Et in Arcadia Ego

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Abstract

Through our traditional and contemporary readings of history, the architectural subject has generally been cast into the role of cultural object, whose purposes, organization and modes of representation are directed, as *aterna veritas*, towards outcomes born of purely architectural and artistic forces. This carries with it an interpretative focus that conceives the past as a realm invested with the same culturally authoritative reasons and needs for building as our own and as such, overlays the organizational and perceptual conditions that empowered, for each differing age, their own motives and necessities for building. The question raised here is that the past is ever an invention of the present and that, conventionally, the historicized architectural object denotes a constructed subject manufactured out of our own conditions and surfaces of possibility. The following paper seeks to explore this question of historical focus and analysis through an outline series of readings that emerge out the medieval church form which draw upon the order of spatial imperatives, significations, meanings and rituals that underscored its own possibilities of production and reasons for being. Beginning from an allegorical rendering and positioning of these other possibilities, this paper will specifically move on to address the underlying conditions of church organization and production particular to the perceptual and discursive relations of the medieval era. These unfold around themes that concern resemblance, ideology, regulation and death. It is in these terms that this paper is aimed at reappraising our normalized view of the historicized architectural subject and at offering further avenues of analysis and interpretation of the Gothic church form.

Keywords: History, perception, representation, ideology, regulation.

Prologue: Another Time and Place

Leaving behind the dark forests and wild regions that divided the urban settlements of this country, the stranger entered a vast, yellowed plain of cultivated fields. Far off in the middle of this agrarian landscape stood a town out of which grew an immense structure, visually dominating the entire terrain. After viewing this scene, he began to follow a well-worn route leading directly through the swaying fields of wheat and towards the town. Walking along the track, he passed other travellers heading in the same direction beneath the mid-day rays of the sun. The first travellers seemed to be no more than children then, further along, youths, whilst those nearing the town itself were of middle years. The travellers who had reached the road's terminus at the town's gateway were old and infirm. Catching the attention of one of these latter individuals, the stranger enquired as to what manner of structure it was that towered above them from the town's centre. "That," said the man who answered, "is the house of the Great-Magician in which all those who believe in him and his commands will find the ultimate ends of their dreams, assisted through his order of Lesser-Magicians. "This must then be a remarkable place," the stranger responded. "Most assuredly," the old man replied, "for it is here that I and my fellow travellers have journeyed all our lives to secure his promise." Recognizing the enquirer as an outsider, the old man took his arm saying, "Come, I will show you."

Passing through the town's arched gateway, the outsider's self-appointed guide led him through a succession of narrow lanes until they emerged into a square filled with market stalls fronting the three great doors of the Magician's house. Above these portals, were three arched windows and over these, a large glazed circular opening. Flanking these elements were towers that, whilst slightly different in style, tapered identically to single points that appeared to scrape the sky and pierce the black storm clouds gathering overhead. The stranger and his guide jostled their way through hordes of people and stalls comprising the market, which offered a variety of drawn and sculptured images said to resemble the Great-Magician or documents that guaranteed an accelerated future of eternal happiness free of want or pain. Reaching the other side, the guide ushered the

stranger through the doors just as the first drops of rain began to fall from the darkened sky above. As they entered, they passed beneath a curved stone tableau depicting on one side the beatific expressions of contentment, joy and gratitude of those who, the guide said, had attained their eternal state of bliss. On the other side, staring out from faces locked in a rictus of fear, despair and pain were the grotesque forms of those who had not.

Inside the Magician's house, the air was filled with the dense smoke and aroma of burning incense and candles intermixed with another pervasive, and yet indefinable smell. Through this he could see dimly above him the high roof space of the building. At ground level, however, his view was restricted by a profusion of ornate screens and partitions located on either side of the main concourse and surrounding the central regions of the space that lay ahead, making it impossible to obtain any clear view of the whole cavernous chamber. After a while, he was able to discern that a large part of the internal space was also lit by beams of light that filtered through the haze of smoke from rows of multi-hued windows piercing the side walls of the building. Further permeating this internalized world was the noise and overlaid echoes of footsteps and whispering voices over which, from somewhere further ahead, could be heard the rhythmic drone of voices chanting in unison.

