, wenn sie etwas tun und wenn sie etwas nicht tun.”

<sup>422</sup> Müller, “Gegenwartskunst im Spiegel von Bildung, Religion und Wissenschaft,” in *Gesucht: Spirituelle Erfahrungsräume*, 91.



beneficial to a certain degree, while works of art can bring forward what remains unseen, unheard, and ineffable otherwise.<sup>423</sup> Thus, experience of art can contribute to the holistic educational growth, in the Protestant sense of the term. How exactly does such contribution occur? In the church and specifically during worship services, “education and edification pathways” lead the attendant to observe the liturgy, reflect on allegories and behold symbols (*Sinnbildern*).<sup>424</sup> In Müller’s understanding of personal learning and growth, engaged process of looking plays a great role. Contemporary art challenges and trains visual perception; therefore it is conducive to holistic educational development of a person.

Let us now turn from the educational goals of the center Hospitalhof to the final key term in our analysis of Müller’s theory, “experiential space” (*Erfahrungsräume*). As part of the educational agenda, the process of looking, or observing, might seem self-explanatory. Nonetheless, this notion is complicated with an inherent physical aspect. Sight is part of the sensory system that reacts to physical surroundings and its particular qualities. Müller recognizes the visitor’s bodily presence as essential to profound encounters with contemporary art in the church. “Spiritual interpretation of artworks is possible, when it comes off without personal concern and is experienced in a subjective, physical manner.”<sup>425</sup> Thus, the corporeal sensation is indispensable for the synergy of aesthetic and religious experiences. Likewise, for one, it is important for the effectual *Gesamtkunstwerk* of the liturgy that is created as the aggregate of art, music, and sermon; for another, it is necessary for exercising *Bildermeditationen* and thus overcoming the limits of intellect and reason. We have earlier introduced the ideas of “a total work of art” and “image-meditations,” both of which figured in Müller’s writings since the 1980s. The term

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<sup>423</sup> Ibid. See also Müller, “Das Schöne im Gotteshaus,” 35–6.

<sup>424</sup> Müller, “Kunstpredigt als Mittel spiritueller Interpretation,” in *Gesucht: Spirituelle Erfahrungsräume*, 65. The original reads, “Bildungs- und Erbauungswege.”

<sup>425</sup> Ibid., 66. The original reads, “Spirituelle Interpretation von Kunstwerken ist möglich, wenn sie interessenlos glücklich und subjektiv, leiblich erfahren wird.”

“experiential space,” on the other hand, first appears in the pastor-curator’s reflections in 2005, and culminates in the title of his latest publication dedicated to art exhibitions in Hospital Church, *Wanted: Spiritual Experiential Spaces for Art and Religion*.<sup>426</sup> Müller cites neurobiologist Gerald Hüther as an inspiration for the concept of experiential spaces. In the outcomes of his recent study of human brain, Hüther proposes that so-called “inner images” have the power over the way man thinks, feels, and acts: “The evolution of life has an engine: with the aid of inner images the already existing living forms beget changes in the world... They have one direction: from the basic to more complex inner images, from simple instructions to viability of visions about the individual and collective malleability of the world.”<sup>427</sup> In other words, man shapes the outer world according to those inner images that gradually develop from DNA-binding patterns and collective memory into immaterial representations and ideas. Müller sees in Hüther’s work the bridge between physical matter and spirit—the transitory space (*Übergangsräume*) where the two co-operate. In this sense the pastor-curator suggests that together inner and outer images, while bound up in physical matter, surmount materiality and create spiritual experiential spaces.<sup>428</sup> First and foremost such spaces stimulate personal “inner spiritual processes that allow us to think about the wholeness and fullness of life.”<sup>429</sup> Similarly, when contemporary non-sacramental art enters a living church space, there emerge “bridges

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<sup>426</sup> In 2005 Müller presented a talk in Kunsthalle Baden-Baden and published it the following year under the same title in *Artheon*. See Helmut Müller, “Spirituelle Erfahrungsräume. Warum brauchen die Kirchen die Kunst, wenn es doch Museen gibt und Museen Spiritualität, wenn es Kirchen gibt?” in *Artheon* 23 (2006), 26–31. The book in question is *Gesucht: Spirituelle Erfahrungsräume für Kunst und Religion: 25 Jahre Gegenwartskunst im Hospitalhof und in der Hospitalkirche Stuttgart; 1987–2012* (Stuttgart: Hospitalhof, 2012).

<sup>427</sup> Quoted in Müller, “Spirituelle Erfahrungsräume,” 26. The original reads, “Die Evolution des Lebendigen hat einen Motor: die mit Hilfe ihrer inneren Bildern von den bereits existierenden Lebensformen hervorgebrachten Veränderungen der Welt... Sie haben eine Richtung: vom Einfachen hin zu immer komplexer werdenden inneren Bildern, von bloßen Handlungsanleitungen zum Überleben hin zu Visionen über die individuelle und kollektive Gestaltbarkeit der Welt.”

<sup>428</sup> Ibid., 27. See also Müller, *Gesucht: Spirituelle Erfahrungsräume*, 78–9.

<sup>429</sup> Müller, “Spirituelle Erfahrungsräume,” 27. The original reads, “inneren geistigen Prozessen, die es uns erlauben, das Gesamt und die Fülle des Lebens zu denken.”

between art and the Other, between sacrality and profanity.”<sup>430</sup> There emerge experiential spaces. Summarizing twenty-five years of exhibition activities at Hospital Church, Müller returns to the notion of *Erfahrungsräume* with a few important additions.<sup>431</sup> To experiential spaces the pastor-curator ascribes the capacity to point towards the invisible and by reason alone incomprehensible parts of the world and reality.<sup>432</sup> Moreover, he accentuates the bodily presence as crucial to undergoing experiential space and thus to the experience of art in ecclesiastical settings. Müller advocates the art that is distinguished by “sensuality, presence, aura, and the sensually experienced synergy of all the contextual factors”; ergo: “The attendance of the beholder is preconditioned.”<sup>433</sup> The pastor-curator expands on the last statement, “Alongside the comparative look, of importance for me are one’s heartbeat, astonishment and occasional non-understanding [sic.]... the aura, which provokes in the viewer both acquiescence and rejection and draws him into the work [of art].”<sup>434</sup> For the lack of more precise description Müller recapitulates experiential space as “creative leap between the times” that, arising from the material, moves beyond it and, as a consequence, allows us to realize and perceive the Other reality of our world.<sup>435</sup>

What follows out of physical experience of spiritually charged space is a necessarily subjective participation, one that is exceptional for every individual. According to the pastor, in front of an

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<sup>430</sup> “Brücken zwischen der Kunst und dem Anderen, zwischen Sakralität und Profanität,” in *ibid.*, 30:

<sup>431</sup> Müller, “Gegenwartskunst im Spiegel von Bildung, Religion und Wissenschaft,” in *Gesucht: Spirituelle Erfahrungsräume*, 77–93.

<sup>432</sup> “Welt und Wirklichkeit,” see *ibid.*, 91.

<sup>433</sup> *Ibid.*, 93. The original reads, “Deshalb setze ich nach wie vor auf ein Verständnis von Kunst, das Sinnlichkeit, Präsenz, Aura und das lustvoll erlebbare Zusammenspiel aller Umstände und Faktoren profiliert, die zur Entstehung eines Kunstwerks und zu seinem Glücken beigetragen haben. Die Anwesenheit des Betrachters ist vorausgesetzt.”

<sup>434</sup> *Ibid.* The original reads, “Neben dem vergleichenden Blick behält für mich das Herzklopfen, die Überraschung und das zeitweilige Nichtverstehen sein Gewicht... die Aura, die den Betrachter zu Zustimmung und Ablehnung reizt und ihn ins Werk hineinzieht.”

<sup>435</sup> *Ibid.* The original reads, “Ich suche nach dem schwer beschreibbaren schöpferischen Sprung zwischen den Zeiten, der über das Machen hinausführt und das Andere der Wirklichkeit in der Welt erkennen lässt.”

artwork “everyone has the freedom to see what he [or she] sees.”<sup>436</sup> Here we can draw a parallel between Müller’s thought and that of Mennekes, who by the same token called for a deeply personal engagement with art in a church space. However, their stances regarding the favorable composition of worship space diverge. As discussed above, Mennekes stripped the interior of Saint Peter of superfluous objects and needless distractions. In contrast, Müller always conceived the historical constituents of Hospital Church as the merits of the space and important factors in the accrual of its specific aura. In an interview with the author, he recollects his first impression of the church interior, “One could sense that life had taken place in and with this church. The old Hospital Church had a characteristic unique aura: with its traces of usage, the central crucifixion group by Hans Seyfer, the dark pews and the light retracted by [stained] glass windows.”<sup>437</sup> Moreover, Müller regarded the busyness of the church space as an advantage to exhibitions and an impetus to new creative solutions for the invited artists.<sup>438</sup> Contemporary artworks communicate with the old visual components of the church: creating the dialogue between the symbolic forms of tradition and the present age, and crossing the borders between sacrality and profanity.<sup>439</sup> Pertaining to the exhibitions curated by Müller at Hospital Church, this explains frequent interaction between the altar area and Seyfer’s sculptural group, on the one hand, and contemporary artworks, on the other. Over the centuries the historical memory of the church has accumulated in the traditional sacred architecture, art and liturgy; and today it is crucial for

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<sup>436</sup> Ibid., 90. The original reads, “Jeder hatte die Freiheit, zu sehen, was er sieht.”

<sup>437</sup> Helmut Müller in email conversation with the author, September 2017. “Man hat aber auch gespürt, dass in und mit dieser Kirche gelebt worden ist. Die alte Hospitalkirche hatte mit ihren Gebrauchsspuren, der zentralen Kreuzigungsgruppe von Hans Seyffer, den dunklen Kirchenbänken und dem durch die Glasfenster zurückgenommenen Licht eine sie kennzeichnende spezifische Aura.”

<sup>438</sup> Ibid. Müller’s examples of such creative solutions include installations by Peter Bömmels (1996), Heinz Breloh (1998), Elmar Trenkwalder (2001), Odili Donald Odita (2003), Werner Pokorny (2008), Brigitte Stahl (2010), Sven Drühl (2011). He asserts, “In an empty, vacated church these challenging presentations would never be possible.” (“In einer leergeräumten Kirche wären diese alle Seiten und Beteiligten herausfordernden Präsentationen niemals möglich gewesen.”)

<sup>439</sup> Müller, “Grenzgänge zwischen Kunst und Religion,” 138.

generating “spaces of the concentrated presence.”<sup>440</sup> That is why, in his assessment of the renovated church after its reopening in 2017, the pastor-curator underlines that Hospital Church has to slowly attain a new and different aura.<sup>441</sup> Contrary to Mennekes’ view on the renovated Saint Peter, Müller does not extol the newly emptied space of the Stuttgart church. But while the bridge between the traditional symbols and the new forms of art within Hospital Church, as perceived by the pastor, is not as emphatic as it was before 2012, what remains constant is a subjectivity of human experience of art. Over the course of thirty years, Müller has held it as the key feature of human experience: whether in image-sermons, image-meditations, vital educational processes, or physical participation in experiential space.

#### **4.2.4. Hospital Church after the renovation of 2012–2017**

In January 2009 the Education Center Hospitalhof announced an architectural competition for a renovation project of the community center and the church building.<sup>442</sup> By the end of the year, the commission went to the Stuttgart-based architectural office Lederer, Ragnarsdóttir, Oei. Hospitalhof was to receive an entirely new edifice because its dilapidated state no longer satisfied obligatory requirements, e.g. fire protection.<sup>443</sup> The work on the new building for the education, administrative, and community center continued between 2012 and 2014; resulting in a modernized three- to five-storey structure defined by light-coloured brick masonry and rhythmical geometric patterns (fig. 21). While the planning of the extended refurbishment of the church began as early as 2012, the first renovation works took place in 2015 and continued till

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<sup>440</sup> Ibid., 139. The original reads, “Räume verdichteter Gegenwart.”

<sup>441</sup> Helmut Müller in email conversation with the author, September 2017.

<sup>442</sup> Renninger, Ahlrichs, and Schwarz, *Der Neue Hospitalhof*, 47.

<sup>443</sup> Arno Lederer, “Neubau Hospitalhof,” in *ibid.*, 6.

2017. The biggest transformation concerned the west end of the church: the low-hanging upper gallery was removed, newly high walls were coated with white paint, and the prior narrow side entrance was replaced with three frontal sets of wide glass doors. As a consequence of the last architectural decision, the east apse of the church, the altar, and the crucifixion group became directly visible from the outside yard. With the pursuit of spatial depth, the chancel itself was reconfigured through a series of “small measures,” such as dismantling of the heavy stone altar table and facilitation of greater incoming light through enlarged upper windows.<sup>444</sup> Previously tightly arranged and massive nave pews were substituted with two trains of light-colored wooden chairs. While this novelty answered to the need of upgrading old heating with an under-floor heating system, its significance lies largely in the new visual lightening and expanse of the inner space. Even though the seating capacity was reduced in half to nearly 300 seats, according to Eberhard Schwarz and Monika Renninger, such drawback was compensated by “the aesthetic and liturgical advantages of the renovation.”<sup>445</sup> It is indeed proper to point out the aesthetic amelioration of the interior of Hospital Church: the new clarity of its architecture, the brightened atmosphere of transparency, and the lucid flow of its space (fig. 22). After the project by Lederer, Ragnarsdóttir, Oei was completed, somewhat gloomy rooms of the postwar church gave way to an airy, spacious, and quasi-minimalistic composition.

The reopening of the church in March 2017 was accompanied by a week-long program of thematic events dedicated to literature, music, role of the church in the civil society, art, and

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<sup>444</sup> “...durch kleine Maßnahmen eine räumliche Verbesserung zu erreichen.” See Architekten Lederer Ragnarsdóttir Oei, “Die Sanierung der Hospitalkirche–Das Konzept der Architekten,” Hospitalkirche Broschüre 2017, leaflet to the reopening of the church (March 2017), available online at [http://www.kirchen-online.com/content/k\\_k-in-stuttgart/hospitalkirche.html](http://www.kirchen-online.com/content/k_k-in-stuttgart/hospitalkirche.html) (accessed September 10, 2017), 3.

<sup>445</sup> “...ästhetische und liturgische Gewinn der Sanierung.” See Eberhard Schwarz and Monika Renninger, “Die neue Hospitalkirche in der Evangelischen Kirche in Stuttgart,” Hospitalkirche Broschüre 2017, leaflet to the reopening of the church (March 2017), at *ibid.* (accessed September 10, 2017), 3.

spirituality.<sup>446</sup> Müller gave one of the opening statements that succeeded the festive Sunday service and led the discussion “Art Space Church” on the following Friday. The latter event brought together historian Dr. Tilman Osterwold; curator of the Stuttgart Art Museum, Dr. Eva-Marina Froitzheim; theologian and art-commissioner of the Regional Church of Württemberg, Reinhard Lambert Auer; and architect Arno Lederer. The evening closed at Hospitalhof with a performance by American composers and musical artists Bryan Eubanks and Catherine Lamb. At the same time photographs of Hans Seyfer’s *Crucifixion* taken by Klaus Pfotenhauer, who frequently provided images for Müller’s catalogs, were displayed in the church tower, while a sales exhibition organized by the drug-counseling center Release Stuttgart e.V. filled the foyer of Hospitalhof.<sup>447</sup> The group exhibition included works by the already familiar to the church community artists—among others Bettina Bürkle, Herbert Egl, Werner Pokorny, Rudolf Schoofs, Lambert Maria Wintersberger, and Bernd Zimmer. Evidently the interest in contemporary arts did not wane during the renovation period of 2012–2017. Moreover, even when Hospital Church and Hospitalhof were closed, in his last projects under the aegis of the Education Center Helmut Müller realized six “guest” exhibitions in the Protestant Church of Brenz in Stuttgart-North.<sup>448</sup> Most notably, an internationally acclaimed German multimedia artist and chief curator of the European Biennial of Contemporary Art *Manifesta 11*, Christian Jankowski (b. 1968) installed a two-channel video work at the east wall of Church of Brenz in 2012 (fig. 23).<sup>449</sup> The hour-long stream documented the artist’s performance *Casting Jesus*, originally staged in Sassia, Rome in

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<sup>446</sup> Flyer to the reopening of the church (online), Pfarramt der Hospitalkirche und der Evangelischen Kirche in der City Stuttgart, <https://www.hospitalkirche-stuttgart.de/die-neue-hospitalkirche/wiederer%C3%B6ffnung/> (accessed September 10, 2017).

<sup>447</sup> The proceeds from the sales exhibition went to Release and the Hospitalhof fund for art projects.

<sup>448</sup> Alexander Tovborg, *Teenage Jesus*; Christian Jankowski, *Casting Jesus* (2012); Florian Klette, *Above us only sky*; Johanna Diehl, *Displace. Fotografien*; Nicola Samori, *Vom Abtun der Bilder, Malerei, Skulptur* (2013); Philipp Schwalb, *VIA sinn T.O. nah* (2014).

<sup>449</sup> Helmut Müller, and Tilman Schlevogt, eds., *Christian Jankowski—Casting Jesus: See them break bread, see them carry the cross, see them suffer for our sins, who has the charisma to be the Next Coming?* (Stuttgart: Edition Taube, 2015).

2011. Jankowski participated in the “liturgy-vernissage” by reading a sermon and subsequently shared his impression with Ingeborg Wiensowski from *Der Spiegel*: “As everyone stood up, prayed and the organ started, I nearly came to tears.”<sup>450</sup> The catalog, appearing three years after the event, is the latest volume that has been edited by Müller. While the exhibition was organized in cooperation with the Education Center Hospitalhof, the catalog was nevertheless produced by another publishing house from Stuttgart, Edition Taube. Despite confirming interest in engagement with contemporary art after Müller’s retirement, the new Hospitalhof team dispensed with publishing of exhibition catalogs. Such foregoing of valuable documentation of art-related initiatives inevitably resulted in the change of status of contemporary art within Hospitalhof. In addition to that, the new head of Hospitalhof, Monika Renninger, does not plan to use the inner space of Hospital Church for future art projects or site-specific installations. Speaking about the upcoming exhibitions, she noted, “in the church we will show one or two objects maybe of current exhibitions.”<sup>451</sup> Even in the hallways of the community center, the average number of annual art shows dropped to three per year: a solo exhibition, an exhibition organized by young trainee-curators from Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, and a group exhibition at the end of the calendar year.<sup>452</sup> Such “new exhibition concept” hinges upon work of guest curators and the advisory board, which consists of contemporary art specialists from Kunstmuseum Stuttgart and the Stuttgart State Academy of Art and Design.<sup>453</sup> While Müller occasionally invited outside curators, the complete delegation of exhibition activities to art professionals who are not affiliated with Hospital Church inevitably causes a higher degree of separation between

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<sup>450</sup> Quoted in Ingeborg Wiensowski, “Videokunst: Vatikan sucht den Super-Jesus,” *Spiegel Online*, May 22, 2012, <http://www.spiegel.de/kultur/gesellschaft/der-kuenstler-christian-jankowski-laesst-jesus-casten-a-834258.html> (accessed September 10, 2017). The original reads, “Als alle aufstanden, als gebetet wurde und die Orgel spielte, da kamen mir fast die Tränen.”

<sup>451</sup> Statement made by Monika Renninger in an email to the author (April 7, 2017).

<sup>452</sup> Hospitalhof Stuttgart-Evangelisches Bildungszentrum, “Gegenwartskunst im Hospitalhof,” Das Bildungszentrum Hospitalhof, <https://www.hospitalhof.de/gegenwartskunst/> (accessed September 12, 2017).

<sup>453</sup> Ibid.



contemporary art and the church life. That is, the division of responsibilities between the main pastor (Schwarz) and the head of Hospitalhof, viz. art exhibitions, (Renninger) was furthered by the division of responsibilities between the head of Hospitalhof and guest curators.<sup>454</sup> It goes without saying that the importance and intensity of engagement with contemporary art was more compelling when the main pastor of Hospital Church was in charge of both the spiritual life of the parish and organization of art exhibitions. Thus we can deduce that Müller's venture of bringing together sacred liturgy and profane contemporary art did not find its following. Instead, the Education Center regularly organizes collective trips to museums, excursions to large art events such as *documenta*, and visits to artists' studios. After Müller's leave exhibitions activities in the community center shifted into the middle-, or as one may argue, background of the Education Center; while in the church inner space they have been virtually discontinued.

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<sup>454</sup> While the director of Hospitalhof, Renninger leads a number of worship services per month in Hospital Church. Previously, she held the pastor position in the Stuttgart Church of the Redeemer (Erlöserkirche) for 13 years.

## 5. Contemporary art in old active German churches

Thirty years after Friedhelm Mennekes and Helmut Müller introduced art exhibitions to the two churches in Cologne and Stuttgart it is not difficult to come across contemporary non-sacramental art in other churches in Germany. Indeed, its presence within active Christian houses of worship is prevalent and grows more common with each year. The goal of this chapter is to analyze such presence in the twenty-first century and to attempt to understand the relationship between ecclesiastical settings of living communities and the secular work of art that enters these spaces. Having discussed the developments at Saint Peter and Hospital Church in the previous chapter, we will first proceed with their comparison in order to draw a profile that reflects the churches' thirty-year-old engagement with the secular visual arts. This will enable the investigation of other case studies against the background of continuous and evolving activities at the Catholic church in Cologne and the Protestant church in Stuttgart. Thus, we will move on to examine the paradigms of coexistence of old active churches and non-sacramental contemporary art in Germany. Finally, we will take a look at the consequences of the three-decade-old phenomenon and inquire into the current place of contemporary art in Christian worship spaces. Echoing the title of this thesis, we will ask how strange such place actually is and what might befall it in the future. Along the discussion, we will observe a new type of space that has been emerging in old active German churches at the turn of the twenty-first century and ultimately raise several pertinent questions that introduce the theoretical framework of chapter six.

## 5.1. Saint Peter and Hospital Church: comparative profile

### 5.1.1. Pioneering steps

When Mennekes and Müller began their exhibition practices in the 1980s, respective contexts of their ventures confronted both pastors with similar challenges. The two undertook their tasks in the communities that were severely reduced immediately after the Second World War and within the edifices that were reconstructed from the ruins largely according to their historical ground plans. Consequently, they faced the necessity to revitalize, on the one hand, the existence of their parishes and, on the other, the worship space of the newly raised architectural structures. As already mentioned, for both Mennekes and Müller the encounters with contemporary secular art contained an element of surprise: before accidental individual experiences they neither studied art nor pursued its understanding as hobby or interest.<sup>455</sup> The distance from learned appreciation of contemporary art was crucial because it made those encounters especially powerful and hence convincing of the significant intrinsic values of autonomous, i.e. non-religious or non-devotional, art. Importantly, their individual beliefs in those values were confirmed by a row of art exhibitions that took place in Germany and abroad throughout the 1980s.<sup>456</sup> From *Zeichen des Glaubens* (1980) to *GegenwartEwigkeit* (1990), the curators and the artists proclaimed art's ability to communicate the contemporary human condition—personal internal struggles as well as pressing social concerns. That is, contemporary art was proposed to raise the most important, existential, questions and stir the viewers' reflection thereof: life and death, hope and fear, love and suffering. Friedhelm Mennekes and Helmut Müller strongly supported the idea of art being capable of moving the observer. More than that, the pastors-curators *believed* in such ability of

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<sup>455</sup> See pages 110 and 157 above.

<sup>456</sup> For the discussion of the thematic exhibitions see chapter 3, section 3.2., in this thesis.

art. Whether it was through doubt and questioning (according to Mennekes) or through constantly renewing perspectives (according to Müller), both pastors believed that art could profoundly affect the human being; that is why they saw it as exactly the instrument necessary for invigorating the community life and animating the church space. The missions and claims raised in the thematic exhibitions of the 1980s fueled the pastors' strong faith in art and gave them impetuses for committing to contemporary art exhibitions within their own churches. Moreover, the exhibitions provided Mennekes, Müller, and subsequently other pastors and curators with the idea of the kind of art that was spiritually poignant and thus suitable for being placed inside a living church. For example, after such artists as Jürgen Brodwolf, Herbert Falken, Markus Lüpertz, Hermann Nitsch, Antoni Tàpies, and Günther Uecker participated in the thematic exhibitions discussed above, their works found ways into both Saint Peter and Hospital Church, as well as into other Christian institutions later on. Abstract images evoking the sublime and expressions of human figure evoking the existential issues produced a particularly strong resonance among church exhibitions in the late 1980s and early 1990s. To be more particular, Mennekes was attracted to the affecting qualities in artworks which could animate the altar and its sacred connotation; we recognize his penchant first in the triptych series and in later site-specific projects at Saint Peter. In comparison, Müller appreciated the concept of thematic exhibitions because of their applicability to theological reflection and image-sermons; hence are characteristic group exhibitions at Hospital Church from *Ecce homo–Seht, der Mensch* (1988) to *Aufstehen. Auferstehen: Auferstehung im Spiegel der Gegenwartskunst* (1998). We hereby notice that for Mennekes and Müller the thematic exhibitions served not only as intangible affirmation of art's values but also as the source of aesthetic inspiration and even names of those artists who could be invited to their respective churches.<sup>457</sup> But while both pastors already showed a taste for

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<sup>457</sup> The latter is especially pertinent to early exhibitions at Kunst-Station Sankt Peter and Hospitalhof/Hospital

the visual arts during their time in rather small communities,<sup>458</sup> for each a move to a bigger urban church was decisive. Comparably, Cologne and Stuttgart of the 1980s were cities with active developments in modern and contemporary art. The former, with its high-profile galleries and the newly opened Museum Ludwig, was an important center of not only the German but the European art scene. Such artists as Martin Kippenberger, Sigmar Polke, and Gerhard Richter lived and worked in Cologne throughout the pivotal decade. The latter, while smaller and less culturally dynamic than Cologne, was nevertheless another destination for art enthusiasts, mainly due to an architectural marvel by Sir James Frazer Stirling built as the home for the Staatsgalerie collection of twentieth-century art. In short, both cities presented auspicious conditions for promoting interest in contemporary art. For this reason the pastors' relocations to art-conscious urban environments are crucial for the story of engagement between old active churches and contemporary secular art in Germany. To recapitulate, for both Friedhelm Mennekes and Helmut Müller the combination of strong individual beliefs in the power of art, the thematic exhibitions that supported those beliefs and the timely appointments at opportune places resulted in the resolve to organize exhibitions of contemporary non-devotional art in their churches.

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Church.

<sup>458</sup> Mennekes with the Saint Mark Community in the district Frankfurt-Nied and Müller at the Protestant collegiate church Sankt Pankratius in the town of Backnang.

### 5.1.2. Liturgy and contemporary art

We have seen that the initial premises and intentions on which Mennekes and Müller based their commitment to contemporary art were comparable in nature. In contrast, the pastors' exhibition strategies vary according to the idiosyncratic theories on art that each of them developed over the decades. It is noteworthy that the idiosyncrasies do not stem from the differences between traditional Catholic and Protestant approaches to church arts but, instead, from the pastors' individual perspectives on the subject that do not necessarily reflect strictly denominational points of view. The differences between Mennekes' and Müller's methods are most notable in two aspects of the exhibitions that took place at Saint Peter and Hospital Church under their leadership: first, the integration of contemporary art into the Christian liturgy and, second, the treatment of the church space. The latter is explored in the following section, while here we juxtapose selected praxes related to the pastors' combinations of art and liturgy. A living church, or active church, is one with an altar table; it is a place where regular god services take place and wherein believers can pray or light candles. When an alien object, such as a contemporary non-sacramental work of art, enters the interior of a living church critical questions emerge. Is an artwork integrated into worship practices or does it stand aloof? How can an artwork disturb the worshipper's experience or contribute to it? Does the artwork speak for itself, or does it need to be mediated, if so, how and by whom? If we take a look at the examples described in chapter four, we can find the answers proposed by Mennekes and Müller.

Firstly, both pastors argued for the integration between contemporary art and the Christian liturgy. From the very beginning, Mennekes brought works by contemporary artists into the heart of Saint Peter: between 1987 and 1994 almost fifty art projects within the triptych series took

place in the apse of the church, i.e. immediately next to the altar.<sup>459</sup> Inevitably, the congregation would have the exhibited artworks in sight during each celebration of the Mass.<sup>460</sup> In 1995, a project by James Lee Byars resulted in integration between liturgy and contemporary art that was unprecedented not only for Germany, but for anywhere in the world.<sup>461</sup> At Saint Peter *The White Mass* was more than a mere background for the liturgy: Mennekes celebrated the Eucharist standing simultaneously inside and under the art installation, while his white garment was part of the artistic concept. In Stuttgart, Müller likewise engaged the altar area as the site for contemporary art interventions: from Werner Knaupp's *Lebensspur* and Thomas Lehnerer's *Gott* to Rudolf Reiber's *Cold Comfort* and Philipp Haager's *Melting Memory*, the altar table of Hospital Church served as the locus of the dialogue between Christian worship and secular language of art. Furthermore, Müller's consistent practice of *Bildpredigten* testifies to the high role he assigned to art in the Christian worship; namely, contemporary art and liturgy were dialogue partners at the common site and in the shared moment. Hence, both pastors would answer the first question, whether artworks should be integrated into liturgy, in the positive.

Nonetheless, the two held different views as to how the artwork could sway the believer's experience in the church. While Mennekes emphasized the virtue of doubt and *questioning* called forth by art, Müller's reliance on image-sermons testifies to his belief in the possibility of arriving at an *answer* via the work of art. Accordingly, the former argued for the importance of subjectivity in an encounter with art, whereas the latter prompted the consideration of an intersubjective appreciation of art without imposing either the "outside uniformity or

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<sup>459</sup> See pages 89–95 above.

<sup>460</sup> Moreover, when art frames the altar (as it decidedly did in the triptych series) it emphasizes the physicality of the Eucharist ritual and therefore accomplishes the transmutation of bread and wine into the flesh and blood of Christ. Such corporeal workings of contemporary art are questioned more closely in chapter six; see pages 277–8 below.

<sup>461</sup> See page 97 in this thesis.

homogeneous perceptions.”<sup>462</sup> If we compare the selected examples from Saint Peter and Hospital Church, we may quickly come to the conclusion that the basic difference between the two is marked by the opposing emphases on, respectively, sensitivity and cognition—heart and head. On the one hand, the triptych series or *The White Mass* created certain ambiances or moods that colored individual experiences primarily through the sense of sight. On the other, a visual object of art is subjected to language through the medium of a sermon. Such understanding agrees with traditional Catholic and Protestant approaches to church arts and therefore with one’s expectations regarding the treatment of the contemporary visual arts within Catholic and Protestant churches today. However, upon closer examination of exhibitions or installations in Cologne and Stuttgart, the logic proves to be reductive and anachronistic. At Kunst-Station a number of memorable art projects were language-based: Jenny Holzer’s *War, Work in Progress* and Rosemarie Trockel’s *Ich habe Angst* (both 1993), Barbara Kruger’s *Wer salutiert am längsten? Wer betet am lautesten? Wer stirbt zuerst? Wer lacht zuletzt?* (2003), as well as the permanent installation by Martin Creed, *DON’T WORRY* (2000). All of these works contained suitable linguistic ingredients on which an image-sermon could be based. In comparison, Helmut Müller invited multiple artists whose interventions at Hospital Church trod far away from verbal interpretations: Claude Sui-Bellois’ *Observation* (1995), Heinz Breloh’s *The Taste of Chastisement* (1998), or Philip Haager’s *Phasis* (2010). The pastor-theologian elaborates on such

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<sup>462</sup> It should be noted that Müller does not assert that the viewers’ interpretations have to be identical. He admits to the significance of one’s own distinct approach to a work of art, which depends on personal insights and life experiences. “Man kann zwar Gottesdienstbesuch und Predigthörer soziologisch als ‘*gleichgestimmte Menge*’ beschreiben, als Personengruppe, die sich in einer gleichen Stimmung, in einer gleichen Gemütsverfassung befindet. Und Predigten wollen auch überzeugen. Aber ich habe in meinen Predigten immer deutlich gemacht, dass die von mir vorgetragenen Zugänge zu den Bildern und meine Bildinterpretationen *meine Zugänge und Interpretationen* sind, es auch andere Zugänge und Interpretationen gibt und es darauf ankommt, seinen eigenen Zugang zu finden. Man konnte mir folgen, musste es aber nicht. Insofern zielten auch die Bildpredigten auf individuelle innere Einsichten und Erfahrungen und nicht auf die Herstellung von äußerer Uniformität oder gleichartige Anschauungen ab.” Helmut Müller in email conversation with the author (November 2017); emphasis in italics is by Müller.



installations through the concept of experiential space,<sup>463</sup> pointing out the auratic qualities of the visual arts and the subjective corporeal manner in which the viewer experiences art. Pertaining to the second question outlined in the beginning of this section, it can be deduced that Mennekes and Müller do indeed differ in their outlooks on how a contemporary artwork can affect the worshipper's experience in the church. Yet, we find concord between their beliefs about the ultimate purpose of an encounter with art—spiritual edification of an *individual* human being. Similarly to the pastors' motivations for engaging with art in the first place, the potential of profound personal enrichment was the reason for bringing together contemporary art and the Christian liturgy.

Turning to the last question—of art mediation in a church—we observe another split in opinions held by Mennekes and Müller. The former regarded art exhibited at Saint Peter as tremendous but silent enhancement of liturgy. The latter approaches art as the dialogue partner of the Christian faith: as such, art must reveal its meaning in utterance. From this we can infer that the difference regarding the issue of art mediation has to do with a theological connection. Mennekes emphatically insisted on art's complete independence of religion, which implied its freedom from theological reflection. Müller, while also accentuating an artist's absolute freedom to create, applied theological reason to the artworks exhibited at Hospital Church in the form of image-sermons and as part of the education program at the Center Hospitalhof. It can be argued that the two pastors targeted different audiences: Mennekes reaching out to a more secular public, e.g. people visiting his church for the purpose of seeing art; Müller speaking both to the community of believers and academics from the fields of theology and religious studies. Alternatively, their perspectives regarding the necessity, or the lack thereof, for reading artworks “out loud” could result in different strategies of art mediation at Saint Peter and Hospital Church.

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<sup>463</sup> For Müller's ideas about experiential spaces (*Erfahrungsräume*), see pages 163–7 above.

In conclusion, the analysis of the pastors' attitudes to the integration between contemporary art and liturgy discloses a divergence in particularities—manners in which artworks can communicate and color the worshipper's experience. The principal questions, however, prove that the consensus prevails: both Mennekes and Müller did not hesitate to allot the place for contemporary art within the Christian liturgy and they did so for the same purposes.

### **5.1.3. Church space and its aura**

It is the argument of this thesis that the old architecture of the churches in question is of crucial role for experiencing art exhibitions in these spaces. The theoretical justification of the point is presented in chapter six. Here, we walk through the interior rooms of Saint Peter and Hospital Church and visualize their composition. The focus is not on the objects of art, which are discussed in chapter four, but rather on the spatial features in each church. The goal is twofold. First, we will appreciate the unique atmospheres of these churches by immersing into the mental images of their active worship spaces. Second, we will understand spatial possibilities presented for contemporary art exhibitions in those rooms. Third, we will compare the ideas about church aura held by Mennekes and Müller. This order allows us to become familiar with the two churches and, having accomplished that, bring our knowledge into conversation with the two pastors, whose exhibition practices greatly depended on the spatial characters of, respectively, Saint Peter and Hospital Church.

The entryway into the Jesuit church of Cologne is located at the building's south wall, which is separated from the adjacent street with a stone fence and a small inner yard. Already by passing through the fence gate, the visitor becomes detached from the city—its noise, cars, shops, and

streams of passers-by—and enclosed into a distinct atmosphere of a centuries-old religious site. Having stepped through the doors, one immediately notices the difference in the quantity of light: here it is a few shades darker than outside (unless one arrives to the church after the sunset). Additionally, it is distinctly quieter; when the congregation is absent, the church becomes marked by almost pure silence. Having beheld the Sacraments Chapel (*Gitterkapelle*) located in front of the entrance doors, the visitor proceeds into the main area. Here, the three expansive aisles and the apse comprise the ritual space of Saint Peter. The central aisle stands far below the flat ceiling communicating a sense of great heights, while the side aisles are topped with the upper galleries that comprise the second floor of the building. The arches separating the aisles lead the gaze and suggest the movement in the direction of the chancel, where three high pointed windows serve as the main source of light inside of the building. Approximately half of the windows' area is embellished with vibrant stained glass images of saints; the other half consists of clear glass panes. Such arrangement results in the dual quality of light that flows into the church: it is simultaneously colorful and pristinely bright. Above the upper galleries and immediately under the ceiling, additional windows run on both sides of the central aisle. Together with the apse windows, they bring the natural light into the central aisle. Supplementary sources of light are side windows located on both south and north walls, arranged along the aisles. They are smaller in size than the apse windows but similarly made up of both stained and clear glass panes. Allowing the natural light to come in, the side windows compensate for the low vaulted ceilings of the south and north aisles; without these additional passages of light the side aisles would be oppressively gloomy. Moving through the interior space, one can explore the parts that are not instantaneously conspicuous. The church baptistery is an enclosed area at the west end, barely large enough to comfortably fit even five or six

people. Next to it, the north-west corner is the darkest area inside the church; here Cornelis Schut's painting creates a partly concealed space for individual contemplation. Via the long spiral staircase one arrives upstairs, where all but the east end are given to the galleries. Similarly to the side aisles on the first level, the broad galleries are defined by low vaulted ceiling and large arched openings into the nave. The lack of height is again compensated with natural light entering through the rows of south and north windows, which however are not adorned with stained glass. From the galleries, the visitor obtains a generous view of the ritual space and, during art interventions, an opportunity to change perspectives. Having travelled through the rooms, one can reflect on how the architecture has guided this exploration. Because there are neither pews nor chairs in the church,<sup>464</sup> the architectural structure enjoys great visibility, while the expanse of the interior space is at the visitor's service. At the lower level, the aisles lead one's steps eastward and westward, with the nave dominating the movement and simultaneously pulling the gaze upward. At the upper level, the galleries suggest walking along the perimeter of the church and, at the same time, demarcate its center. On both floors, the architecture concentrates one's attention first on the nave and, transitioning from there, on the chancel—the heart of the church. Altogether the spatial elements support the centripetal perception of Saint Peter's interior, inviting the visitor to move through the rooms, to become familiar with the aisles and the galleries, and to discover the more intimate areas for personal contemplation.

