

FROM REPRESENTATION TO EXPERIENCE: THE CENTURIES OLD SACRAL SPACES REVIVED THROUGH VIDEO-MAPPING PROJECTIONS

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Abstract: The study offers a series of aperçus that slowly unravel the diverse contemporary events, methods and visual ties which turn worldwide sacral buildings into a new type of experiential spaces. Working in conjunction, artists and institutions are using the latest 3D projection technology that can completely transform any surface with spectacular display of light and color to produce a moving tribute of illuminations with sound for the audience. Although the chapters follow a loosely chronological schema, the research does not paint a continuous cultural history but contemporary topics, methods and their technological framework. The exterior and interior of these sacral spaces are re-interpreted through illuminations on the façade, the ceiling, the altar, and the pipe organs through commemorations, anniversaries, Light Festival events turning churches into reflective and meditative cultural spaces.

Keywords: *immersion, video mapping, site-specific installation, liminoid media heterotopia, communitas*

(Video) Mapping Histories through spectacle of light, sound and movement

Video Mapping is an audiovisual format that consists of projecting images onto diverse surfaces, according to their geometric characteristics. It is also synonymous with spatial augmented reality, projection mapping.¹

¹ Burczykowski, Ludovic, *The Origins of Projection Mapping*, p. 33.

Light Festivals organized around the world promoted extensively the video mapping technique bringing new layers of meaning to landmarks and historical monuments.

Foucault uses the term “heterotopia” to describe spaces that have more layers of meaning or relationships to other places than immediately meet the eye and describe certain cultural, institutional and discursive spaces that are somehow ‘other’: disturbing, intense, incompatible, contradictory or transforming.² It is very true that the method of our time is to use not a single but multiple models for exploration. New Media scholar Hye Jean Chung applies the concept of heterotopia to describe the multiple superimposed layers of spatiality and temporality observed in highly digitized audiovisual media. She is expanding Michel Foucault’s concept of heterotopic spaces to encompass the digitally composited environments in contemporary cinema, introducing the critical concept and methodology: “media heterotopia.”³ In her book she demonstrates the use of “media heterotopia” as a mode of perception that recognizes and describes new hybrid forms, that is, digital composites of multiple layers that contain material residues of globally dispersed film production. It examines industry practices that take place in the workflow of global production pipelines in a digital era: “Because digital compositing is an integral stage in film production that achieves the technical and aesthetic merging of multiple digital layers, assets, and environments, the critical appropriation of this term is apposite to analyze the site-specific conditions of contemporary film production and the effects they produce.”⁴

In our case the meeting of centuries old architectonics with the state-of-art imagery and light generates not only a representation of space but spatial experiences, so my aim here is further contextualizing the “media heterotopia” concept as “liminoid media heterotopia”: in 1974, Victor Turner coined the term liminoid to refer to experiences that have characteristics of liminal experiences but are optional and do not involve a resolution of a personal crisis. Unlike liminal events, liminoid experiences are conditional and do not result in a change of status, but merely serve as transitional moments in time. The liminal is part of

2 Foucault, Michel, *The Order of Things*, p. 20.

3 Chung, Hye Jean, *Media Heterotopias: Digital Effects and Material Labor in Global Film Production*, pp. 17-37.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

society, an aspect of social or religious rites, while the liminoid is a break from society, part of “play” or “playing”.⁵ With the rise in industrialization and the emergence of leisure as an acceptable form of play separate from work, liminoid experiences have become much more common than liminal rites. In these modern societies, rites are diminished and ‘forged the concept of “liminoid” rituals for analogous but secular phenomena’ such as attending concerts and other liminoid experiences, in our case the video-mapping events illuminating sacred architectures. The use of light as an intangible factor of architectonic and identity of sacred architectural space goes beyond its primarily reasonableness above all in the perception of light in the context of the phenomenology of symbols and its founding in the religious ontology. In our case the light as a symbol that manifests through the sacred architecture is further enhanced by the artificial light produced by the video-mapping to uplift the mind to the spiritual. However this is my personal interpretation of possible spectatorial experience. To attest this, audience research should be made through questionnaires or video interviews. This kind of urban communication reaches a high point since arts are no longer limited by museum or gallery spaces. Today we meet many media based interventions in public spaces, which include and involve passersby on the street. Victor Turner also develops the term “Communitas” referring to an unstructured state in which all members of a community are equal allowing them to share a common experience, usually through a rite of passage. The transient personal experience of togetherness which occurs during events generates existential or spontaneous communitas.⁶ As we will see these video-mapping events held during Light festivals or other events create “liminoid media heterotopias” or to put it simply: spatial experiences. The very first Light Festival⁷ opened in Berlin on 14 October in 2008, with the light fountain show *Flames of Water* in front of Humboldt University. The light artists lit up and cast projections

5 Turner, Victor, „Liminal to Liminoid”, in *Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbolology*, p. 85.

6 Edith Turner, *Victor's widow and anthropologist in her own right*, published in 2011 a definitive overview of the anthropology of communitas, outlining the concept in relation to the natural history of joy, including the nature of human experience and its narration, festivals, music and sports, work, disaster, the sacred, revolution and nonviolence, nature and spirit, and ritual and rites of passage, *Communitas: the anthropology of collective joy*, p. 132.