The stranger's guide said he should follow him down the central passageway, with the warning that he should watch his step in respect to the uneven flagstones resulting from the burial of the dead beneath the floors of the building. Proceeding, they passed several bays on either side of the colonnaded and vaulted concourse, containing a variety of objects and decorated receptacles. Gathered within a number of these bays were individuals, some standing or on their knees, hands clasped deep in meditation. Others, more dramatically, touched or embraced the artefacts forming the centre of attention within each bay. In one deeply shadowed space, muffled cries of pain could be heard to issue from the partially visible form of an individual, who was emaciated and stripped to the waist in an act of self-flagellation. "What," asked the stranger, "are these artefacts

and receptacles that attract such devotion and passion?" "These," said the guide, "resemble or contain the bodies or partial remains of the Great-Magician's most devoted followers who died in his service and which hold the power to heal or even appease the Great-Magician himself.

Moving closer to the end of the passageway, the stranger asked: "Why could not the people speak directly to the Great-Magician whose house they occupied?" The guide replied that this was impossible "as the Great-Magician was no longer of this world, having already died. But," he added, "such was the power of his spells that his death has prepared the way for others to reach the realm in which he now reigns. Moreover, the Great-Magician lives on in this building through the various objects, rituals, images and spatial relations dedicated to him and which act together as a mechanism to capture his magic and assist in our entrance to that other and better world when we, too, die." By now it was much darker outside, but having adjusted to the available light, the stranger could see a vast assortment of images carved out of stone, painted or set in glass which represented the Great-Magician's life, death and transition to that other world.

The progress of the stranger and guide was finally halted when they came up against a richly carved, painted and gilded screen stretching almost across the entire width of the building. From behind this, the chanting could be clearly heard to originate. "This," said the guide, pointing at the screened enclosure, "is the domain especial to the ranks of the Lesser-Magicians and not open to us." But, just as the stranger began to observe this privileged space within a space, the deep chimes of bells resounded for a few minutes throughout the building. At this signal, a crowd gathered before the screen about a raised table. In the ensuing silence, a splendidly-robed individual appeared behind the table on which bread and wine had been laid. Over these, the Lesser-Magician spoke several phrases and performed gestures which, according to the guide, invoked the power of a spell. In response to various stages of this incantation, the assembly declared themselves insignificant, unworthy and offenders against the prescriptions of the Great-Magician. At the end of the proceedings, the Lesser-Magician passed out the bread and wine to the

crowd who began to eat and drink the offering. Confused, the stranger asked, "Where is the magic in this?" "Can you not see for yourself?" said the guide, as he collected his share of the feast, "The bread and wine has been transformed into the flesh and blood of the Great-Magician himself." "This," he continued, "is the greatest magic of all. For it marks a sign that the Great-Magician still lives beyond death and that by eating his flesh and drinking his blood, we too will live forever."

 At that moment the silence was shattered from outside by an immense explosion of thunder. In the stark glare of a simultaneous lightning flash, the scene before the stranger changed into an almost frozen tableau depicting an ivory-pallored assembly, ripping into pieces of human flesh with their teeth whilst rivulets of blood dribbled down faces locked into expressions of ecstasy. As he stood transfixed by this vision that reappeared with each bolt of lightning, the constant crash and rumble of thunder was joined by a seemingly intensified deluge of bells and chanting in celebration of the feast. The smoke and incense renewed their assault upon the senses of the stranger, as did the cloying nature of the other smell, which, he suddenly realized, belonged to the putrefaction of the bodies interred below the cracked and disjointed floor stones. Crying out, the stranger pointed at the guide saying, "How can this be a house that speaks of happiness and life-everlasting? - the only message here is one of death and decay set within the sickening space of cannibalism and madness!" "Life is but a preparation for death and thus of no importance here," replied the guide as he turned a pallid face towards the stranger. "The dead are our link to immortality and it is here that we praise, ritualize, resemble and embrace the materiality of death as our means to another life. What could be better than to die as did the Great-Magician, our lord of the dead, and receive the promise of an eternity whole in body, mind and health. This is not madness, but the exquisite apotheosis of our dreams."