The Protestant church *Hospitalkirche* is located in the center of Stuttgart, amidst the busy streets filled with restaurants and shops. Yet the church manages to provide an escape from the vibrant urban environment. Similarly to the entrance of Saint Peter, the main doors of Hospital Church face the inner yard. In addition to the church, the latter is confined on the south side by the wall remnants of the prewar church building and on two other sides by the center Hospitalhof. Here,

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<sup>464</sup> The chairs are brought in for god services and public events, after which they are once again removed.

the visitor gains an impression of the size of the former church by observing the south wall and the baptismal font, which used to stand on the inside before the war but is located in the yard today. Standing in front of the double set of glass doors, one can already catch a glimpse of the interior and even the east end with Hans Seyfer's sculptural group. Once inside, the visitor quickly gets a full grasp of the church's interior due to its diminished scale and resulting from it the direct spatial orientation. The room immediately involves the visitor who, after crossing the threshold, finds him- or herself in the nave. Here, two trains of chairs are symmetrically arranged on either side of the middle pathway. The pathway itself is an unequivocal, straightforward linkage between the visitor and the altar area. It guides not only the gaze but also the movement; namely, it offers a singular possible and unmistakable direction. While the ceilings are not as high as those in the Cologne church, their vaulted and abundantly ribbed form visually heightens the interior and therefore compensates for the small size of the church with expressive elevation. Such elevation corresponds with a tall, three-meter, sculpture by Seyfer and the pointed high windows behind the crucifixion group. The three east windows, unlike those at Saint Peter, are entirely filled with stained glass. Two more stained glass windows of the same height and breadth are located to the right side of the altar, i.e. on the south wall of the apse. When the sunlight comes through the rich and vivid palette of all five windows, it produces animated luminosity that first engrosses the altar area and then radiates further into the nave. To the south side of the nave are a bare white wall and an equally white blind window; to the north side of the nave are two levels of additional seating area that discernably break the symmetry of the whole interior. The visitor entering this side room physically detaches him- or herself from the main worship space and might even feel as if leaving the church behind. Here, the simple semi-clear windows with thick glass, the dark blue wall, the unusual low stools stand out from the

composition of the rest of the interior. At the same time however, this area offers a more concealed space and might therefore appeal to someone who is more comfortable in a smaller room and a more intimate environment. In addition, the upper level provides a distinctive outlook on the nave, the apse, and the entrance. Comparably to the galleries in the Cologne church, here the visitor can find a standpoint from which to appreciate architecture or art installations in a new enriching way. Differently still, the altar and Seyfer's sculptural group are no longer the foci of attention in this part of Hospital Church: the apse disappears out of one's sight as soon as one sits down in the back of the side room, either down- or upstairs. Overall the interior of Hospital Church is an explicitly organized space that gives its visitor a clear direction of movement; even though it is not necessary to walk about the rooms in order to comprehend the aggregate spatial configuration. Merely standing at the west entrance, we can grasp the entire interior prospect of the church.

These descriptions refer to the current compositions of interior spaces at Saint Peter and Hospital Church. As discussed in chapter four, after the Second World War both of these churches were rebuilt from the ruins and in the recent past both underwent renovation.<sup>465</sup> In the analysis of those transformations, a significant parallel comes to light. The postwar reconstruction processes resulted in simplified and visually less burdened interiors at both of the churches. Moreover, the tendency for clarification of space has persisted over the decades and, following the latest renovation works, Saint Peter and Hospital Church emerged emptier yet. The reduction of visual busyness is a well-known trend taken up by old churches in Germany, especially prevalent when those churches face the need of renovation and hence the task of spatial reconfiguration. Nonetheless, the degrees of emptiness are unequal. In the 1980s the Cologne church was

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<sup>465</sup> The renovation works took place at Saint Peter between 1997 and 2000 and at Hospital Church between 2012 and 2017. See pages 100–1 and 167–8 above.

evidently barer than the Stuttgart church and today remains much barer than most old active churches in the country. For more than two decades since 1987, both Mennekes and Müller were largely responsible for the appearance of the interior spaces in their respective churches and both witnessed the years of renovation. Therefore, it is appropriate to juxtapose their thoughts on what a church should look like and why. We have already explored Mennekes' ideas concerning emptiness—particularly the emptiness of the church space—as well as Müller's reflection on why churches can be profound experiential spaces.<sup>466</sup> Avoiding reiteration we now proceed to compare their perspectives in view of the renovated interiors discussed above. The notable point of agreement is found in the pastors' discussions of aura in living Christian places of worship. The Cologne pastor argues that such aura primarily stems from the heart of the church, i.e. the altar, because of the Christian truths that the altar represents. For Mennekes, the function of the church aura is to produce experiential space and, when works of contemporary art are involved, to disclose the kindred spirits that are intrinsic to those artworks. The Stuttgart pastor believes that the special aura of a church accrues from the spiritual and devoted life that is led within the church walls over time; ergo the longer the sacred space is actively used, the richer its aura. For Müller, the function of the aura is therefore close to sanctification of place. In other words, notwithstanding its symbolism an inanimate altar does not lend the auratic quality to a room, but the living community does. According to Müller that is why those objects in the church that point to the existence of its community are necessary for the maintenance of the aura. These positions explain the divergent approaches to renovation at Saint Peter and Hospital Church. Whereas Mennekes was content with keeping as few objects and images as possible provided that the altar remained in the church apse, Müller regarded them as meaningful advantages for the spiritual life of believers. Only as Müller was stepping down from his duties at Hospital

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<sup>466</sup> See pages 114–8 and 163–7 above.

Church, the renovation works undertaken by Lederer, Ragnarsdóttir, Oei considerably reduced the interior space. Hence are the current bareness of Saint Peter and the rather late renovation of Hospital Church.

It is equally curious to witness the Catholic pastor calling himself “a radical Protestant, a Zwinglian, on the inside” during a discussion on visual composition of churches and the Protestant pastor defending the traditional visual elements of a Christian house of worship.<sup>467</sup> Such individual perspectives speak overtly against the historical attitudes towards church arts among Catholics and Protestants, thus bringing the denominations closer to each other in the present-day Germany, leastways pertaining to one subject. Furthermore, the emphasis on the aura is the common ground, on which Mennekes and Müller engaged with the contemporary art. Both pastors agree that the church aura enhances experience of seeing art and, in most ideal cases, facilitates profound encounters that would not be possible in a different setting.<sup>468</sup> The point becomes clearer once site-specific projects at Saint Peter and Hospital Church are taken into account. Consequently, Mennekes and Müller saw the value of site-specific art installations within active churches not in relation with the building structure and its elements but in relation with the auratic specificity of living worship spaces. In chapter six we will return to the question of the aura peculiar to old church architecture. At this point, the pastors’ opinions about the essence of church space and its visual composition provide practical directions for investigating the influence of the developments in these two churches on ensuing cases, first, in Cologne and Stuttgart and, second, around Germany.

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<sup>467</sup> Friedhelm Mennekes in conversation with the author, Bonn, November 10, 2016; and Helmut Müller in email discussion with the author, September 2017: “Ich sehe nach der erfolgten Renovierung den eindringlichen Rat eines mit Raumfragen befassten Referenten bestätigt, der mir nach seinem Vortrag in der Hospitalkirche eindringlich ans Herz gelegt hat, weiter auf die Gebrauchsspuren und die Aura dieser Nachkriegskirche zu setzen und so lange als möglich von einer Renovierung abzusehen.”

<sup>468</sup> In this thesis see pages 115–6 for Mennekes’ perspective and 163–4 for Müller’s perspective.



### 5.1.3. Influences in Cologne and Stuttgart

The art projects at Saint Peter Cologne and Hospital Church Stuttgart have continuously attracted attention in their respective cities and federal states. The local and regional press has dedicated pages on reviews of events and exhibitions held in the two churches, as well as interviews with their pastor-curators.<sup>469</sup> The impact of activities organized by Mennekes and Müller can be detected among both religious and secular cultural institutions. At another level, the initiatives in the two churches have contributed to a growth in public awareness of developments in contemporary art. We inquire into reception of art exhibitions in active churches later in this chapter, turning our attention to the influence that Saint Peter and Hospital Church have exerted on the neighbouring institutions.

Not long after the inauguration of Kunst-Station Sankt Peter, several other churches in Cologne began to cooperate with contemporary artists on opening temporary exhibitions of art within their sacred spaces. So in 1990 Hans-Ulrich Wiese, the new parish priest of the Catholic church Saint Agnes (*Sankt Agnes*), started the series of art projects, which he consistently ran until his retirement in 2005.<sup>470</sup> In 1992 the Protestant Trinity Church (*Trinitatiskirche*) opened its doors to exhibitions of contemporary art under the direction of Pastor Erich Witschke. Over the course of eighteen years, the evangelical pastor-curator has realized around 120 exhibitions inside the church.<sup>471</sup> At the time, the introduction of art projects into one of Cologne active churches was

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<sup>469</sup> Most frequently these have appeared in *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger* and *Stuttgarter Zeitung*. Online archives are available at <https://www.ksta.de/archiv> and <http://www.sz-archiv.de/sz-archiv/onlinearchiv-stuttgart>. Selected reviews of exhibitions at Hospital Church are reprinted in Müller, *Jetzt, Neugierig, Präsent, Offen*, 66–70, with additional references listed on pages 113–4.

<sup>470</sup> In addition to Wiese's *Karsamstagsexistenz* (2002), see his essay "Kunst in St. Agnes: Reflexionen und Praktische Anregungen," in Gottfried Bitter, ed., *Glauben Lernen, Glauben Feiern: Katechetisch-Liturgische Versuche und Klärungen* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1998), 129–36. The neogothic building of Saint Agnes, consecrated in 1902, is the second largest church in the city after the Cologne Cathedral.

<sup>471</sup> See Trinitatiskirche Köln, "Nutzungsgeschichte," Trinitatiskirche Köln, <http://trinitatiskirche-koeln.de/nutzungsgeschichte.php> (accessed December 18, 2017), under the subheading "Die Ära Witschke."

planned and executed by Mennekes in collaboration with the city superintendent Manfred Kock. The latter suggested Witschke as the curator, while Trinity Church was then the only available location.<sup>472</sup> Subsequently, some art projects that took place at Saint Peter were incorporated into the exhibitions by Witschke.<sup>473</sup> Also in 1992, the first art exhibition was organized in the Lutheran Church of Cologne (*Lutherkirche*, consecrated in 1906).<sup>474</sup> With its regular concerts, theater plays, dance performances, literature readings, festivals, fairs, and art exhibitions, Luther Church has been an example of so-called “culture-churches” (*Kulturkirchen*) since 1990. So already as early as 1990–1992 three old Christian houses of worship in Cologne followed Saint Peter by starting their own engagements with contemporary non-sacramental art.

By now more culture-churches, e.g. Kulturkirche Köln-Nippes and Kulturkirche Ost, are active in the city. More Christian communities based in modern church buildings, e.g. Saint Gertrude, vigorously support local artists. Importantly, the Cologne Cathedral did not stay untouched by the developments in the relationship between churches and contemporary art. In 1994, James Lee Byars performed *The Perfect Smile* in front of the great cathedral.<sup>475</sup> A later example is an installation at the Cathedral Square by HA Schult, *Trash People* (2006), which was seen by 1.2

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<sup>472</sup> Ultimately Mennekes was dissatisfied with the outcome of the idea, having stated that Protestants were “not radical enough” in regard to the visual arts because they did not allow for the coexistence of art in liturgy. He pointed out that evangelical pastors did not dare interfere their god services with art and, as a result, lost opportunities for the powerful involvement of both sides. Friedhelm Mennekes in conversation with the author, Bonn, November 10, 2016. Witschke, on the other hand, praised the Jesuit’s efforts: “Ausstellungen in Sankt Peter wurden exemplarisch für den Dialog von Kunst und Kirche in der Kunstszene weit über Deutschland hinaus wahrgenommen.” See Witschke, “Sankt Peter und Trinitatiskirche,” in Schlimbach, *Für Friedhelm Mennekes*, 75–80; the text includes information about the exhibitions in Trinity Church as well as Witschke’s comparison of his own projects to those of Mennekes.

<sup>473</sup> For example, exhibition *Altarbild–Geist und Körper* or paintings by Hermann Nitsch. See Witschke, “Sankt Peter und Trinitatiskirche,” 75–9. Witschke writes in conclusion, “Was bei mir von der gemeinsamen Zeit bleibt, ist die Erinnerung an eine wunderbare, freundschaftliche Zusammenarbeit auf einem schwierigen zu bestellenden Acker...” Ibid., 80.

<sup>474</sup> Evangelische Kirchengemeinde Köln, *Lutherkirche in der Südstadt: 1906–2006* (Cologne: Evangelische Kirchengemeinde Köln, 2006). Also see Lutherkirche: Evangelische Gemeinde Köln, “Historisches über die Lutherkirche Köln,” Lutherkirche: Evangelische Gemeinde Köln <http://www.lutherkirche-koeln.de/historisches.aspx> (accessed December 18, 2017), under the subheading “Zeittafel der Lutherkirche von 1906 bis heute.”

<sup>475</sup> James Lee Byars, *The Perfect Smile: The Thinking Field* (Cologne: Gesellschaft für Moderne Kunst am Museum Ludwig, 1995). This is the first conceptual work of art ever purchased by a museum, in this case for the collection of Museum Ludwig.

million visitors.<sup>476</sup> One of the most famous episodes in the recent history of interaction between a contemporary artist and institutionalized religion also concerns the Cologne Cathedral. Gerhard Richter's design for the south transept window has been the subject of numerous international debates, scholarly articles, books, and documentaries.<sup>477</sup> So while it would be superfluous to reiterate the arguments for or against Richter's work, it is interesting to cite Guido Schlimbach's opinion on the subject because he connects it to Mennekes' influence on the Archdiocese of Cologne. Schlimbach is convinced that

without Mennekes' consistent and uncompromising readiness to engage in dialogue; without his determination to get involved with the impulses of artists and offer to them Saint Peter as space for articulation, at times regardless of the sensitivities of his own church [community]; without the resonance of the dialogue led inside Kunst-Station in the city of Cologne... the Cathedral Chapter would not have the courage to commission Gerhard Richter the south transept window of the Cologne Cathedral.<sup>478</sup>

We might disagree with such a plain attribution of merit but it is worth contemplating the role of Friedhelm Mennekes in the episode that is historic equally for the Catholic Church and the

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<sup>476</sup> HA Schult, "Trash People," HA Schult, <http://www.haschult.de/action/trashpeople> (accessed December 18, 2017). Between 1996 and 2016, the artist installed versions of the work in more than twenty historically and politically important locations around the world.

<sup>477</sup> To name a few examples, Stephan Diederich, *Gerhard Richter: Zufall, das Kölner Domfenster und 4900 Farben* (Cologne: Verlag Kölner Dom, 2007); Benjamin Buchloh, "Gerhard Richter," in *Artforum International* 46, no. 4 (2007), 306–11; Hans Ulrich Obrist, "Gerhard Richter," interview in *Domus* no. 899 (2007), 116–25; Wolfgang Ullrich, "Religion gegen Kunstreligion: Zum Kölner Domfensterstreit," in *Merkur* 62 (2008), 93–102; James Romaine, "Gerhard Richter: The Capacity for Belief," in *Image: A Journal of the Arts and Religion* no. 64 (2010); Jonathan Koestlé-Cate, "Grids: A Kraussian Perspective on New Windows for the Church," in *Religion and the Arts* 18 (2014), 672–99. Koestlé-Cate further discusses Richter's window and its reception in his book *Fractious Embrace* (see pages 79–81). Recent publication by Gerhard Büttner, *Kirche sein als communio: Das neue Kirchenfenster im südlichen Querhaus des Kölner Domes von Gerhard Richter* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2015) provides a perspective of an evangelical theologian. Lastly, see a thirty-minute documentary film *Gerhard Richter. Das Kölner Domfenster* (2008), produced by Corinna Belz in cooperation with the State Art Collection Dresden and the Gerhard Richter Archive. In 2018 a new work by Richter, *Two Gray Mirrors for a Pendulum*, was permanently installed in the deconsecrated Dominican Church of Münster.

<sup>478</sup> Schlimbach, *Für einen lange währenden Augenblick*, 386. The original reads, "Der Verfasser ist der festen Überzeugung, dass ohne die konsequente und kompromisslose Dialogbereitschaft von Friedhelm Mennekes, ohne dessen Entschiedenheit, sich zum Teil ohne Rücksicht auf die Befindlichkeit seiner eigenen Kirche und seiner selbst auf die Impulse der Künstlerinnen und Künstler einzulassen und ihnen in Sankt Peter einen Raum der Artikulation zu bieten, dass ohne die Resonanz, die dieser in der Kunst-Station geführte Dialog in der Stadt Köln, [the following excerpt until "das Domkapitel" is omitted in the quotation above] im Rheinland, im In- und Ausland gefunden hat, weder das Museum Kolumba in seiner heutigen Form und Qualität errichtet hätte werden können noch das Domkapitel den Mut gehabt hätte, Gerhard Richter den Auftrag für das Südquerhausfenster des Kölner Doms zu geben."

contemporary art world. A less known but likewise remarkable instance is the window design that the German artist Markus Lüpertz created for one of the twelve Romanesque churches in the city, the Catholic Saint Andrew (*Sankt Andreas*).<sup>479</sup> Another momentous commission by the Archdiocese of Cologne, this time for the Romanesque Church of Saint Cunibert (*Sankt Kunibert*), was given to Sigmar Polke but not realized due to the artist's death in 2010.<sup>480</sup> Reflecting on Schlimbach's proposition, it can be further suggested that all of these projects resulted from the rapprochement between contemporary art production and the Catholic Church prompted in Cologne precisely by Mennekes.

The discussion about the influences of Kunst-Station on its city should mention the Kolumba Museum, which according to Schlimbach owes its current form and quality to Mennekes. Founded by the Society for Christian Art in 1853, this art institution has been historically dedicated to the Christian visual arts with an emphasis on the medieval period.<sup>481</sup> The Archdiocese of Cologne took over the directorship of Kolumba in 1989 and already in the early 1990s came to a decision to start a collection of contemporary art that was neither religious nor devotional. In 1993–1995, curators Katharina Winnekes, Stefan Kraus, and Ulrike Surmann organized exhibitions by such artists as Joseph Beuys, Antonio Saura, and Antoni Tàpies—all hitherto exhibited at Saint Peter. Moreover, Winnekes previously assisted Mennekes at Kunst-Station and, during her time in Kolumba, worked on the exhibition of Paul Thek that she brought to Saint Peter in 1997.<sup>482</sup> Today the museum is renowned for its innovative approach to art

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<sup>479</sup> Derix, *Lüpertz, Richter, Schreier*. The execution of Lüpertz's window design was completed in spring 2010.

<sup>480</sup> Hanna Styrie, "Sigmar Polke: Abschied von einem Visionär," *Kölnische Rundschau*, <https://www.rundschau-online.de/11584014> (accessed December 18, 2017). The realization of Polke's design was scheduled for 2011.

<sup>481</sup> Having been founded by the Society for Christian Art in 1853, Kolumba is one of the oldest museums in the country. Norbert Schmidt, ed., *Kolumba* (Prague: Krystal, 2011) and Elke Backes, *Kolumba: Die Evolution eines Museums* (Mönchengladbach: Kühn, 2015).

<sup>482</sup> Erzbischöfliches Diözesanmuseum, *Paul Thek*, exh. cat. (Cologne: Kunst-Station Sankt Peter, 1997). In 2012 Kolumba once again acted as a guest curator at Saint Peter, presenting works from its own collection. See the catalog *Andy Warhol: Crosses* edited by Joachim M. Plotzek (Cologne: Kolumba, 1999).

mediation, for which it received the “Museum of the Year” award from the international association of art critics AICA.<sup>483</sup> It is interesting how the current director, Stefan Kraus, explains that the ways in which art is displayed in Kolumba derive from contemplative experiences in church spaces.<sup>484</sup> Mennekes contributed to the same volume, where he stated that Kolumba was principally concerned with the viewer’s existential questions: a remark that shows the affinity between the purposes of exhibitions in the museum and Saint Peter. The comparison of the two is beyond the scope of this research but certainly holds potential for meaningful insights. Here, we can observe apparent connections between the church and the museum that suggest Mennekes’ role in the development of curatorial strategies at Kolumba.

In Stuttgart the Education Center Hospitalhof has been one of the most energetic academic and cultural sites since the 1980s. Helmut Müller’s prolific activity annually brought four to five hundred events to Hospitalhof, including regular exhibitions accompanied by lectures, interviews and discussions.<sup>485</sup> Such numbers imply a high amount of attention drawn to Stuttgart from regional and national educational institutions as well as religious organizations. Accordingly, incorporation of contemporary art into the discourse led at Hospitalhof would, on the one hand, promote academic investigation into the relationship between Christianity and the secular arts and, on the other, prompt consideration of art exhibitions and/or installations in sacred spaces among representatives of other Protestant churches in Germany. Consulting the literature review in chapter one of this thesis, we may notice the currently growing number of sources dedicated to the interaction between contemporary non-sacramental art and active church communities;

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<sup>483</sup> Danièle Perrier, “Das Kolumba Museum, Köln. Museum des Jahres 2013,” AICA Germany, <http://www.aica.de/auszeichnungen/museum-des-jahres/2013-das-kolumba-museum-koeln.html> (accessed December 18, 2017).

<sup>484</sup> Stefan Kraus, “Kolumba-The Museum as Laboratory of Aesthetics,” in *Kolumba* (2011), 42.

<sup>485</sup> Eva Funke, “Pfarrer Helmut Müller: Den Hospitalhof zur Marke gemacht,” *Stuttgarter Nachrichten* (February 27, 2014), <https://www.stuttgarter-nachrichten.de/inhalt.pfarrer-helmut-mueller-den-hospitalhof-zur-marke-gemacht.27c7ce0b-82db-4984-bc1e-dbc558595423.html> (accessed December 21, 2017).

specifically the sources that come from the departments of religious studies and evangelical theology. When the art-commissioner of the Regional Church of Württemberg Reinhard Auer contemplates such development, he underlines Müller's part in the process as categorically essential.<sup>486</sup> Importantly, the opinion comes from one of the board members of the Association of Church and Art (*Verein für Kirche und Kunst*), which since 1993 has carried on the work of the Association for Christian Art (*Verein für christliche Kunst*) in Württemberg. The change in the name "signals openness and interest for the contemporary artistic expressions"<sup>487</sup> that can be perceived as an outcome of Müller's first years in Stuttgart. To be more specific, simultaneously Müller's founding of the Association for Contemporary Art and Church Artheon (*Gesellschaft für Gegenwartskunst und Kirche Artheon*, 1992) and Thomas Lehnerer's project in the altar area of Hospital Church (*Wenn Gott allmächtig ist und gut, Wenn er Gott ist, Warum läßt er dann die menschen elend sterben und leiden?*, 1992) must have jointly contributed to such new openness and interest.<sup>488</sup> Both Artheon and *Verein für Kirche und Kunst* have since then proceeded to organize exhibitions, conferences, and art-awards together with publishing their journals on the subject.<sup>489</sup> Moreover, the former collaborates with the Institute for Contemporary Church Building and Art in Marburg, the Institute for Art Studies and Philosophy at the Catholic-Theological Private University in Linz, and the German Society for Aesthetics (*Deutsche Gesellschaft für Ästhetik e.V.*). The connections undoubtedly broaden the reputation of Müller, the co-founder of Artheon. In view of these developments, what becomes clear is the significance of

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<sup>486</sup> Reinhard Lambert Auer, "Entwicklungslinien im Feld von Kunst und Kirche 1987 und 2012. Der Hospitalhof als Akteur und Mitspieler," in *Gesucht: Spirituelle Erfahrungsräume*, 118–28.

<sup>487</sup> Verein für Kirche und Kunst, "Verein," Verein für Kirche und Kunst in der evangelischen Landeskirche in Württemberg, <http://www.kirche-kunst.de/verein-fuer-kirche-und-kunst/verein/> (accessed December 21, 2017). The original reads, "Er signalisiert damit Offenheit und Interesse auch für gegenwärtige künstlerische Äußerungen."

<sup>488</sup> For the discussion of Lehnerer's project, see pages 138–9 above.

<sup>489</sup> Between 1992 and 2012 Artheon released thirty editions of the eponymous journal, discontinuing the publishing activity after Helmut Müller stepped down as co-president. *Verein für Kirche und Kunst* has published their art newspaper under the title *dialog*. Müller repeatedly contributed his essays to the issues of both *Artheon-Mitteilungen* and *dialog*.

Hospitalhof, first of all, as the center of the scholarly conversation. As the protagonists of what Hans-Peter Ehrlich called discourse culture (*Diskurskultur*), Hospitalhof and by implication Hospital Church are the interlocutors not only on the local but also the regional and European scale.<sup>490</sup>

The influence of Müller's work immediately in Stuttgart can be recognized in certain innovations that have recently taken place in the city churches. During the renovation works at Hospital Church, its pastor-curator did not cease to organize exhibitions but brought them into the Protestant Church of Brenz (*Brenzkirche*) in Stuttgart-North. With that, he involved the new parish priest Karl-Eugen Fischer into the curatorial process. One of the projects that they realized together was the abovementioned video installation *Casting Jesus* by Christian Jankowski (2012).<sup>491</sup> What followed out of their collaboration was Fischer's embrace of contemporary art as a suitable partner to the life of the Christian community. For example, during the 35th German Evangelical Church Assembly (*Deutscher Evangelischer Kirchentag*, 2015) the Church of Brenz was transformed into a working studio of Thomas Putze (b. 1968). The German sculptor and performance artist earlier participated in the exhibition *The Bread in Between* (*Das Brot dazwischen*, 2001) curated by Müller at Hospital and Leonard's Churches. For two weeks at the Church of Brenz Putze worked on a site-specific installation conceptualized for the worship space. At the same time he led conversations with the community members and church visitors.<sup>492</sup> Since then the ongoing project "Studio-church" (*Atelierkirche*), supported by *Verein für Kirche und Kunst*, has exemplified active interaction between an active Christian community and non-sacramental contemporary art in the city of Stuttgart.

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<sup>490</sup> Hans-Peter Ehrlich, "30 Jahre Bildungsarbeit im Hospitalhof," in Müller, *30 Jahre Bildungszentrum Hospitalhof*, 7.

<sup>491</sup> See pages 169–70 in chapter four of this thesis.

<sup>492</sup> Rebecca Anna Fritzsche, "Ein Ort der Verwandlung. Zum Kirchentag wird aus der Brenzkirche ein Atelier," *S-Nord*, January 14, 2015.

Compared to the spread of church art exhibitions in Cologne, it might seem that Müller's initiatives have not been as significant as those undertaken by Mennekes a few hundred kilometres north. However, given their diverse approaches to the application of the arts in a church, the resonance of projects from Hospital Church should not be searched for in the quantity of similar exhibitions but in the quality of engagement with contemporary culture. For example, today Hospital Church cooperates with Leonard's Church and Collegiate Church (*Stiftskirche*) not only on providing god services to the city Christian communities but also on arranging cultural events such as concerts, presentations, exhibitions, creative workshops, joint museum and studio visits, or talks with musicians, curators and artists.<sup>493</sup> Similarly, artists are regularly invited to compose the inner space of the youth church Martinskirche and in the process build relationships with the believers.<sup>494</sup> In these cases, the openness and interest in contemporary art evolves into enthusiastic experimentation not only with the visual composition of a single church but with the integration of the arts into the daily life of parishes as well as personal lives of individuals who come to these churches. In Stuttgart such readiness to embrace non-religious and non-devotional expressions of secular culture began with Müller in 1987 and, in the twenty-first century, characterizes the spiritual lives of many Christians.<sup>495</sup>

The creative work of the pastor-curator from Hospital Church found its echo beyond the religious institutions of the city. Soon after its inauguration Art Museum Stuttgart (*Kunstmuseum Stuttgart*), which is dedicated to modern and contemporary art, presented a large exhibition *Three. The Triptych in Modernity (Drei. Das Triptychon in der Moderne)*. Then the museum director, Marion Ackermann, described this particular form as one that produces auratic

<sup>493</sup> Evangelische Kirche in der City, "Citykirchen Stuttgart," Hospitalkirche Stuttgart, <https://www.hospitalkirche-stuttgart.de/citykirchen/> (accessed December 21, 2017).

<sup>494</sup> Petra Dais, "Wenn Kirche zum Experimentierraum wird," in Zink, *Lebensräume*, 26–34, and Architektenkollektiv Kirchentrojaner, "Raum entdecken–Raum gestalten," in *ibid.*, 35–43.

<sup>495</sup> From his early years in Stuttgart, Müller encouraged application of creativity to conventional worship practices. See Müller, *Gesucht: Spirituelle Erfahrungsräume*, 44.



situations, comparable to those produced in churches by traditional Christian triptychs.<sup>496</sup> The inclusion of the artists who earlier showed their work in Hospital Church but did not yet gain wide renown—Georg Winter, Dieter Krieg, and Jonathan Meese—to the exhibition at Art Museum shows the close ties that had been established between the church and art institutions in Stuttgart.<sup>497</sup> Further examples are the Art Foundation Baden-Württemberg, the State Academy of Fine Arts, the State Gallery, and a number of local galleries.<sup>498</sup> Lastly, between 1994 and 2004 the Landeskirchliches Museum Ludwigsburg showed a series of exhibitions devoted at the same time to traditional Christian and contemporary secular visual arts.<sup>499</sup> Located fifteen kilometres from Stuttgart, it was supported by the Evangelical Church of Württemberg for a decade but subsequently had to be closed due to a lack of funding. Despite its short existence, the museum testified to the willingness of the Protestant Christians in Stuttgart to learn about and appreciate contemporary art. In this we may see the merit of Müller’s work at Hospital Church.

Having analyzed the ramifications of Mennekes’ and Müller’s art programs in their respective cities, it can be argued that their efforts found substantial following both in Cologne and in Stuttgart. Through a number of case studies—prominent exhibitions of contemporary art in old active churches—the next section explores whether such following manifested itself elsewhere in Germany.

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<sup>496</sup> Hans-Joachim Müller, “Die Altäre der Moderne,” interview with Marion Ackermann in *Art: Das Kunstmagazin*, January 23, 2009.

<sup>497</sup> Marion Ackermann, *Drei: Das Triptychon in der Moderne*, exh.cat. (Berlin: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2009).

<sup>498</sup> Helmut Müller in email conversation with the author, November 2017. “Mit der Kunststiftung Baden-Württemberg und der Staatlichen Akademie der Bildenden Künste Stuttgart entstanden langfristige Beziehungen schon dadurch, dass ich immer wieder ausgewählte Professoren, Studenten, Ehemalige und Stipendiaten der Kunststiftung ausgestellt habe. Vergleichbares gilt für die Kunstakademie Karlsruhe. Mit den Direktoren der Staatsgalerie gab es einen regelmäßigen Austausch und auch gelegentliche Ankauf aus den Ausstellungen.” Regarding the galleries, Müller wrote: “Deshalb kam es auch sehr rasch [in the beginning of his work at Hospital Church] zur projektbezogenen Zusammenarbeit mit einzelnen Galerien wie der Galerie Angelika Harthan, Stuttgart, mit der damals noch Galerie der Stadt Stuttgart und heute Kunstmuseum genannten Städtischen Galerie, dem Württembergischen Kunstverein Stuttgart und auch der Akademie Schloss Solitude.”

<sup>499</sup> Müller, “Grenzgänge zwischen Kunst und Religion,” 136.

## 5.2. Paradigms of coexistence

Today around 45,000 church buildings are spread across Germany.<sup>500</sup> This number includes both Catholic and Protestant, inactive and active, old and modern/contemporary, urban and rural churches. Delineating our subject as contemporary non-sacramental art exhibitions in *old living* churches, we present a micro-discourse within a larger topic regarding cultural policies of Christian institutions in Germany. Bearing in mind pioneering initiatives in Cologne and Stuttgart, we now arrive at the study concentrated on paradigms of coexistence between contemporary non-sacramental art and old active churches in this country. A few facets guide the investigation. First, the following fourfold organisation does not reflect a linear development in the history of interaction between Christian institutions and secular visual art. Rather, it shows how today churches can select a model of engagement with contemporary art according to their own liking and suitability. Second, the case studies are selected from prominent temporary exhibitions that took place in urban environments during the early twenty-first century.<sup>501</sup> It is beyond the scope of this thesis to trace the relationship between multiple German churches and contemporary art over the course of thirty years: the task calls for a separate dissertation that can do justice to such an expansive topic. Instead, this section analyzes most recent examples in order to answer the questions “What is the current state of affairs?” and “What outcomes of the ground-breaking years can be discerned today?” Third, the grouping of case studies is based on the role of, first, *old* church architecture (sections 5.2.1.–5.2.3.) and, second, *active* Christian communities (section 5.2.4.). The method highlights those characteristics of church exhibitions that distinguish them from art experiences in museums, galleries, or other public venues—the

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<sup>500</sup> Olaf Zimmermann and Theo Geissler, *Die Kirchen*, 6.

<sup>501</sup> As argued in chapter two, the emphasis on urban churches is proper to our subject (see pages 36–8 in this thesis). While the present focus is on temporary exhibitions, section 5.3.1. reviews some examples of permanent integration of contemporary art into old active churches.

characteristics that will subsequently be approached via theory in chapter six. Lastly, given the great heterogeneity of art projects that enter living worship spaces, it is impossible to provide their comprehensive account. That is why the categories below are not offered as all-encompassing groups of possible art interventions in churches; rather they reflect those paradigms of coexistence that occur most frequently and, thus, hold high explanatory values.

### 5.2.1. Artwork as a guest

The thematic exhibitions of the 1980s demonstrated that contemporary secular art could raise important questions about human existence and, for this reason, be pertinent to the Christian Church.<sup>502</sup> As argued in chapter four, the first art projects at Saint Peter and Hospital Church were influenced by the momentous accomplishments of *Zeichen des Glaubens*, *Menschenbild–Christusbild*, *Ecce Homo*, and *GegenwartEwigkeit*. Their very form—an art exhibition—initially excited interest in Friedhelm Mennekes and Helmut Müller who invited contemporary artists to *exhibit* in their churches. Thus, the idea of showing contemporary non-sacramental art in a church was to some extent an analogue of showing art in an art museum. Put simply, the intention was to present something that could be looked at and—for the process of looking—to consequently stimulate inner experiences or mental reflection in the manner of the thematic exhibitions of the 1980s. Furthermore, the qualitative difference from traditional church arts was an exhibition’s freedom from overt religious purposes. In other words, when an artwork first entered the church as part of an exhibition, it assumed the role of a guest.

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<sup>502</sup> See chapter 3, pages 50–65 above.

Today large numbers of German churches invite contemporary art exhibitions to their spaces. For this they provide side walls, galleries, vestibules, church yards, and often detached rooms or buildings of community centers. First, this method of church engagement with contemporary art keeps the latter outside of either the space or the time of the Christian liturgy. By merely being present at side walls or in vestibules, artwork as a guest does not obligate pastors or communities to integrate such “alien body” into the internal matters of Christian faith, i.e. worship. As a guest, it is available for church visitors but does not confront them, unless the visitors themselves move to the periphery of the church space and meet the artwork there. When at the periphery, the viewer is not required to keep moving because the experience in front of an artwork primarily relies on the process of looking. Second, artwork as a guest arrives to a church from the artist’s studio, where it has been completed with no regard for the site of its future display. In other words, artwork as a guest does not respond to a specific architectural situation of a church; often it is created years or decades before being invited to a sacred space. This additionally implies that in many cases artists work without knowing that their works will subsequently be exhibited in a church. Thus and third, the role of the artist is minimized to that of an autonomous producer. Arrangement and hanging of art is usually carried out by curators; these can be pastors, members of art committees, or external professionals from museums, galleries, or academic institutions. Providing that the content of exhibitions is not excessively provoking or sacrilegious, “artwork as a guest” is therefore an easy strategy for an active church to engage with contemporary secular art.

Both Catholic and Protestant institutions provide ample supply of examples. In 2000 the German Association for Christian Art (*Deutsche Gesellschaft für christliche Kunst*) realized an exhibition project simultaneously in five Catholic churches of Erfurt, a city in the German state of

Thuringia.<sup>503</sup> Titled *SoundShadows (KlangSchatten)*, the project included works by eight artists in four active medieval churches located in the city center and the ruins of the Church of the Discalced Friars (*Barfüßerkirche*). Except for the site-specific installations at the Erfurt Cathedral by Christoph Rhis (b. 1957) and Hannelore Landrock-Schumann (b. 1950),<sup>504</sup> *SoundShadows* exemplifies the way in which artworks become guests inside church spaces. Klaus Illi brought to the Erfurt church of Saint Severus two pneumatic mechanisms, similar to those installed at the Stuttgart Hospital Church in 1995.<sup>505</sup> However, at Saint Severus his breathing discs stayed distant from the altar area, or even the worship space. Together with a suspended bell and a ram horn raised on what appeared as a standing microphone pole, the discs were placed at the very entrance of the Erfurt church. When believers sat on the pews during the liturgy, they could not have Illi's objects in sight. Neither could they hear them: the breathing compressors were to be switched off during god services at Saint Severus lest the worshippers become distracted.<sup>506</sup> Thus, the experience of Illi's artworks could take place only outside of either the time or the space of the liturgy celebration. In the cloister of the Erfurt Cathedral and on the south wall of the Church of Saint Lawrence, visitors could contemplate works by South Korean artist and goldsmith Hyon Soo Kim (b. 1955). The artworks—white mummified objects made of coarse cotton cloth and binder—are once again arranged outside of worship area.<sup>507</sup> Similar situation occurs at Saint Ursula, where a video by Nina Fischer (b. 1965) and Maroan el Sani (b. 1966) as well as glass panels shielded with photographic paper by Christoph Dahlhausen (b. 1960) remained outside of the religious rituals. Moreover, the panel discussion dedicated to

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<sup>503</sup> Markus Wimmer, ed., *KlangSchatten: Installationen aktueller Kunst in fünf Erfurter Kirchen* (Munich: DG Deutsche Gesellschaft für christliche Kunst, 2000).

<sup>504</sup> Christoph Rhis, *Schiff*, stainless steel, aluminium (2000) in *ibid.*, 42–5; Hannelore Landrock-Schumann, *Herzstück*, velvet carpet (2000) in *ibid.*, 26–9.

<sup>505</sup> See pages 142–3 in this thesis.

<sup>506</sup> Bistum Erfurt, “Sich auf zeitgenössische Kunst einlassen: Klangschaten,” in *Tag des Herrn* 35 (August 27, 2000).

<sup>507</sup> Illustrations in Wimmer, *KlangSchatten*, on pages 23 and 25.