7 *Berlin Festival of Lights*, Berlin Cathedral. Retrieved from <https://www.lumine.at/en/projekte/folberlindom/> and <https://festival-of-lights.de/en/> (accessed July 7, 2020).

across 49 landmarks and squares across Berlin. The church towers of the Nikolaikirche Nikolaikirche in the city centre were for the first time ever illuminated all in white, commemorating the legend of the escape of John Sigismund, Elector of Brandenburg from his castle to the Nikolai quarter in the 17th century. For the very first time the Berlin Cathedral, one of the best-known landmarks of Berlin and Germany, was the venue for a creative and innovative mapping competition with the latest technology. National and international artists transferred their visions of the future about the festival's motto "Creating Tomorrow" into 3D- video mappings. 11 artists from 5 different countries created a breathtaking 3D- video mapping show. All detailed projects are on the festivals website.⁸

Contemporary missions: Covid-19, climate change and poverty-end messages debated publicly through art projections *Remember Me*

Covid-19 brought unprecedented loss of human life. Access to hospitals and hospices has been restricted. Bedside goodbyes may not have been possible. Attendance at funerals has been greatly reduced, preventing many family, friends, colleagues and neighbors from expressing their grief. Through the project *Remember Me*⁹, St. Paul Cathedral initiated a memorial project to honor all who have died as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. During the lockdown the St. Paul's choristers have also recorded a piece of music via video. For centuries St. Paul's Cathedral has been a place of remembrance and memorial, for individuals and for important events, helping people support one another in hard times. The initiated *Remember Me* memorial project has three parts making it a veritable transmedia project: inside the church a physical memorial will be built, an inner portico at the North Transept representing a place of refuge, solace, and hope.¹⁰ Secondly, an online book of remembrance to commemorate those who have died from coronavirus was opened in a website format. While the news discusses large numbers of infections and deaths, estimating that more than 36,000

8 *Berlin Festival of Lights*, Berlin Cathedral. Retrieved from <https://festival-of-lights.de/en/> and <https://www.lumine.at/en/projekte/folberlindom/> (accessed July 7, 2020).

9 *Remember Me project*. Retrieved from <https://www.rememberme2020.uk/remember/> (accessed July 17, 2020).

10 News article, *Remember Me*, St. Paul: <https://www.standard.co.uk/comment/comment/join-st-pauls-cathedral-in-remembrance-of-every-person-we-have-lost-a4448381.html> and <https://www.standard.co.uk/comment/comment/join-st-pauls-cathedral-in-remembrance-of-every-person-we-have-lost-a4448381.html>.

people have died in the UK after testing positive for the virus, we know that each statistic is a person — a parent, a spouse, a sibling, a neighbor, a friend. Every person is valued, each life is worthy of remembrance. Through the memorial website family members, friends of anyone who has died can submit the name, photograph and a short message. For over 300 years the Cathedral with its famous dome has served as that national beacon of hope which during these enduring times was representing the project through projecting the message *Remember Me* on the surface of the cupola: “We’re finding new and creative ways to remember loved ones. We are grieving too and you are not alone”¹¹ declared Reverend David Ison, the Dean of St Paul’s Cathedral.

Fiat Lux: Illuminating Our Common Home, the Earth

The public art display known as “Fiat Lux: Illuminating Our Common Home”¹² marks the start of the *Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy*, an almost year-long Catholic celebration of divine mercy. The projection on the Basilica is being presented as a gift to Pope Francis who has encouraged positive action against global warming. The public art display formed a visual story inspired by the themes of climate change, human dignity and the earth’s living creatures in the Encyclical Letter “*Laudato Si*” of Pope Francis; in which he wrote, “What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?” The Latin phrases “fiat lux” announcing “Let there be light!” ascending to the state of the God of the Old Testament so the world can begin again... “lux sit” translated “*and there was light*” was accomplished metaphorically by the illuminations presented inspired of Mercy, of humanity, of the natural world, and of climate changes and future generations fate.

The Vatican displayed projected images of the natural world on the façade of St. Peter’s Basilica, in St. Peter’s Square on 8th December 2015, during the event, Illuminating Our Common Home: Fiat Lux. The art showed the interdependency of humanity and all life on earth with the planet, in order to educate and encourage positive action and

11 The Very Reverend David Ison is Dean of St Paul’s Cathedral; rememberme2020.uk and Coronavirus: St Paul’s Cathedral sets up online book of remembrance, 22 May, 2020: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-52764444>.