Introduction: The Seduction of the Muses

Moving from the realms of the allegorical, there is a building set within its own particular time and place whose story has been rendered lucid through various historical narratives. Drawing from some of these, we can follow R. F. Jordan and read this form as a cultural instrument that once preserved and promoted the bounds of civilization across the face of Europe.[1] By invoking Banister Fletcher, we can locate this structure within the prism of a developmental and progressive view of history, and treat it as a taxonomic indicator to a definitive stage of architectural evolution, aesthetic style and nationalistic heritage.[2] After Gombrich, its wealth of carvings, statues, wall paintings and stained-glass windows can be counted by us as objects dedicated to the ideals and values of humanistic expression.[3] From the insights of Roger Scruton, we can reveal the interior domains of this building as reflecting an arena of public participation and congregation par excellence.[4] Traced from this building's strategic gestures of plasticity, spatial movement and stylistic integrity, Pevsner leaves us the means to expose the enunciative possibilities of aesthetic purpose or cultural spirit (*geistesgeschichte*) consciously inlaid into its design, like a precious jewel, by its architect.[5] From such positions, we can finally take this building's play of line, proportion, geometry, light and methods of construction and resurrect the familiar and traditional features to an architectural discourse that speaks of the complexity, veracity and functionality of design, craftsmanship, stylistic innovation and cultural expression.

The focus of each of the above narratives is the Gothic church, whose normalized and conventional conditions of possibility are seen to form the subject of various cultural forces and modes of production. Yet, the authority that underpins the recognizable and privileged qualities of cultural expression, style, form, function and materiality that we apply to the surfaces, volumes, artefacts and practices of the Medieval church, belongs to a problematics and economy of architectural knowledge and history that emerged only

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[1] R. Furneaux Jordan, *A concise History of Western Architecture*, Norwich: Thames and Hudson, 1979, pp 99, 100, 111, 126.

[2] Banister Fletcher, *A History of Architecture*, London: Athlone Press University of London, 1975.

[3] E. H. Gombrich, *The Story of Art*. Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1979, pp 7, 12.

[4] Roger Scruton, 'The Public Domain,' *The Public Face of Architecture*, Nathan Glazer & Mark Lilla (eds), New York: Free Press, 1987, p 16.

[5] Nikolaus Pevsner, *An Outline of European Architecture*. Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1979, pp 17, 89-90, 110.

during the last two hundred and fifty years. Part of this slide in perceptual and descriptive relations occurred in response to the Gothic revival which, like other nineteenth-century revivalist movements, was concerned with revitalizing and recreating the stylistic forms of earlier ages as relevant and meaningful additions to their own point in time. This same focus and empowerment of the past was also entertained by the established institutions of Christianity, who saw the revival of the Gothic church form as a means to recapture the morality, spirituality and faith of an earlier age.[6] But these actions merely transferred to the objects of each earlier age the values and beliefs of the nineteenth century. It was through this that the spatial relations of the Gothic church began to fade as it transformed into nothing more than a stylistic model whose historical and pattern-book language could be extended to a wider and fashionable range of urban and architectural forms. Next to these surfaces of emergence, born of cultural historicism, nationalistic heritage and Hegalian *zeitgeist*, the later movements of the Arts-and-Crafts and Modernism gave legitimacy to a design and historical critique focussing upon the essentialist conditions of material usage, functionalism and structural expression.

 Emerging out of these paradigm shifts is a Gothic building that now reads as a temple dedicated to the rituals and pleasures of cultural nourishment in which we come to praise its collection of paintings, frescoes, stained-glass windows, carvings and its architectural details of spatial layout, language, structure and function. The focus of this cultural excursion is further instilled through guidebooks that steer visitors towards only those things considered worthy of cultural attention.[7] Against this, the Gothic church has transformed into a quasi-museum, whose catalogued exhibits constitute objects of cultural pilgrimage in a domain where the ancient Muses of art and poetry now hold court. In these terms, the Medieval church can be said to have mutated into a performance ground for our own values of cultural significance, reducing our understanding and recognition of this urban form to a program of purely architectural or artistic ends.

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[6] Roger Dixon & Stefan Muthesius, *Victorian Architecture*, London: Thames & Hudson, 1978, p 182.