*SoundShadows* took place not in one of the churches in which the project was realized but in the Erfurt Kunsthalle.<sup>508</sup> Nevertheless such clear division between contemporary art and liturgy should not be explained with lack of curatorial audacity,<sup>509</sup> but with a particularity of the project's goal. "The contact with contemporary art is an existential act, which happens in the encounter of beholder and artist," states the curator of *SoundShadows*, Markus Wimmer.<sup>510</sup> In his essay for the exhibition catalog, Wimmer further underlines transcendental possibilities in the experience of contemporary art.<sup>511</sup> Similarly, he describes the breathing of Illi's pneumatic mechanisms as "billows between life and death, between individual existence and the Absolute."<sup>512</sup> His words are reminiscent of the statements made by Wieland Schmied, who insisted that transcendence was the connecting agent between religion and art.<sup>513</sup> Thus, the possibilities offered in the thematic exhibitions of the 1980s found following in the form of exhibitions in churches; namely, where an emphasis is placed on the visitor's individual experience of art outside of the time and the place of the Christian liturgy.

In 2004 an unprecedented collaboration of the Evangelical Forum, the Catholic Education Institute, and Art Museum Bonn resulted in the exhibition project titled *Art-Spring-Church* (*KunstFrühlingKirche*). It involved twenty-five active churches—thirteen Protestant and twelve Catholic—in the former national capital of Germany.<sup>514</sup> What is particularly interesting for us is

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<sup>508</sup> Bistum Erfurt, "Moderne Kunst in Erfurter Kirchen: Projekt 'Klangschatten'," in *Tag des Herrn* 32 (August 6, 2000).

<sup>509</sup> Rhis' and Landrock-Schumann's pieces show conspicuous intervention into the worship area of the Erfurt Cathedral. As site-specific works, these examples belong to the paradigm "artwork as a surround" discussed in section 5.2.2. below.

<sup>510</sup> "Moderne Kunst in Erfurter Kirchen." The original quote reads, "Der Umgang mit zeitgenössischer Kunst sei ein existentieller Akt, der in der Begegnung zwischen Betrachter und Künstler geschieht."

<sup>511</sup> Wimmer, *KlangSchatten*, 16.

<sup>512</sup> Ibid., 31. Wimmer: "Klaus Illis Atemprozesse sind Wellen zwischen Leben und Tod, zwischen individueller Existenz und dem Absoluten."

<sup>513</sup> See pages 51 and 62–3 in chapter three of this thesis.

<sup>514</sup> Evangelischer Kirchenkreis Bonn, "Säkulare Kunst in 25 Bonner Kirchen," Evangelischer Kirchenkreis Bonn, <http://www.bonn-evangelisch.de/aktuell/archiv-2004-FB2638F1A8D04462A195D1DF1949ED3B.php> (accessed December 28, 2017).

the curatorial choice of certain works from the museum collection—those by Joseph Beuys, Günther Uecker, Rainer Jochims, and Felix Droese.<sup>515</sup> The names refer to the 1980s, the decade’s thematic exhibitions and first installations of contemporary art into active churches. So do the curatorial focus on the image of human being (*Menschenbild*) with his “existential sensitivities,”<sup>516</sup> and the goal of revealing “the crucial intersection between artistic and spiritual experiences.”<sup>517</sup> The differentiating feature was an accompanying program of events that comprised readings, concerts, conversations with artists, workshops for kids and adults, thematic god services, and a symposium at the Evangelical Academy of Rhineland. This heavy mediation of displayed works of contemporary art was part of the organizers’ agenda: both the Evangelical Forum (*Evangelisches Forum*) and the Catholic Education Institute (*Katholisches Bildungswerk*) specialize in the educational programs for adults. This case reminds us of the busy schedule at Hospitalhof and its intermediate role between theology and the visual arts. However, many churches that opened their spaces for *KunstFrühlingKirche* had not previously engaged with contemporary non-sacramental art and, after the spring 2004, held no more comparable exhibitions. Artworks from Art Museum Bonn entered their interior spaces as one-time guests, whose visit was an apt occasion for educational activities on the side of daily religious life led by the involved Christian communities.

Since 2006 Berlin-based gallerist and curator Alexander Ochs has been organizing exhibitions at various churches in the German capital. Most prominent are his project for the Berlin Cathedral, a grand domed structure rising 115 meters above the city’s Museum Island. Its High Renaissance style combined with rich Baroque decorations is somewhat unusual for a Protestant church that

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<sup>515</sup> A miniature catalog with 25 illustrations appeared on the occasion of the exhibition. See *Kunst, Frühling, Kirche: Werke aus dem Kunstmuseum Bonn in 25 Bonner Kirchen*, exh. cat. (Bonn: Kunstmuseum Bonn, 2004).

<sup>516</sup> Thomas Kliemann, “Tanzende Knaben, getürkte Mädchen,” *Bonn General Anzeiger*, January 15, 2004. The original reads, “Aber immerhin kreisen diese Werke um das Menschenbild oder existenzielle Befindlichkeiten, regen zum Nachdenken an.”

<sup>517</sup> Christoph Schreie, director of Art Museum Bonn, quoted in “Säkulare Kunst in 25 Bonner Kirchen.”

underwent conversion from Catholicism in the mid-sixteenth century.<sup>518</sup> Today its architecture and treasures attract tourists, while the spacious green square outside is a popular leisure spot for the locals. That is to say, an exhibition at this site is bound to be seen by many. Through the support of such institutions as the Association Exhibition-House for Christian Art and Hauptstadtkulturfond Berlin, Ochs has had the vast interior of *Berliner Dom* at his disposal. Here he frequently employed its various rooms, including the altar area, for contemporary art interventions. In 2015, the curator demonstrated an unusual and unique approach to church exhibitions with a project *Du sollst dir (k)ein Bild machen*, which could be translated as “You shall (not) make an idol for yourself.”<sup>519</sup> While the topic of the prohibition of images in the context of a Protestant church seems understandable, the form of the art show is somewhat surprising. Ochs inserted a whole room into the baptismal and matrimonial chapel of the Berlin Cathedral, detaching it from the rest of the church. The result was a grey cube that was to house at once several works of old, modern, and contemporary art. Ten groups of different art objects were exhibited in a sequence of ten scenes, each occupying the grey cube for the duration of one week. Neither text nor labels were applied to the walls of the enclosed exhibition room. In the words of Joachim Hake, director of the Catholic Academy in Berlin: “Here are no pedagogy and no didactics and especially nothing of the desperate art-religious will, which all too often today harms equally faith and art. Here are only artworks.”<sup>520</sup> This shows the strategy opposite to that undertaken in Bonn for *KunstFrühlingKirche*. The curator’s purpose is “to show art, which

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<sup>518</sup> Dieter Brozat, ed., *Der Berliner Dom und die Hohenzollerngruft* (Berlin: Haude & Spencer, 1985), 49. For a comprehensive historical account of the cathedral, see Karl-Heinz Klingenburg, *Der Berliner Dom: Bauten, Ideen und Projekte vom 15. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart* (Berlin: Koehler & Amelang, 1992).

<sup>519</sup> Alexander Ochs and Petra Zimmermann, eds., *Du sollst dir (k)ein Bild machen: Texte und Bilder zu einer Ausstellung im Berliner Dom* (Bielefeld: Kerber Art Verlag, 2015).

<sup>520</sup> *Ibid.*, 9. The original reads, “Hier gibt es keine Pädagogik und kein Didaktik und vor allem ist nichts von jenem verzweiferten kunstreligiösen Willen spürbar, der heute allzu oft Glaube und Kunst gleichermaßen schadet. Hier gibt es nur Kunstwerke.” As a famous example, such exhibition strategy has been implemented at the Kolumba Museum in Cologne since the opening of its new building in 2007. See “Vermittlungsformate,” in Backes, *Kolumba*, 60.



touches and moves the living [essence] in every man... art, which originates from the private spirituality and capacity for love of its creators, the artists;”<sup>521</sup> the intention that is reminiscent of the mission statements from the 1980s thematic exhibitions. It is likewise telling that in the next year Ochs curated an exhibition titled *Ecce Homo? Ecce Homo!* at the Berlin church of Saint Canisius. Looking back at the 1970s–1980s, Ochs himself names Mennekes as one of the few men who helped bring religion and contemporary art into the dialogue with one another.<sup>522</sup> Curiously in his own exhibition *Du sollst dir (k)ein Bild machen*, the two are clearly separated by the grey cube walls and, hence, do not come into a direct contact. Even in those of Ochs’ exhibitions where art does intervene into living worship space, the separation remains palpable because Ochs is an outside curator.<sup>523</sup> We have detected a similar separating shift at both Saint Peter and Hospital Church after, respectively, Mennekes and Müller left their pastoral duties.<sup>524</sup> In Stuttgart the division is especially noticeable in the “new exhibition concept,” according to which guest curators work on contemporary art exhibitions at Hospitalhof and Hospital Church. Thus the recent case from Berlin provides an example of a curator as a guest and, by extension, artwork as a guest in the Christian house of worship.<sup>525</sup>

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<sup>521</sup> Ochs and Zimmermann, *Du sollst dir (k)ein Bild machen*, 11. Ochs: “Eine Kunst zu zeigen, die das Lebendige in jedem Menschen anrührt und berührt... eine Kunst, die von ihren Schöpfern, den Künstlerinnen und Künstlern, aus der ihnen eigenen Spiritualität und Liebesfähigkeit entsteht...”

<sup>522</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>523</sup> See for example Ochs’ recent exhibition series at Berlin eight churches and a synagogue: Alexander Ochs, Georg Maria Roers, and Katja Triebe, eds., *Sein.Antlitz.Körper.: Kirchen öffnen sich der Kunst* (Bielefeld: Kerber Art Verlag, 2017). There, Ochs’ arrangement of artworks in the church space gives an appearance of a cramped gallery show and lack of attention to the worship function of the church rooms.

<sup>524</sup> See pages 119–23 and 167–71 in chapter four of this thesis.

<sup>525</sup> Alexander Ochs’ curatorial interest in the grand building of the Berlin Cathedral can also be seen as part of the international art world development characterized by the gallerists’ and curators’ staging of blockbuster exhibitions in both former and active churches. Ochs’ own expertise and connections in the art world helped him to bring such big names to his church exhibitions as Marina Abramović, Lucio Fontana, Félix González-Torres, Alfredo Jaar, Chris Newman, Andres Serrano, and Ai Weiwei; even a single one of these artists would suffice to draw flows of art aficionados. In Vienna, independent curator David Rastas organized three large-scale art shows in active city churches between 2014 and 2016, with works by such artists as Marina Abramović, Joseph Beuys, Damien Hirst, Takashi Murakami, Pipilotti Rist, and Bill Viola. In New York, art museums and galleries are invited to install exhibitions in, among others, the Cathedral Church of John the Divine. In London, curator Meryl Doney organized contemporary art shows in the city cathedrals and chapels, and ran the Wallspace Gallery in the simultaneously

Since the times of *Zeichen des Glaubens* and *GegenwartEwigkeit*, which were organized to celebrate respectively the 86<sup>th</sup> and 90<sup>th</sup> German Catholic Days, contemporary artworks also entered church spaces as guests invited on special occasions. As a rule, art exhibitions are among cultural events that accompany the biannual German Catholic Days and the biannual German Protestant Church Assembly. Special anniversaries are also often marked by art exhibitions: To give a couple of examples, in 2015 the German Bishops' Conference organized art exhibitions at museums (*playing by heart* at Kolumba and *Problem of God* at Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen) and in churches (*LIT.fest* in Munich and Freising, *Signalwege* in Würzburg) for the fifty-year anniversary of the Second Vatican Council.<sup>526</sup> In 2017, or "The Luther Year" (500 years since the Reformation), a remarkable exhibition project *Luther and the Avant-Garde* ran simultaneously at different sites in Berlin, Kassel, and Wittenberg, including two active churches.<sup>527</sup> Secular events can also become occasions for contemporary art exhibitions in churches. For the World Fair Expo 2000 in Hanover, Jürgen Doppelstein, director of the Association Ernst Barlach, led a large-scale exhibition project in thirteen active Lutheran churches of the city. *Lost Paradise Lost: Art and Sacred Space* included works by many artists who are associated with the thematic exhibitions discussed in chapter three: Jürgen Brodwolf, Joseph Beuys, Eduardo Chillida, Günther Förg, Alfred Hrdlicka, Markus Lüpertz, Hermann Nitsch, and Günther Uecker.<sup>528</sup> Another situation is that of *documenta* in Kassel, where during the quinquennial art exhibition churches Saint Martin and Saint Elisabeth hold their own

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functioning All Hallows Church. At the latter, Doney's installation of Damien Hirst's *New Religion* had a huge public appeal. The use of formerly active churches as galleries is another phenomenon. For example, in 2011 the Berlin church of Saint Agnes was acquired by an art dealer Johann König and since 2015 has been one of the König Galerie exhibition spaces.

<sup>526</sup> Hofmann, *Freude, Trauer, Angst, Hoffnung*, 6–8 and 63–4.

<sup>527</sup> Smerling, *Luther und die Avantgarde*.

<sup>528</sup> Doppelstein, *Lost Paradise Lost*.

exhibitions or installations of contemporary art.<sup>529</sup> Being associated with concurrent public events allows churches to attract large audiences. In such cases, artworks as guests lead to increasing numbers of “guests as guests” in the given church spaces.

To sum up, artwork as a guest enters the interior church space but does not interrupt its rituals. It stays on the periphery, where visitors find it on their own time rather than during worship services. The experience is therefore private, marked by quiet contemplation and minimum of movement; hence the artwork is passive. Artwork as a guest does not react to particularities of either church architecture or its religious purpose and is frequently oblivious thereof. Often decisions made by curators or pastors are more important than those made by artists, whose primary contribution occurs outside of the church walls, i.e. in the studio. Under the influence of the ground-breaking undertakings by Wieland Schmied, Horst Schwebel and Heinz-Ulrich Schmidt, pioneers Friedhelm Mennekes and Helmut Müller embraced the form of contemporary art exhibitions and showed that it can be applied within functioning ecclesiastical settings. Others followed their lead so that in the early twenty-first century we can observe contemporary artworks being welcomed in numerous Catholic and Protestant churches in Germany.

### **5.2.2. Artwork as a surround**

Early on the paths of their exhibition activities, both Mennekes and Müller broadened the horizons of artists’ spatial possibilities inside their respective churches. After the triptych series, the former did so by expanding the spatial scale with works by Anish Kapoor and James Lee Byars. The latter gradually opened the church space for art interventions with works by HA

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<sup>529</sup> Meyer zu Schlochtern, *Kunst, Kirche, Kontroversen*.

Schult, Madeleine Dietz, and, radically, Thomas Lehnerer. During those projects what all the artists had in common was a mode of art production that was responsive to the specifics of the church spaces. The artists' studying of the interior rooms of Saint Peter or Hospital Church ultimately informed their creative decisions. In each case the outcome was a site-specific project that altered the terms of the sacred settings.

For an active church, a site-specific project is more difficult to execute because it usually demands more time and financial means than an art exhibition. On the other hand, site-specific installations offer the benefit of a closer relationship between the artist and the church, the artist and the community. It can lead to a better understanding of contemporary art for church visitors and a better understanding of the religion for invited artists. A site-specific project rarely stays on the periphery of church space; instead it intervenes in the worship area and claims its presence. But it does not stop there: a site-specific installation reconfigures the atmosphere of the given space. An artwork becomes a surround. Since the mid-90s, when *The White Mass* produced a sensation, installations started appearing in churches throughout the country. While Byars' work in the Jesuit church of Cologne is without analogue, the influence it had on succeeding art projects in German (and international) churches is significant. The following installations may be seen as part of the art world movement, according to which in the 1990s museum curators embraced large-scale indoor art objects as exhibitions in their own right.<sup>530</sup> However, in the art projects undertaken specifically at Christian worship spaces one finds pervasive forms, reminiscent of Byars' intervention in Saint Peter. Changing the meaning of his title, we can designate such forms as "white masses." A considerable pool of examples comes from Kunst Station itself: Fernando Prats' luminous neon-white rod, Simon Ungers' incandescent white

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<sup>530</sup> In this respect, installations at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York and the Turbine Hall at Tate Modern in London are trailblazing.

*lichtobjekt*, Angela Glajcar's hovering white tunnel, Berndnaut Smilde's ephemeral white nimbus, Claire Morgan's delicate descending white sphere, or even Eduardo Chillida's multi-part white sculptural arrangement. But it is more compelling to trace how various churches, which do not systematically engage with secular visual arts, have welcomed the monumental installations marked by the unity of light and whiteness. Such was Robert Longo's installation of white wax crosses made at the Church of the Holy Spirit in a small Bavarian town Landshut.<sup>531</sup> Closer to our day, such were Maria-Leena Räihälä's white egg-shaped object set aloft above the altar of Zion Church in Berlin (2012); Jo Pellenz's immense web of white book-paper stripes suspended above the altar of Saint Agnes in Cologne (2014); Danuta Karsten's sublime white rain pendent above the nave of Saint Peter in Recklinghausen (2016); or Michael Pendry's monumental white heart-shaped trestle filling the chancel of the Church of the Holy Spirit in Munich (2016). The epitome of "white masses" is Gabriela Nasfeter's *Light Pyramid*, an ecumenical project that between 2000 and 2003 travelled to twelve churches in Europe and Asia.<sup>532</sup> Conceived by the artist, the project was supported by Fine Art's Service of the Evangelical Church (*Evangelischer Kunstdienst*) and personally its director Manfred Richter.<sup>533</sup> Nasfeter (b. 1950) created great imposing pyramids of white spinnaker fabric and suspended them above the central altar in each of the participating churches (fig. 24).<sup>534</sup> Brought to churches of different denominations and nations, *Light Pyramid* was meant to symbolize the

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<sup>531</sup> Robert Longo, *When Heaven and Hell Change Places*, seven cast wax crosses, 427 x 244 x 40 cm each; installation at the Church of the Holy Spirit, Landshut, 1998.

<sup>532</sup> Manfred Richter, *Lichtpyramide: Gabriela Nasfeter. Ein Kunstkatalog als Dokument eines Ökumenischen Abenteuers* (Teetz: Hentrich & Hentrich, 2003). The churches included Berlin Cathedral, Ulm Cathedral, Saint Sulpice in Paris, Saint Elisabeth in Wrocław, Saint James in London, Saint Thomas in Strasbourg, Church of the Redeemer in Jerusalem, Saint Laurenskerk in Rotterdam, Hagia Irene in Istanbul, Etchmiadzin Cathedral in Eriwan, Saint Georg in Wismar, and the Church of Saint Athanasius and Saint Shenouda in Berlin.

<sup>533</sup> The project was jointly financed by the artist and Fine Art's Service of the Evangelical Church.

<sup>534</sup> The height of the pyramids ranged from 3,5 meters at the Church of Saint Athanasius and Saint Shenouda to 23 meters at the Berlin Cathedral. The latter was largest of all the pyramids requiring 1,777 square meters of spinnaker fabric, 5,000 meters of polyester robes, and 450 hours of cutting and sewing. *Ibid.*, 129.

universal hope for harmony and humanity's bright future.<sup>535</sup> Richter discussed the form of the installation from the religious point of view:

If Christ is the Light to the Christians, this light is not only of faith or of art but of the world... Christians have the freedom to see the Light of Christ "through which all things are made," and the same "Light from Light" shining everywhere; to let it be proclaimed by art as it is proclaimed in the catechisms of the liturgy: "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light." Others might see a different light or something different in this light, even this light speaking to them in a different way—everything is allowed in art, and art allows it.<sup>536</sup>

In other words, he perceives the potential of the artwork to speak to every human being and does not regard it disadvantageous if the communicated messages vary from one individual to another. Representing a secular position, art historian Barbara Lipps-Kant defined Nasfeter's installation as a multi-layered symbol. For her too, the white pyramids offer a wide range of possible interpretations: "a shape of light, a sign of hope, the New Jerusalem, an ecumenical symbol but also a sign of peace and harmony, a canopy of heaven. And if one refers to religions of earlier cultures a symbol of *vanitas*, a reproduction of the world and the dwelling of God."<sup>537</sup> For the artist, white light is "a symbol of life, a very old symbol of the connection between Heaven and Earth."<sup>538</sup> Their opinions demonstrate that when one contemplates such an installation in an ecclesiastical context, the connotation with the divine is difficult to escape. Even in a secular mind, white color and light are linked to the ideas, albeit ambiguous, of the pure and the good, ranging from the sentiments of beauty to those of hope. In addition to white radiance, what further unites the aforementioned projects is suspension of "white masses" above beholders' heads. Their elevated state hints at the presence and, it might be, existence of something pure and otherworldly, be it Christian God, a spirit, an angel, or something more abstract and secular as

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<sup>535</sup> Konrad Raiser, then the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), in *ibid.*, 9.

<sup>536</sup> Manfred Richter in *ibid.*, 44. The biblical quote comes from Ephesians 14.

<sup>537</sup> Barbara Lipps-Kant, "Manifestation–Sign–Symbol," in *ibid.*, 127–8.

<sup>538</sup> Gabriela Nasfeter in *ibid.*, 138.

love or hope. Koestlé-Cate argues that the most important aspect of Nasfeter's work was its ability to "operate both artistically and liturgically."<sup>539</sup> Airborne above the altar table or the nave, the light pyramids do indeed partake in the liturgy. Moreover, their site-specific placement is based not only on suitable architectural structures (e.g. dome or vaults) but also on the liturgical function of space. The artist responds to the particularities of each of the twelve interiors, modifying the character of her pyramids so that they could tune to the unique atmospheres of the churches. This aspect of site-specific contemporary art is particularly appealing to Christian communities because it brings into focus the life and the spirit of their churches.

*Light Pyramid* illustrates why "white masses" have become appropriate artistic expressions specifically for sacred settings. While in Gabriela Nasfeter's project the crucial role of light is played by natural sunlight flowing into churches through windows or oculi, another form of site-specific art projects that is increasingly prevalent in German churches is a light installation created with artificial light. Again, *The White Mass* is an original example; but Byars' light bulb was so strong and intense that it troubled and irritated the eye. Subsequent and most recent light installations in churches are rather soothing. For example, in 2003 Michael Bleyenberg's series of holograms transformed interior spaces of multiple churches of the Archdiocese of Cologne with soft luminosity of site-specific color palettes.<sup>540</sup> Or, Andreas Lohrey's light projection of intersecting sky blue and earthly red lines softly glowed on the undulating surface of the east wall at the Capuchin Church in Paderborn (*Kapuzinerkirche*, 2010).<sup>541</sup> Or, Angela Bulloch's romantic *Night Sky* conjured an appearance of the starry heaven sharing its quiet light with the interior space of the Lutheran Protestant Church of St. Reinold in Dortmund as part of the artistic

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<sup>539</sup> Koestlé-Cate, *A Fractious Embrace*, 134.

<sup>540</sup> Michael Bleyenberg, Renate Goretzki, and Kurt Koddenberg, *Spero Lucem: Licht Bilder* (Cologne: Erzbistum Köln, 2003). Since the first installations of 2003, Bleyenberg produced site-specific hologram sculptures in fifteen churches of the Archdiocese of Cologne. See also Wiese, *Karsamstagsexistenz*, 174–85.

<sup>541</sup> Zink, *Lebensräume*, 229.

project Light-Art-Space (*“LichtKunstRaum,”* 2010).<sup>542</sup> At the time of writing, artists Detlef Hartung and Georg Trenz are showing a mesmerizing light projection of circling and spiralling white texts on every plane of the interior space at the Church of Christ-the-King in Bochum.<sup>543</sup> In 2013/2014, Michael Pendry’s (b. 1974) first installation for the Church of the Holy Spirit in Munich lavishly dispersed blue and lilac illumination throughout the interior rooms of the sacred space (fig. 25).<sup>544</sup> This type of art installations paraphrases the Christian tradition of lighting candles and restates the importance of colored light that historically comes from stained glass windows. The immateriality of light and symbolic connotations thereof—God and Holy Spirit according to the religious thought or guiding lanterns and beacons according to the secular view—make light installations all the more pertinent for church contexts. It is therefore understandable why multiple artists, whose primary medium is not light, nevertheless choose to work with it when invited to exhibit in Christian houses of worship (e.g. Angela Bulloch). On the other hand, architectural peculiarities of old churches attract artists whose light installations become especially expressive inside cathedrals or chapels (e.g. Michael Pendry). The visitor cannot view the artwork “from the outside” but is inevitably drawn in its midst, becoming absorbed by the light. Such installations encourage one to move and notice the shifts in the quality of light and the transformation of space that occur with each step. Significantly, the medium of light is a fitting tool for highlighting the architectural structure of a church building: it can brighten some

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<sup>542</sup> Organized by RUHR.2010 GmbH on the occasion of Dortmund’s role as the European Capital of Culture 2010; see Bahr, Bresgott, and Langbein, *Kulturkirchen*, 124.

<sup>543</sup> Förderverein Kunst-Kirche Bochum, “Ring: Licht-Projektion von Detlef Hartung und Georg Trenz,” Kunst in Christ-König, <http://www.kick-kunstkirche.de/archiv/2017-beziehung/ringen/> (accessed June 1, 2017).

<sup>544</sup> Michael Pendry, “LES COLOMBES,” Pendry ArtLab, <http://www.pendry.de/de/multimedia-art/les-colombes/index.html> (accessed January 1, 2018). After Munich, Pendry’s installation travelled exclusively to ecclesiastical settings: Saint Jacob in the Bavarian Burghausen, Grace Cathedral in San Francisco, Dormition Abbey in Jerusalem, and Saint Martin-in-the-Fields in London. At the time of writing, *Les Colombes* is once again exhibited in the Munich Church of the Holy Spirit, this time accompanied in the evenings by a sound installation from the musical artist Digital Haze. The next destination of Pendry’s church installation is Salisbury Cathedral in Wiltshire, England (scheduled for July–August 2018), while subsequent showings are planned for Berlin and Graz. In 2014, Pendry brought another of his installations, *Clouds*, to the Church of the Holy Spirit in Munich.



areas while leaving others in shade; it can appear episodically or claim its omnipresence in the room; it can submissively depend on the flow of natural light or actively transform the surrounding walls, columns, and vaults. So whereas “white masses” can be understood as the artists’ response to the liturgical aspect of church spaces, the authors of these light projects aim at a dialogue with the ecclesiastical architecture.

Recent examples from Saint Peter and Hospital Church are likewise cogent about the aptness of light installations in their historical building. In Stuttgart, Joachim Fleischer’s *liquid light* (2007) responded to the tall ceilings and high windows of the church’s worship area by dividing light and shade into delineating areas.<sup>545</sup> In Cologne, Olafur Eliasson’s *Inner Touch Sphere* (2016) engaged with the natural light, inflowing from the window behind a lamp that projected intricate patterns of light and shadows onto the baptistery walls.<sup>546</sup> In other words, these artists considered architecture as the element defining the church environment and thus incorporated architectural characteristics into their installations. Given that Saint Peter, Hospital Church, and other cases studies discussed here represent old, e.g. late Gothic, church architecture, the past of a building is another essential feature that artists take into account. For example, Christian Boltanski evinced his study of Saint Peter’s history and traditions in the spacious exhibition *Lichtmesz*; while Klaus Illi and Bettina Bürkle referred to a specific problematic moment in the history of Hospital Church with a similarly broad exhibition *Atem-Raum*.<sup>547</sup> On the occasion of the 34<sup>th</sup> Evangelical Church Assembly in 2013, the regional Culture Council (*Kulturbeirat*) invited nine artists to work with fourteen Protestant communities in Hamburg, Lübeck, and other towns in

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<sup>545</sup> “Die Verlangsamung der Zeit–Joachim Fleischers Lichtkunst,” in *Art Info Magazin* 3 (May/June 2007), 6–7. On the occasion of the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Ulm Cathedral tower (2015), Fleischer created an LED-light installation for the world’s tallest belfry. See [www.ulm125.de](http://www.ulm125.de) (accessed January 2, 2018).

<sup>546</sup> Kunst-Station Sankt Peter, “Olafur Eliasson–Inner Touch Sphere,” Kirche der Jesuiten Sankt Peter Köln, <http://www.sankt-peter-koeln.de/wp/kunst-archiv/olafur-eliasson-inner-touch-sphere/> (accessed January 1, 2018).

<sup>547</sup> See pages 103–6 and 142–3 in chapter four of this thesis.

Northern Germany.<sup>548</sup> As part of the project titled *Artists in the Parish*, each artist spent several weeks at one church, learning about the history of the place and conversing with the community members. Only afterwards artworks were to be created.<sup>549</sup> The resulting exhibitions and installations demonstrated deep understanding of the churches on the artists' side and acceptance and satisfaction on the believers' side. Similarly to works by Boltanski, Illi, and Bürkle, this example shows the artistic approach that enhances the connection between an artwork and a church community as its site-specificity relies at once on liturgical, architectural, and historical aspects of a particular sacred space.

Art historian Miwon Kwon defines site-specific art as “phenomenological or experiential understanding of the site.”<sup>550</sup> Applying her term to our case studies, we observe that artists' comprehension of church spaces can result in comparable visual language. Originating from the artist's experience of a sacred space, the artwork in its turn creates an experiential surround for the viewer. As argued above, what qualifies the ensuing encounter between the artist and the viewer in the work of art is the combination of religious use, architectural forms, and history of old active churches. In chapter six, we build on these points to negotiate the beholder's personal experience of contemporary art in ecclesiastical settings. For the present discussion artwork as a surround demonstrates the paradigm of coexistence between secular non-sacramental art and functioning churches, in which the former claims its presence in the interior spaces of the latter

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<sup>548</sup> Imke Lüders, *Artists in the Parish: Ein Kunstprojekt der Nordkirche zum 34. Evangelischen Kirchentag in Hamburg 2013* (Kiel: Lutherische Verlagsgesellschaft, 2013).

<sup>549</sup> In these cases, the concept “autonomous art” grows increasingly problematic. Even though *Lichtmesz*, *Atem-Raum*, and *Artists in the Parish* do not imply churches' commissioning of art, the artists' act of creating becomes informed by the context in which their work is to be displayed. So while we can still avoid the term “non-devotional” art, the discussion of these particular cases suggests consideration of a parallel notion—“non-dedication” art. With artists knowingly producing installations and exhibitions for sacred settings, their works are susceptible to the latter term; notwithstanding whether the artists are non-believers or not. The author would like to thank Dr. Norbert Nußbaum for fruitful discussions about classifications of non-devotional and non-dedication contemporary art.

<sup>550</sup> Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press, 2002), 3.

and allows itself to partake in the religious ritual. Artwork as a surround is an active response to architecture and, accordingly, it induces active movement and physical exploration of space on the side of the beholder. In movement, we gain possibilities for a wide range of individual interpretations that paradoxically rise from one denominator, i.e. site-specificity of installations. Lastly, through an artwork as a surround the artist's absorbed experience of the church atmosphere translates into experiential values for the church visitors. It is a process of meaningful communication that nevertheless does not need to manifest itself in any precise messages.

### **5.2.3. Artwork as a bridge**

Whereas site-specific installations can create surrounds inside church spaces, the artist can likewise choose to step outside and work with the exterior of the church building. Here, a number of possibilities are offered for art's interaction with architecture: church yards, surface of outer walls, façades, and towers. What such site-specific projects lose is interaction with the primary purpose of the place, i.e. worship. On the other hand, a different type of effect occurs. An artwork does not intervene into the locus of the religious ritual; instead it intervenes into the city space. Such installations originate in the secular artistic realm but come into being on the sacred terrain. Thus living on the border between profanity and sacrality, an artwork becomes a bridge between two distinct spheres of today's society.

Similarly to site-specific installations inside churches, art projects at the exteriors of ecclesiastical settings display a number of curious similarities. As early as 1995, the artist Mischa Kuball chose to work with the external walls of Saint Peter. The scaffolds with spotlights

that he installed onto the external facing of the church cloaked the late Gothic building in an unfamiliar, diffused light.<sup>551</sup> Several years later, Martin Creed turned to the Romanesque tower to build a communication channel between the urban environment of Cologne and the Jesuit church. He formed a simple message in a white neon text.<sup>552</sup> Interestingly, both of these artists selected the medium of light as most suitable for their tasks and contexts. The British artist added the verbal element and, with that, provided a compelling exemplar for outside site-specific installations in churches. In 2010, an American conceptual artist Jenny Holzer (b. 1950) created multiple light installations in Frankfurt at the invitation of the Foundation of the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau.<sup>553</sup> For the duration of one week a series of scrolling texts was projected in bold light letters onto six public buildings, including three active Lutheran churches.<sup>554</sup> Holzer brought together the city's past and present by selecting texts by those writers and philosophers who were especially important to the history and culture of Frankfurt and of German Protestantism; among them Theodor W. Adorno, Martin Buber, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Martin Luther, Friedrich Schleiermacher, and Paul Tillich.<sup>555</sup> Whether church buildings or secular public spaces, the selected sites became meeting places for the Christian and non-Christian residents of Frankfurt. Initially drawn by the form of light, passers-by stopped to read the flowing text and, as pointed out by philosopher Jürgen Werner, had to wait in order to understand.<sup>556</sup> In front of the central installation at Old Saint Nicholas Church (fig. 26), the passer-by slowed down and remained still while the form, the content, and the site of the light installation merged into the beholder's personal, subjective understanding of the

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<sup>551</sup> For the discussion of Kuball's project *Projektion/Reflektion*, see page 98 above.

<sup>552</sup> For the discussion of Creed's installation *Don't Worry*, see page 103 above.

<sup>553</sup> Friederike von Büнау, ed., *For Frankfurt: Jenny Holzer* (Bielefeld: Kerber Art Verlag, 2011).

<sup>554</sup> The three churches included Old Saint Nicholas Church (*Alte Nikolaikirche*), Church Saint Catherine (*Sankt Katharinenkirche*), and the Dreikönigskirche ("The Three Kings' Church"). The other three buildings were the medieval town-hall complex Römer, the Literaturhaus, and the exhibition hall Portikus. Ibid.

<sup>555</sup> The texts are reproduced in German and English in *ibid.*, 95–117.

<sup>556</sup> Ibid., 22.

experience. Instead of being concealed inside the church, the artwork pervaded the public space and invited everyone for contemplation. In Werner's words "city and religion speak to one another,"<sup>557</sup> to which we may add that the language of their given conversation is contemporary art. In the evening of the Reformation Day 2017, forty-seven churches of the state North Rhine-Westphalia were transformed by grand light installations as part of the series *Illuminated (Erleuchtet)*.<sup>558</sup> The graphic artist Inka Kardys developed individual designs for each participating church, based on the specificities of architecture and location. Single words, short phrases or questions halted or moved on the wall surfaces and the towers of churches. Some appeared ambiguous in their content (e.g. "TROSTAUTOMAT?!" at Saint Luke Church in Bochum, or "Neues Wagen" at Church Oberrahmede in Lüdenscheid); while others sent explicitly Christian messages (e.g. "Einsam? Gemeinsam Gemeinde!" at Saint Marien in Dortmund, "Glauben ist Freiheit" at the Church of the Redeemer in Essen, or "Gott in Allen Dingen" at Saint Servatius in Kierspe). Just as *Light Pyramid*, this was an ecumenical project that included Catholic and Protestant regional churches.<sup>559</sup> These cases show, first, that light installations have become widely accepted among churches in the twenty-first century and, second, that today churches employ the language of contemporary art for overtly religious statements. Reflecting on Holzer's project, it can be added that the means of exterior light installations has become an active communication tool. Such large light installations can hardly be overlooked and therefore can reach the audience, regardless of the audience's intentions.

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<sup>557</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>558</sup> Gerhard K. Schäfer, "Erleuchtet," Reformationsjubiläum, <http://www.erleuchtet-reformationsjubilaeum.de/> (accessed January 4, 2018).

<sup>559</sup> Notwithstanding the occasion, four Catholic churches joined the celebration of the Reformation Day—a sign of "das gute ökumenische Miteinander." The project coordinator Gerhard Schäfer quoted in Evangelische Kirche von Westfalen, "Projekt 'Erleuchtet' lässt Kirchen im Westen mit Licht-Worten erstrahlen," Evangelische Kirche von Westfalen, <http://www.evangelisch-in-westfalen.de/aktuelles/detailansicht/news/einzigartig-und-einmalig/> (accessed January 4, 2018).

At this point, a distinction should be made between artworks such as those discussed above and so-called festivals of light, which have recently grown tremendously popular in Germany and beyond. Since the first Berlin Festival of Lights in 2004, the Berlin Cathedral has been among the buildings that have been annually enveloped in colourful illumination.<sup>560</sup> In Aachen, the Cathedral in Light (*Dom im Licht*) has attracted such big crowds in its first and second editions of 2015 and 2016 that the entry to the most recent festival had to be limited to 4,000 spectators.<sup>561</sup> It might suffice to say that the founder of the Aachen festival, Kurt Savelsberg, is the chief executive of KS Production Shows, a commercial organization that arranges PR-, fashion, media, and entertainment events. Such events intend to draw large crowds and gain financial profits by producing a spectacle, rather than creating an artwork. They do not aspire to bring about meaningful encounters for individual viewers but rather aim to cause transient collective excitement. For these reasons, the thesis draws a boundary from such cases.

It is noteworthy that the majority of light texts in *Illuminated* (2017) were projected on church towers—an architectural element that has historically been the foremost distinguishing feature of Christian sacred buildings. Markus Zink gives a special attention to the church tower as a site for contemporary art, encouraging pastors and church art-commissioners (*Kunstbeauftragten*) to use this part of church buildings for art experimentation.<sup>562</sup> He calls it “pointer upwards” (“*Fingerzeig nach oben*”) and connects the image of the church tower with one’s sentimental memories of homeland. Zink continues, “As religious symbol, the tower extends into secular

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<sup>560</sup> FOL Festival of Lights International Productions, “Berlin,” Festival of Lights, <http://festival-of-lights.de/> (accessed January 4, 2018).

<sup>561</sup> Thomas Vogel, “Nur mit Bändchen: 4000 dürfen auf den Katschhof,” in *Aachener Nachrichten*, Oktober 25, 2017.

<sup>562</sup> Markus Zink, “Ein Turm, der über sich hinausweist: Der Kirchturm als Symbol und Kunstort,” in Zink, *Lebensräume*, 257–63.

surrounding of the church, acoustically through the bells, optically through the architecture.”<sup>563</sup> With examples from Wartburg Church in Frankfurt, he underlines the value of churches engaging with larger city spaces via artistic methods.<sup>564</sup> Zink’s observation on visibility of church towers in skylines of their towns or cities is significant. From the artist’s perspective, this conspicuous position can be appealing because it ensures public notice. From the perspective of a church, a contemporary art installation on its tower is an opportunity to claim its participation in the present-day society. So the Jesuit Church of Cologne has done that with bright neon letters since 2000. When hundreds of thousands visitors travelled to Kassel to see *documenta 13*, this is what the church Saint Elisabeth did with Stephan Balkenhol’s sculpture of the human figure with widespread arms mounted high above the city’s central square, called Friedrichsplatz.<sup>565</sup> During the following edition of the vast exhibition, the belfry of yet another Kassel church, Karlskirche, was transformed by an artwork of Thomas Kilpper (b. 1956). In a variation of his project *Lighthouse for Lampedusa*, the German artist clad the tower with remains of refugee boats found in Sicily and added text in capital letters “Lampedusa, Melilla/Lesbos/is here/legal escape routes to Europe!” (fig. 27).<sup>566</sup> Art historian and curator Susanne Kleine interprets Kilpper’s installation at the tower: “He thus unites his artistic and profoundly personal concern with the self-

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<sup>563</sup> “So ragt der Turm als religiöses Symbol in den säkularen Umraum der Kirche hinein, akustisch durch die Glocken, optisch durch die Architektur.” Ibid., 257.