During the Gothic age, however, architecture and indeed art were seldom if ever produced for architecture or art's sake alone.[8] These were buildings that emerged not to glorify architecture but the socio-religious beliefs, desires and practices of their world, just as the role of architects and artists was focused on serving these same ends as opposed to the caprice of their own critical or innovative desires. Furthermore, what we see as the lofty and open spaces of a Gothic church's interior reflects the requirements of later liturgical practices which initiated major alterations to the internal organization and décor of these buildings. These changes occurred for reasons such as those associated with the reformation and counter-reformation, the instillation of organs, and the withdrawal, modification or redeployment of partitions that once divided up the church's inner spaces.[9]

The light casting its shadows over the interiors and exteriors of the Gothic church today brings into relief a different visual terrain to the one encountered by individuals during the medieval era when the weight of religious discourse would have exposed a different sense of being and possibility than the one suggested through the architectural prerequisites of today. This was also an age whose surfaces of possibility did not include questions of national identity, the concept of culture or even history in the sense that we would understand this. It is in respect to these other possibilities that this paper, drawing upon the works of Michel Foucault, Louis Althusser, Pierre Bourdieu and Friedrich Nietzsche, will sketch out four other readings of this spatial form which concern the issues of representation, ideological regimes of faith, regulatory practice and the problematic of death. Each of these readings, however, reflects not a definitive analysis, but an introduction to other ways of coming to know the space and relations of buildings once dominating the landscapes of medieval Europe.

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[7] For example, read in relation to Notre-Dame Christopher McIntosh, *Paris*, London: Mitchell Beazley, 1986, pp 89-91 and in relation to the basilica of San Marco see Claude Janicot, *Times Bartholomew Guide: Venice*, London: Times Books, 1986, pp 89-91.

[8] Nicola Coldstream, *The Decorated Style*, London: British Museum Press, 1994, p 82.

[9] Richard Morris, *Cathedrals and Abbeys of England and Wales*, London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1979, p 145

Echoes of the Divine

On first entering the Medieval cathedral, we are greeted by an overwhelming and uninterrupted vista of a cavernous chamber lit through crystal screens of stained glass and held aloft by an intricate and delicate canopy of vaulting resting upon a forest of slender columns. But this is not how the space of the Medieval church would have been perceived by those who originally used or constructed it, for then, as noted by Erlande-Brandenburg, the central aisle of the nave was divided by screens that broke it up into a series of bounded volumes.[10] Further restricting any interior view of the whole, as detailed by Richard Morris, the central regions were spatially isolated from the rest of the church through the intervention of rood screens, pulpitum and partitions.[11] The nature of these divisions, however, describes not only a divergent sense of spatial arrangement and registration in comparison to our own views of the space, but also a separate conception of humanity and its relations to the world.

Supporting and empowering a particular version of humanity, the ontological horizon of the Christian paradigm gave advocacy to a sense of reality which spoke of the indivisible relationship and subjection of individuals to an omnipotent god, from whom they gained their entire aura of definition, meaning and likeness. This same reality, discussed by Foucault in *The Order of Things* (1974), was located within a macrocosmic and microcosmic framework of semiological analogies that conferred upon the nature of all things a sign expressing their character and function within the interconnected spheres of a divine universe. Whilst Foucault was concerned with the Renaissance, this equally refers to the medieval age's world of similitudes or symbolic order of signs revealing the meaning, value and purpose of any given object, which could be read though their externalized or internalized patterns of resemblance to other things.[12] As Paul Hirst also

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[10] Alain Erlande-Brandenburg, *The Cathedral*, Martin Thom (trans), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p 266

[11] Richard Morris, Cathedrals and Abbeys of England and Wales, pp 143-145.

[12] It was from the perspective of resemblances as discussed by Foucault, that aconite could rationally be conceived as a remedy for eye diseases in relation to the similarities thought to exist between the dark globes and white skin-like covers of its seeds and the human eye and eyelid, just as the form and texture of

noted, in this world, all relations were real relations unlike ours, where one thing can stand for or represent anything else.[13] Through this particular law and play of signs, the nature of the Christian god could be read from the human form itself which, as a product of that god, must therefore resemble that god in some way, as did the figure of that entity's son, forming a doubled sign mirroring both humanity and his divine progenitor. Likewise, the rituals of trial-by-ordeal and transubstantiation expressed a sign that spoke of both the direct intervention of their god into the affairs of humanity and the adjacency between heaven and earth through their respective outcomes. Revealing the presence of the Christian god, these latter signs, which also spoke of heavenly justice and redemption, belonged to vast order of divine signatures including the phenomena of inner voices, visitations, bleeding figures of Christ, plagues and earthquakes.