<sup>564</sup> In addition to the visual arts, Zink provides an example of a sound installation: *Laugh-Tower (Lachturm)* by “CaBri” (Carolyn Krüger und Brigitte Kottwitz), 2007. At regular intervals, installed speakers emitted a 15-minute recording of laughter from the church bell tower (see *ibid.*, 260–2; and Thomas Diemer’s discussion of the project in *ibid.*, 264–7). Contemporary acoustic installations have been frequently welcomed by church spaces, e.g. Manos Tsangaris’ chime installation at the tower of Saint Agnes in Cologne (2000). Other examples, not necessarily set in church belfries, include Apolonija Sustercic at Reglerkirche and Natascha Mehler at Ägidienkirche in Erfurt (1999), Thomas Rehberger at Bergerkirche in Düsseldorf (2003), Falk Zenker at Kulturkirche Isseroda (2003), Martin Creed at Kunst-Station Sankt Peter (2005), Alvin Lucier at Kreuz-Kirche in Krausnick (2005), Alois Späth at Minoritenkirche Regensburg (2012), Rochus Aust in the Cologne Luther Church (2014), Michael Vorfeld at Zwingli-Kirche in Berlin (2016), Shilpa Gupta at Karlskirche in Kassel (2017), Simon Rummel and Tina Tonagel at Kunst-Station Sankt Peter (2017), Tobias Hagedorn at Hospital Church (2017) and at Kunst-Station Sankt Peter (2018). Due to the present focus on the visual forms of contemporary art, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to give proper attention to these or other examples of sound art.

<sup>565</sup> Christoph Baumanns, ed., *Stephan Balkenhol in Sankt Elisabeth* (Cologne: Snoeck, 2012).

<sup>566</sup> Smerling, *Luther und die Avantgarde*, 164–7.

understanding of the Protestant church as lighthouse and safe haven for all people...”<sup>567</sup> The installation is also a call addressed at the secular world for a more humanitarian approach to the urgent refugee crisis in Europe. Its visual form—a beacon and its light reaching across the city—create a bridge between the secular and the sacred social spheres. To be more precise, this is the bridge of common concern and shared responsibility expressed in the language of contemporary art.

So while site-specific projects at church exteriors remain outside of the liturgical space, their functioning as a bridge between a church and its environment is important for the relationship between the two. Artworks as bridges represent the borders between neighbouring social domains of profanity and sacrality. Similarly to examples of artworks as surrounds, the artistic vocabulary of exterior church installations often relies on the medium of light because its symbolic meanings for both Christians and non-believers intersect in artistic undertakings without a jar. To a greater extent than with artworks as guests or artworks as surrounds, architecture channels the production of these site-specific projects by challenging contemporary artists to engage with outer walls, façades, and towers of old church buildings. Furthermore, artwork as a bridge stretches the area of the viewer’s movement: instead of confining our steps within the church walls, it invites us to expand the range of exploration and walk around, away from, or, when an artwork is spotted from afar, towards the church building. Hence both the artwork and the viewer are active and, by responding to one another, they animate the surrounding atmosphere of the city. Multiple cases of contemporary art installations at belfries show that Christian communities can, on the one hand, visually claim their presence in German cities and towns by means of the tower image and, on the other hand, use the language of contemporary art to add their voice to the pressing social issues. In other words, artwork as a

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<sup>567</sup> Ibid., 104.



bridge can manifest the churches' participation in the life of society at large. Thus contemporary art can serve as morals, which is the following point of our inquiry.

#### 5.2.4. Artwork as morals

One paradigm of engagement with contemporary non-sacramental art has remained significant throughout the thirty-year dialogue between churches and artists in Germany. When there was a lack of cogent purposes for art intervention in an active sacred space, arguments and discontent were not uncommon.<sup>568</sup> However, when artworks addressed a pressing social issue and required public attention, churches and art often seemed to exemplify concord and unite for the righteous course. Subjects have ranged from specific events, such as a massacre of insurgents in Guatemala,<sup>569</sup> to the broader issues like economic collapse and environmental concerns.<sup>570</sup> Compared to the abovementioned examples, the present category cannot be termed as site-specific. Instead, it invites the discussion of *society*-specific art projects. Whether participating in the liturgical act or keeping its distance, situated at the inner or outer parts of churches' architectural structures, artwork as morals has consistently participated in the life of old active German churches over the course of the past thirty years. Today, it is the most firmly established

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<sup>568</sup> For the discussion on public reception of contemporary art exhibitions or installations in active churches, see section 5.3.2. below.

<sup>569</sup> The title of Günther Uecker's *Chichicastenango* (1980) refers to the city in Guatemala, where in the course of the decade-long civil war thousands of insurgents were murdered. The artist created the sculpture for the exhibition *Zeichen des Glaubens* (Berlin, 1980), following which Karl Josef Massen acquired the work as a permanent loan from the artist for the collection of the church Pax Christi in Krefeld (see pages 66–7 in chapter three of this thesis). In 2000, Uecker's "nail-boat" was exhibited at Aegidienkirche in Hanover as part of the exhibition *Lost Paradise Lost: Kunst und sakraler Raum*.

<sup>570</sup> The German artist HA Schult created an army of 1,000 human figures made from found trash in order to raise awareness about the amount of trash produced by people in consumerist societies. The first installation of *Trash People* appeared at the historical amphitheatre in Xanten, Germany in 1996. Some of the subsequent locations included the Cologne Cathedral Square (2006), as well as The Great Wall of China, Moscow's Red Square, the Pyramids of Giza, and the Arctic. See HA Schult, "Trash People."

and widely validated paradigm of coexistence between living Christian churches and contemporary non-devotional art in Germany.

On what basis does art as morals enter sacred Christian spaces? If we return to the history of exhibitions at Saint Peter and Hospital Church, we witness multiple examples of artworks as morals. As part of the triptych series at the former, these were Felix Droese's image of a psychosomatic illness in *Pictures of the children who don't want to eat anymore*, Hildegard Weber's commemoration of the Holocaust in *Black Banners-Black Mirrors*, or Gerhard Altenbourg's portrait of the tragedy of the Second World War in *Ecce homo*.<sup>571</sup> Later at Kunst-Station Jannis Kounellis compared the "throwaway-mentality" of capitalist Germany with the paucity of needed goods in West Africa in the installation *Interventio crucis*, while Fernando Prats' approached the pressing subject of climate change in *Hacia el Polo Sur*.<sup>572</sup> At Hospital Church, the art projects that accentuated various problems of the contemporary society, rather than aiming at an artistic composition or an aesthetic effect, are yet more prominent. This may be explained with, first, Müller's uniting of art and liturgy in his exhibition-specific image-sermons and, second, the educational agenda of the Center Hospitalhof. At any rate, from the late 1980s until Müller's last exhibitions in Stuttgart the social issues were at the forefront of art discussions at Hospital Church. So one of the two exhibitions of 1988 conjoined art made by professional and disabled artists at Hospitalhof.<sup>573</sup> Likewise the first art exhibitions inside the church confronted the viewers with the questions of social responsibility, e.g. HA Schult's *Fetish Car* (1991) or Claude Sui-Bellois' *Exterminationen* (1992).<sup>574</sup> During his last year in Stuttgart the pastor-curator invited the traveling exhibition *Art despite (defies) Dementia (Kunst trotz(t)*

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<sup>571</sup> Mennekes, *Triptychon*, 70, 106, and 170, respectively.

<sup>572</sup> "...von Überfluss und Wegwerfmentalität geprägten Deutschland," in Schlimbach, *Für einen lange währenden Augenblick*, 303; also see pages 316–7 in *ibid*.

<sup>573</sup> *Botschaften: Eine Ausstellung behinderter und zeitgenössischer Künstler*, Center Hospitalhof, 1988.

<sup>574</sup> See pages 135–6 and 143–4 in chapter four of this thesis. We can add to this list the already mentioned works by Klaus Illi and Bettina Bürkle and *Instant Memorials* by Winfried Baumann (pages 142–3 and 149–50 above).

*Demenz*) to the newly built Hospitalhof. The art show included, among others, works by the artists familiar to the historian of contemporary art exhibitions in churches: Joseph Beuys, Madeleine Dietz, Felix Droese, Jörg Immendorff, Johann Peter Reuter, and Günther Uecker. The exhibition was to bring to public attention the difficulties associated with dementia in order to “dismantle prejudices, generate acceptance and understanding, and bolster social engagement.”<sup>575</sup> The last point is the essential principle and the purpose of artwork as morals. In other words, such art exhibitions or installations call for the awareness of and response to current social problems. The aim coincides with that of the Christian community: both the artist and the church express concern for the human condition and suggest conduct towards possible improvement. Using Helmut Müller’s analogy, we can name the two “dialogue partners.” To add precision to the character of this dialogue let us then define its central question—what is the right thing to do?

Over the past several years, the refugee crisis has been both the subject of many art projects<sup>576</sup> and the primary concern of the international Christian communities. With their own methods, artists and churches have compelled public action. But it also happens that the two join their efforts and become allies in the face of human crisis. Hermann Josef Hack’s *Base Camp* or Wolfgang Vetten’s *Dimenticare* are examples of such collaboration.<sup>577</sup> In 2015, German artist and student of Georg Baselitz, Rebecca Raue (b. 1976) brought her installation *Arriving and Leaving (Ankommen und Ablegen)* to the Berlin church Saint Matthew (*Sankt Matthäus*). She

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<sup>575</sup> “Vorurteile abzubauen, Akzeptanz und Verständnis zu wecken und soziales Engagement zu stärken,” in Wilfried Knapp, ed., *Kunst trotz(t) Demenz: Katalog zur Wanderausstellung* (Frankfurt: Hansisches Dr. und Verl. Haus, 2009), 16. Conceived and realized by the endowment fund DiaDem, *Kunst trotz(t) Demenz* was shown in thirty-nine different spaces across Germany and Switzerland between 2009 and 2015: open public spaces and parks, art museums and galleries, governmental and cultural centers, historical buildings and, comprising almost half of all locations, churches.

<sup>576</sup> We can name the renowned examples of Ai Weiwei’s *Life Jackets* (2016/2017) and his representation of the drowned Syrian toddler Alan Kurdi (2016).

<sup>577</sup> See pages 122–3 in chapter four of this thesis.

filled the entire central space of the church's interior with large fiberboard boats that, in collaboration with the Refugees Company for Crafts and Design, were made by those African migrants who crossed the Mediterranean Sea and arrived to Berlin.<sup>578</sup> Nearly life-size white-colored vessels resembled magnified origami boats, while mostly checkered fabric of their sails appeared to be sewn out of men shirts (fig. 28). By inviting visitors to sit down in the boats, Raue intended for the installation to elicit empathy: "In order to act in a sustainable way we have to find a personal reference to the events that take place around us. The political has to become private for us to establish a personal relation despite the harshness of reality and consequently get really involved."<sup>579</sup> The interactive experience of the art installation stimulated the church visitors to action, which they could subsequently carry on beyond the church walls, in their daily life. By means of artistic language, the artist thus calls for action, "We will then act together, supporting. And we will be aware, that ultimately we are all connected together."<sup>580</sup> She refers to our ability not only to have compassion towards the African refugees but also to help them—in Berlin, in Germany, and worldwide. Similarly, Christianity preaches compassion and caring for others. During *Arriving and Leaving*, together the two engaged in a conversation on the topic of the refugee crisis. The dialogue found its embodiment in the special "art-worship service" (*Kunstgottesdienst*), which addressed the life of immigrants in Berlin with the discussion of Raue's art project.<sup>581</sup> The white boats became the point of departure and reference, as well as the stimulus for moral act. In other words, the artwork voiced an urgent concern relevant to every

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<sup>578</sup> Rebecca Raue, "Arriving and Leaving," Rebecca Raue, <http://rebeccaraue.de/extexts/arriving-and-leaving-rebecca-raue/> (accessed January 8, 2018). Working with immigrants or refugees has been a common practice among contemporary artists in the past years; e.g. Olafur Eliasson's workshop *Green Light* at the 57th Venice Biennale (2017).

<sup>579</sup> Ibid.

<sup>580</sup> Ibid.

<sup>581</sup> Stiftung St. Matthäus, "ankommen und ablegen: Installation von Rebecca Raue zur Passionszeit 2015," Stiftung St. Matthäus, Kulturstiftung der Evangelischen Kirche Berlin-Brandenburg-schlesische Oberlausitz, <https://www.stiftung-stmatthaeus.de/programm/archiv/veranstaltung/ankommen-und-ablegen-1/> (accessed January 8, 2018).

visitor of the church and prompted a consideration of one's personal position in relation to an actual problem of the present-day society.

It is not difficult to find more examples of cooperation between active churches and artists in tackling the present refugee crisis; indeed, one does not need to search beyond one's city limits. We have already considered Hermann Josef Hack's and Wolfgang Vetten's art projects at Kunst-Station Sankt Peter. In 2016, Rebecca Raue modified her installation for the Cologne church Saint Gertrude. There, soon after *Arriving and Leaving*, another exhibition on the subject took place. Titled *Syria, Art and Escape (Syrien, Kunst und Flucht)*, it presented works by more than thirty Syrian refugee and immigrant artists.<sup>582</sup> But churches can use the medium of art for addressing social crises in more than one way. In early 2017, the visitor to Saint Gereon's Basilica in Cologne could view a large collage of pictures painted by refugee and immigrant kids at the high altar of the church. The immigrant artist Hasan Hüseyin Deveci works together with the Luther Church of Cologne to provide refugees living in the city with art therapy classes. Moreover, the visual form of art in itself appears to be a powerful tool for communicating morals. Thus in 2016 the Archdiocese of Cologne purchased a refugee boat, which was confiscated by the Maltese army during one of its rescue missions in the Mediterranean Sea, and exhibited it first in the Cologne Cathedral and subsequently in several diocesan churches.<sup>583</sup> In addition to the explanatory text, the visual presentation of a seven-meter vessel comprised a video projection with the scenes of the rescue mission and a light installation on the floor in front of the boat. In soft white light, the latter cast letters that read "Christ sits in the refugee boat" in

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<sup>582</sup> Jabbar Abdullah, "Ausstellungen," Syrien, Kunst, und Flug, <http://www.syrien-kunst-flucht.de/ausstellungen.html> (accessed January 9, 2018). Saint Gertrude (*Sankt Gerturd*) is an example of a "concrete church" (*Betonkirche*), designed by German architect Gottfried Böhm in the 1960s. So while it exemplifies dynamic engagement with contemporary visual arts, which goes beyond Raue's exhibition of 2016, the thesis leaves this church out of the discussion in order to stay focused on the subject of investigation.

<sup>583</sup> Tabea Herrmann, "Flüchtlingsboot des Kölner Doms kommt ins Haus der Geschichte," *Bonn General Anzeiger*, November 5, 2017. After being exhibited in churches, the boat was gifted to the Haus der Geschichte, a museum of contemporary history located in Bonn.

ten different languages. Expressed with the visual means, the message required one's engaged process of looking and only so could be effectively delivered to the cathedral guests. Together these cases demonstrate that certain questions and values can be communicated to church visitors through the medium of the visual arts and, as a consequence, that for churches contemporary art can be a helpful partner in the dialogue about important social events.

For anyone who studies the relationship between contemporary art and active churches it soon becomes evident that this paradigm of their coexistence is most common in the twenty-first century. This situation concurs with the development in the professional art world, where social responsibility is ever more present on artists' agendas. In churches, socially engaged art arguably appears less alien or out-of-place than contemporary art that does not display evident connections to relevant social situations. When the pastor refers to the troubles of the contemporary mankind and views them through the lens of the Christian faith, Barbara Kruger's political questions on the floor of Saint Peter's or Winfried Baumann's "memorial-systems" in the vestibule of Hospital Church appear germane to individual worshippers who find themselves in-between the inner realm of the church and the outer realm of the society at large. Outside of the liturgical celebration, artworks as morals communicate care for the current events from the side of the church. Thus even for a non-believer, e.g. a tourist visiting an old church to appreciate its architecture and the arts, these examples come across as reasonable—standing for the church's attentiveness to the matters at hand. Under the circumstances, it is of lesser importance whether artworks as morals partake in the religious ritual or not: because they articulate their questions actively and clearly, such artworks are less susceptible to the surroundings than either exhibitions or site-specific installations of art.

In essence, artworks as morals are markedly active. As such they, on the one hand, galvanize the viewer into moral activity and, on the other, represent activity of the Christian institution. In other words, artworks as morals help both the individual human being and the church to declare their participation in the contemporary society. In chapter six we will assess such participation in view of the post-secular thesis and specify the voices of both contemporary art and churches within the post-secular discourse. Having introduced the four paradigms, we now turn to the outcomes of the thirty-year engagement between secular art and living churches in Germany.

### **5.3. After thirty years**

In the previous section we outlined the types of temporary art projects that today frequent active German churches. While the discussed case studies are indicative of a dynamic relationship between Christian institutions and contemporary non-devotional art, their temporality inevitably limits the scope of their effect. Thus a study of more enduring outcomes is due. Although to give an in-depth analysis of such outcomes would require a separate study, within the present research frame we can highlight key changes that resulted from a three-decade-old interaction between sacred spaces and secular visual arts in Germany. First, examples of permanent integration of contemporary art into visual composition of living churches present counterpoints to the temporary paradigms of the church-art relationship. Second, public reception of art exhibitions and installations in churches attests both the assimilation of contemporary art into the religious life of believers and the interest in church exhibitions in the secular world. Third, current Catholic and Protestant approaches to non-sacramental art in churches show, on the one hand, some predictably distinct opinions and, on the other, common attitudes to the visual arts in the

twenty-first century. The chapter closes with a reflection on the place of contemporary art in old active German churches and a list of questions for further exploration. To conduct a concentrated discussion, we will consult the case of Saint John's Church in Düsseldorf by presenting concrete points of reference and illustrations to the given arguments. Lastly, it is necessary to point out that the discussed outcomes are not conclusive interpretations of our topic but rather provisional observations. Because the development of the phenomenon is still in progress, they serve not to define the subject matter but to assist future investigation.

### 5.3.1. Permanent integration of contemporary art

In comparison to temporary art exhibitions in churches, cases of permanent assimilation of contemporary artworks into old sacred spaces are rarer but nevertheless conspicuous throughout the country. Several examples have already been mentioned in this thesis: Hermann Buss' painting at Inselkirche in Langeoog, art collection gathered by Karl Josef Massen at Pax Christi in Krefeld,<sup>584</sup> Eduardo Chillida's and Martin Creed's site-specific works for Saint Peter in Cologne, as well as many designs for stained glass windows executed by renowned artists. In addition to commissioning window designs, parishes of old churches have often invited artists to create altar tables and even to remodel whole interior spaces.<sup>585</sup> Similarly to the renovation works at Saint Peter and Hospital Church, such transformations often result in barer appearances and minimalistic decoration of church rooms. Since her exhibition at Hospital Church,

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<sup>584</sup> While Pax Christi does not exemplify old church architecture, Massen's pioneering activities in Krefeld are noteworthy. See pages 65–9 above.

<sup>585</sup> In 2007 the exhibition in the Carmelite Church in Munich documented artistic transformation of sanctuaries in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Munich and Freising between 1997 and 2007. See Alexander Heisig, ed., *Raum–Kunst–Liturgie: Altarräume im Erzbistum München und Freising 1997–2007* (Munich: Erzbischöfliches Ordinariat, 2007). An outstanding example is Leo Zogmayer's design for a thorough interior transfiguration of the Church Maria Geburt in Aschaffenburg; see Markus Krauth, ed., *Die Neugestaltung der Kirche Maria Geburt in Aschaffenburg* (Münster: LIT, 1999).



Madeleine Dietz has shaped multiple chapels, altar areas, columbaria, baptismal fonts, shrines, pulpits, and even crosses in churches across Germany.<sup>586</sup> Her use of natural materials and steel, combined with simple geometric forms and marked right angles represents the distinct aesthetics embraced by churches in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.<sup>587</sup> Anish Kapoor's monumental altar of black limestone at the Church of Our Lady in Dresden is another example thereof.<sup>588</sup>

Sculptural works of wood, stone, and steel by such artists as Franz Bernhard, Ingrid Hartlieb, Werner Mally, Werner Pokorny, Ulrich Rückriem, and Klaus Simon are also akin to one another and can be found at altar areas in many old German churches.<sup>589</sup> However secular the art of Bernhard or Kapoor might appear to us, these examples show works that were produced explicitly for religious purposes and therefore cannot be considered as utterly non-devotional. Be that as it may, similar cases abound in both Catholic and Protestant churches in Germany. So in spring 2017 an imposing altarpiece jointly painted by a South African artist Marlene Dumas and Dutch artists Jan Andriessse and Bert Boogaard was inaugurated at the Church of Saint Anne in Dresden.<sup>590</sup> Capped by a soft-colored rainbow five tondi with Christian motifs are connected through the tree of life; one of them is titled "The Ship of Life" and depicts a crowded refugee boat that seems to be on the verge of sinking in the sea. At this juncture, a paradigm for temporary church exhibitions—artwork as morals—and permanent assimilation of a contemporary painting into an old sacred space intersect. The case is indicative of the new meaning of

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<sup>586</sup> Benn, *Dein Plan für das Paradies*.

<sup>587</sup> In this regard Markus Zink speaks of "material-aesthetics" (*"Material-ästhetik"*), according to which the material of a work of art is the end in itself (*"Selbstzweck"*). Markus Zink, ed., *Kreuz+quer: Gegenwartskunst für Kirchen* (Marburg: Institut für Kirchenbau und kirchliche Kunst der Gegenwart, 1998), 16 and 69.

<sup>588</sup> Volp, "Anish Kapoor in Dresdens Frauenkirche," 220–1.

<sup>589</sup> See examples in Zink, *Kreuz+quer*, 50–1 and 80–96.

<sup>590</sup> Marlene Dumas, "News: An Altarpiece for the Annenkirche," Marlene Dumas: Resources and references, <http://www.marlenedumas.nl/an-altarpiece-for-the-annenkirche/> (accessed January 11, 2018). See also Christfried Weirauch, Jan Andriessse, Bert Boogaard, Ulrich Bischoff, and Marlene Dumas, *Marlene Dumas. Ein Altarbild für die Annenkirche in Dresden* (Cologne: Walther König, 2017).

contemporary art in churches in the twenty-first century.<sup>591</sup> Moreover, the meeting of liturgy and art at the altar of Saint Anne demonstrates the development in their conversation. Whereas thirty years ago only a few exhibitions, such as those organized by Mennekes and Müller, would dare to bring secular art into a ritual space, today similar examples of unconventional altarpieces are common. After Langeoog, Buss painted altarpieces for small-town churches in Ardorf, Warzen, Adenstedt and Oldenstadt.<sup>592</sup> In 2002 an abstract cross painting by one of the protagonists of the thematic exhibitions, Arnulf Rainer, was installed above the altar table of the church Sankt Marien in Kemberg. With similar expressionistic strokes, Johann Peter Reuter produced altar paintings for over ten churches in Germany and the Netherlands. Like Rainer, he too participated in one of the trailblazing exhibitions in the 1980s. Again in a similar visual language, a Greek artist Christos Koutsouras produced a prodigious wall painting for a permanent display behind the altar table of the Luther Church in Cologne: a surge of red and russet storm stretches over a twelve-by-six-meter cloth. The overpowering presence of the painting is a poignant statement as to the place of contemporary art in the religious life in this place and at this time.

The Church of Saint John (*Johanneskirche*) in Düsseldorf was built in the late nineteenth century in the Romanesque Revival style and, after receiving severe damages in the Second World War, was reconstructed according to the original architectural plan.<sup>593</sup> As early as 1995, then the church pastor Thorsten Nolting invited composer and music artist, Kyra Stratmann, to produce a sound installation for the inner space of Saint John.<sup>594</sup> Since then engagement with contemporary culture has continuously been on the agenda of the church's activities, which brought along regular temporary exhibitions of art. With personal interest in the arts and connections at the Arts

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<sup>591</sup> The elaboration on the point follows in section 6.3. below.

<sup>592</sup> Klahr and Kanzenbach, *Horizonte*.

<sup>593</sup> Bahr, Bresgott, and Langbein, *Kulturkirchen*, 127.

<sup>594</sup> Rita Kersting, "Kunst in der Johanneskirche—Interview mit Thorsten Nolting," in Thorsten Nolting, ed., *Ein Fenster: Eine Dokumentation* (Cologne: Salon Verlag, 2001), 11–2.

Academy of Düsseldorf, Nolting managed to acquire a permanent artwork for the Church of Saint John.<sup>595</sup> In 1998, protagonist in the development of conceptual art of the 1960s and participant in the Venice Biennale 1984 and *documenta* 5, 6, and 7, Lawrence Weiner (b. 1942) delivered one of his typographic text-works onto the wall of the church gallery.<sup>596</sup> When due to the complete building renovation of 2008 the text had to be removed, the artist offered to compose a new site-specific text for the church. Thus since 2010 two versions of Weiner's text—in English and German languages—have framed the worship space from the side walls supporting the upper seating areas (fig. 29). With the common subtitle "DICHT BEI" (literally "close to"), each sentence is executed in capital black letters and hollow font, reading "Brought forth by the resonance of a dissonance."<sup>597</sup> During the presentation of the work, Pastor Uwe Vetter stated: "This is neither a Bible illustration, nor a concealed religious metaphor. It is simply what art sees and expresses in contemplation."<sup>598</sup> He argued further that the creative autonomy of Weiner's text provided value for believers by opening a conversation about the meaning of the sacred space and raising questions about its personal significances for each worshipper. The artist himself suggested that the dissonance between "simultaneous realities" of profanity and sacrality in a city church ultimately yields resonance.<sup>599</sup> Barbara Wengler, who has been responsible for cultural activities at Saint John's since 2008, views the lettering as "a motto for all art exhibitions and cultural events in Johanneskirche."<sup>600</sup> For the present discussion on the integration of

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<sup>595</sup> Barbara Wengler, Head of Public and Cultural Programs at Johanneskirche Düsseldorf, in conversation with the author, Düsseldorf, May 5, 2017.

<sup>596</sup> "Rows of cabbage marked with red ink and buried tomorrow." See Pastor Uwe Vetter, "13. Juni 2010: Kunst-Gottesdienst," Johanneskirche StadtKirche, <http://www.johanneskirche.org/stadtpredigten-1/stadtpredigten-2003-bis-2010/stadtpredigten-2010/181-middabber-oder-wenn-kirche-und-kunst-einander-begegnen/file.html> (accessed January 13, 2018), 2.

<sup>597</sup> The German version is "Hervorgebracht durch die Resonanz einer Dissonanz."

<sup>598</sup> Vetter, "Kunst-Gottesdienst," 3. The original reads, "Das ist keine Illustration zur Bibel, keine versteckte religiöse Metapher. Es ist einfach das, was Kunst sieht und einwirft ins Nachsinnen."

<sup>599</sup> Ibid.

<sup>600</sup> Barbara Wengler in conversation with the author, Düsseldorf, May 5, 2017.

contemporary art in active sacred spaces, Weiner's words become emblematic of the goals pursued by the church communities when they committedly embrace secular visual language for their worship spaces. That is, an encounter with contemporary non-devotional art can trigger visceral reactions and stimulate thought processes that are of profound benefit for each person. Although so are the motivations behind temporary art exhibitions in churches, the examples of specifically permanent integration reveal further information. On the one hand, they testify to the high level of openness to secular culture in German churches and, on the other, they show that the visual language of contemporary art is gradually transforming the atmospheres inside Christian houses of worship. While influenced by a history of temporary church exhibitions, permanent cases illustrate those artistic tendencies that churches have committedly adopted and disclose the selective character of the process. Leaving the discussion about the nature of this atmospheric transformation for the last chapter, we now turn to the question of public reactions.

### **5.3.2. Public reception**

Thirty years after first exhibitions took place at Saint Peter and Hospital Church, contemporary art in ecclesiastical settings can no longer boast novelty as its principal trait. The twenty-first century visitor to old cathedrals and chapels can be little surprised by encountering there a secular art object; given the visual arts' omnipresence in today's public space, contemporary art in churches might even be taken for granted. That is why the major change in public attitude is in a gradual becoming accustomed to exhibitions of non-Christian art in churches. The getting used to, however, does not imply total acceptance or approval of the phenomenon. Just as public discontent was part of the pioneering art projects brought into ecclesiastical settings thirty years

ago, so too it exists today. By the same token, advocates of contemporary art in churches made their arguments in the 1980s and support this development in the twenty-first century. Thus, the examination of public reception should not pursue quantitative evidence as to which position is more predominant in the present-day Germany but instead try to understand the conditions of accepting and rejecting attitudes.

Public response to a new exhibition of contemporary art in a church is inevitably contingent on individual reactions and therefore can vary greatly from one visitor to another. In 1987 Arnulf Rainer's *Triumphal Cross* (*Triumphkreuz*) was introduced into the chancel of Sankt Petri in Lübeck. The reactions to a crucifix overpainted with thick coat of black paint ranged from one extreme to another: from "Better heretics than Rainer!" and "Is this a church or an art gallery?" to "The exhibition is like a drink of water," and "The church lives with the art!"<sup>601</sup> When a painting by Dumas, Andriesse, and Boogaard was brought to Saint Anne's in Dresden, the announcement on the official Facebook page of the church received multiple positive smileys and "likes." In contrast, it instigated one Facebook user to express a strong displeasure by labelling the altarpiece "insanity" (*Irrsinn*) and claiming that kids from a nearby kindergarten could create a better painting.<sup>602</sup> Reminiscing about the early years of Kunst-Station, Lesa Mason narrates "At first it seemed like a disaster. The press had no mercy and it was a battle. The parishioners were mad. They could not understand it."<sup>603</sup> So why and how did the initially negative attitudes steered towards acceptance? Mason explains,

It took conviction. Dr. Mennekes stayed on task and his homilies were powerful, and the art spoke loudly for itself... the people who individually and communally

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<sup>601</sup> Siewert, *Raumdialoge*, 63. The originals read: "Besser Ketzer als der Rainer!"; "Ist dies eine Kirche oder eine Kunstgalerie?"; "Die Ausstellung ist wie ein Schluck Wasser," and "Zusammenführung-Kunst-Kirche gelungen! Die Kirche lebt mit der Kunst! P.S. Verständnis suchen-finden."

<sup>602</sup> Annenkirche Dresden Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Annenkirche-Dresden/143075822506448> (accessed January 15, 2018).

<sup>603</sup> Dr. Lesa Mason, art historian and former educator at Kunst-Station Sankt Peter (1987–1999), in email conversation with the author, June–July 2017.

took part in the events all played a role. The Kunst-Station Sankt Peter found new words; the art was one integral means to [helping] the language of the real world come into the realm of existence and faith...<sup>604</sup>

Her account reveals how the pastor's commitment to contemporary art translated to its gradual integration into the spiritual life of the community. The beginnings in Stuttgart were likewise difficult, as the situation with Werner Knaupp's *Lebensspur* has shown.<sup>605</sup> Helmut Müller recollects his early years at Hospital Church, "At the first exhibitions one was rather reserved and also irritated."<sup>606</sup> According to the pastor, what subsequently led to public approval of contemporary art exhibitions in his church was a learning process that led to the realization "that this [engagement with secular culture] was not about any rival events but rather a specific and qualified encounter between contemporary art and church as well as about the revision of a centuries-long deficit of the Protestant Church."<sup>607</sup> In both of these cases, the steady and ongoing commitment to collaboration with secular art was conducive to eventually positive public reactions. Nevertheless, church visitors can occasionally speak against exhibitions even at these established centers for secular art and culture. In the opinion of one parish member at Saint Peter some events, e.g. lighting candles under Hack's *Base Camp*, are meaningful for Christians but other projects, e.g. exhibition of New Talents Biennale at Kunst-Station, "have little or nothing to do with the church; they are made for [the] city and tourists."<sup>608</sup> At the convocation of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Württemberg in 2006, a debate took place regarding Mara Wagenführ's exhibition at Hospitalhof that addressed the subject of prostitution and included a

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<sup>604</sup> Ibid.

<sup>605</sup> See page 133 in chapter four of this thesis.

<sup>606</sup> Helmut Müller in email conversation with the author (November 2017): "Bei den ersten Ausstellungen war man zuerst mehrheitlich eher zurückhaltend und verwundert und wohl auch irritiert."

<sup>607</sup> Ibid. "Das hat sich geändert, als man realisierte, dass es um keine Konkurrenzveranstaltungen, sondern eine spezifische und qualifizierte Begegnung von Gegenwartskunst und Kirche geht und um die Aufarbeitung eines jahrhundertealten Defizits der Evangelischen Kirche."

<sup>608</sup> Cologne resident Leonore Kalmes has attended numerous exhibitions at Saint Peter since the 1980s. Kalmes in conversation with the author, April 26, 2017.

provocative image of a *Piratenbraut*.<sup>609</sup> In view of the dispute, Müller concludes that every case is different and thus comprehensive valuation is a problematic task. So whereas a general or even most common mode of public response is impossible to determine, the following conclusions are due. First, exhibitions of contemporary non-sacramental art in active churches have constantly found both advocates and opponents since the 1980s. Second, when pastors themselves are deeply involved in organising art-related events, their commitment is conveyed to the community members; ergo, the levels of understanding and acceptance of contemporary art are expected to be high when the initiative for exhibitions comes from churches' spiritual leaders. Third, public reactions consist of various necessarily subjective stances towards works of contemporary art. What can deepen our understanding of these stances is a profile of an exhibition visitor. Positing the post-secular character of today's society, chapter six underscores individuality of reactions in discussing the experience of contemporary art in ecclesiastical settings.

As a so-called "city-church," Saint John's does not have a fixed parish but is open to everyone.<sup>610</sup> Located in the center of Düsseldorf, the church also lies in the close proximity to numerous art galleries and institutions such as Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Museum Kunstpalast, and the Arts Academy of Düsseldorf. With two to three art exhibitions per year, the Church of Saint John becomes the meeting place for Christian and non-Christian city-dwellers—those coming to the church for worship and those wanting to see its architecture, the arts, or to wander inside during bad weather. For Barbara Wengler, the multifariousness of the public is an

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<sup>609</sup> Helmut Müller in email conversation with the author (November 2017). See the exhibition catalog edited by Müller, *Mara Wagenführ, Ich glaube, wir sind Engel: Malerei, Installation, Stickarbeiten* (Stuttgart: Hospitalhof, 2006).

<sup>610</sup> For discussion of the concept "city-churches" and its application in Germany, see Herbert Bauer, *City-Kirchen: Bilanz und Perspektiven* (Hamburg: EB-Verlag, 1995).

advantage for everyone.<sup>611</sup> The meeting of diverse perspectives creates a lively social place—a resonance deriving from dissonance. Wengler says that a lot of new people who come to Saint John’s for its exhibitions and cultural events are surprised by the social vivacity of the place; they therefore appreciate the role of contemporary art exhibitions in transforming a traditional church into a dynamic urban center. Similarly, the Christian visitors note the enlivening quality of the arts and even express wishes for permanent integration of certain contemporary artworks.<sup>612</sup> On the other hand, Wengler added that once an elderly man was so distressed by an alien art object that he announced to the pastor that Saint John’s was “no longer his church.” In few exceptional cases a worshipper could also complain about removal of the pews for the sake of an art installation. And yet, she asserts, opponents represent an extreme minority. Thus in an urban setting such as Düsseldorf the presence of secular non-sacramental art in a sacred space is viewed as emblematic of the diverse perspectives inhabiting the city and, per se, as attuned to the larger social environment.

### **5.3.3. Catholic and Protestant approaches to contemporary art**

In the beginning of the present inquiry, we took note of Catholic and Protestant approaches to traditional church arts that marked the age of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation.<sup>613</sup> More precisely, we distinguished the former as the position that emphasized the role of image contemplation in exercising devotion and of total visual environments inside churches as

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<sup>611</sup> Barbara Wengler in conversation with the author, Düsseldorf, May 5, 2017.

<sup>612</sup> Ibid. For example, Katharina Grosse’s monumental sculpture *Ellipse* installed at the façade of Saint John’s in 2010 was especially popular among the regulars of the church. Due to the financial restraints, however, it was not possible for the church to acquire the artwork. See Gregor Jansen, ed., *Katharina Grosse: Transparent Eyeballs* (Cologne: Walther König, 2011).

<sup>613</sup> Chapter two, pages 29–36, in this thesis.



conducive to religious experiences. In comparison, the reformers and their followers created a language-dominated and education-oriented culture that has historically defined the interior spaces of their churches. Furthermore, we paid attention to the views on specifically modern art put forward by the Second Vatican Council and influential Protestant theologians in the twentieth century.<sup>614</sup> Here the discussion about the outcomes of engagement between secular art and old living churches necessitates a consideration of current Catholic and Protestant approaches to contemporary art in their sacred spaces. Do they reflect or contradict historical standpoints?

The parallel study of exhibitions at Saint Peter in Cologne and Hospital Church in Stuttgart between 1987 and 2017 has provided us with an opportunity to observe the developments at one Catholic and one Protestant houses of worship. On the one hand, the two cases showed adherence to certain ideas about the visual arts established within their respective branches of Christianity. So Mennekes' frequent choice of large abstract panels and canvases for the apse of Saint Peter, e.g. works by James Brown, Helmut Federle, Gloria Friedmann, or Raimund Girke,<sup>615</sup> falls in line with the Catholic stress upon the possibilities of contemplating the eternal and experiencing the spiritual through the process of viewing images. Or, Müller's recurrent incorporation of text-based art in his church and reliance on image-sermons are consistent with Protestant privileging of word over image, the ear over the eye. On the other hand, Mennekes drastically emptied the interior space of Saint Peter, while Müller long defended the busy visual appearance of Hospital Church.<sup>616</sup> In other words, they also demonstrated attitudes opposite to those that one might expect from historical Catholic and Protestant perspectives in regard to

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<sup>614</sup> Chapter one, pages 14–5 and 9–10, respectively.

<sup>615</sup> See Mennekes, *Triptychon*. A great number of examples from the catalog reflects Mennekes' early predilection for purely non-objective works that can be described as evoking the sense of the sublime; e.g. pages 58, 62, 66, 70, 78, 82, 86, 118, 134, 142, 146, 150, 154, 166, 174, and 182 in *Triptychon*.

<sup>616</sup> See pages 184–6 in this thesis.

church arts. By inference, the two case studies reveal that the pastors' individual beliefs played significant roles in the relationship between contemporary art and their respective churches—at times more significant than the roles of established denominational notions.

Do other examples of secular art in old German churches prove similarly inconsonant views, or is there a single mode of conduct when it comes to organising art exhibitions in ecclesiastical settings?<sup>617</sup> Considering the paradigms of coexistence discussed earlier in this chapter, we can observe that Catholic and Protestant churches equally provide examples of artworks as guests, artworks as surrounds, artworks as bridges, and artworks as morals. Thus they comparably embrace art that is site-specific, society-specific, or both. To put it another way, they both invite art that can respond to the old architecture of their churches, to the social life of their active communities, or both (e.g. Thomas Kilpper, *A Lighthouse for Lampedusa*, 2017). Second, the case studies in this thesis showed that contemporary art exhibitions in Catholic and Protestant churches often included works by the same artists, notably by the participants of the thematic exhibitions of the 1980s, and even identical works of art. So, Gabriela Nasfeter's *Light Pyramid* entered not only Catholic or Protestant sacred spaces but, curiously, the Coptic Orthodox church in Berlin. Third, both denominations in Germany frequently resort to the visual language of contemporary art when addressing pressing social issues such as the current refugee crisis. When we take into account permanent integration of contemporary artworks into old worship spaces, further similarities between the two branches of Christianity emerge. They include recent tendencies for, one, emptying of liturgical space and modernizing of visual compositions in altar areas and, two, assimilation of abstract paintings and text-based artworks either into interior or

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<sup>617</sup> Answering this question in full requires a separate research project, which would include theological explanations, mediation strategies, and thorough historical accounts of the place of art in Catholic and Protestant churches. For current purposes, the given provisional remarks serve to describe one of the outcomes of the three-decade-old engagement between secular art and old living churches in Germany.

onto exterior church spaces. Lastly, the Catholic tradition of the Artists' Ash Wednesday (*Aschermittwoch der Künstler*, originated in the mid-twentieth century) has recently been espoused by some of the regional Protestant churches in Germany.<sup>618</sup> Altogether, such Catholic and Protestant practices exhibit overlaps in their principles and methods related to contemporary art.

At the same time, we can recognize certain distinctions between current Catholic and Protestant approaches to secular art in sacred spaces. Recent publication from the German Culture Assembly outlined the present-day cultural engagement in both churches.<sup>619</sup> From the Catholic perspective art is described as “non-discursive path of faith disclosure,” while future Catholic objectives include a continuing increase in the churches’ dialogue with the contemporary visuals arts.<sup>620</sup> In the Protestant view art is part of the culture at large, which is regarded integral to the Christian faith, and it therefore holds “its firm place” in German communities, schools, and academies.<sup>621</sup> We see that the two approaches diverge in their understandings of the functions of art: for the Catholics art can lead to profound spiritual experiences and for the Protestants it is valuable in education. This explains the latter’s more guided and communal presentation of contemporary art, i.e. a number of accompanying lectures, talks, and seminars as well as popularity of image- or art-sermons in Protestant churches.<sup>622</sup> On the contrary, the highly

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<sup>618</sup> For the principles of the Catholic tradition, see Georg Maria Roers, *Die ungleichen Brüder: Künstlerreden und Predigten zum Aschermittwoch von 1986 bis 2004* (Munich: Verlag Sankt Michaelsbund, 2005). For examples of Protestant *Aschermittwoch der Künstler*, see Evangelischen Medien Service Zentrum der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Landeskirche Hannovers, “Aschermittwoch der Künste,” Kunstinfo, [http://www.kunstinfo.net/aschermittwoch\\_der\\_kuenste](http://www.kunstinfo.net/aschermittwoch_der_kuenste) (accessed January 18, 2018).

<sup>619</sup> “Daten und Fakten zum Kulturengagement der Kirchen,” in Zimmermann and Geissler, *Die Kirchen*, 97–105.

<sup>620</sup> “Kunst als nicht-diskursiver Weg der Glaubenserschließung.” Ibid., 105.

<sup>621</sup> “Kultur hat ihren festen Platz in den 16.200 evangelischen Kirchengemeinden in Deutschland, in den 8.953 evangelischen Kindertagesstätten, den 975 evangelischen Schulen, den 16 evangelischen Akademien und an vielen anderen Orten.” Ibid., 98.

<sup>622</sup> The emphases on intellectual discussions about contemporary art and its role in educational programs of Protestant churches are evident in Frank Hiddemann’s exploration of church exhibitions. See Hiddemann, *Site-Specific Art im Kirchenraum*, especially pages 88–90, 251–2, and 255–6.

personal, visceral, and even existential experience of art is valued in the Catholic churches.<sup>623</sup> Pursuing analogous questions, theologian David Plüss and art historian/philosopher Johannes Stückelberger argue that for the Protestants secular art communicates the reality of the world and is therefore meant to be *mentally reflected upon*.<sup>624</sup> In contrast, they point out, for the Catholics art overcomes and transcends the earthly realm and, thus pointing towards the eternal, should be *spiritually meditated*.<sup>625</sup> Nevertheless, these distinctions cannot make a sweeping statement regarding all the Christian institutions in the country. It does happen that contemporary art becomes the focus of Catholic educational events and that Protestant pastors invite their congregations to contemplate the spiritual dimension of non-Christian art. Furthermore, the heterogeneity of art projects that take place in old active churches stands above all for the diversity of individual opinions among German clergymen. Just as the decoration of post-Tridentine churches lacked a singular pattern and varied from one bishop to another, in the twenty-first century there is not a general direction for art exhibitions in old active churches. The Church of Saint John in Düsseldorf is the main church of the Protestants in Düsseldorf.<sup>626</sup> But being “a city-church,” it is a multifaceted center that remains open throughout the day and hosts varied cultural events for all groups and individuals. Accordingly, the audience at contemporary art exhibitions organised in this church is not limited to the Protestants or even to Christians. For her curatorial work at the Church of Saint John, Barbara Wengler received a

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<sup>623</sup> After Wieland Schmied “existential” has been one of the keywords used by Catholic writers in discussion of contemporary non-devotional art. For instance, Stefan Kraus uses it to explain why the Catholic Church seeks contact with secular art: “Kunst und Kirche leisten eine Form der Auseinandersetzung mit existenziellen Themen, die in eine andere Form nicht zu übersetzen sind.” See Stefan Kraus, “Chancen einer zweckfreien Kulturförderung durch Kirche,” in Hofmann, *Freude, Trauer, Angst, Hoffnung*, 52–4.

<sup>624</sup> David Plüss, and Johannes Stückelberger, “Hat Kunst eine Konfession: Ein Schreibgespräch,” in Henke, *Kunst und Religion im Zeitalter des Postsäkularen*, 69–84. Emphasis in italics is by the author of this thesis.

<sup>625</sup> Ibid., 82–3. Emphasis in italics is by the author of this thesis.

<sup>626</sup> Pastor Uwe Vetter, “Church in the City,” Johanneskirche StadtKirche, <http://www.johanneskirche.org/city-church.html> (accessed January 13, 2018).

manual titled “Art in Churches: A Practical Guide to Exhibitions.”<sup>627</sup> Published by the Regional Church of Rhineland in consultation with art- and culture-commissioners of the Evangelical Church of Germany (EKD), it is one of numerous handbooks of the kind that provide guidelines for exhibitions in Protestant churches across the country.<sup>628</sup> Their wide spread suggests the possibility of a single mode of conduct after all, leastways within one branch of Christianity. Such conclusion, however, would be problematic for the following reasons. The manual offers advice without placing exhibition organizers under any obligations to follow the written recommendations. Hence, one can accept certain guiding principles and disregard others. More significantly still is the fact that today pastors and priests themselves are rarely responsible for curating art exhibitions in their churches. As in Stuttgart after Müller’s retirement or in exhibitions at the Kassel churches during *documenta*, external curators are often in charge of the matters of contemporary art. Or, as during *Artists in the Parish* and *KlangSchatten*, artists can conceptualize and realize projects for church spaces on their own. In such cases the manuals like “Art in Churches” are of little to no weight. In Düsseldorf, Wengler conceives art events for the Church of Saint John in consultation with art historians from Arts Academy of Düsseldorf and the invited artists.<sup>629</sup> Her work depends on the artists’ proposals, themes of concomitant cultural events at the church, and funding available for art-related activities. So while Wengler asks herself how each project can be relevant to the questions that Christian people raise in the church, a short exhibition manual does not play a big part in the organisational process. Thinking about the phenomenon of secular art in old churches, Wengler states that first and foremost art

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<sup>627</sup> *Kunst in Kirchen: Eine praktische Ausstellungshilfe* (Düsseldorf: Evangelische Kirche im Rheinland, 2013).

<sup>628</sup> Released by regional Protestant churches over the past decade, such manuals abound across Germany. To give a few examples, editions of *Kunst in Kirchen: Eine praktische Ausstellungshilfe* were recently published by Evangelische Kirche von Westfalen (2013); Verein für Kirche und Kunst in der Evangelischen Landeskirche in Württemberg (2013); Bremische Evangelische Kirche (2012); and Haus Kirchlicher Dienste der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Landeskirche Hannovers (2012). To the knowledge of the author, no analogous handbooks are offered by the dioceses in Germany.

<sup>629</sup> Barbara Wengler in conversation with the author, Düsseldorf, May 5, 2017.

projects are “site-specific because [each] church room is different from other church interiors.”<sup>630</sup> Thus particular spatial conditions exercise influence on art exhibitions to a larger degree than denominational ideas. That is why, the present thesis works with the method “image as insight”<sup>631</sup> and thereby privileges the art object and its reception over the churches’ religious motivations for engagement with the secular visual arts. Whereas the generalization about Protestant or Catholic approaches to contemporary art in churches is neither possible nor desirable, the issue of the viewer’s experience figures importantly throughout this thesis and is at the center of chapter six.

#### **5.3.4. How strange is the place of contemporary art in churches?**

In the early twenty-first century James Elkins tried to grasp the place of religion in contemporary art.<sup>632</sup> Because of the elusive character of the subject the art historian decided to tersely define such place as “strange.” This chapter in turn has attempted to pinpoint the place of contemporary art in old active German churches thirty years after Mennekes and Müller resolved to invite non-Christian artists to the two Christian spaces in, respectively, Cologne and Stuttgart. Borrowing Elkins’ prosaic but well-suited expression, we can likewise describe the place of secular art in churches as “strange.” An explanation is hereby due. What does this strangeness stand for and why does it resist further elucidation?

Most of the case studies presented in this thesis represent *temporary* exhibitions and installations of art: they appeared in diverse forms and for various purposes but eventually disassembled and left Christian houses of worship. Three decades of their coming and going resulted in the

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<sup>630</sup> Ibid.

<sup>631</sup> See pages 41–3 in chapter two of this thesis.

<sup>632</sup> See page 2 in this thesis.

cumulative residuum that is perceptible today in the examples of permanent assimilation of contemporary artworks into visual compositions of churches, in the common public adaptation to the phenomenon, or in the partial blending of Catholic and Protestant attitudes towards secular arts. The residuum of short-term projects also manifests in the established paradigms of coexistence between old active churches and contemporary non-sacramental art. Whether as reticent guests, well-disposed interveners, channels to churches' surroundings or appeals for ethical action, contemporary artworks in ecclesiastical settings relentlessly respond to the specifics of old architectural spaces on the one hand and to spiritual lives of active Christian communities on the other. The abovementioned case studies have accordingly demonstrated that these two aspects, rather than denominational theologies or pastoral interests, account for the "strange" place of contemporary non-sacramental art in sacred spaces.

Together, historical architectural structures and rituals of Christian communities contextualize the experience of contemporary art in *old active* churches. They are the two constants in the stream of multifarious exhibitions and heterogeneous cultural programs led by German churches. As such, they can be considered responsible for occasional *emergence of comparable paradigms or artistic patterns* (e.g. "white masses" or light installations). What is more, the two facets can help us to determine the place of contemporary art in old active churches. Specifically, secular art in ecclesiastical settings oscillates between old, historical character of a church building, including the Christian tradition associated with it, and new, contemporary ground on which it itself originates; between sacrality of liturgical space and profanity of the art world; between an enclosed religious site and a larger urban environment; between communal practices and individual contemplation; between the prevailing secularization narrative and the discourse on reemergence of religion in public sphere. Precisely this in-between, and indeed strange, state

makes our subject matter too elusive to pinpoint. If we consider the viewer's experience, another important question arises. How do the primary roles of historical architectural structures and living Christian communities qualify the encounter with contemporary art for a church visitor? To elaborate upon the inquiry, we pose further questions. How is this encounter different from experience of art in museums, galleries, or other public places? What makes spaces of old churches unique and how are these causes related to the spiritual situation of the twenty-first century in Germany? What are the terms we can use to understand the contemporary viewer's experience of secular art in sacred spaces? To address these questions, we now turn to the theoretical discussion of, first, old church spaces (6.1.) and, second, spiritual disposition of a contemporary man (6.2.). By looking at the former through the spatial lens and at the latter through the post-secular lens, we arrive at the synthesizing concept of *post-secular space* (6.3.).



## 6. Post-Secular Space

In conclusion to the previous chapter we have established that old church architecture and rituals of Christian communities are central to the investigation of the place of contemporary art in old active German churches as well as to the analysis of the visitor's experience. Having observed the primary roles of these two aspects through, first, the cases of Saint Peter and Hospital Church and, second, the paradigms of coexistence of the Christian religion and secular visual arts, this thesis argues for the emergence of a new type of space in old active churches in the twenty-first century and phenomenological meanings of this process. In order to qualify the distinct character of such space, this chapter deliberates the visitor's disposition (*Befindlichkeit*) and consequently puts forward a synthesizing concept "post-secular space." The term comprises two recent discourses. Firstly, Gernot Böhme's theory of atmospheres offers a phenomenological perspective on the visitor's experience. On the one hand, living church spaces are defined by their genius loci; their histories, traditions, and rituals. On the other hand, objects of secular contemporary art emit their own "ecstasies," thereby altering atmospheres of the given religious sites. Amidst the resulting tension is the visitor's bodily presence. Secondly, topical discussions of post-secularism suggest a renewed significance of religion in both public and private spheres of the contemporary life. Avoiding polemical claims to the unequivocal return of religion in the twenty-first century, we can consider the possibility of post-secular spaces at the intersection of two realms—sacred and profane. One of such intersections is produced when contemporary non-religious art enters historical ecclesiastical settings. The resulting post-secular space is highly liminal, oscillating between sacred and profane, old and new, communal and individual, ceremonial and mundane.

## 6.1. The spatial analysis

For centuries church buildings with its arresting façades and tall belfries have been distinguishing features of German cities and towns. Today old church edifices are historical markers in the midst of increasingly modernized urban scenes. Surrounded by office complexes, shopping centers, and heavy-traffic streets, the muted and soft-lit ecclesiastical ambiances appear as oases of calm in the hectic electric environs. Along these lines, Koestlé-Cate describes the visitor's experience of entering a sacred Christian site noting that "most people would probably attest to an immediate sense of being somewhere beyond or outside daily life in a way that seems unique to these buildings."<sup>633</sup> The cultural historian argues that the impression of uniqueness results not from the knowledge of the church's religious purpose or history but rather one's sensory experience of the space—"a bodily response to the distinctive atmosphere, the vastness of the chamber, its sonorous acoustics and mitigated quality of light."<sup>634</sup> Then considering the visitor's experience of contemporary art inside the church, Koestlé-Cate asks the reader, "What conditions determine the encounter with art as an aspect of one's experience of the sacred space? [...] is it an isolable object within a building that [the visitors] find or is the observer aware of an entire environment stretching away from the focal point of the artwork in question?"<sup>635</sup> Koestlé-Cate's questions undoubtedly correspond to those we have raised at the close of chapter five. While he responds to them through philosophical inquiry into the concepts of event, duration and porosity,<sup>636</sup> the theoretical framework of this section is built on the spatial turn and its specific branch—atmospheres. Without contesting Koestlé-Cate's methodology, the following discussion

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<sup>633</sup> Koestlé-Cate, *A Fractious Embrace*, 19.

<sup>634</sup> Ibid.

<sup>635</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>636</sup> Koestlé-Cate consults the theories of Alfred North Whitehead, Henri Bergson, and Walter Benjamin for the discussion of, respectively, event, duration, and porosity. See *ibid.*, 20–47.

offers another perspective on the sensory experience in ecclesiastical spaces. Ultimately, the two approaches supplement each other and allow for a deeper understanding of contemporary art exhibitions in European churches.

In order to determine the role of historical architectural structures in our case studies, it is first necessary to locate the element of the “old” in the given sacred spaces. What precisely is *old* about old German churches for a contemporary person? What are most essential differences between old church architecture and modern or contemporary church buildings; between old churches and museum spaces as exhibition venues? What is decisively unique about Romanesque, Gothic, or Baroque churches and therefore cannot be replicated in the present-day constructions? To answer these questions the thesis turns to an expert in Gothic architecture, Otto von Simson, whose major work *The Gothic Cathedral* (1956) introduced insightful connections between architectural structures of medieval churches and people’s visions, perceptions, and experiences thereof. Through an analysis of a later text dedicated to Saint Elisabeth Church in Marburg (1983) the focus on the Gothic style in Simson’s most renowned book is supplemented by his view of historical churches in general and of their meanings for the visitors, whether churchgoers or not. In other words, the art historian elaborates on those aspects of ecclesiastical architecture that fall under the category of architectural phenomenology. This is why consulting the author of *The Gothic Cathedral* is conducive to understanding contemporary reactions to the “old” element of church buildings. Following Simson, it is appropriate to engage in phenomenological description of the visitor’s experience in regard to art exhibitions in old churches. How can an encounter with contemporary non-devotional art in an old sacred space affect one’s disposition? How can aspects of history and traditions be activated in one’s memory and imagination? Is it possible for these aspects to translate into certain types of interpretations?

The method that relates to Simson's ideas but addresses such concerns from a present-day standpoint is Gernot Böhme's theory of atmospheres and, particularly, the notion of architectural atmospheres. Proceeding from the thought of Simson to that of Böhme, the following spatial analysis serves to explicate the role of old architecture in the contemporary viewer's experience of secular art in historical German churches.

### 6.1.1. Old church architecture

Characteristics of old church architecture are often studied via deconstructive analysis, which implies description of tectonic parts and explanation of their synthesis. It is evidently an approach that the present thesis could apply to the given question of ecclesiastical settings. Alternatively, *The Gothic Cathedral* by a German art historian Otto von Simson (1912–1993) offers a view of old Christian buildings that takes into account cultural contexts of their production and symbolic meanings of their experience.<sup>637</sup> Therefore his thoughts help us to appreciate not merely certain architectural achievements of the past centuries but also the experiential value of old cathedrals and town churches. By definition Simson's research pertains to the spaces of Saint Peter and Hospital Church, both of which represent the late Gothic building design. In order to refer to churches from other historical periods, we subsequently determine those qualities of the Gothic form that are germane to the contemporary perception of other types of old Christian edifices. The primary objective here is to identify the specificity of *old church spaces* so that the exploration of their *experience* may follow.

In an attempt to pinpoint the birth of the Gothic cathedral, Simson explored the vision behind its construction and related it to the medieval understanding of reality. "The Middle Ages lived in

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<sup>637</sup> Otto von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral: Origins of Gothic Architecture and the Medieval Concept of Order* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1956).

the presence of the supernatural, which impressed itself upon every aspect of human life.”<sup>638</sup> This omnipresence of the supernatural was both the cause and result of metaphysical associations that medieval man attached to physical objects and phenomena. In short, medieval man perceived the surrounding world *symbolically*. As part of the world, architecture was accordingly “designed and experienced as a representation of an ultimate reality.”<sup>639</sup> Medieval architects and artists believed that their creation was nothing less than revelation that transcended human existence, so their wish to behold sacred reality was always the governing motive. Medieval works of architecture and art originated in the author’s religious experience and, in turn, were to bring religious experience to other people. In Simson’s words, those churches were created “in response to a powerful demand for an architecture particularly attuned to religious experience.”<sup>640</sup> That is to say, the architect realized that buildings could produce a certain type of effect on human beings. Essentially, Simson’s book teaches us that the symbolic vision of Gothic churches resulted in the discovery of the capability of architectural space to move the feelings and impress the mind.

On such premise, Simson examined how the symbolic instinct had been transformed into specific tectonic forms of medieval churches. He proposed two key aspects that had together distinguished the Gothic style—the use of light and the relationship between appearance and structure—and then delved into the multiple differences among Gothic, Romanesque, and Byzantine edifices that could be revealed through those two facets. Rather than to recount the dissimilarities, more illuminating for the purposes of this chapter is to decipher those qualities that Simson attributed to church forms in general. First, speaking of the measure of old churches

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<sup>638</sup> Ibid., xv.

<sup>639</sup> Ibid., xvii.

<sup>640</sup> Ibid., 10.

he pointed out that they had been built “to reproduce the structure of the universe.”<sup>641</sup> This purpose was more significant than either beauty or even practical purpose of the buildings: “The Creation appeared as the first of God’s self-revelations, the Incarnation of the Word as the second. Between these two theophanies medieval man perceived [...] ultimate meaning and structure of the cosmos.”<sup>642</sup> Second, regarding the use of light, Simson explained that its great significance for the medieval architect had stemmed from the Platonic metaphysics of the Middle Ages. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, light was “conceived as the transcendental reality that engenders the universe and illuminates our intellect for the perception of truth.” For these reasons, Simson explicated, it had been “the most direct manifestation of God.”<sup>643</sup> However—here we arrive at one of the key arguments in the book—such metaphysical and theological views on either the measure or the light in medieval houses of worship are inaccessible to the contemporary perception. Whether in the mid-twentieth century, when Simson wrote *The Gothic Cathedral*, or in the early twenty-first century, the experience of old churches is inevitably different from the medieval vision of sacred architecture. By this logic, the original perception of Christian buildings from any historical period is irreversibly detached from sensitivities of our own age. In this case, can the two aspects that Simson brought to the forefront of his research help us to pinpoint the element of the “old” in old churches? On the one hand, the measure of medieval churches served as the model of the universe and therefore assisted believers in grasping the connection between a specific sacred space and ultimate reality. Lacking the aforesaid symbolic instinct, the contemporary visitor to an old church cannot have an internal resonance with the Christian doctrine of the creation of the universe. Alternatively though, she *recollects* the Christian story of God’s creation of the world, which is communicated through the

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<sup>641</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>642</sup> Ibid., 35–6.

<sup>643</sup> Ibid., 52–3.

church building. On the other hand, without associating light with the Incarnation<sup>644</sup> a contemporary person can appreciate cathedral light in terms of its physical or aesthetic qualities.<sup>645</sup> Importantly, either case points to the immateriality of light and hence its ability to transcend the corporeal reality. Citing medieval philosopher Robert Grosseteste, Simson observed that light in the Middle Ages had been “the mediator between bodiless and bodily substances, a spiritual body, an embodied spirit...”<sup>646</sup> Working on the subject in the 1940–50s, the art historian did not infer that Grosseteste’s notion of light could be relevant to a contemporary person. In contrast, the cases of artistic light installations discussed in chapter five have shown that the connotative, anagogic value that medieval churchgoers attributed to light can be pertinent in the early twenty-first century. That is, the contemporary church visitor can experience light in old German churches in a symbolic manner: connecting it to certain ideas, and in some cases beliefs, about transcendence. Old sacred spaces *remind* the visitor of the Christian concept of transcendence, which stimulates the visitor’s contemplation of the term that may or may not expand beyond the religious meaning. So although today’s experience of historical church spaces categorically differs from their original purpose, the two aspects that Otto von Simson underlined in *The Gothic Cathedral* provide insights into those conceptual elements of old church architecture that are not insignificant for a contemporary person. Through the means of measure and light, old church buildings tell the stories of creation and transcendence to contemporary Western visitors, who in their turn do not have to be Christian believers in order to remember those stories.

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<sup>644</sup> “Christian theology is centered in the mystery of the Incarnation, which in the Gospel of St. John is perceived as light illuminating the world.” Ibid., 55.

<sup>645</sup> “The sunlight filtering through the transparent walls of a Gothic cathedral is for us either a physical phenomenon to be explained in terms of physics or an aesthetic one that may or may not awaken religious reflections within us.” Ibid.

<sup>646</sup> Ibid., 51.

Nearly thirty years after the publication of *The Gothic Cathedral* Simson wrote a lecture titled “What does the Marburg Church of Saint Elisabeth mean for us today?”<sup>647</sup> Addressing his audience in the early 1980s, the art historian extended the arguments that he had earlier made in the book to reveal meaningful experiences not only of the cathedral but of historical church spaces at large. Pointing out that every sacred Christian building, irrespective of its style, is a symbol of the Heavenly Jerusalem,<sup>648</sup> Simson suggested that an idiosyncratic and significant gestalt of any old church transcended its historical contingency because the experience it offered could surpass that of a mere recognition of a time period. Instead, old church spaces afford the experience of that which is “vital” or “principal”—the *Wesentliche*.<sup>649</sup> Importantly, even a contemporary person could be sensible of the *Wesentliche*: “Beyond all theological speculations, even today we perceive in the serene and clear sharpness of the [church] proportions something valid, [something] that might take hold of us hardly less than of the human in the thirteenth century.”<sup>650</sup> Furthermore, Simson underlined that old sacred buildings—Gothic, Romanesque or other—could awaken in their visitors “the feeling of the numinous” regardless whether the latter were believers or not.<sup>651</sup> He closed the speech by accentuating the significant role of old churches in the world overburdened with empty media images and superficial visual clutters. The monumental language of historical ecclesiastical buildings, Simson stated, revealed the

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<sup>647</sup> Otto von Simson, “Was bedeutet uns die Elisabethkirche in Marburg heute?”, in Simson, *Von der Macht des Bildes im Mittelalter* (Berlin: Mann, 1993), 117–31. The lecture was co-organized by the Protestant church parish and the Hessian Art Historical Association (*Hessische Kirchengeschichtliche Vereinigung*), and took place in the Church of Saint Elisabeth on May 31, 1983.

<sup>648</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>649</sup> *Ibid.*, 130. Simson borrowed the descriptor “*Wesentliche*” from a nineteenth-century art and cultural historian Jacob Burckhardt.

<sup>650</sup> *Ibid.*, 129. The original reads, “Jenseits aller theologischen Spekulationen empfinden wir wohl auch heute in der ruhigen und klaren Strenge dieser Verhältnisse etwas Gültiges, das uns kaum weniger ergreifen mag als den Menschen des 13. Jahrhunderts.”

<sup>651</sup> *Ibid.*, 131. With “the feeling of the numinous” Simson refers to the philosophy of Rudolf Otto, for whom the Gothic style embodied the numinous in art and architecture. Curiously, Simson argued against confining the experience of the numinous, or the sublime, to the Gothic art and architecture: “Ich glaube zwar nicht, daß wir dieses Erlebnis des Erhabenen und Heiligen auf die Gotik beschränken müssen.”



*Wesentliche* in a way that no example of contemporary architecture could emulate.<sup>652</sup> Thus, he restated the conclusions that we have earlier drawn from *The Gothic Cathedral*, but this time pertaining to a wide range of historical church styles. What defines the experience of old sacred architecture for a contemporary person is therefore its power not necessarily to move the feelings and impress the mind, which Simson accentuated in the medieval relationship to worship spaces, but specifically to evoke memories about the biggest existential questions, which for centuries permeated the dominating cultural and social tradition in Western Europe. Today, this is what sets historical ecclesiastical spaces apart from other public sites and, in addition, distinguishes them specifically from modern or contemporary Christian buildings.

Representing a modern architect's perspective approximately concurrent to *The Gothic Cathedral*, Rudolf Schwarz (1897–1961) likewise recognized that medieval churches had originally been built as models of the whole cosmos—"a revelation of eternal structure"—and similarly to Simson maintained that such reality of the Middle Ages was no longer extant in the twentieth century.<sup>653</sup> Hereto the architect added, "This does not mean that 'in themselves' [the great realities of medieval cathedrals] are no longer true. No, they are as true to us as on their first day and they move us deeply."<sup>654</sup> While arguing against architectural historicism throughout his treatise *The Church Incarnate*, i.e. against producing buildings in any old style, Schwarz nevertheless held that "[d]eep in our hearts we know what the solemn words of the old cathedrals mean."<sup>655</sup> We can interpret the "solemn words" as the Christian stories, including those of creation and transcendence, and the place "deep in our hearts" as repository of our memories,

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<sup>652</sup> Ibid.

<sup>653</sup> See Schwarz, *The Church Incarnate*, 8–9, 173–4, and 220. The original German publication is titled *Vom Bau der Kirche* (Wurzburg: Werkbund-Verlag, 1938.)

<sup>654</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>655</sup> Ibid.

including the remembrance of the Christian religion.<sup>656</sup> Schwarz's concise remarks—"move us deeply" and "deep in our hearts"—are further revealing. Even though the architect did not expand on them, the expressions reveal his belief in experiential values of old church spaces. Together, the thoughts of Simson and Schwarz highlight those *phenomenological* characteristics of old churches that are instructive for the exploration of Gernot Böhme's notion of atmospheres. The latter is a product of the late twentieth century and, as may be argued, an example of a post-secular academic discourse. Were Simson and Schwarz to contemplate sacred architecture a few decades later, perhaps their ideas would have demonstrated similarities to Böhme's philosophy. The analysis of theoretical approaches by Simson and Böhme especially demonstrates how the two lines of reasoning are congenial to one another. So bearing in mind the conceptions about old churches from *The Gothic Cathedral* and *The Church Incarnate*, we now proceed to the study of atmospheres.

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<sup>656</sup> Although referring to medieval worshippers, Rudolf Schwarz too pointed out the role of the Gothic cathedral in activating memory and helping believers to contemplate the history of Christianity. Regarding the church apse with its altarpieces, he thus noted that "[a]ccording to the seasons of the sacred year it displays various occurrences and at the greatest occasion the whole body of history is unfolded as a shining order. And thus at least the most sacred spot takes part in the cathedral, reaching out from the form of the age into the fullness of sacred history." *Ibid.*, 207.

## 6.1.2. Architectural atmospheres and churches

Atmosphere as a philosophical concept appeared in academic writing throughout the late twentieth century, reaching its acme in a developed theory by a German philosopher Gernot Böhme (b.1937). It is another German scholar however, Hermann Schmitz (b.1928), who is considered to be the founder of the research.<sup>657</sup> In 1969, he introduced atmospheres as a supplementary term that supported his discussion of “emotion-spheres” (*Gefühlsräume*) and helped to explain emotions as “quasi-objective” phenomena that filled the space in which the person was present.<sup>658</sup> Schmitz’s ideas bore influence on a number of theorists, among whom particularly Gernot Böhme and Tonino Griffero elaborated on the concept of atmospheres and put forward its principles and implications. While the latter’s *Atmosferologia* (2010) is an informative systematic source,<sup>659</sup> here we examine the former’s thought on the subject not only due to its chronologically preceding place but also for the following two reasons.<sup>660</sup> First, while Griffero largely follows Schmitz’s definition of atmospheres and thus focuses on their emotional aspect, Böhme evolves his own ideas beyond the question of perception and delves into the issue of the production of atmospheres, which includes, *inter alia*, the role of architecture. Second, among Böhme’s writings we find an essay that specifically explores church atmospheres and considers the profane use thereof.<sup>661</sup> It propitiously allows for, first, comparing Simson’s and

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<sup>657</sup> Rainer Kazig, “Presentation of Hermann Schmitz’ paper, ‘Atmospheric Spaces’,” *Ambiances* (2016), <http://journals.openedition.org/ambiances/709> (accessed February 13, 2018), 1.

<sup>658</sup> Ibid., 2–3. The publication in question is Hermann Schmitz, *System der Philosophie: Der Gefühlsraum* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1969). For the most recent edition of Schmitz’s writing on atmospheres, see Schmitz, *Atmosphären* (Freiburg: Alber, 2014).

<sup>659</sup> Tonino Griffero, *Atmosferologia: Estetica degli spazi emozionali* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 2010). The English version of the book is Griffero, *Atmospheres: Aesthetics of Emotional Spaces* (London: Routledge, 2014).

<sup>660</sup> Böhme’s first publication at length dedicated to atmospheres was *Atmosphäre: Essays zur neuen Ästhetik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1995).

<sup>661</sup> Gernot Böhme, “Atmosphären kirchlicher Räume,” in Böhme, *Architektur und Atmosphäre* (Munich: Fink, 2006), 139–50.

Böhme's views of Gothic, i.e. old, churches; and second, taking a phenomenological perspective on the visitor's experience of contemporary art exhibitions in active ecclesiastical settings.

Gernot Böhme arrives at the term *atmosphere* while arguing against the traditional understanding of aesthetics and hence calling for “a new aesthetics.”<sup>662</sup> He argues that from Immanuel Kant to Theodor Adorno and Jean-François Lyotard the field of aesthetics had relied on judgement, or “justification for a positive or negative response to something,” and thus had completely neglected the question of experience.<sup>663</sup> Due to the resulting dominance of language in both aesthetic and art theory, the object of art had long been denied its presence and the viewer the experience of such presence. As a response, Böhme proposes the new aesthetics—“a general theory of aesthetic work, understood as the production of atmospheres.”<sup>664</sup> In other words, atmosphere is the philosopher's solution for paying due attention to the viewer's perception of an object's presence. Holding an intermediary status between subject and object, atmospheres underpin the new aesthetics as the shared reality of the perceived and the perceiver.<sup>665</sup> The purpose of understanding this reality leads Böhme to delve into the conception of atmospheres. The in-between position is the key characteristic of atmospheres. It defines the relationship between environmental qualities of an object or place and human states during the experience of that object or place. For this reason Böhme's concept equally diverges from Walter Benjamin's aura and Hermann Schmitz's atmospheres, both of which are limited to the discussion of perception and therefore trapped in “the subjective-objective dichotomy.”<sup>666</sup> In order to relate the

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<sup>662</sup> Gernot Böhme, “Atmosphere as the Fundamental Concept of a New Aesthetics,” in *Thesis Eleven* 36 (1993), 113–26. The essay also appeared in a recent English-language anthology of Böhme's writings on the subject; see “Atmosphere, a Basic Concept of a New Aesthetic,” in Böhme, *Atmospheric Architectures: The Aesthetics of Felt Spaces* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 13–35.

<sup>663</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>664</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>665</sup> Ibid., 122. Because of such in-between position, the notion “atmosphere” cannot be misunderstood as a romanticist idea that communicates one's purely subjective experience.

<sup>666</sup> Ibid., 120.

term to the aesthetics of production, Böhme coins the term *ecstasies of things*. Simply put, it refers to the ability of objects to step outside of themselves and claim presence in the surrounding space.<sup>667</sup> As Böhme himself brings this to our attention, the term categorically disagrees with classical ontology because the latter conceives things as something enclosing and internally complete. According to the idea of the ecstasies of things, “[t]he form of a thing, however, also exerts an external effect. It radiates as it were into the environment, takes away the homogeneity of the surrounding space and fills it with tensions and suggestions of movement.”<sup>668</sup> Extending into the common environment, the combination of the ecstasies of several things can be sensed by humans precisely as atmospheres:

Conceived in this fashion, atmospheres are neither something objective, that is, qualities possessed by things, and yet they are something thinglike, belonging to the thing in that things articulate their presence through qualities—conceived as ecstasies. Nor are atmospheres something subjective, for example, determinations of a psychic state. And yet they are subjectlike, belong to subjects in that they are sensed in bodily presence by human beings and this sensing is at the same time a bodily state of being of subjects in space.<sup>669</sup>

Two factors are crucial here. First, the ecstasies of things clarify why atmospheres are situated in between the subject and the object. Second, atmospheres are contingent on the bodily presence of a person. So before we can turn to Böhme’s description of church atmospheres, it is necessary to unfold the significance of *bodily presence*.

Does one’s bodily presence remain significant in the age when telecommunications and social existence in the virtual realm increasingly occupy human lives? In particular, can the experience of architecture remain relevant for a technological civilization? To answer the question Böhme speaks of the difference between the objective body (*Körper*) and the subjective body (*Leib*),

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<sup>667</sup> See Böhme, “Das Ding und seine Ekstasen,” in *Atmosphäre: Essays zur neuen Ästhetik*, 225–46; and the English translation by Tina Engels-Schwarzpaul, “Ecstasies of Things: Ontology an Aesthetics of Thingness,” in *Atmospheric Architectures*, 37–54.

<sup>668</sup> Böhme, “Atmosphere as the Fundamental Concept of a New Aesthetics,” 121. See also “Ecstasies of Things: Ontology an Aesthetics of Thingness,” 51–4.

<sup>669</sup> Böhme, “Atmosphere as the Fundamental Concept of a New Aesthetics,” 122.

thereby borrowing the method from Hermann Schmitz.<sup>670</sup> The former is corporeal and relies on the five senses; the latter is at once felt and feeling. Consequently Böhme introduces the term that denotes the interplay between *Körper* and *Leib*: disposition (*Befindlichkeit*).<sup>671</sup> In German, the word *Befindlichkeit* stems from the reflexive verb *sich befinden* that means both “to be positioned” and “to feel.” According to Böhme, such ambiguity provides exactly the definition of bodily presence: to simultaneously be present in space (*Körper*) and to be disposed in a specific way (*Leib*). Importantly, the space of bodily presence cannot be geometrical space that is conceived in historical terms *topos* or *spatium*.<sup>672</sup> One of Böhme’s principal arguments is that the space of bodily presence is an atmosphere. On the one hand, atmospheres in which one finds oneself (*sich befindet*) can be sensed: “We sense expansiveness or tightness, we sense uplift or depression, we sense closeness and distance, and we sense movement suggestions.”<sup>673</sup> This is possible due to “generators of atmospheres,” or spatial categories, such as architectural forms, light, and sound. On the other hand, atmospheres can also be characterized by means of one’s disposition (*Befinden*): “*depressing, uplifting, expansive, or restrictive [...] serious, serene or melancholic*.”<sup>674</sup> That is, the subjective side of disposition imparts mood qualities to the space. As a whole, the term *Befindlichkeit* demonstrates the high importance of bodily presence in spatial experiences.

Buildings and spaces are in reality not free and easily available; rather one has to access them, one has to walk around them, and that takes time and effort. The experience of one’s own corporeality embedded in these acts is, like disposition, central to bodily presence. This shows that the need to feel one’s bodily presence is at once the need to feel one’s own liveliness, to feel vitality.<sup>675</sup>

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<sup>670</sup> Schmitz, *Atmosphären*, 13–8.