 Drawing upon this background of similitudes, we can begin to read the Medieval church as a territory whose dimensions of space, organization, surface and ritual pronounced for this age a privileged and real affinity between the domains of heaven and earth. This particular play of earthly and divine resemblances was realized through the interior landscape of the cathedral, which was rigidly divided into two regions denoting the respective realms of the clergy and laity. The boundaries between these two spheres were inscribed through screens closing off the areas of the choir, presbytery, high altar and bishop's throne from those areas occupied by the laity. The dynamics of this division also mirrored the belief that heaven was populated exclusively by priests, nuns, monks and saints, with the rest of humanity consigned automatically to an eternity of torment.[14] This exclusionary regime was emulated through a ground plan distinguishing between and resembling the polarized constituencies of heaven and hell. The analogous character of these divided realms was extended further by some religious orders, such as the Cistercians, who wished to prohibit the lay community altogether from churches, in line

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a walnut was considered to resemble the human brain and thus a cure for ailments of the head. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, London: Tavistock, 1974, p 27.

[13] Paul Hirst, 'Foucault and Architecture.' *AA Files*, 26 (1993): 52-60, p 54.

[14] R. N. Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe, c. 1215 – c. 1515*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, p 36.

with their original principles of design and purity.[15] From a ritualistic perspective, these mimetic distinctions were also reinforced through the practice of communion, to the extent that members of the clergy received both bread and wine, whereas the laity were restricted to bread alone.[16]

From these various threads that speak of boundaries, rituals and prescriptions, we can reconfigure the internalized arrangement of the cathedral into a mirror for this age's division of the cosmos into its constituent components of the sacred and profane. These were cosmological reflections that also expanded into the wider community through a distribution of land and judicial authority between the institutions of canon and secular law and the independence of church and crown land which, displayed from such demarcations, the same indivisible sovereignty of heavenly and earthly kingdoms. Played between the conception of the macrocosmic and microcosmic, this was an age abundant with signs of the distance and affinity between heaven and humanity. These can be seen to ripple down from the materiality of the earth in relation to the physical heavens, to the geographical zones of church institutions and state and finally to the church itself, which formed not only a model of the heavenly city, but also a mirror of the universe through its spatial boundaries and duplications.[17] From within this horizon of similitudes and doubled realities, the internal regions of the church emerge as a realm not open to all. Instead it reads as an prohibitive domain constructed around the concept of a privileged space within a space and which materially emulated the exclusive realm of heaven, complete with a population represented by a clergy guaranteed a place in that other world beyond time.

The Conditioned Faith

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[15] Richard Morris, *Cathedrals and Abbeys of England and Wales*, pp 145-146, 154, 173.

[16] R. N. Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe, c. 1215 – c. 1515*, p 99.

[17] This latter issue of resemblance was portrayed later during the Renaissance by Palladio who saw the little temple of the church as a microcosmic reflection of the larger temple of the earth and heaven. Andrea Palladio, *TheFour Books of Architecture*, Isaac Ware (trans), New York: Dover Publications Inc, 1965, p 79.

Next to the question of similitudes and the Gothic church's spatial distributions of the sacred and the profane, this space also acted as a stage for the visual theatre and spectacle of this age's faith, operating directly through the mediums of architecture, art, drama and liturgical ritual whose purposes existed solely to convey and promote the meaning and power of a Christian god. This leads us towards the pedagogic function of the church, which operated through an art and architecture that now stand bereft of the rich colour and gilding once adorning their surfaces. From this standpoint, the paintings, stained-glass, statues and carvings can be seen to serve as an educational tool designed to bring, in particular, an orally-dominated society closer to the message of the Christian faith. Following this purely instructional strategy, as sanctioned by Gregory the Great during the sixth century, we can still therefore describe the Gothic cathedral as a hall of multiple images designed as a book for the unlearned.[18] If we also take into account church dramas, such as the passion play,[19] and liturgical ritual, we can retain an equally valid image of the church form, in the words of Pevsner, as an encyclopedia.[20]

Art and architecture are not however so innocent. Below the surface dimensions of this visually rich and spatially evocative domain, its sensual texts went further than just neutrally transmitting stories and moral anecdotes from the bible, as though each individual had a choice in accepting or rejecting what was laid out before them. Rather, the church performed as an ideological mechanism aimed at maintaining the hegemony of Christian ideals and through this, perpetuate the institutional monopoly of Christianity.[21] At this juncture, the visual and spatial narratives of the church shed their naive layers of aesthetic repose to emerge as objects designed to compel and condition faith, leaving no room for choice, question or doubt. We should also recognize that these mediums of instruction were aimed, not at any rational discourse on the nature of Christian belief, but at the psychological centres of an individual's emotion and faith.