<sup>671</sup> “The presence of living bodies in space,” in Böhme, *Atmospheric Architectures*, 90. Here we follow Tina Engels-Schwarzpaul, who translates *Befindlichkeit* as “disposition.” See “Translator’s Introduction” in *ibid.*, 8–9. The original essay “Leibliche Anwesenheit im Raum” appeared in Böhme, *Architektur und Atmosphäre*, 114–25.

<sup>672</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>673</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>674</sup> *Ibid.*, 92. Emphasis in italics is by Böhme.

<sup>675</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

This is why, Böhme concludes, bodily experience of architecture is especially significant in the twenty-first century—at the time when rapid technological advancement enables virtual existence of personal identities and even scientific reproduction of human bodies. Today bodily presence is essential to the experience of being human. In Böhme’s example, the “craving” for bodily presence is evident when tourists enthusiastically touch and scratch the buildings that they visit. Thus, the human want to *really be there*—be present in space—defines people’s relationship to architecture and shows that architectural spaces can have effect on a bodily present person. The conclusion brings us one step closer to determining a person’s experience of contemporary art exhibitions in old churches. Böhme’s consideration regarding church atmospheres will shed additional and pivotal light on the question.

Gernot Böhme’s interest in specifically church atmospheres arises from a simple premise that church spaces are special because they are secluded from worldly activities.<sup>676</sup> Prior to delineating ecclesiastical atmospheres, the philosopher points out that the Christian authorities have historically repressed recognition of spiritual spatial impressions that one might have inside a church building, e.g. experiences of the numinous, or the sublime. That is, Christian institutions “claim authority even over the interpretation of experiences in these spaces” and thus render certain impressions as inadmissible.<sup>677</sup> Furthermore, the Christian doctrine—common to different branches of the religion—establishes that church buildings *per se* do not possess the divine presence; instead God can become present during certain acts performed in a church, such as the Eucharist celebration or the community assembly. According to Böhme, this belief goes against the actuality of ecclesiastical spaces; namely, the inherence of characteristic atmospheres in

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<sup>676</sup> The following discussion is based on the English translation of Gernot Böhme’s essay “Atmosphären kirchlicher Räume” (2006); namely “Church Atmospheres,” in Böhme, *Atmospheric Architectures*, 167–79.

<sup>677</sup> Böhme, *Atmospheric Architectures*, 168.

church architecture.<sup>678</sup> The philosopher argues that special church ambiances, or *genius loci*, exist outside of the religious practice and, to prove his point, considers the atmospheres of former churches reutilized for profane use. Postponing the decision whether to agree with Böhme's postulation it is constructive to examine it first.

What experiences are available to church visitors independently of the religious practice? What elements of church architecture exude distinctive atmospheres and withstand profanization (sic.)? To answer these questions, Böhme expounds on "the generators of atmospheres" that are peculiar to Christian buildings. It should be noted here that, without specifying his method, he exclusively discusses what we call in this thesis "old churches." To thematize the atmospheres of old churches, Böhme divides the generators thereof in four groups: sacred twilight–diaphanous light, silence and the sublime, stone and space, and Christian symbols.<sup>679</sup> By thinking about how each of them affects a person, he provides a phenomenological description of human experience of visiting an old church. Because this directly relates to the purposes of the present chapter, we follow Böhme's account of the four generators of church atmospheres.

First, he defines church light as one "that is experienced on the basis of darkness, out of holy twilight."<sup>680</sup> Since *heilige Dämmerung* is limited by the church walls it does not cause personal anxiety of being lost in dark vastness, as natural twilight might, but instead comes across as enclosing and therefore protecting. It also leads human intuition to hint at "a secret that twilight harbours." Böhme explains that this insight is influenced, on the one hand, by the appearance of the holy twilight to disappear upwards and, on the other, by an uncertain source of light. "Precisely because the source is invisible, it can be intuited as transcendental."<sup>681</sup> This

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<sup>678</sup> Ibid, 168–9.

<sup>679</sup> Ibid., 172.

<sup>680</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>681</sup> Ibid., 174.



association further helps the person to connect church light with the idea of creation by way of light: “The light shafts lift single objects out of the twilight [...] as a principle of individuation.”<sup>682</sup> Lastly, light in an old church provides direction for both the gaze and the movement. Due to all of these qualities, church light “redeems individuals who experience the atmosphere, as well as individual objects, from being lost in the indeterminate.”

Second, Böhme speaks of how silence and great heights in old churches affect their visitors. He describes one’s initial experience of the former as “walking into a wall of fog,” followed by a sharp awareness of silence “most intensively articulated by one’s own footsteps.”<sup>683</sup> The latter, Böhme argues, is not contingent on absolute magnitude—as suggested by Kant—but is already sensed as “a detachment from human scale” and therefore possible inside of a building. The vast naves of old cathedrals are accordingly capable of evoking the sublime: by suspending one’s gaze and movement they cause one to “slide into infinity.”<sup>684</sup> As a result, the person feels the limits of own bodily presence contrasted with the scale of the church architecture. So although silence and the sublime are independent concepts, Böhme emphasizes that both of them turn the subject’s attention to his or her limited presence within the expanse of space. In other words, the church spaces can heighten one’s awareness of the self.

Third, important generators of church atmospheres are building materials and particulars of spatial composition. Regarding the former, Böhme believes that historical church architecture can be characterized by its use of stone. While allowing for multiple exceptions, he states that when visible “stone exudes volume and radiates firmness and calm.”<sup>685</sup> Moreover, floors, columns, and walls in Gothic and Romanesque churches are united through the medium of stone

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<sup>682</sup> Ibid.

<sup>683</sup> Ibid., 175–6.

<sup>684</sup> Ibid., 176.

<sup>685</sup> Ibid., 177.

and thus experienced by the visitor as a spatial totality. Such totality is enhanced by the tectonic structure that, as also explained by Simson, represents a certain order that is absent in secular buildings. Together stone and spatial composition bring about deep fascination with old church architecture.

The fourth, last, and fundamental generator of church atmospheres is Christian insignia. In a more concrete and explicit way than the preceding three groups, religious signs and symbols determine the character of church spaces, i.e. of church atmospheres. Böhme asserts that it is precisely religious visual vocabulary that preserves the *genius loci* of old churches, even when the latter become inactive. “Certain insignia, like religious symbols, stylistic [e.g. Gothic] features, frescoes and inscriptions, continue to shape the character of these spaces as church-like.”<sup>686</sup> This is why today, the philosopher concludes, we witness numerous examples of profane use of church buildings. In other words, outside of the religious practice churches continue to be special places because of their unique ambiances, and it is the promise of church atmospheres that attracts multiple organizers of exhibitions, concerts, lectures, and other secular events. “They anticipate,” Böhme reflects, “that visitors will enter these spaces with a certain awe, a readiness for contemplation, and, if I can put it that way, an expectation of transcendence.”<sup>687</sup> The observation closes Böhme’s phenomenological description of a person’s experience of church atmospheres. In summary, twilight and light, silence and the sublime, stone and space, and the Christian imagery affect the visitor of an old church in two ways. They call to mind the ideas of transcendence and creation against the background of the totality of the world and one’s place within it; and they have an effect on the subject’s disposition by imparting greater self-awareness.

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<sup>686</sup> Ibid., 179.

<sup>687</sup> Ibid.

Böhme's analysis of church atmospheres reveals impressive qualities of architectural forms of old churches. His conclusions help us to understand experience of a contemporary person visiting old ecclesiastical spaces. To be more precise, Böhme points out how generators of architectural atmospheres can translate into certain types of interpretations. Two key connotations that emerge from Böhme's discussion of church atmospheres correspond to Otto von Simson's and Rudolf Schwarz's views on the power of old church spaces to ring an existential bell with a human being: creation and transcendence. But while these concepts are attached to old ecclesiastical architecture, they are not bound to endure if churches are reutilized. Böhme's claim that church atmospheres do not depend on liturgical use contradicts his own account of sacred ambiances. First, he describes holy twilight and church light in terms of, on the one hand, invisible source of light and, on the other, shades of gold produced by individual candles. In churches reutilized for profane use, the former aspect disappears because secular purposes demand bright and clear light. Böhme's own example—a bookstore inside erstwhile Dominican Church in Maastricht, Netherlands—shows a space lit with white electric lamps that serve to sufficiently illuminate the bookshelves and the café area.<sup>688</sup> As for golden shades permeating church interior, they come from those candles that believers light along with their prayers or devotion; thus they belong in active, living houses of worship rather than in reused church buildings. Similarly to holy twilight, the silence of church spaces is conditional upon its liturgical function: devotional purpose of the place hushes loud voices and even restrains the visitor from speaking. In a church transformed into a lecture hall, the silence that Böhme describes gives place to a buzz of ready conversations among gathered guests. Profanization often alters the spatial order itself by means of rearranged

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<sup>688</sup> In his essay "Of the Atmosphere of a Church" (1947), eminent British architect Sir Ninian Comper argued against the use of electric light in churches because it ruined "a dim religious light" and hence the very church atmosphere. See Ninian Comper, "Of the Atmosphere of a Church," in Anthony Symondson and Stephen Arthur Bucknall, eds, *Sir Ninian Comper: An Introduction to His Life and Work with Complete Gazetteer* (Reading: Spire Books, 2006), 231–46, especially 242–3.

rooms, mobile walls, and new furniture. Lastly, although Böhme suggests that signs and images with Christian content remain in reutilized church spaces, it is rarely true that such objects as altar, crucifix, or religious paintings are not removed once a church becomes a restaurant or a library.<sup>689</sup> Thus, the four outlined groups of generators of church atmospheres do not prove that *genius loci* continues to exist in former churches. Instead, they point to the significance of the religious function in the production of special atmospheres. It is therefore only in combination that *old* architectural forms and *active* ritualistic use create unique church atmospheres.

The spatial analysis presented in this chapter has contributed to a description of a contemporary person's experience of space in old churches. First, Otto von Simson's research about the production context and the original meaning of Gothic cathedrals has revealed connections between architectural forms and human sensitivity. Simson underscored how people's symbolic relationship to church spaces resulted in the capability of architecture to move feelings and create inner reverberations. In particular, the art historian showed that through the means of spatial order and light old church buildings had been able to communicate the stories of creation and transcendence. While theological reading of these stories is alien to the contemporary perception, Simson's study suggests that old church architecture can indeed evoke memories about the biggest existential questions—creation and transcendence—in the cultural, i.e. historically Christian, milieu of Western Europe. Consequently, such specific experiential value of old churches is what distinguished them from modern or contemporary Christian buildings. Second, whereas Simson did not expound on the present-day experience of historical cathedrals, Gernot Böhme's theory of atmospheres can be viewed as supplementary to the former's ideas. That is, the philosopher provides a phenomenological depiction of the human experience of visiting an

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<sup>689</sup> For some examples of reutilized old churches, see Nollert, *Kirchenbauten in der Gegenwart*, 132–41.

old church. With cohering terms *atmosphere*, *ecstasies of things*, and *bodily presence*, Böhme demonstrates that architecture produces an effect on human disposition. Reflecting on church atmospheres, he elucidates that old ecclesiastical architecture possesses special, unique ambiances that have an accordingly distinctive, unique effect on the subject. It is noteworthy that both Simson and Böhme not only accentuated light and spatial order as key characteristics of church spaces but also associated them with the concepts of creation and transcendence. Together the two scholars have substantiated *the experiential value of old ecclesiastical architecture* and, for the purposes of this thesis, proved the significance of specifically *old* sacred spaces in one's encounter with contemporary non-sacramental art in old active churches.

Having argued against Böhme's hypothesis about the endurance of *genius loci* in profanized churches, we now face the task of explaining the importance of the descriptor *active* in the subject of old active churches. How does the presence of living faith influence one's experience of old sacred spaces and contemporary profane art therein? To address the question, it is necessary to contextualize expectations and attitudes that visitors might have before walking into a church as well as initial reasons for entering the place. Applying Böhme's term *Befindlichkeit*, we may rephrase the method as identifying one's personal disposition as part of the larger social disposition. In view of the discussions about renewed prominence of religion in the twenty-first century, the living Christian religion of the discussed churches acquires a crucial role in the conversation. For this reason, the thesis situates its case studies in the so-called *post-secular* debate. Employed at the intersection of profane art and active sacred spaces, the post-secular theory helps to reveal common concerns on both sides and recognize social meanings of the phenomenon.

## 6.2. The post-secular analysis

In their study of Gothic churches, Otto von Simson and Rudolf Schwarz came close to describing historical ecclesiastical settings in terms of their special atmospheres. At the time of their research, ca. middle of the twentieth century, the Western world was perceived as a decidedly secularized place, one in which reason and sciences prevailed in the public mind. Even Schwarz, a devoted Catholic, applied scientific logic and technical guidelines to the production of sacred architecture. Outside of the fields of theology and religious studies, scholarly interest in impressive qualities of church spaces hardly existed until Böhme's philosophy of atmospheres.<sup>690</sup> Developed at the turn of the twenty-first century, Böhme's ideas can be seen as representative of the post-secular turn in academia. Rather than labelling the present-day society, the young term "post-secular" refers to an academic discourse that considers the renewed significance of religion in the contemporary Western world. Without defending the unequivocal return, or resurgence, of religion, the thesis consults the post-secular discussion in order to understand the experience of a church visitor in view of significance of living religions in the twenty-first century.

The following inquiry begins with the definition of the post-secular and characteristics of the post-secular person, which are elaborated upon via Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* (2007). Then post-secular potential of contemporary art is discussed, whereby texts by Mike King and Mark C. Taylor provide helpful insights. Proceeding in this manner, the question that we try to answer is "How does the present-day significance of living religions influence the experience of a person visiting an *active* old church and encountering profane art therein?" In other words, we pursue the description of a person's *post-secular disposition* towards a locus of living faith and, further, towards contemporary non-sacramental art in its midst. Thus, the post-secular discourse allows

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<sup>690</sup> Hermann Schmitz mentioned church atmospheres while listing atmospheres of such places as apartments or gardens, without any further characterization. See Schmitz, *Atmosphären*, 28, 63, and 105.

us to negotiate the intersection between belief and non-belief—the space that we accordingly designate at the close of this chapter as post-secular.

### 6.2.1. Post-secular person

The term “post-secular” is ambivalent and immediately raises questions. Conceiving an interdisciplinary academic conference “(Post)secular: Imagining Faith in Contemporary Cultures” (2017), Professors Silke Horstkotte and James Hodkinson of the University of Warwick explained the ambivalence of the topic in an incisive and concise manner:

The term “post-secular” is often used to indicate a renewed interest in religion as a social, political and cultural force, acknowledging the need for political and social engagement with religious as well as non-faith based groups and voices. Yet in many ways, the term remains unclear, and its usage inconsistent. “Post-secular” can refer to the return of religion not on a social scale, but as a discursive aspect of modernity; or it can indicate a deconstructive critique of the secular, as well as of its opposite, religion, or an ambivalent discourse about secularity and religion in literature and the arts.<sup>691</sup>

What their summary shows is that post-secularism can take multiple forms. As such, post-secularism categorically differs from post-secularity: the former denotes the discourse, ideas and perspectives, whereas the latter asserts a certain quality of the contemporary society. The following discussion builds upon post-secularism, or the post-secular mentality. By doing so, we bypass the literal meaning of the prefix “post”—behind, after, or posterior to—and thus avoid, one, futile division of time periods and, two, the need to choose between religions’ return and religions’ resurgence. While some theorists argue that religious significance has come back after a wholly secular age and others claim that it has never disappeared completely and now simply

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<sup>691</sup> Silke Horstkotte, and James Hodkinson, “(Post)secular: Imagining faith in contemporary cultures,” School of Modern Languages and Cultures at the University of Warwick, <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/modernlanguages/research/german/conferences/postsecular> (accessed May 7, 2017).

recovers its position, both perspectives share the conclusion that religions have recently gained a prominent visibility in public and private spheres of human life. With this inference, we proceed to explore the philosophical work that has exerted paramount influence on the development of the post-secular thesis.

Charles Taylor (b.1931) is a Canadian philosopher, whose large body of written work has earned him a number of eminent awards along with the status of one of the most esteemed contemporary thinkers in the humanities.<sup>692</sup> Over the course of the past ten years Taylor's arguments for the modification of our understanding of secularity in the Western world, painstakingly expounded in *A Secular Age*, have stimulated theoretical discussion of the term "post-secular."<sup>693</sup> In the book the author reviews the master narrative of secularization, which is the story of modernization that demonstrates how humanity has progressed over the centuries towards its current scientific and technological advances and in the process lost those values and practices that could not sustain themselves, specifically religion. Disagreeing with such oversimplification of the "progress picture," Taylor argues that the gradual secularization of society has not established definite decline of faith and religious dimension of human actions but rather produced new conditions under which belief can exist today.<sup>694</sup> More precisely, these conditions include simultaneous availability of multiple spiritual options and options of unbelief.<sup>695</sup> Contemplating the transformation of belief over the past half a century, Taylor observes that beginning in the 1960s the Western world has undergone "an individuating revolution." By this he means moral, spiritual, and expressive individualism that has gained a

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<sup>692</sup> The awards include Kyoto Prize, Templeton Prize, John W. Kluge Prize, and Berggruen Prize for Philosophy.

<sup>693</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard, 2007).

<sup>694</sup> It should be clarified that Taylor does not reject the fact that the decline in practice and faith has occurred. However, he does not accept "a linear regression" and argues for transformation of religious belief that has taken place along social and intellectual transformations in the Western world. For Taylor's emphatic statement of this position, see *ibid.*, 530.

<sup>695</sup> *Ibid.*, 423–72.



widespread appeal against the vices of the consumerist society, e.g. hedonism and egoism, and ultimately against “the sense [that] this life is empty, flat, devoid of higher purpose.”<sup>696</sup> Taylor points out that within the movement against consumerist conformism and social conventionality a certain spiritual life emerged. The key characteristic of the new spirituality is a personal search for wholeness, for greater meaning and life purpose; the well-known designation of it is “New Age.” According to Taylor, the problem with the general notion of the phenomenon is that due to its emphasis on subjectivism new forms of spirituality are commonly seen as “intrinsically trivial or privatized.”<sup>697</sup> So while critics look at the individualism of the “New Age” as concordant with the ideas of secular humanism, the philosopher thinks that the spiritual quests in question go beyond the issue of human flourishing and evince human orientation towards transcendence.<sup>698</sup> The crucial binary concepts “immanence/transcendence” not only strengthen Taylor’s deconstruction of the secularization thesis but also help to understand the present, i.e. our own, moment and thus our own selves.

One of the methods Taylor uses to trace social and intellectual transformations from the Middle Ages to the present day is the dialectic of immanence and transcendence. What the philosopher calls “the immanent frame” is a modality of life that is dominated by rationality and pervasively secular time.<sup>699</sup> It emerged from the process of the Reformation that initiated “a transfer out of embodied, ‘enfleshed’ forms of religious life, to those which are more ‘in the head’,” confirmed its position during the Enlightenment, and grew into the supreme worldview by the twentieth century.<sup>700</sup> Individuals contained within the immanent frame develop “buffered selves”—a type of identity that draws a firm boundary between self and other, asserting that “all thought, feeling

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<sup>696</sup> Ibid., 473–4 and 506.

<sup>697</sup> Ibid., 508.

<sup>698</sup> Ibid., 509–10.

<sup>699</sup> Ibid., 542.

<sup>700</sup> Ibid., 299–304 and 554.

and purpose [...] must be in minds, which are distinct from the ‘outer’ world.” And further, “The buffered self begins to find the idea of spirits, moral forces, causal powers with a purposive bent, close to incomprehensible.” In contrast to the immanent world of order and reason Taylor introduces a transcendent perspective, which allows for independent existence of something outside of human mind.<sup>701</sup> The transcendent modality applies to Latin Christendom during the Middle Ages and early modern period—an enchanted world in which human beings were surrounded by spirits and divine expressions, all parts of the absolute and uncompromised cosmic order. Counter to the buffered modern person, premodern individuals experienced the world as full of outer meanings and forces. Taylor refers to them as “porous selves,” i.e. permeable subjects who can be affected by the exterior charged objects and situations.<sup>702</sup> To recapitulate the philosopher’s use of the binary concept “immanence-transcendence,” the gradual prevailing of the immanent frame over the transcendent perspective—together with the increasing preponderance of the buffered self—recite the story of disenchantment of the world from the late Middle Ages to the twentieth century.

The contemporary world is thus the world of the immanent frame constituted of instrumental reason and secular time, advanced science and natural law, the buffered identity and modern individualism.<sup>703</sup> Whereas this modality appears to cast off any possibilities of transcendence, Taylor argues that it does not necessarily do so, “the immanent frame is common to all of us in the modern West [...]. Some of us want to live it as open to something beyond; some live it as closed. It is something which permits closure, without demanding it.”<sup>704</sup> Here we reach one of

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<sup>701</sup> Ibid., 542.

<sup>702</sup> Ibid., 35–9 and 542.

<sup>703</sup> Ibid., 543–66.

<sup>704</sup> Ibid., 543–4.

the critical points of *A Secular Age*: a contemporary person has options of belief and unbelief as well as various forms of either one. It is worth quoting Taylor's elucidation at length:

So in one sense it is true that living within this frame pushes us to the closed perspective. But this is the sense in which living within the frame is living according to the norms and practices that it incorporates. However, I have been arguing all along that the actual experience of living within Western modernity tends to awaken protest, resistances of various kinds. In this fuller, experiential sense, "living within" the frame doesn't simply tip you in one direction, but allows you to feel pulled two ways. A very common experience of living here is that of being cross-pressured between the open and closed perspectives.<sup>705</sup>

The excerpt provides the philosopher's description of the present-day culture as dwelling of cross-pressures and of the contemporary individual as standing at their midpoint. It further clarifies Taylor's discussion of the "New Age" by admitting the phenomenon of the new spirituality into the picture. To be more precise, he argues that the spiritual quests of the past decades have pointed to the human capacity for transcendent perspectives and thus for being porous. They have thus demonstrated that the immanent frame cannot withstand the question "What is the meaning of life?" and that, accordingly, the buffered self is vulnerable and threatened to be pierced by the transcendent perspective.<sup>706</sup> For Taylor the present spirituality of North Atlantic region represents the move towards personal forms of religious devotion and practices, i.e. transformation of a religious search not dissimilar to such historical examples within official Christianity as the Reformation itself.<sup>707</sup> Thus our age is post-secular not in terms of the reversal of decline in religious practices and belief, but rather in terms of possibilities of piercing or opening up the immanent frame as well as the religious search that these possibilities bring about.<sup>708</sup>

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<sup>705</sup> Ibid., 555.

<sup>706</sup> Ibid., 676–7.

<sup>707</sup> Ibid., 532–3.

<sup>708</sup> Ibid., 535–6.

With Taylor's amendment to the secularization thesis, definition of a contemporary person's cross-pressured stand, and binary concepts of immanence/transcendence and buffered self/porous self, we now attempt to identify essential qualities and the post-secular disposition of the visitor to an *active* old church. First of all, Taylor's reasoning showed that the secularization thesis cannot be reduced to the dominance of fully secular outlook in the twenty-first century. The important outcome of his account is that the secularization narrative does not refer to the essential transformation of human beings but to the ideas about what it is to be a human being. Consequently, the currently prevailing idea positions a contemporary person into a dilemmatic situation that is cross-pressured between immanence and transcendence. Today, Taylor argues, we feel pulled in one direction by the secularization "progress story" and in the opposite by "that religious longing, the longing for and response to a more-than-immanent transformation perspective."<sup>709</sup> Such is the predicament of a contemporary person: finding oneself in an uncertain in-between space, with existential questions hindering the choice of either side and propelling personal search for meaning. Individual, subjective character of such quests suggests a reconsideration of religious presence in our society. Progressively more, it manifests itself not in adherence to a certain institutionalized religion but instead in a freely chosen religiosity, an individual pursuit of answers to everlasting existential concerns.<sup>710</sup> Although it is likewise possible that a person abides by the immanent frame and thus maintains the buffered identity, such choice of unbelief is nevertheless made under distinctive post-secular conditions; namely,

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<sup>709</sup> Ibid., 530.

<sup>710</sup> In a similar manner, German theologian Wilhelm Gräb analyzes the post-secular transformation of religion. First, he traces how the process of secularization has resulted in the functional differentiation of religion; viz. today religion is independent from political, juridical, or educational implications. Second, he argues that religion continues to inform personal life by addressing the issues of absolute meaning, moral motivations, and regard for society, and hence merging into personal attitudes and convictions. Wilhelm Gräb, "Transformation of Religious Culture within Modern Societies: From Secularization to Postsecularism," in A. Molendijk, J. Beaumont, and C. Jedan, eds., *Exploring the Postsecular: The Religious, the Political and the Urban* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010), 113–30.

the simultaneous availability of multiple options of belief and unbelief.<sup>711</sup> In view of such cross-pressured situation, what would be the post-secular disposition of the contemporary visitor to an active old church? Charles Taylor notices that old churches and cathedrals are invested with strong transcendent meanings:

[T]he civilizations of the past invested heavily in the transcendent; those who want to see the monuments of the past, admire its art, etc., don't have the choice; they have to find these in cathedrals, mosques, temples. But I don't believe that this is all there is to it, but that there is also a certain admiration, wonder, mixed with some nostalgia, at these sites where the contact with the transcendent was/is so much firmer, surer.<sup>712</sup>

What the philosopher thereby suggests is that old sacred spaces can threaten to pierce the modern buffered self with a possibility of transcendence. The transcendent meanings of cathedrals as well as their rituals, sacred geography, and associations with a bygone enchanted age make the immanent frame particularly vulnerable and fragile. In other words, the pull towards the transcendent possibility challenges the contemporary secular perspective when a person finds him- or herself inside a space that actively and explicitly resists the secularization narrative. Even for someone who deliberately maintains the buffered self, the cross-pressure is intensified due to the public visibility of opposing life view, or belief option: "The existence of an alternative fragilizes each context, that is, makes its sense of the thinkable/unthinkable uncertain and wavering."<sup>713</sup> It is interesting and telling that, reflecting on the situations in which

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<sup>711</sup> The availability of options refers to the religious pluralism and new religious philosophies that characterize contemporary public and private life in the Western world.

<sup>712</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 360. By "nostalgia" Taylor means that we associate old cathedrals with a past enchanted age, in which "the presence of something beyond" was palpable, and regret its passing. See *ibid.*, 553. We can draw a parallel between Taylor's remark and the following words by a German art historian Wilhelm Pinder (1878–1947): "Warum sind wir enttäuscht, wenn wir eine alte Kirche erwarten und eine neue treffen? Warum froh gespannt, wenn statt der neuen eine alte auftaucht? [...] Wer ohne viel Wissen und Denken, aber empfänglichen Herzens, die mittelalterliche Kirche betritt, fühlt ein Leben, für dessen Sinn er keinen Ausdruck in seiner Sprache hat." Quoted in Nollert, *Kirchenbauten in der Gegenwart*, 26.

<sup>713</sup> Taylor makes this point on page 556 of *A Secular Age*: "An atheist in the Bible belt has trouble being understood, as often (in a rather different way) do believing Christians in certain reaches of the academy. But, of course, people in each of these contexts are aware that the others exist, and that the option they can't really credit is the default option elsewhere in the same society, whether they regard this with hostility or just perplexity. The existence of an alternative fragilizes each context, that is, makes its sense of the thinkable/unthinkable uncertain and wavering."

the immanent frame is especially fragile, Taylor lists medieval cathedrals together with nature and art. Even when an artwork is entirely independent of the religious realm, the philosopher proposes that the aesthetic experience thereof is capable of breaking through the buffered self.<sup>714</sup> We take a closer look at contemporary non-sacramental art in the following section. The valuable conclusion to draw from the current discussion is that the post-secular disposition of a contemporary person is cross-pressured between immanence and transcendence and, once the person visits an active old church, it becomes subject to those qualities of the place that can cause breaking or opening of the immanent frame. By recounting the story of transcendence and thus raising eternal existential questions, active old ecclesiastical settings threaten the secular buffered self.

### **6.2.2. Post-secular potential of contemporary art**

In the beginning of this thesis we pointed out that the relatively young art historical discipline had evolved amidst the prevailing secularization narrative of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As a result, ideas somehow associated with religious sentiments or devotion had been eschewed in serious academic literature in the field until the 1970s and 1980s, when such terms as “spiritual” and “sublime” entered the scholarly discourse.<sup>715</sup> Nevertheless institutionalized religion remains a rare topic in contemporary art criticism, even when artists or curators bring it to the forefront of their work.<sup>716</sup> James Elkins explains such discrepancy by the absence of

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<sup>714</sup> Ibid., 360.

<sup>715</sup> See pages 16–20 in chapter one of this thesis.

<sup>716</sup> A recent example comes from the reviews of the 57<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale, the vast majority of which does not mention any religious dimension of the exhibited artworks. This contrasts, on the one hand, with the thematic concept carried out by Christine Macel, who noticed that contemporary artists “are increasingly turning towards the holy” (Christine Macel in an interview with Sebastian Frenzel, in *Monopol*, “Special Issue: Venice Biennale”

adequate theory, or language, which could provide the dialogue between religion and contemporary art with a common ground.<sup>717</sup> Art historian notices that interactions between the two ineluctably result in splitting of the conversation into two parts. For example, during art exhibitions in active churches one side talks about religious or spiritual contents, while the other refers to the history of installation art. For the dialogue to be effective, Elkins argues, boundaries between the two sides need to be reconceptualized. While stating that the sublime is one of the viable concepts that could bridge the conversation, he admits that it is a narrow path and calls for new thinking that could eventually render the art historical discourse “attuned to the sincerity, to different kinds of sincerity and unusual uses and appropriations of art materials and methods and forms and histories.”<sup>718</sup> The following discussion is an attempt to present a mode of art criticism that reconsiders the relationship between contemporary art and Christianity under the new conditions, viz. post-secularism. It argues that post-secularism is an apposite theoretical framework, which can relate to the concerns of both institutionalized religion and contemporary non-sacramental art and at the same time answer the question “How is contemporary profane art relevant to the presence of living faith within old sacred spaces and, as a consequence, to the viewer’s experience?”

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[2017], 6–10). The director of the 2017 biennale expressed this belief by focusing on human feelings of solitude and foreignness in “The Pavilion of Joys and Fears” and the missionary role of the artist in “The Pavilion of the Shamans.” On the other hand, many subjects raised by the participating artists openly invited critics to converse about religion, e.g. representation of Christ in Roberto Cuoghi’s *Il Mondo Magico (The Magic World)* in the Italian Pavilion, or a temple erected by Ernesto Neto for *Um Sagrado Lugar (A Sacred Place)* in the Central Pavilion. American artist and art critic Jonathan A. Anderson points out one of the most palpable outcomes of this problem and simultaneously suggests a solution: “The primary gravitational force by which the art world and the church have been pulled apart—and by which they might be brought back together—is art criticism.” See Anderson’s essay “On the Strange Place of Religious Writing in Contemporary Art,” in David O. Taylor and Taylor Worley, eds., *Contemporary Art and the Church: A Conversation between Two Worlds* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic and imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2017), 37–46; quote from page 43.

<sup>717</sup> James Elkins, “Four Reasons Why Religion and Contemporary Art are Incompatible,” keynote speech at The School of Visual Arts 21<sup>st</sup> Annual National Conference on Liberal Arts and Education of Artists “Art Education, Religion and the Spiritual,” New York, NY (October 19, 2007).

<sup>718</sup> Ibid.

In order to apply the post-secular thesis to the study of contemporary secular art without running into the same obstacles that prevent most art critics from talking about religion, it is instructive to shift the inquiry focus from the matters of production to those of exhibition and, especially, reception of contemporary art. To this end, we consult two rare examples of academic writing that wed visual arts and the idea of post-secularism: Mike King's "Art and the Postsecular" (2005) and Mark Taylor's *Refiguring the Spiritual: Beuys, Barney, Turrell, Goldsworthy* (2012). Their thoughts reveal potential post-secular meanings, which reside in contemporary art and therefore inform the experience of viewer.

Former reader at London Metropolitan University and University of East London, Dr. Mike King is a researcher in sciences, the arts, and the spiritual studies. His notable publications include *Secularism: The Hidden Origins of Disbelief* (2007) and *Postsecularism: The Hidden Challenge to Extremism* (2009), which explore the post-secular sensibility in such diverse contexts as physics, psychology, New Age, feminism, non-Western spirituality, nature, and the arts. While both volumes contribute original thought and methodology to the broader post-secular discourse, for the purposes of this chapter we concentrate on King's writing about contemporary art. Precisely corresponding to Elkins' insistence on the need for a new a mode of art criticism, the scholar addresses the problem of art critics' rejection of the spiritual in art and proposes a new pluralist language that helps to construct "a fine-grained spiritual criticism of art [...] adequate to contemporary fine art practice."<sup>719</sup> In the essay "Art and the Postsecular," King examines spiritual impulses behind art of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. While suggesting there is a variety of these "modalities of the spirit," the author focuses on the two of them: the *shamanic* and the *transcendent*. With examples of the twentieth-century abstraction such as art of

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<sup>719</sup> Mike King, "Art and the Postsecular," *Journal of Visual Art Practice* 4, no. 1 (2005), 3–17. The content of the article constitutes chapter eleven in *Postsecularism*. See Mike King, *Postsecularism: The Hidden Challenge to Extremism* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2009), 187–201.



Kandinsky, Miró, Pollock or Campbell, King describes the former as “irredeemably visual, oral and ahistorical.”<sup>720</sup> More precisely, the *shamanic* impulse refers to those artists who undergo personal crises and can translate their transformative journeys into art that is genuine and timeless. King opines that the manifestation of the shamanic modality of the spirit in visual arts disposes of the strains that secularists have imposed on the definition of shamanic and therefore allows the spiritual to reenter the discourse. As such, the shamanic impulse can be applied to the analysis of abstract painting in the post-secular era.<sup>721</sup> In comparison, the *transcendent* spiritual impulse can be understood as an urge to disconnect from the earthly and the mundane and, instead, plunge into the void, nothingness, or the absolute.<sup>722</sup> King associates this impulse with artistic processes of erasure of and detachment from the worldly matters and exemplifies it with works by such contemporary artists as Anish Kapoor and Susan Shantz. The scholar thus proposes that the two examples of spiritual impulses enrich the art critical language and help to address the complexities of contemporary art production. King argues that in the post-secular era these and other spiritual impulses improve our knowledge of the present-day pluralism, deciphered in the diversity of relevant artistic expressions. This is an important contribution to the vocabulary of current art criticism as well as to our understanding of the relationship between the contemporary arts and the post-secular thesis. Yet, by practicing biographical and contextual methodology, King’s spiritual criticism of art is wholly rooted in the production side of the issue. To expand the idea of spiritual impulses into a more-inclusive post-secular mode of art criticism—one that involves the issues of exhibition and reception of art—we now turn to the philosopher and cultural critic Mark Taylor.

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<sup>720</sup> King, “Art and the Postsecular,” 10.

<sup>721</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>722</sup> Ibid., 12.

Mark C. Taylor is the former Chair of the Department of Religion at Columbia University, whose interdisciplinary writings on post-modern religion, visual arts, architecture, and new media brought together theological, philosophical, and artistic perspectives on issues mutual to these respective fields.<sup>723</sup> His latest works include a book series published through the Institute for Religion, Culture, and Public Life at Columbia University, the initiative that concentrates its attention on post-secular issues in multiple academic disciplines—from political science and history to cultural anthropology and social psychology. The three books explore the interplay between religion and contemporary art, religion and technology, religion and materiality of place.<sup>724</sup> The first of them, *Refiguring the Spiritual*, takes a look into the potential of contemporary visual arts to create transforming experiences amidst the problems and concerns of the present-day society.<sup>725</sup> On the premise that religion has always found expression in areas of culture, Taylor<sup>726</sup> checks ostensibly secular contemporary art for symptoms of its spiritual dimensions.<sup>727</sup> He begins by outlining the situation of today: “With so much hanging in the balance, the future seems more uncertain than ever. There is a palpable anxiety afoot today that I have never before experienced. The crisis of confidence plaguing individuals and institutions is a crisis of faith. We no longer know what to believe or whom to trust.”<sup>728</sup> As a response to such crisis, we have been witnessing not only a global resurgence of institutionalized religion but also a flourishing of different, non-doctrinal, forms of spirituality. Taylor argues that one of the latter

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<sup>723</sup> Mark Taylor’s most notable publications include *Erring: A Postmodern A/Theology* (1984), *Disfiguring: Art, Architecture, Religion* (1994), *About Religion: Economies of Faith in Virtual Culture* (1999), *The Moment of Complexity: Emerging Network Culture* (2001), *Confidence Games: Money and Markets in a World Without Redemption* (2006), *After God* (2007), and *Speed Limits* (2014). The scholar regularly contributes to such periodicals as *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times*.

<sup>724</sup> These are, respectively, *Refiguring the Spiritual* (2012), *Rewiring the Real* (2013), and *Recovering Place* (2014).

<sup>725</sup> Mark C. Taylor, *Refiguring the Spiritual: Beuys, Barney, Turrell, Goldsworthy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

<sup>726</sup> Here and below “Taylor” refers to Mark C. Taylor, unless otherwise stated.

<sup>727</sup> Taylor, *Refiguring the Spiritual*, xi.

<sup>728</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

can manifest itself in contemporary art and, to exemplify his point, discusses practices of Joseph Beuys, Matthew Barney, James Turrell and Andy Goldsworthy. Against the prevailing circumstances of the commodification, corporatization, and financialization (sic.) of art, the works by these artists insist on the necessary reassessment of values that surpass those of money and pursuit of riches.<sup>729</sup> To draw a telling parallel, the artists in question are relevant to Charles Taylor's description of a new spiritual search for wholeness that took its origin in the 1960s.<sup>730</sup> What is significant for our purposes is the set of commonalities that Mark Taylor deciphers among the four artists because it represents a post-secular perspective on contemporary non-sacramental art. In sum they hinge upon, first, non-marketability and explicit materiality of artworks and, second, the artists' "abiding faith in the capacity of [imagination] to transform first the self and then the world."<sup>731</sup> The first quality refers to methods of presentation that are either site-specific—separated from the conventional exhibition space, or deliberately impermanent and irreproducible. Such are Turrell's and Goldsworthy's geographically remote installations as well as Beuys' and Barney's digitally uncapturable works out of fat, beeswax, or petroleum jelly. The second quality implies the goal shared by the four artists; namely, triggering human transformation through an encounter with a work of art.<sup>732</sup> Together the two qualities result in "the materialization of the spiritual." According to Taylor, this tendency reveals spiritual impulses peculiar to contemporary art—as distinguished from those of old or modern art. "For many people who no longer regard themselves as religious, art replaces ancient beliefs and rituals with new forms of spirituality." From a post-secular perspective, such a new form produced by art implies a spiritual experience of material objects, viz. works of art. Undeniably,

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<sup>729</sup> Ibid., 1–15.

<sup>730</sup> See pages 266–7 above.

<sup>731</sup> Taylor, *Refiguring the Spiritual*, 15.

<sup>732</sup> Ibid., 176.

this is not always the case: Taylor points out obvious marketability of works by many contemporary artists, e.g. Jeff Koons, Damien Hirst, and Takashi Murakami. However, when artists do commit to personal and social transformation, they instill value into modes of exhibition and reception. Taylor concludes:

The work of Beuys, Barney, Turrell, and Goldsworthy renews the lessons of ancient spiritual traditions; self and other, inner and outer, culture and nature, finite and infinite, and material and immaterial, they teach us, are not opposites but are [entwined] in a complex web that forever evolves. When art is effective, it does not lift one out of time into a timeless aesthetic realm; to the contrary, art that matters situates us in the world differently by opening us to temporal rhythms and spatial flows that alter the mind by attuning the body differently.<sup>733</sup>

In this summation post-secular potential of art can be recognized as follows. First, it synchronizes the opposites—secular and post-secular mentalities, thus amending the hitherto prevailing secularization narrative of the Western world.<sup>734</sup> Second, by situating us in the physicality of the here and now and simultaneously releasing spiritual impulses—what Taylor calls “the materialization of the spiritual”—contemporary art can break through the immanent frame.<sup>735</sup> Therefore, we can render art “opening us to temporal rhythms and spatial flows that alter the mind” in Charles Taylor’s terms and argue that such opening up applies precisely to the piercing of the buffered self. Third, because “attuning the body” refers to the *viewer* and, specifically, the viewer being bodily present before a work of art, the role of space is crucial. We

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<sup>733</sup> Ibid., 190–1.

<sup>734</sup> Philosopher Martin Buber similarly underlines the in-betweenness of art: “Art is neither the impression of natural objectivity [secular mentality] nor the expression of spiritual subjectivity [post-secular mentality], but it is the work and witness of the relation between the *substantia humana* and the *substantia rerum*; it is the realm of ‘the between’ that has become a form.” Quoted in Taylor and Worley, *Contemporary Art and the Church*, 11.

<sup>735</sup> The author of *Art + Religion in the 21st Century* and *Religion and Art in the Heart of Modern Manhattan*, Aaron Rosen, also considers corporeal workings of contemporary art and even suggests that it can help us to rethink traditional divisions between immanence and transcendence by treating flesh rather than spirit as the unifying reality of the world. See Rosen’s essay “Embodiment,” in *Art + Religion*, 207–11. Embodiment as an operative mode of contemporary art is conceptually juxtaposed with theology of place in a recent essay by an American theologian Jennifer Allen Craft, “Art, Place, and the Church: Thinking Theologically about Contemporary Art in the Worship Space.” See Craft’s text in Taylor and Worley, *Contemporary Art and the Church*, 143–57. Philosopher Boris Groys sees in art’s material essence an emancipatory role in today’s society. See “A Conversation between Boris Groys and Maria Hlavajova: In Absence of the Horizon,” in Hlavajova, Lütticken, and Winder, *The Return of Religion*, 72–81, especially pages 80–1.

thus infer from Mark Taylor's study that post-secular potential of art is to be located not in the spiritual impulses of artistic production, as suggested by Mike King, but rather in the modes of exhibition and, foremost, reception by the viewer.

On the one hand, applying the post-secular perspective to the discussion of exhibition and reception of contemporary art allows for art criticism that facilitates communication between institutionalized religions and contemporary non-sacramental art without intruding upon independence and autonomy<sup>736</sup> of artistic production. Thus, post-secularism is a theoretical framework that relates to the concerns of both sides and therefore permits the sincerity that James Elkins spoke about.<sup>737</sup> On the other hand, the discussion of art's post-secular potential reveals that contemporary art can break the immanent frame without supporting any sets of religious beliefs. To be more exact, this is the potential of opening the viewer to the possibility of transcendence. Similarly to church atmospheres, contemporary art threatens the immanent frame by creating conditions for the vitalization of the porous self. This threat can be particularly efficacious because contemporary art itself comes from the profane realm and is consequently expected to comply with the secular mentality. As we have observed, however, contemporary art does not always correspond to the principles of the immanent frame and, we should argue, does never do so within living sacred spaces. While the goal of Christianity can be understood as piercing the buffered self with the story of creation, fall, and salvation, i.e. transcendence; contemporary non-devotional art can pierce the buffered self in old active churches with its own visual and material means. Returning to the question of the viewer's disposition, we can compare a contemporary person's cross-pressured stand between transcendence and immanence with the

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<sup>736</sup> Because the term "autonomous art" is highly problematic, here we speak of art's autonomy singularly with respect to the religious realm.

<sup>737</sup> See pages 273 above.

viewer's position between the sacred space of a living faith and the profane work by a professional artist. But while in the first case the person undergoes a pull in different directions, in the second the viewer may well experience the alignment of the transcendent and the immanent due to art's post-secular potential. Moreover, we can argue that exhibitions of contemporary non-sacramental art in old sacred spaces produce a new type of experience that is qualitatively different from either aesthetic or religious experiences, or even the combination of the two.<sup>738</sup> This new type of experience occurs in a productive space—a certain type of atmosphere that we designate below as post-secular space.

### 6.3. Post-secular space

The theoretical framework of this chapter articulates *post-secular space* as the aggregate of unique atmospheres of old church buildings, relevance of the living ritual within them to the searches of the post-secular person, and post-secular potential of art. To validate the use of the synthesizing term this section, first, explicates post-secular space in the order corresponding to the three elements and, second, relates it to the material presented earlier in this thesis: thematic exhibitions (chapter 3), Saint Peter and Hospital Church (chapter 4), and paradigms of coexistence between old active churches and contemporary non-sacramental art (chapter 5). By comparing historical living churches with modern/contemporary ecclesiastical architecture, deconsecrated churches, and other venues for art exhibitions, the chapter closes with an argument that the possibility of post-secular space is conditional upon the descriptors *old* and *active* in the title of this thesis. As indicated in the introduction, the objective of the entire study

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<sup>738</sup> Commonalities, differences, or intersections between aesthetic and religious experiences constitute the main subject of the anthology that was put together by Jörg Herrmann, Andreas Mertin, and Eveline Valtink, *Die Gegenwart der Kunst: Ästhetische und Religiöse Erfahrung Heute* (1998).

is to understand one's experience of contemporary non-Christian art in active Christian houses of worship. The idea of post-secular space can achieve the goal through a complex phenomenology that involves space, society, subject, and object.

In the spatial analysis above, we have established that the space of *old* ecclesiastical architecture can recount the Christian story of creation and transcendence. It thereby raises existential questions for the visitor from the Western milieu. Moreover, in the words of an acclaimed Finnish architect and philosopher Juhani Pallasmaa old places hold an especial experiential value:

We like to be connected with signs of life instead of being isolated in hermetic and artificial conditions. Don't we seek historically dense settings because they connect us experientially and imaginatively with past life, and because it makes us feel safe and enriched to be part of that temporal continuum? Traces of life support images of safety and generate images of continued life.<sup>739</sup>

In other words, old churches activate our imagination by bringing the memories of Christianity's—and with that our own—past and longstanding tradition. Their histories, or “traces of life,” also allow for experiencing connections with the past as well as sharing the sense of security, belonging, and edification.<sup>740</sup> Thus, the history and traditions of a particular church are not only imagined and remembered but also sensed, i.e. experienced in one's bodily presence. This is the experience described by Gernot Böhme as “a certain awe, a readiness for

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<sup>739</sup> Juhani Pallasmaa, “Space, Place, and Atmosphere: Peripheral Perception in Existential Experience,” in Christian Borch, ed., *Architectural Atmospheres: On the Experience and Politics of Architecture* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2014), 18–41; quote from page 30.

<sup>740</sup> Helmut Müller argues that precisely such traces of communal life in an old active church are responsible for preserving the special aura of the church space. See pages 185–6 in chapter five of this thesis. In his view on the church visitor's feeling of safety, Pallasmaa agrees with Böhme who mentions “safety and calm” among the subject's reactions to a church atmosphere; see page 260 above. While the sensation of calm might seem to contradict the ability of space to bring forward one's existential concerns, the state of repose is indispensable for contemplation of the eternal questions. In the words of Peter Zumthor: “Um angerührt zu werden, müssen wir ruhig werden.” See “Ruhe und Weite. Räume der Nachdenklichkeit und Spiritualität in der Architektur der Gegenwart,” in Thomas Erne and Peter Schütz, eds., *Der Religiöse Charme der Kunst* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2012), 281.

contemplation, and [...] an expectation of transcendence,” and by Charles Taylor as “a certain admiration, wonder, mixed with some nostalgia, at these sites where the contact with the transcendent was/is so much firmer, surer.”<sup>741</sup> Consequently, what old churches elicit for their visitors is not only the presence of the past but also the presence, or at the very least the possibility of, the other reality—one that transcends the limitations of the secular world. The experiential value of evoking the transcendent perspective is the first characteristic of post-secular space.

Our examination of Böhme’s phenomenological account of church atmospheres has revealed that even though old ecclesiastical architecture can bring to mind the ideas of transcendence, its ability to raise existential questions and therefore produce experiential space depends on the presence of the living Christian ritual. The latter yields a condition that reflects a contemporary person’s “being cross-pressured between the open and closed perspectives.”<sup>742</sup> That is to say, active churches embody the antithesis to the dominant secular mentality of the Western world. German theologian Benedikt Kranemann defines the role of active churches in today’s society exactly so, viz. as the act of piercing through the prevailing secularization narrative:

What does this mean for a secularized society, when the houses or religious worship—with all their varieties and differences—attest in its very midst that people live with God, practice their devotion, and also express faith architectonically? *Every “working” church or synagogue bursts through the pattern of axiomatic secularization.* As long as these spaces can be experienced as living, they enable the awareness of theism in its entire diversity.<sup>743</sup>

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<sup>741</sup> See pages 260 and 271 above, respectively.

<sup>742</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 555. See page 269 above.

<sup>743</sup> Benedikt Kranemann, “Symbole des Religiösen im Urbanen: Ein Versuch über Architektur der Religionen in säkularer Gesellschaft,” in Nollert, *Kirchenbauten in der Gegenwart*, 175–80; quote from page 178. The original reads, “Was bedeutet es für eine säkularisierte Gesellschaft, wenn die Gotteshäuser der Religionen—bei allen Unterschieden und Differenzen—in ihrer Mitte bezeugen, dass Menschen mit Gott leben, entsprechend religiös praktizieren und dem auch baulich Ausdruck verleihen? *Jede ‘arbeitende’ Kirche oder Synagoge durchbricht das Muster selbstverständlicher Säkularisierung.* Indem diese Räume als belebt erfahren werden können, ermöglichen sie die Wahrnehmung von Gottesglauben in ganzer Vielfalt.” Emphasis in italics is by the author of this thesis.



Similarly to Charles Taylor,<sup>744</sup> Kranemann demonstrates that active churches can breach, what the author of *A Secular Age* called, the immanent frame. Thus, active churches intensify the cross-pressures between immanence and transcendence in the present-day society; namely, the cross-pressured stand of a contemporary person.<sup>745</sup> In addition, what Kranemann refers to as the full range of theism relates to Taylor's identification of post-secular pluralism with today's availability of multiple options of belief and unbelief. If contemporary non-devotional art represents the latter, then exhibitions in living churches become intersections of the secular and the sacred. The in-betweenness stemming from the junction between belief and unbelief is the second characteristic of post-secular space.<sup>746</sup>

In our discussion of art's post-secular potential, we have established that contemporary art can, one, situate the subject in the physicality of the here and now and, two, threaten the immanent frame without advocating any religious beliefs. The former ability, termed by Mark Taylor "the materialization of the spiritual," applies to the effect that a material work of secular, non-sacramental art has on the sacred space of an active church. Reversely, the latter stands for the saturation of tangible art objects with a specific church aura.<sup>747</sup> Such exchange of material and spiritual qualities results in a qualitatively unique type of experience, which often entails a symbolic response of the viewer. This means that a contemporary person employs symbols to

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<sup>744</sup> See pages 271–2 above.

<sup>745</sup> Comparably Eckhard Frick (Ludwig Maximilian University, Munich) characterizes sacred spaces as sites in between sacred and profane realms: "Sakralbauten unterscheiden sich jedoch nicht nur als abgegrenzter 'témenos' von profanen (im Allgemeinen nicht-heterotopen) Bauten. Sie symbolisieren auch die Grenzlinie zwischen profan und sakral, sowie das Hin- und Herwandern zwischen beiden Sphären." See Nollert, *Kirchenbauten in der Gegenwart*, 46.

<sup>746</sup> For a theological perspective on "the in-between spaces," see Eveline Valtink, "In Between: Kirche in einer urbanen Kultur," in Herrmann, Mertin, and Valtink, *Die Gegenwart der Kunst*, 320–33.

<sup>747</sup> Compare this idea with the following conclusion by Gernot Böhme: "Church spaces even have a particular attraction for the visual arts—due, of course, to the fact that visual artists can relate their works to an already existing atmosphere, with which they can then play through contrast, augmentation or modification. In this way, they may regain the very aura they lost with modernism. If, according to Benjamin's analysis, this loss occurred in the transition from cult value to exhibition value, then at least a whiff of cult value may be re-impacted to the works of visual art when they participate in the atmosphere of church spaces." Böhme, *Atmospheric Architectures*, 179.

interpret connections between the material and the spiritual, i.e. between the immanent and the transcendent. This symbolic operation, however, is different from a conventional understanding of symbols in both art and religion; e.g. an image of a lamb represents Jesus Christ. Beyond either aesthetic or religious interpretations, the symbolic response to secular art in sacred spaces involves a myriad of possible meanings—we may call them post-secular symbols. While traditional symbols affirmatively communicate information about the world and its attributes, post-secular symbols are first of all individual, subjective phenomena that vary from one person to another. Second, they are ambiguous and interrogative: pointing not to one but to a range of meanings; not to answers but to questions. Third, oscillating between the immanent and the transcendent, post-secular symbols lead one's mind to eternal existential questions—those about one's inner self as well as the contemporary *conditio humana*. Eliciting symbolic response to the in-betweenness of belief and unbelief is thus another distinguishing feature of post-secular space.<sup>748</sup>

To sum up, post-secular space is a productive atmosphere that originates at the intersection of the sacred and the secular, thereby creating a new type of experience for a contemporary person. In post-secular space the secular (contemporary non-devotional art) can evoke the sacred through “the materialization of the spiritual,” while the sacred (church atmosphere) can lend a spiritual aura to the secular. Importantly, post-secular space belongs neither to specific ecclesiastical settings<sup>749</sup> nor to works of contemporary art; instead originating between the two it is necessarily the space of the person visiting an old active church and encountering art therein.

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<sup>748</sup> Of relevance here is Otto von Simson's differentiation between meanings and functions of symbols for the medieval man and those for the modern man. For the former the entire physical reality was a multitude of symbols; for the latter a symbol is “the subjective creation of poetic fancy” (Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, xvi–xvii, 54–5). Post-secular symbols are neither of these definitions; they are neither metaphysical nor illusory. Instead, we should describe them as participatory and engaging.

<sup>749</sup> It would be indeed illogical to designate spaces of active churches as post-secular because living churches by definition have always been antithetical to the secular realm.

So entering this type of space the subject experiences an intensified cross-pressure—a pull in opposite directions—and responds by constructing symbolic connections between the immanent and transcendent perspectives. Returning to Böhme’s notion *Befindlichkeit*, we may now define the post-secular disposition of a contemporary person as a tension that is caused by one’s bodily presence in post-secular space—at the junction between belief and unbelief, consequentially heightening one’s awareness of the self as part of the present-day society and provoking contemplation of existential questions. Exhibitions of contemporary non-devotional art in old active churches create possibilities of post-secular space, and ensuing experiences are arguably different from encounters with art in other, i.e. secular, public places.

It is the argument of this thesis that post-secular space is a concept that synthesizes the discussion of the presented case studies by explicating the phenomenological processes that occur at the intersection of contemporary non-sacramental art and old living churches. Not part of the intent of either involved pastors or artists, post-secular spaces are rather by-products that belong to the third party—the exhibition visitor. That is why the term can synthesize a great diversity of examples—whether in Protestant or Catholic churches, group or solo exhibitions; artworks as guests, surrounds, bridges, or morals. Corresponding with the timeframes of discourses on the spatial turn and post-secularism, the term also pertains to the developments at issue that span the period from the 1980s to the present. So how is the proposed term relevant to the contents of this thesis?

Looking back at the thematic exhibitions of the 1980s, we may properly inquire whether post-secular space showed its first signs in the museum projects realized by Wieland Schmied, Franz

Joseph van der Grinten and Friedhelm Mennekes, Horst Schwebel and Heinz-Ulrich Schmidt.<sup>750</sup>

As argued in chapter three, at the core of these events was the curators' belief in modern and contemporary art's ability to transcend the material realm and thus communicate to the viewer eternal, existential questions. The art at the exhibitions was argued to serve as a source of profound personal experience, or as expressed by Schmied "the experience of glimpsing into the eternity."<sup>751</sup> Accordingly, we can infer that the first characteristic of post-secular space—the experiential value of eliciting the transcendent perspective—can be alluded to in the thematic exhibitions discussed above. However, whereas the interaction between the religious and artistic realms was on the curators' agenda, the museum context posed limitations on the possibility of effective cross-pressured experience. Because the thematic nature of exhibitions necessarily entailed a cognitive interpretation—an instrument native to the immanent frame, one side of the conversation dominated the interaction, impeding the possibility of productive in-betweenness. For the same reason, any symbolic construing of artworks derived from art historical accounts of exhibitions and therefore could be accomplished via conventional sense of symbols; rather than post-secular, viz. subjective and ambiguous, symbols. So while the thematic exhibitions displayed a certain affinity with our definition of post-secular space, they did not attain the term's magnitude but only paved the way for its development. The greatest prognostic significance of the 1980s projects was thus invigorating the dialogue between Christian institutions and the art world and encouraging future organisation of contemporary non-devotional art exhibitions inside active churches in Germany.<sup>752</sup>

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<sup>750</sup> Thematic exhibitions are discussed on pages 50–65 of this thesis.

<sup>751</sup> "Erfahrung des Augenblicks Ewigkeit," in Schmied and Schilling, *GegenwartEwigkeit*, 16.

<sup>752</sup> It would be an interesting study to compare the goals and ideas behind the thematic exhibitions of the 1980s with those of similar museum shows of the early twenty-first century. For example, a comparative analysis could be conducted between the exhibitions discussed in this thesis and such recent projects as *Medium Religion* at the Center for Art and Media in Karlsruhe (2008/2009), or *The Problem of God* at Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen in Düsseldorf (2015/16).

It is arguably at the earliest exhibitions in two old active churches, Saint Peter in Cologne and Hospital Church in Stuttgart, that post-secular spaces emerge as a new type of intersection between the secular and the sacred. How did the triptych series at the former and first site-specific projects at the latter create such spaces and the associated with them experiences? Contemplating Jürgen Brodwolf's *Three Figures for a Chancel* in the Jesuit church of Cologne (fig. 3) we may reason that, despite death being the overt subject of the work, the sculptures' direct proximity to the altar table raises the question of everlasting life. The contact between the atmosphere of Saint Peter and the ecstasies of Brodwolf's figures result in surpassing the secular reading of the art installation. In between the transcendent and the immanent sides of the encounter, the viewer connects the two through eternal existential questions and personal, subjective symbolization. So thinking about secular and religious perspectives on life and death, the individual asks what these two words mean to him- or her and thus interprets the experience in accordance with his or her own personal response. The post-secular disposition reveals itself in a heightened awareness of the self amid the simultaneous availability of multiple options of belief and unbelief. Ergo, the space of such experience can be defined as post-secular. In a subtler but similar way one can experience Madeleine Dietz's *One Part of...* at Hospital Church (fig. 14): the work invites a conversation between the iconography of Seyfer's crucifixion group and the poetics of materials in the contemporary sculpture, between the sacred world of religious beliefs and the profane world of artistic production. Again, the church atmosphere does not dictate but hints at certain questions so that the responsibility to interpret belongs solely to the viewer. Observing later art examples from both churches, we can appositely employ the term post-secular space to describe one's experience of exhibitions as a productive cross-pressure. Post-secular space is created when because of James Lee Byars' or Thomas Lehnerer's (figs. 6

and 15) interventions in worship services each “pulling” side is challenged with a valid alternative and the medium of light serves as the channel of exchange of material and spiritual qualities between sacred and secular domains. Or, when Rudolf Reiber’s and Barbara Kruger’s straightforward questions meet the viewers at the centres of active ritual spaces and require them to answer candidly, neither to the church nor to the artist but to the viewer’s inner self. Pioneering in the church engagement with contemporary non-sacramental art in Germany, Friedhelm Mennekes and Helmut Müller initiated such a new type of interaction between the two spheres that produced spaces of unique experiences, which were neither merely aesthetic nor purely religious. So today Saint Peter and Hospital Church can be understood as post-secular spaces located within the current social context and urban environments of respectively Cologne and Stuttgart.

With the thematic exhibitions and activities by Mennekes and Müller setting the tone for ensuing engagement between Christian institutions and the art world in Germany, possibilities for post-secular spaces have grown accordingly. Namely, churches recognized the secularity of contemporary art not as incongruous with their own principles but instead as valuable for human growth. Over the past thirty years this engagement found multiple forms of expressions throughout the country. As argued in chapter five, some of the most frequent forms include artworks as exhibitions, surrounds, bridges, and morals.<sup>753</sup> While such categories underline the roles of old ecclesiastical architecture and active ritual practice, in view of the present theoretical framework they correspond to different modes of the subject’s bodily presence. Artworks as exhibitions lead the visitor to church peripheries and in so doing weaken, yet do not eradicate, the tension between immanent and transcendent perspectives on account of an increased distance between the altar and the work of art. Artworks as surrounds can overwhelm or even envelop the

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<sup>753</sup> See pages 196–225 above.

person and thereby overpower the church atmosphere; hence, the tension can abate in this case too. Artworks as bridges create a working balance that allows both sides to meet at the junction with proportioned weight. Consider Koestlé-Cate's interpretation of Jenny Holzer's installation *For Frankfurt* (fig. 26) as a strategy "turning the surface of the church into a screen for projected imaginings or alternative stories."<sup>754</sup> Making creative use of the exterior surfaces of old churches contemporary artists draw public attention to the presence of the religious, "alternative," perspectives in the city. Koestlé-Cate continues, "It matters, then, that it is churches onto which these words, messages and meanings are projected. Whether it is with the thoughts of great minds or the reflections of the public this is a conversation in which the church has been accorded a foundation role."<sup>755</sup> Post-secular spaces indeed facilitate the dialogue between the two perspectives, and artworks as bridges are excellent examples thereof. So are artworks as morals: although this exhibition paradigm does not exert a particular influence on the viewer's bodily presence, it reveals the post-secular disposition of a contemporary person by connecting the experience in a church to the social matters and difficulties of the day. The exhibition viewer thus asks where the needed solution might come from: the immanent frame of the secular society or the transcendent possibility of the religious sphere. For example, *A Lighthouse for Lampedusa* by Thomas Kilpper (fig. 27) raises precisely this question in relation to the current refugee crisis. Importantly, artworks as morals emphasize the shared interests of both sides and therefore bring the different worldviews closer to one another. This paradigm especially demonstrates a constructive function of post-secular spaces; namely their ability to broaden awareness of the pluralistic character of today's society as well as to call for personal responsibility at *the age of uncertainty*. In his essay "Sacred and Secular Sources of Hope for a Post-Modern Society,"

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<sup>754</sup> Jonathan Koestlé-Cate, "Meditations on Religion, Art, and the City," in Rosen, *Religion and Art in the Heart of Modern Manhattan*, 222–3.

<sup>755</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.

sociologist of religion and Emeritus Fellow of Trinity Hall at the University of Cambridge, Graham Howes has recently described the febrility of the contemporary *conditio humana* in a similar way: “There is a deep sense of unease about the future, and our hopes for it. Older ideological moorings have either disintegrated or are no longer trusted, and the ordinary person who used to be considered a citizen is now reduced to the status of a consumer.”<sup>756</sup> Notwithstanding the title of his text, Howes eschews identifying the sacred and secular sources of hope because such agenda is “too ambitious.”<sup>757</sup> In reply, we can suggest that post-secular space, neither secular nor sacred in nature, can be an effective, in-between source of hope in the twenty-first century.<sup>758</sup>

This thesis developed on the premise that encountering contemporary art inside old active churches is an experience that is essentially distinct from seeing art either at conventional exhibition venues such as museums and galleries or in public spaces such as parks or city halls. In order to authenticate our definition of post-secular space, it is therefore necessary to test the applicability of the term in comparable settings: modern church buildings, deconsecrated churches, and museums/galleries. First, the primary difference between old and new ecclesiastical architecture is clarified by Pallasmaa, who observes that whereas historical buildings “elicit powerful emotional identification and engagement,” contemporary spaces tend to alienate a human being.<sup>759</sup> Thus, the existential experiential value of specifically *old*

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<sup>756</sup> Graham Howes, “Sacred and Secular Sources of Hope for a Post-Modern Society,” in *Estudos Avançados* 75, no. 26 (2012), 237–47; quote from page 242.

<sup>757</sup> That is, too ambitious “for a single lecture.” Ibid., 243–4.

<sup>758</sup> “Effective” in regard to the ongoing seeking of the post-secular man, as defined by Charles Taylor; “hope” in regard to the problems and concerns in this day and age.

<sup>759</sup> Pallasmaa, “Space, Place, and Atmosphere,” 38.



ecclesiastical architecture is absent in modern church buildings.<sup>760</sup> In 2016 Alexander Ochs curated the exhibition *Ecce Homo? Ecce Homo!* in the Berlin church of Saint Canisius—an example of contemporary architecture the structural plan of which consists of two intersecting concrete cubes and the wooden portal.<sup>761</sup> Profusely distributed works of art engaged with the white walls and minimalistic, geometrically organized space in a way that produced the impression of a gallery show, leaving scarce opportunity for the building’s sacred function to manifest itself.<sup>762</sup> In this example the combination of new art and new architecture overbore the balance between the sacred and the secular, considerably weakening the possibility of post-secular space coming about. Given that modern churches do not activate the memory of the Christian story of creation and transcendence they, furthermore, cannot rouse existential questions and hence threaten the secular buffered self.<sup>763</sup> The lack of tension between old and new, between memory and modernity, results therefore in the lack of productive interaction between the transcendent and the immanent, without which post-secular space cannot emerge.

Second, we have earlier disputed Gernot Böhme’s opinion that formerly active churches retain their unique atmospheres.<sup>764</sup> Without reiterating the entire argument, it is important to reemphasize that a contemporary person’s post-secular disposition depends not only on old

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<sup>760</sup> In this thesis Otto von Simson, Rudolf Schwarz, Gernot Böhme, Charles Taylor, and Juhani Pallasmaa are the voices that confirm the profound experiential significance of historical church buildings.

<sup>761</sup> The church was built between 2000 and 2002 according to the collaborative design by Heike Büttner, Claus Neumann, and George Braun. See Nollert, *Kirchenbauten in der Gegenwart*, 102–5.

<sup>762</sup> See Alexander Ochs, “ECCE HOMO? ECCE HOMO! 5. Mai bis 29. Juni 2016,” SEIN. ANTLITZ. KÖRPER., <http://sein-antlitz-koerper.de/st-canisius/> (accessed April 6, 2018). Ochs’ exhibition bears close resemblance to recent activities at another Berlin church, Saint Agnes. An example of a “concrete church” (*Betonkirche*), Saint Agnes is a former Christian house of worship (1967–2011) that has been turned into a commercial art gallery, König Galerie, in 2015. The comparison between the two spaces reveals a broader tendency to aestheticize modern and contemporary ecclesiastical spaces in order to achieve spectacular visual effects and original display of art objects.

<sup>763</sup> Along the same lines but through believers’ private stories rather than the main story of Christianity, German theologian Fulbert Steffensky accentuates the existential character of old churches: “Hier wurde ihr Lebensanfang unter die große Geste der Taufe gestellt, hier haben sie geschworen, hier haben sie den Bruch ihrer Schwüre bereut, hier haben sie ihr Glück gefeiert und ihre Niederlagen beweint, hier wurden die letzten Gebete über sie gesprochen. Jeder [alte] Kirchenraum ist dunkel von der Patina der Seufzer, der Gebete, der Zweifel, der Hoffnung der Toten.” Quoted in Nollert, *Kirchenbauten in der Gegenwart*, 28.

<sup>764</sup> See pages 261–2 above.

architectural elements of the given church but also on active ritualistic use thereof. Graham Howes writes of the principal meaning of old active churches for the Western society today:

...such buildings can serve as a psychological resource. As self-explanatory monuments to the historical continuity of Western Christendom, they lead us back to a world we have lost—a deep wellspring of residual religiosity upon which we can therapeutically draw—and deliver an emotional and spiritual pay-off which is far less evident in secular buildings of the same era. Indeed they represent something beyond, and above, the merely secular.<sup>765</sup>

Howes' point of view agrees both with Pallasmaa's "temporal continuum" and Charles Taylor's association of churches with a bygone enchanted age. The active religious use of churches allows for a "therapeutic" experience of their spaces. On the other hand, an erstwhile church can lead to a drastically different perception. An old ecclesiastical building devoid of its principal function communicates the idea of perishing of things. When something as longstanding and monumental as the Christian religion disappears in front of one's eyes, i.e. when one enters a former church, the feeling of insecurity and apprehension may follow. In this case the immanent perspective occupies the fullness of one's surroundings, disorienting one's perception of the world and depriving life of the possibility of "beyond, and above, the merely secular." For these reasons inactive churches, with or without contemporary art in their midst, cannot produce post-secular spaces and the associated with them experiences.

Finally, can post-secular spaces emerge in museums, galleries, or other venues for art exhibitions? Similarly to the case of modern church buildings, the majority of art museums are housed in modern or contemporary edifices and therefore lack the tension between the old and the new, history/tradition and the nowadays, the enchanted world of the past and the secular world of the present. In his book *The Re-enchantment of the World: Art versus Religion* Gordon Graham, professor of philosophy and the arts at Princeton University, poses a question whether

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<sup>765</sup> Howes, *The Art of the Sacred*, 76.

art can provide religious experiences in the secular world. One of the methods of his investigation concerns the category of space: the author wonders if there are secular equivalents to “the enchanted spaces” of churches.<sup>766</sup> Graham suggests that today grand architecture of museums, or “temples of the arts,” supplies the public with an experience that lends higher meaning to the routine of daily life. More precisely, he argues that the space of such cultural centers “inclines and empowers those who enter it” and can thus serve as a counterpart of the religious ritual.<sup>767</sup> What Graham does not take into consideration is that any meanings that museums impart on their visitors cannot surpass the immanent frame and provide answers to those existential questions which are directly addressed by religious faith. In other words, the space of secular exhibition venues lacks the first characteristic of post-secular space—an experiential value of evoking the transcendent perspective.<sup>768</sup> And while exhibitions’ themes can hint at the possibility of the transcendent perspective, as we have previously observed,<sup>769</sup> the museum context imposes limitations on the existential consequences of encountering art. So

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<sup>766</sup> Graham, *The Re-Enchantment of the World*, 129.

<sup>767</sup> Ibid., 140. One may dispute Graham’s phenomenological description: instead of empowering the visitor, modern and contemporary art museums and galleries can come across as elitist, catering for a particular type of audience, and therefore inaccessible for the general public. This is what O’Doherty argued against when he talked about “the white cube” as an environment for a consumerist, capitalist attitude to art appreciation. See pages 72–4 in chapter three of this thesis.

<sup>768</sup> Contrariwise, Danish cultural historian Peter Bjerregaard argues that museums have the capacity to generate engaging experiences by means of atmospheres. He argues that one can undergo “an intensified ‘being here,’ a sense of presence,” when visiting a museum exhibition. However, Bjerregaard notices that such experience of presence is necessarily a result of curatorial manipulation of space and hence not an inherent quality of museums (Peter Bjerregaard, “Dissolving Objects: Museums, Atmosphere and the Creation of Presence,” in *Emotion, Space and Society* 30 [2014], 1–8). Some of recent exhibition strategies, or “manipulation of space,” can indeed be perceived as curators’ aiming at impressions of sacred spaces; e.g. dimming of lights or use of liturgical music. Contemporary art curator Dieter Roelstraete remarks: “the expressionist technique of ‘shadows and fog’ has become a pervasive scenographic trope in much curating” (Hlavajova, Lütticken, and Winder, *The Return of Religion*, 170). Another factor that speaks against museums’ ability to create profound experiences is a plentiful quantity of artworks displayed in the same area: when the person is exposed to multiple works at once, it is certainly more difficult to concentrate on a single object. Any person who has ever been to an art exhibition can confirm that only fully engaged looking can lead to significant art experiences. That is why exhibitions in churches, which do not include as many artworks as museum shows, have such a benefit for the viewer.

<sup>769</sup> See pages 285–6 above.

even if religions and their beliefs are at the center of certain curatorial projects,<sup>770</sup> the discussions that accompany these events are confined within the immanent frame, rendering the balanced in-betweenness and thus post-secular space improbable.

The present analysis has defined post-secular spaces as productive atmospheres that originate at the intersection of sacred and profane realms and consequently create situations of unique personal experiences. We have identified the key characteristics of the synthesizing notion as ability to evoke transcendent perspective, effective in-betweenness, and stimulation of the subject's symbolic response to this in-betweenness. In addition, we have described the post-secular disposition of a contemporary person as a tension that is caused by one's bodily presence in post-secular space and that therefore provokes raising of existential questions and increased awareness of the self. In an attempt to pinpoint experiences relevant to the case studies of this thesis, we have ultimately determined that the unique experience of non-sacramental art in old active churches is dependent upon the descriptors *old* and *active*. In other words, exhibitions and installations of secular art in old living sacred places are phenomena that create possibilities of post-secular space in the twenty-first century.

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<sup>770</sup> Lately this has been the case in German and European museums. See Marion Ackermann, "Freie, persönliche Aneignung: Direktorin der Kunststammlung NRW Marion Ackermann im Gespräch mit Philipp Gessler," Deutschlandfunk Kultur, [http://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/kunst-und-kirche-freie-persoennliche-aneignung.1278.de.html?dram:article\\_id=307756](http://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/kunst-und-kirche-freie-persoennliche-aneignung.1278.de.html?dram:article_id=307756) (accessed January 24, 2018). Perhaps the most notable example is a monumental exhibition *Traces of the Sacred (Traces du Sacré)* at Centre Pompidou in Paris (2008).

## 7. Conclusion

This thesis has been built upon the question “What happens to a person in the space where living Christian religion meets secular artistic expression?” In pursuit of possible answers, it has focused on the two churches—Saint Peter in Cologne and Hospital Church in Stuttgart—where the engagement with contemporary non-sacramental art has been ongoing since 1987. The research has resulted in several findings that help to understand one’s experience of non-Christian art in active Christian houses of worship. First, the thematic exhibitions of the 1980s have proved to be pivotal not only in giving impetus to initial exhibitions in ecclesiastical settings organized by Friedhelm Mennekes in Cologne and Helmut Müller in Stuttgart but also in connecting the worlds of the church and contemporary art by disclosing their shared concerns and values. Second, Mennekes and Müller have been identified as bellwethers in the field of church exhibitions because they recognized the potential of art to generate profound personal experiences, viz. the potential that has been described in chapter six of this thesis as post-secular potential of contemporary art. Third, the comparison between curatorial activities by both pastors and the investigation of case studies beyond Saint Peter and Hospital Church has led to a discovery of those common patterns or paradigms of coexistence between contemporary non-sacramental art and old active churches that have emerged in Germany over the past three decades. Ultimately, the analysis of case studies has revealed that old ecclesiastical architecture and living Christian faith are the two key characteristics that distinguish unique experiences of the given church exhibitions. Based on the last outcome the thesis has conceptualized the experience of contemporary non-Christian art in old active churches as a personal experience of post-secular space. Thus, the proposed theory of post-secular space has answered the principal

question of this thesis through a complex phenomenology that involves space, society, subject, and object.

Serving to interpret the findings of this thesis, post-secular space simultaneously describes the in-between predicament of a contemporary person. In reference to Gernot Böhme's theory of atmospheres on the one hand, this implies the subject's situation between the ecstasies of things and the subject's personal disposition, or *Befindlichkeit*. Viewed from a post-secular angle on the other hand, the in-between predicament denotes the cross-pressure between the immanent and transcendent mentalities. While post-secular space refers to church exhibitions in this thesis, the term can be applicable in a wide range of contexts where combinations of atmospheres and post-secularism create varied experiential circumstances. In other words, post-secular space is an interdisciplinary concept because it can be useful across multiple fields within the social sciences and the humanities, promoting discussions on, *inter alia*, relations between historical religions and contemporary culture, contexts of secularisation, psychologies of visual faith, phenomenology of architecture, or categories of spatial experiences. For the discipline of art history and art criticism, post-secular space can be particularly valuable because it aids the problematic conversation at the intersection of religion/spirituality and the professional art world. By enriching the vocabulary of the conversation, the term helps to clarify both "the strange place of religion in contemporary art," originally considered by James Elkins, and the strange place of contemporary art in old active churches in Germany. Importantly, post-secular space can facilitate art historical discussions without resorting to the re-enchantment argument. Instead, the theory of post-secular space allows disenchantment (immanence) and enchantment (transcendence) to independently and yet synergistically coexist in one conversation. Specifically within the post-secular debate, this research project reveals one area of human

activity where post-secularism manifests itself; namely, the visual arts. And for the discourse on atmospheres, the thesis elucidates active sacred spaces as significantly unique precisely because such spaces are associated with the current ideas about post-secularism.