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[18] R. N. Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe*, p 85.

[19] David Bevington, *Medieval Drama*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1975.

[20] Pevsner, *An Outline of European Architecture*, p 115.

[21] Pierre Bourdieu, Practical Reason: *On the Theory of Action*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998, pp 124-126

The strategic force of Medieval Christian architecture, art, ritual and drama was designed to prevent any wavering in belief by keeping an individual's conscious and sub-conscious attention focused upon their obligations to a Christian life. The church played a key role in this ideological process, which begins through its visual dominance of the skyline, comprising a spectacular, permanent and inescapable reminder to all of the Christian god's presence on earth. These ideological characteristics and strategies of the Christian church, were specifically identified and promoted during the fifteenth century, as portrayed by Pope Nicholas V who stated:

"To create solid and stable convictions in the minds of the uncultured masses there must be something that appeals to the eye: a popular faith, sustained only by doctrines, will never be anything but feeble and vacillating. But if the authority of the Holy See were visibly displayed in majestic buildings, imperishable memorials and witnesses seemingly planted by the hand of God himself, belief would grow and strengthen like a tradition from one generation to another, and all the world would accept and revere it. Noble edifices combining taste and beauty with imposing proportions would immensely conduce to the exaltation of the chair of St Peter."[22]

But the ideological relations stemming from these buildings that filled the horizons of the Medieval gaze, described only one aspect of a production process through which individuals came to adopt the demands and self-evidency of Christian faith. Inured from birth through channels of a systemic and normalizing field of religious discourse, each individual over time came to embody and identify with the conventions and empirical baggage of the Christian world as a relevant, necessary and even desirable condition of their conscious being or habitus, as Bourdieu would describe this.[23] Ensuing from this conventionalizing regime, without access to any counter-perspective from which to question the authority of such discourse, grew a sense of reality and conviction via which individuals, as Althusser noted, would readily and happily go to church, pray, attend

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[22] qtd. in A. E. J. Morris, *History of Urban Form: Before the Industrial Revolution*, Essex: George Godwin, 1974, p 140.
[23] Pierre Bourdieu, 'Social Space and Symbolic Power,' *In Other Worlds*, Stanford: Stanford UP, 1990, 123-139.

mass, kneel, confess etc.[24] It is from a question of total immersion into an ideological field of the symbolic and material that this age held their god and his signs to be real, along with the idea of his son as a god in human form, executed to save the world from sin, who arose from the dead and through the magic of transubstantiation, constantly reappeared as an ideal affirmation of life everlasting for all. It was also an imperative of this same ideological environment that the need for church buildings in which to practice and transmit the themes of religion and to come directly into the presence of their heaven and god, would appear as an absolute necessity for the overall community's wellbeing and salvation.

The Regulated Penitent

Moving on from the visual, instructional and ritualistic processes of the Christian ideology, there also existed an entire regulatory apparatus that further reinforced an individual's observance to the needs of Christian faith. We can see this emerge through the details recorded in church registers on matters such as marriage, attendance at mass and penances issued. It was however in respect to those names that failed to appear, highlighted through their absence, that transforms these documents into tools for policing the Christian community. Another mode of this took place within the community itself, where in the small urban populations of this age, it was relatively easy to observe those who did not regularly attend mass or confession, who lived out of wedlock or committed any number of other infractions.[25] These issues point towards the regularizing pressure of Christian conformity, to the extent that normality was determined by an individual's observance of religious practice and abnormality through its deficiency. The reduction of such deficiencies was the underlying feature of this regime of inspection, where parishioners observed each other who, in their turn, came under the watchful gaze of the priest, who was equally scrutinized by those above him.[26] Conformity was the first rule of a unified church, against which the risk of various punishments and in particular the

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[24] Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays*, Ben Brewster (trans). London: NLB, 1971, 157.

[25] Mary C. Mansfield, *The Humiliation of Sinners*, New York: Cornell University Press, 1995, p 75.

[26] Mary C. Mansfield, *The Humiliation of Sinners*, p 74.

threat of excommunication and exclusion from church, society and potentially heaven, constituted a powerful instrument in the regulating armoury of the church.[27] In this manner, individuals transposed into both a subject and object of religious discourse. And yet, as noted by Althusser, individuals within an ideological regime perceive the actual conditions of their world in an imaginary or idealized form.[28] This was a world, therefore, where individuals obscured from consciousness the normalizing and regulatory conditions that encompassed them, conceiving their adoption of religious belief and ritual instead, as a condition of their own free will and rational choice.

Bringing these conditions together, the space of the cathedral can be read as an intense ground of ideological and regulatory relations for the production of Christianized subjects. This also corresponds to several aspects of the disciplinary gaze outlined by Foucault in his discussion of the Panopticon.[29] In this case, the object of the power relations inherent to the Christian regime concerned the preservation of the soul, set within a spatio-regulatory field where resistance against conventional religious behaviour was reduced through a pastoral ethic that necessitated *guiding* individuals, in spite of themselves, towards their final judgement. The church space constituted the privileged field for this guidance in which the repetition of liturgical practice and instruction inscribed within each participant a series of actions, gestures and thought processes that became second nature to their conditions of being. From these relations of policing and psychological inurement, the church unfolds into a monitored domain where the participation of individuals was observed and where, as knowing objects of inspection, they internally regulated their lives to meet the demands of their religion as willing subjects.

These aspects of ideological and regulatory conditioning can further be seen through the spatial layout of the cathedral. For this we must enter the centralized route of the nave, whose linearity expresses the exemplary and self-disciplined course that every Christian

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[27] R. N. Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe, c. 1215 – c. 1515*, p 294
[28] Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays*, p 153.

should follow. Specifically, this concourse mirrored the road of human life surrounded by images that spoke of the perils of deviation through grotesque and demonic figures and on the merits of conformity, through faces of a contented or blissful disposition. This course thus charted for each Christian, as a ship of the soul, the journey of the perfect penitent finally arriving at the end of their years at the threshold between heaven and earth. That same threshold returns us to the screened enclosure of the inner church which allowed through its resemblance of heaven, a tantalizing view of the world to come. The message carried through this strengthened the principle that heaven was conditional and open only to those who had divested themselves of sin and remained true to the dictates of Christian life. It is then as an enclosure of multiple and doubled signs, rendered meaningful and necessary through the underlay of ideological and regulatory strategies, that the architecture, art and practices of the church solidify into a discursive statement on this age's critical values of inclusion and exclusion, of reward and punishment, and of hope and despair.

Necrotopia

 But as with the workings of any discursive formation, the mechanisms that underlie their ideological conditions of production remain obscure. Because of this invisibility, the surface values of Christian discourse, as manifested through its church structures, practices and beliefs, could appear as essential and desirable. Moreover, when speaking of the discursive relations of the church and associated channels of ideological and regulatory production, there also resides a set of non-discursive relations which formed both the principal subject of Christian architecture and art and the primary condition of possibility for the Christian religion as a whole. This was aired a century ago by Nietzsche.

 "Everything in a Greek or Christian building originally signified something, and indeed something of a higher order of things: this feeling of inexhaustible significance lay about

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[29] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Alan Sheridan (trans), Harmondsworth: Penguin,

the building like a magical veil. Beauty entered this system only incidentally, without essentially encroaching upon the fundamental sense of the uncanny and exalted, of consecration by magic and the proximity of the divine; at most beauty *mitigated* the *dread* - but this dread was everywhere the presupposition."[30]

The question of dread invoked here concerned death. More especially, it was this dread which rested upon the non-discursive fact, mystery and fear of death, which invested every facet of Christian discourse and whose all-pervasive shadows formed the most obvious and yet unseen feature laid before our culturally orientated view of Christian architecture and art. When viewing works such as Fra Angelico's *Last Judgement* (1431), Titian's *Assumption of the Virgin* (1516-18), or Rubens' *Descent from the Cross* (1611-14), we see images that pronounce on the qualities of humanistic expression, use of line, colour, texture, light and shade but not on any subject of mortality. This was not the case for the Medieval era where, through the all-too-frequent hazards of disease, famine and violence, death still formed a natural part of life.[31] The problematic born from an ongoing concern and psychological fear of death formed the *raison d'être* of a Christian institution which appropriated the non-discursive event and dread of death and converted it into an ideological fear for what might eventuate on the other side of life. This discursive state of anxiety which ameliorated each individual's dread for the actuality of death also defined the underlying regulatory force which compelled them to conform by avoiding actions denying them entry to that other ideal world. The subject of death and the Christian solution to its problem finally emerges from an entire field of art and architecture celebrating a god who died by crucifixion; martyrs who died in the cause of that god; and death itself as the privileged means to gain access to another idealized realm.