Inevitably there have been a number of limitations to this research. Because the subject matter is confined to a singular country and a short span of time the conclusions in this thesis represent a Western perspective, and similar case studies even in neighbouring countries such as France and the Netherlands could bring about different inferences. As the examination of every recent art exhibition or installation in an old active church was not possible, the paradigms of coexistence outlined in chapter five do not encompass all types of art interventions in ecclesiastical settings but instead highlight those patterns that have most frequently featured within the studied phenomenon. Therefore further research into more cases in Germany and abroad can provide additional insights. Another difficulty that the thesis has faced is its interdisciplinary position between the fields of art history and art criticism on the one hand and theology on the other. Without adhering to methods and vocabularies of merely one discipline, this thesis has attempted to find such creative ways of answering its main question that could be relevant to the interests of both sides. It is the hope of the author that the innovative theoretical framework introduced in chapter six stimulates criticism as well as future research in those fields. Building precisely on the notion “post-secular space,” the author would like to further inquire into manifestations of post-secularism, rather than religiosity or spirituality, in contemporary art. Likewise, the influence of atmospheres on the reception of art deserves special attention and can be evaluated in a variety of contexts—from conventional exhibition venues to many types of public spaces. Other intersections of atmospheric and post-secular attributes can be closer explored in cases of contemporary ecclesiastical architecture (where mnemonic operation is not as powerful as in old

churches), synagogues and mosques, or inactive sacred spaces. Critical comparison between interpretations of old church edifices in classical modern times and those in the late twentieth-early twenty-first centuries can produce a conceptual model that would be historically relevant to the emergence of post-secularism. The author is currently pursuing such a project within the history, philosophy and phenomenology of architecture, aiming to uncover connections between modern/contemporary theories of architectural space and sequential amendments to the secularization narrative. Finally, conceptual development of post-secular symbolism is on the author's research agenda: this concept can be a useful tool for evaluating reception of contemporary art from a phenomenological perspective.

Beyond academic discussions and scholarly research, the idea of post-secular space carries a practical value. Representing intersections of the secular and sacred realms, post-secular space brings together two contrasting worldviews and thus makes them aware of one another's existence. Moreover, it helps us to be conscious not only of the pluralistic character of the contemporary society but also of those concerns and questions that we share with other people, notwithstanding how different from us they appear to be. That is why exhibitions of non-religious, non-devotional art in old active sacred places facilitate communication that surpasses a narrowly defined dialogue between a singular faith-based community and a local art scene. Communication engendered by post-secular spaces transpires between the secularization narrative and the transcendent perspective, amidst both of which a contemporary person finds his or her bodily presence. Exhibitions of contemporary non-sacramental art in old active churches are neither merely Christian nor aesthetic spaces: they are newly open spaces for individual experiences. Consequently, the meanings derived from the experiences belong neither to an artwork nor to a church—but to a contemporary person. And although such meanings will vary



from individual to individual, it is important that both worldviews are equally available for everyone. At the age of dividedness and uncertainty post-secular spaces invite each of us to unite rather than separate, build bridges rather than raise walls. That is not to say that exhibitions of contemporary secular art in old active churches will bring peace to the world, however they can have a contributive impact at an individual level, and the sum of personal transformations can evolve into social change.

### Illustration credits

Fig. 1: Hermann Buss, altar painting, 1990, oil on panel, 165 x 70 cm, Inselkirche, Langeoog.

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(July 16, 2018). © Kurt Wichmann.

Fig. 2: View of the interior of Saint Peter Cologne, with a triptych-painting by Markus Lüpertz,

*Ich war in einem Land in dem die Schmetterlinge gekreuzigt wurden*, 1987.

From Guido Schlimbach, *Für einen lange währenden Augenblick* (2009).

Fig. 3: Jürgen Brodwolf , *Drei Figuren für einen Altarraum*, 1987, cardboard, gauze, asphalt,

Plexiglas, and iron, each 250 x 20 x 20 cm, Saint Peter, Cologne.

From Guido Schlimbach, *Für einen lange währenden Augenblick* (2009).

Fig. 4: Fred Thieler, *Palenque '78*, 1978, mixed media on canvas, each 200 x 170 cm,

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Fig. 5: Chieo Senzaki, *Transparent*, 1990, tree branches, ca. 700 x 550 x 400 cm,

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various dimensions, Saint Peter, Cologne.

From Guido Schlimbach, *Für einen lange währenden Augenblick* (2009).

Fig. 7: Anish Kapoor, *Changing Focuses*, installation at Saint Peter, Cologne, 1996.

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Fig. 8: Interior view of Saint Peter, Cologne, 2000.

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Fig. 9: Eduardo Chillida, *Gurutz Aldare*, 1967/2000, granite, 100,5 x 201 x 99 cm, Saint Peter, Cologne.

From Friedhelm Mennekes, *Eduardo Chillida: Kreuz und Raum* (2001).

Fig.10: Barbara Kruger, installation at Saint Peter, Cologne, 2003.

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Fig.11: Angela Glajcar, *AD LUCEM*, 2009, paper and steelwork, 400 x 125 x 1050 cm, Saint Peter, Cologne.

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Fig.12: Wolfgang Vetten, *Dimenticare*, April 6, 2017, performance at Saint Peter, Cologne.

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Fig.13: Interior view of Hospital Church, Stuttgart, with Hans Seyfer's *Crucifixion* (1501).

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Fig.14: Madeleine Dietz, *Ein Teil von...*, 1990, steel and earth, Hospital Church, Stuttgart.

From Helmut Müller, *Jetzt, Neugierig, Präsent, Offen* (1997).

Fig.15: Thomas Lehnerer, *Gott*, 1992, installation at Hospital Church, Stuttgart.

From Helmut Müller, *Gesucht: Spirituelle Erfahrungsräume* (2012).

Fig.16: Klaus Illi, *Atem-Raum*, 1995, red “breathing” disc, deflated 96 x 96 x 27 cm, lightbox, 26 x 32 x 11 cm, Hospital Church, Stuttgart.

From Helmut Müller, *Atem-Raum*: (1996).

Fig.17: Heinz-Josef Mess, *Ich (bin die Auferstehung, Selbstbildnis)*, 1986/1994, oil and mixed media on cloth, various dimensions, Hospital Church, Stuttgart.

From Helmut Müller, *Gesucht: Spirituelle Erfahrungsräume* (2012).

Fig.18: Victor Mira, *Hallucinogen für Extasis*, 1997, mixed media, 92 x 65,5 cm, Hospital Church, Stuttgart.

From Helmut Müller, *Auferstehen: Auferstehung* (1998).

Fig.19: Heinz Breloh, *Der Geschmack der Züchtigung*, 1998, eight terracotta figures, various dimensions, Hospital Church, Stuttgart.

From Helmut Müller, *Gesucht: Spirituelle Erfahrungsräume* (2012).

Fig.20: Philipp Haager, *Melting Memory*, 2010, Indian ink on linen, 380 x 650 cm, Hospital Church, Stuttgart.

From Helmut Müller, *Philipp Haager: Phasis* (2010).

Fig.21: View of Hospital Church and the renovated Hospitalhof, Stuttgart, 2014.

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Fig.22: Interior view of Hospital Church, Stuttgart, after the renovation, 2017.

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Fig.23: Christian Jankowski, *Casting Jesus*, 2011/2012, two-channel video installation, Church of Brenz, Stuttgart.

Image above downloaded from <https://www.mainpost.de/regional/main-tauber/Stuttgart-sucht-den-Super-Jesus;art21526,6798271> (July 16, 2018); image below from Helmut Müller, *Gesucht: Spirituelle Erfahrungsräume* (2012).

Fig.24: Gabriela Nasfeter, *Lichtpyramide*, 2000-2003, spinnaker fabric and polyester robes, traveling exhibition: Berlin Cathedral (left), St. James in London (right).

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Fig.25: Michael Pendry, *Les Colombes*, 2013/2014, multimedia installation, Church of the Holy Spirit, Munich.

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Fig.26: Jenny Holzer, *For Frankfurt*, 2010, light projection onto the north façade of Old Saint Nicholas Church, Frankfurt.

Downloaded from <http://luminapolis.com/en/2010/10/jenny-holzer-for-frankfurt/> (July 16, 2018). © Westermann Kommunikation Gesellschaft für Publizistik mbH.

Fig.27: Thomas Kilpper, *A Lighthouse for Lampedusa*, 2017, remains of refugee boats and mixed media, Karlskirche, Kassel.

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Fig.28: Rebecca Raue, *Ankommen und Ablegen*, 2015, fiberboard and cloth, Church of Saint Matthew, Berlin; background with a painting by Arnulf Rainer (*Kreuz*, 1980–1985) that was exhibited in the church apse between February 18 and April 3, 2015.

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Fig.29: Lawrence Weiner, *DICHT BEI*, 2010, permanent installation in the Church of Saint John, Düsseldorf.

Downloaded from <https://kunst-marlies-blauth.blogspot.com/2015/04/johanneskirche-dusseldorf.html> (July 16, 2018). © Marlies Blauth.

## Illustrations



Figure 1: Hermann Buss, altar painting, 1990, Inselkirche in Langeoog

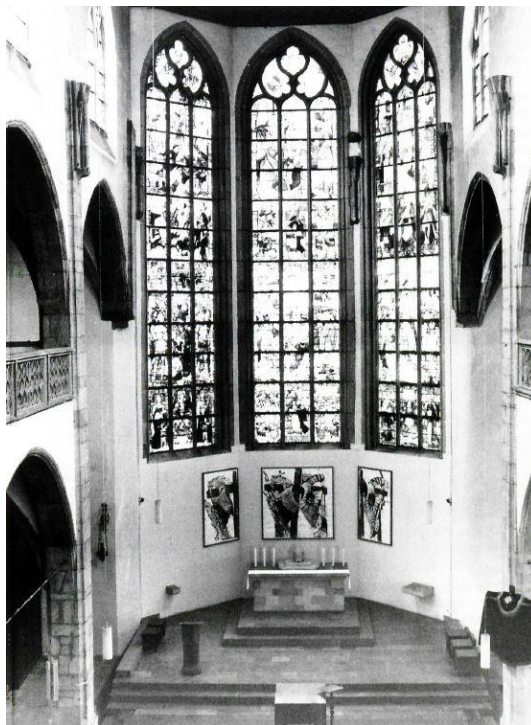


Figure 2: View of the interior of Saint Peter with a triptych-painting by Markus Lüpertz, 1987



Figure 3: Jürgen Brodwolf, *Drei Figuren für einen Altarraum*, 1987, Saint Peter, Cologne

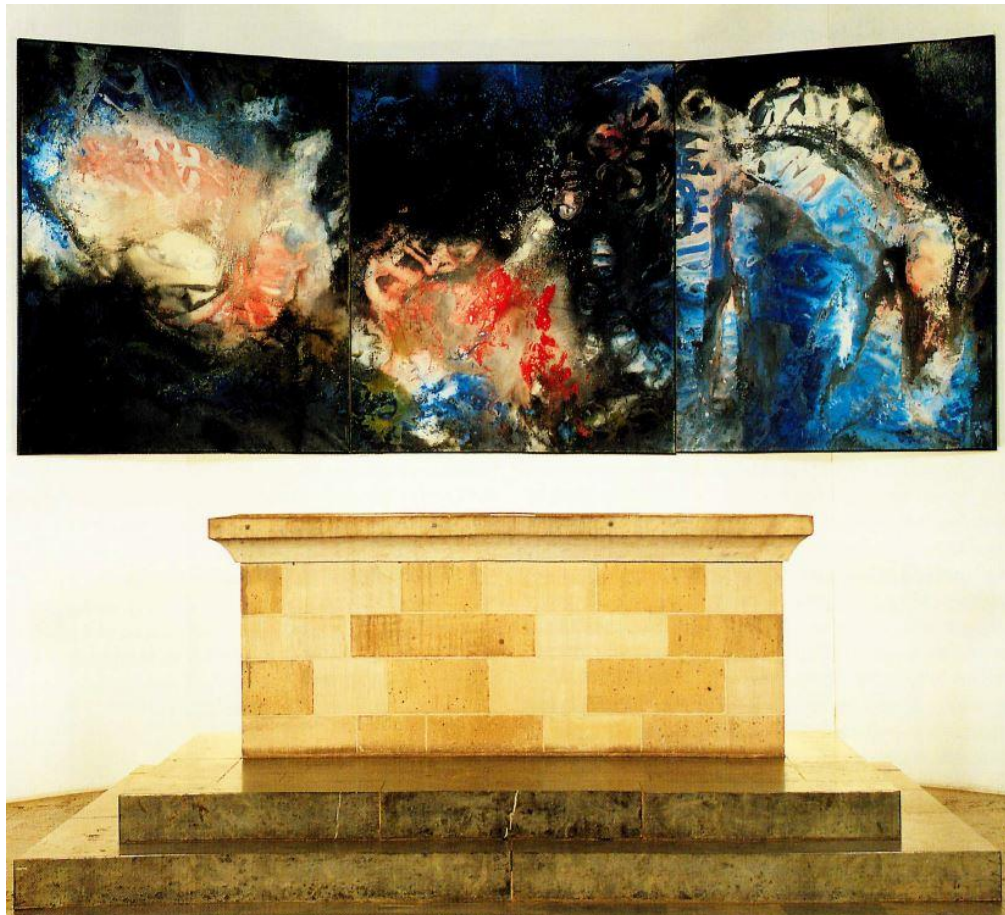


Figure 4: Fred Thieler, *Palenque '78*, 1978, Saint Peter, Cologne



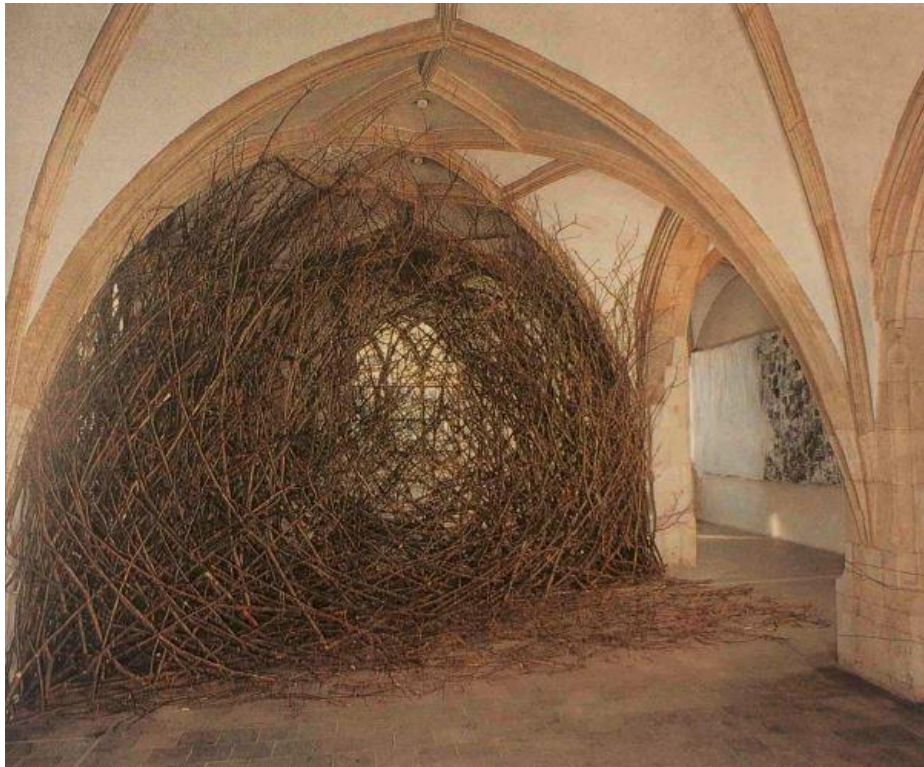


Figure 5: Chieo Senzaki, *Transparent*, 1990, Saint Peter, Cologne

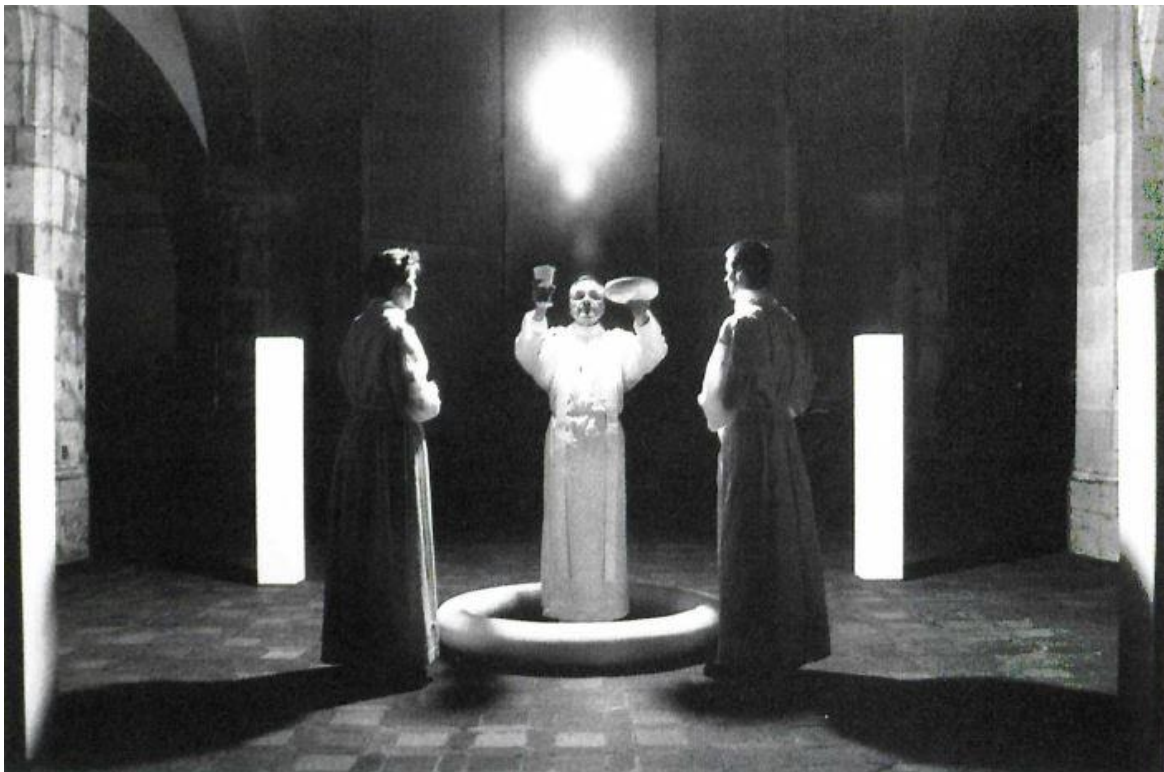


Figure 6: James Lee Byars, *The White Mass*, 1987/1995, Saint Peter, Cologne



Figure 7: Anish Kapoor, installation at Saint Peter, Cologne, 1996





Figure 8: View of the interior of Saint Peter after the renovation of the church, 2000

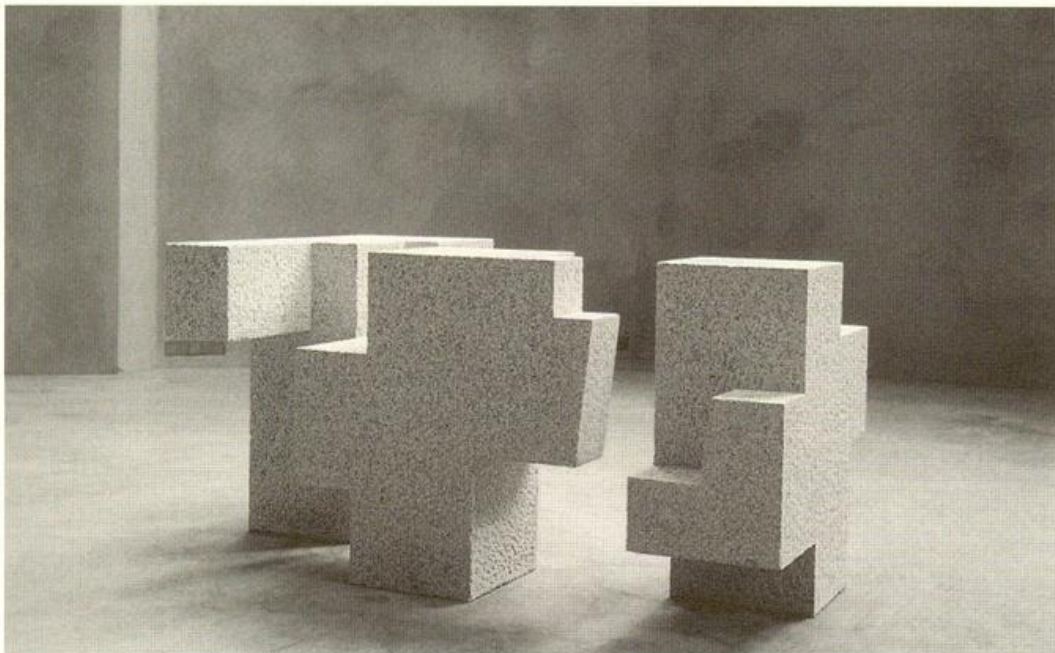


Figure 9: Eduardo Chillida, *Gurutz Aldare*, 1967/2000, Saint Peter, Cologne



Figure 10: Barbara Kruger, installation at Saint Peter, Cologne, 2003



Figure 11: Angela Glajcar, *AD LUCEM*, 2009, Saint Peter, Cologne



Figure 12: Wolfgang Vetten, performance at Saint Peter, Cologne, 2017





Figure 13: Interior view of Hospital Church, Stuttgart, with Hans Seyfer's *Crucifixion*



Figure 14: Madeleine Dietz, *Ein Teil von...*, 1990, Hospital Church, Stuttgart



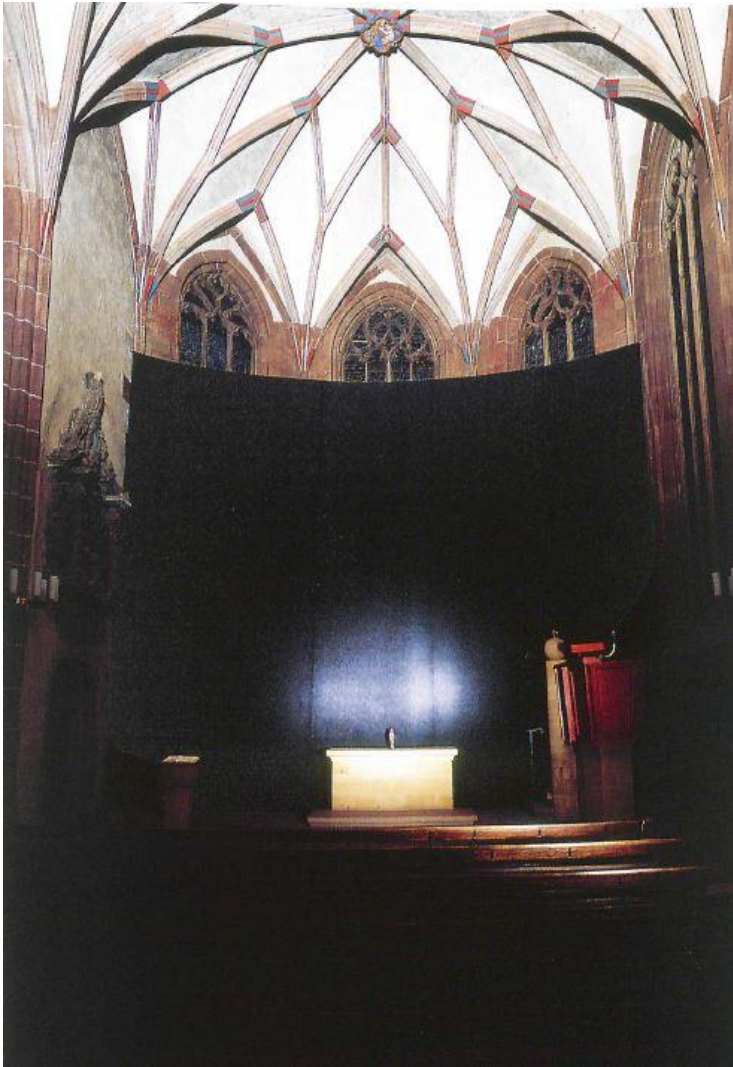


Figure 15: Thomas Lehnerer, *Gott*, 1992, Hospital Church, Stuttgart

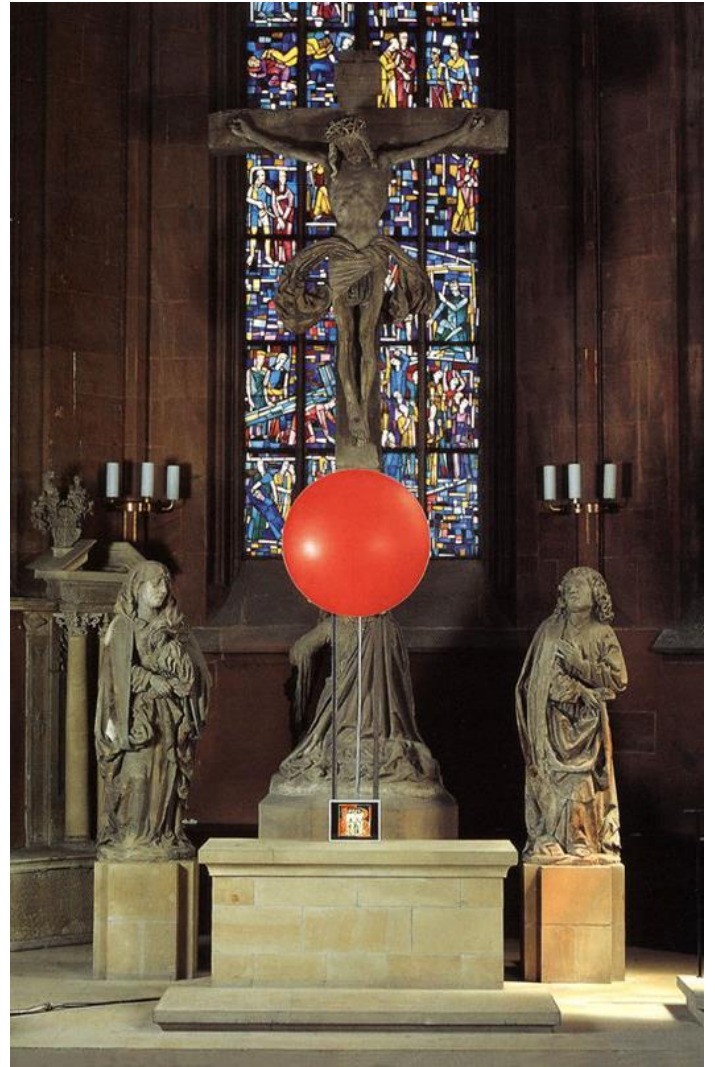


Figure 16: Klaus Illi, *Atem-Raum*, 1995, Hospital Church, Stuttgart

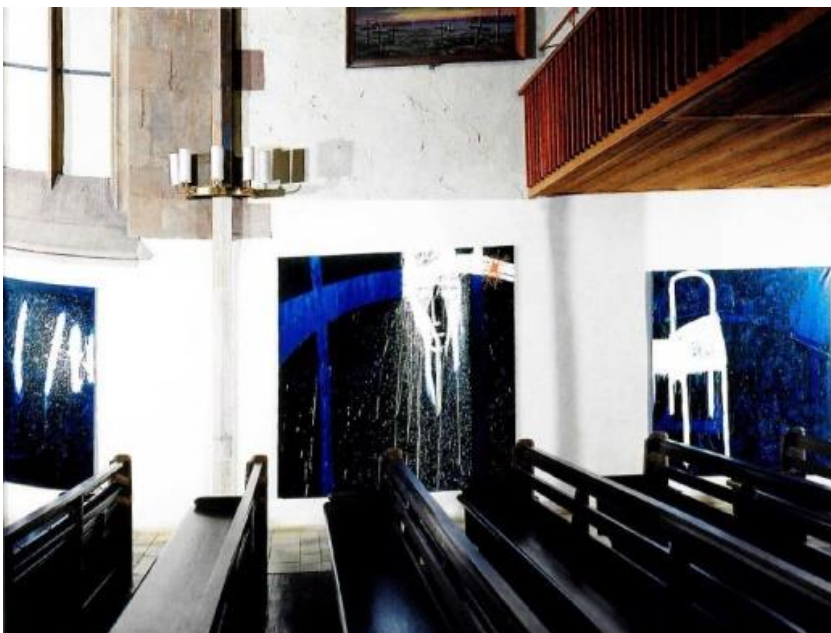


Figure 17: Heinz-Josef Mess, *Ich (bin die Auferstehung, Selbstbildnis)*, 1986/1994, Hospital Church, Stuttgart



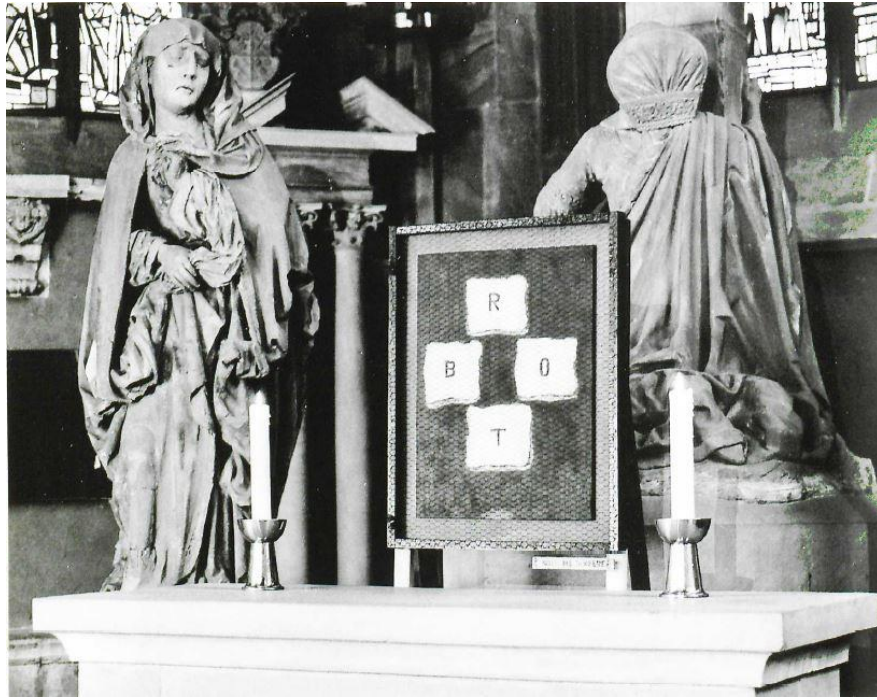


Figure 18: Victor Mira, *Hallucinogen für Extasis*, 1997, Hospital Church, Stuttgart

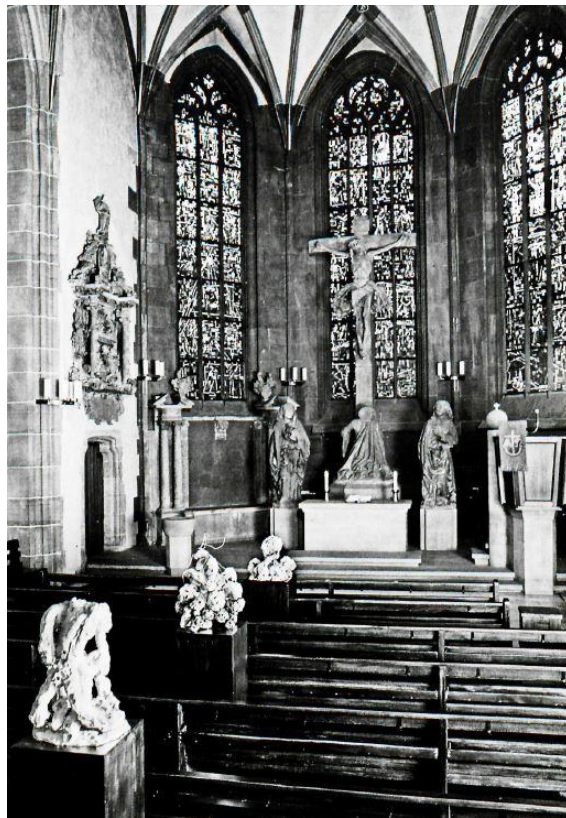


Figure 19: Heinz Breloh, *Der Geschmack der Züchtigung*, 1998, Hospital Church, Stuttgart

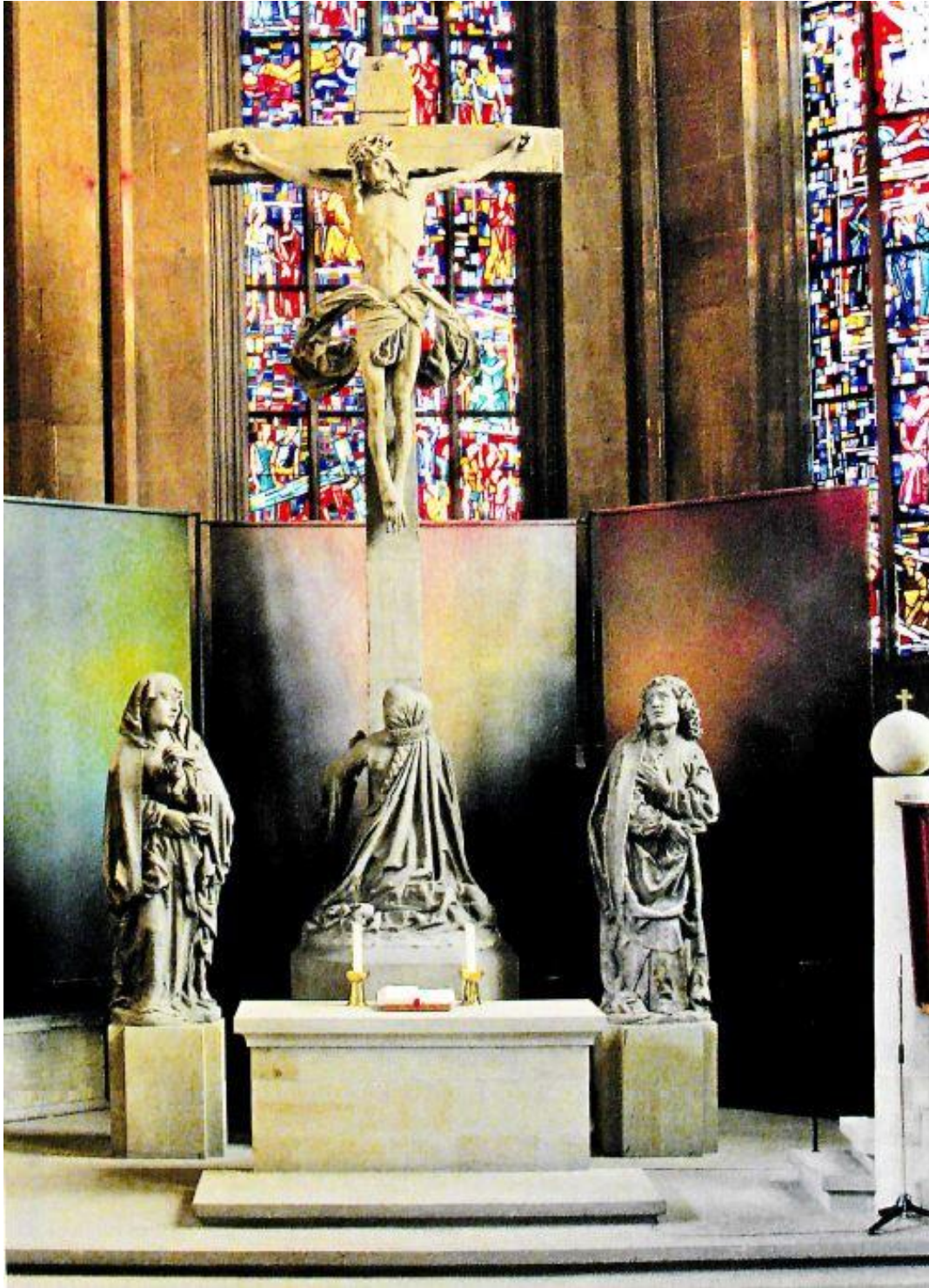


Figure 20: Philipp Haager, *Melting Memory*, 2010, Hospital Church, Stuttgart





Figure 21: View of Hospital Church and the renovated Hospitalhof, 2014



Figure 22: Interior view of Hospital Church after the renovation, 2017

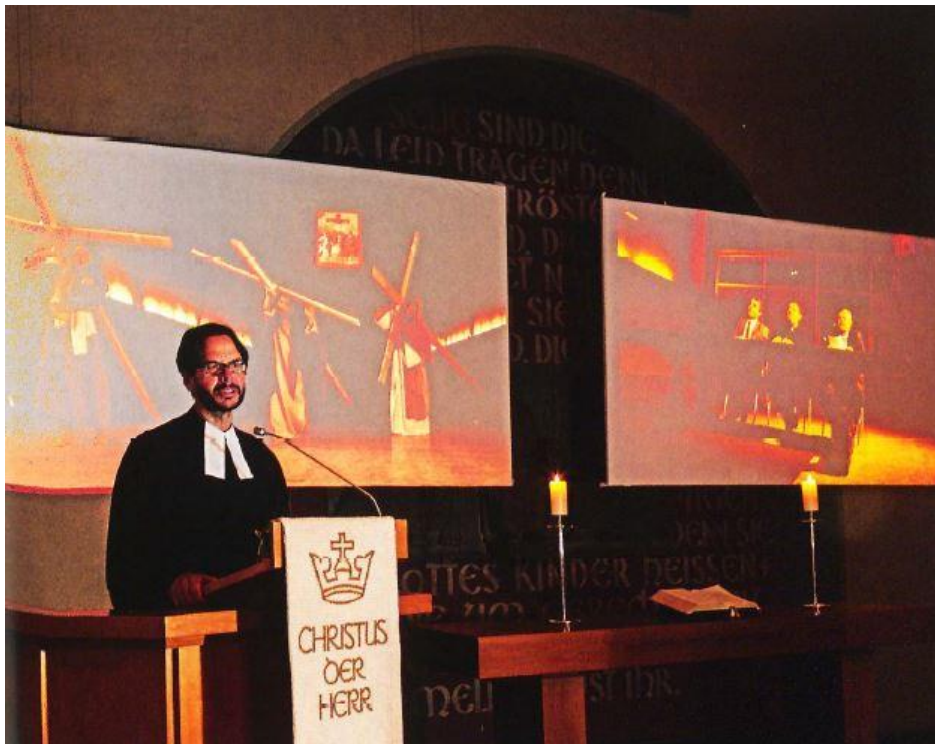


Figure 23: Christian Jankowski, *Casting Jesus*, 2011/2012, Church of Brenz, Stuttgart: artist in a pastor's robe before the congregation (above); the church minister Karl-Eugen Fischer (below)





Figure 24: Gabriela Nasfeter, *Lichtpyramide*, 2000–2003, various locations



Figure 25: Michael Pendry, *Les Colombes*, 2013/2014, Church of the Holy Spirit, Munich



Figure 26: Jenny Holzer, *For Frankfurt*, 2010, Old Saint Nicholas Church, Frankfurt



Figure 27: Thomas Kilpper, *A Lighthouse for Lampedusa*, 2017, Karlskirche, Kassel





Figure 28: Rebecca Raue, *Ankommen und Ablegen*, 2015, Church of Saint Matthew, Berlin



Figure 29: Lawrence Weiner, *DICHT BEI*, 2010, Church of Saint John, Düsseldorf

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