The enunciative statement that therefore erupts out of the Medieval spatial domain of the church, its art, rituals and interior organization which duplicated both the realm of heaven

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1975, pp 195-228.

[30] Friedrich W. Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, R. J. Hollingdale (trans), Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986, p 101.

and each individual's processional route to life's end, proclaims: 'Remember, you are going to die.' The overt nature of this pronouncement can still be found through the Medieval age's array of *memento mori*, which reminded all of their impending fate through the iconographic devices of skulls, chronological measuring instruments and mirrors. But the concept of death extended beyond idealized imagery alone, for the space of the church also reflected a ground for its physical occupation. This begins with the cult of relics. Some of the most prized objects within any Medieval church concerned their collection of artefacts drawn from dead saints, ecclesiastics, apostles, the Madonna or Christ. These could include clothing and other personal items, but more usually the hair, nail parings, teeth, bits of intestine, bones and whole or dismembered parts of bodies. Numerous churches also claimed to possess fragments of the true cross, one a crown of thorns and in two cases, Christ's foreskin.[32] Whilst miracles were often associated with relics, their main function was seen as a means to attract the spiritual power of their dead owner for intercession on behalf of an individual already in purgatory or, for oneself, to aid entry into heaven. Thus, relics formed a circularized set of relations in that, as remnants of the dead, they acted as mechanisms to tap into the realm of the dead to intercede on behalf of the already or future dead.

 The direct association between a church's material expressions of death was further underscored through the ritual of burial within its own precincts. As discussed by Philippe Aries in *The Hour of Our Death*, the interring of bodies within churches declined during the eighteenth century in response to new concerns about health and an increasing distaste for the stench of decomposing corpses buried beneath their floors.[33] In contrast to this, during the Gothic age, burial within the confines of the church formed both a desirable and advantageous practice, given that burial as near as possible to relics or the high-alter, would, by association, further assist the departed in reaching the heavenly world beyond. However, through this convention the mimetic qualities of the church domain are completed. For within this space of resemblances, ideological

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[31] Frederick S. Paxton, *Christianising Death*, New York: Cornell University Press, 1990, p 17.
[32] R. N. Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe, c. 1215 – c. 1515*, pp 152, 159-161.
[33] Aries, Philippe Aries, *The Hour of Our Death*, Helen Weaver (trans), New York: Alfred A Knopf Inc, 1981, p 479.

overlays and regulatory prescriptions, the natural analogy to the idealized Christian dead and living, as portrayed through their productions of art, ritual and spatial organization, were found through the actual dead and living, who existed like the church form, as imperfect reflections or shadows of that other mode of being. To walk then through the spaces of the medieval church, was to subsume the needs of this life for those of the next in order to attain an emancipatory release from the woes of everyday life, for the pleasures of a freedom, health and equality thought possessed by the corpses of the dead.

Conclusion

 The themes followed through this paper have attempted to offer several other ways of coming to know the Gothic church. These readings, which are by their nature theoretical, have also drawn upon various inter-disciplinary avenues of historical analysis to widen the scope of this investigation into the productive relations of Medieval church architecture.

What these readings have also sought to disclose, is that the purpose and reasons for the erection of these buildings were firmly entrenched within the epistemological and ontological horizons of their own time as they equally satisfied the needs, desires and expectations of those for whom they were constructed. Out of this, and through readings that focus upon the questions of resemblance, ideology, regulation and death, the Gothic church emerges as a necroptopic domain, produced in response to the problematization of death. It is also through the church's combined semiology of spatial, surface and ritualistic modes of expression, that it transmutes into the monumental figure of a *memento mori*. This conclusion represents a series of meanings, empowerments and modes of necessity, whose possibilities stand outside and distinct from our own culturally legitimated conditions of architectural identity and experience. This also raises the question, that in exploring beyond the perceptual boundaries of our own time, can past forms of architecture, such as the Gothic church, represent anything other than an alien landscape, which we visit as strangers.