12 FIAT LUX, *Illuminating Our Common Home*. Retrieved from <http://ourcommonhome.world/> (all accessed July 17, 2020).

reform around the climate crisis. Together with the World Bank Group and other partners, the Vatican gave an urgent call to all leaders and citizens of the world, to join and celebrate a global movement to protect Our Common Home, the Earth, and all of its living creatures. “We are honored to be working with the Vatican to raise awareness of an issue so critical to our shared goal of ending extreme poverty,”¹³ said World Bank Group President Jim Yong Kim about their support for the art display. “The poorest people in the world are disproportionately affected by the effects of a warming climate and are most vulnerable to natural disasters and extreme weather. This impressive initiative will draw global attention to the urgency of tackling climate change for the sake of people and our planet.”¹⁴ End Child Poverty joins in the call for climate change action and climate justice, recognizing that the current consequences of climate change disproportionately affect the poor and the younger generation. Children and youth form 30% of the world’s population. They’re the largest group of people currently affected by climate change. And they are the generation that will deal with the worst future impacts of climate change. The images, of ocean life, flowers in bloom, wild animals, and indigenous people, many taken by National Geographic photographers, are meant to deepen the meaning of the Paris climate talks, COP21, as well as the Jubilee, and are intended to demonstrate humanity’s dependency on the planet and its dire need for immediate attention.¹⁵

Facades of historical commemoration and anniversary celebrations: bringing the community together by innovative graphics and hidden archives

“*Where Light Falls*”¹⁶ is a stunning installation which invites the people of Coventry to mark the 80th anniversary of the start of World War

13 FIAT LUX, *Illuminating Our Common Home*. Retrieved from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2015/12/07/public-art-projection-featuring-images-of-humanity-and-climate-change-to-illuminate-st-peters-basilica-on-the-opening-of-the-extraordinary-jubilee-of-mercy-on-december-8> (accessed July 17, 2020).

14 FIAT LUX, *Illuminating Our Common Home* - 2015.12.08. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wrkkyw1D7KA> and <https://endingchildpoverty.org/en/blog/157-our-common-home-the-earth> (all accessed July 17, 2020).

15 Idem.

16 *Where Light Falls*, St Paul’s Cathedral. Retrieved from <https://vimeo.com/386914296> (all accessed July 17, 2020).

Two. The Coventry Cathedral was destroyed in the Second World War, after an air raid on October 14, 1940. A new Cathedral was built, which preserves the remains of the old Cathedral and aims to serve as a reminder of the waste of war. The joint project was developed between Historic England, the Imperial War Museum, Double Take Projections, Poetry Society and Coventry Cathedral.

The scope of the outdoor large scale projection mapping event was to pay tribute to the heroic individuals who tried in vain to save the building during the blitz in WW2 and to the future of the city of Coventry as a city of peace and reconciliation. The juxtaposition of Basil Spence's Coventry Cathedral and ruins of the medieval Coventry Cathedral provided a stunning backdrop for a projection mapping show of powerful poetry, visuals and photography. The large scale projection was part of Historic England's 'Loss and Destruction' season: a series of events that seek to understand the consequences when cultural heritage is attacked during conflict and how we save, protect and restore. Jane Comman's poem 'In A New Light' was brought to life through cutting-edge projections, incorporating innovative graphics and archive photography, as it remembered the heroic efforts of individuals who risked their lives to save a building they loved. Five sites around the two cathedral buildings to create a dramatic light trail experience for the audience was created. The projections on the massive walls and tower were declared awe-inspiring and invited people to look at their own cathedral in a beautiful new light. And now to mention the most important feature of the visuals: the projection displayed during nighttime was representing an illuminated stained glass artwork. The stained-glass features in the projection with tumbling, glowing shapes resembling sun shining through the rainbow colors of the building's glass was bringing the interior church experience outside on the surface of the walls. Bringing the interior on the exterior is the act of remembering and re-enactment of memory for a new generation to assimilate a common societal value and local identity.

"On dark winter nights, a light show brings people out from their houses and into their communities – connecting people and places through spectacular visual storytelling. More than 16,000 people braved torrential rain and flooding in the area to attend over three evenings. Capturing the history and emotion of our incredible city, capturing and conveying not just the tragedy of loss but overwhelmingly the hope of a

new future – Coventry’s story of hope rebuilt again and again from the rubble of destruction, a gift for a world which is looking for peace” declared in the Coventry Observer the Dean of Coventry, John Witcomb.¹⁷ The gathering around the light installation in the magnificent ruins of the old cathedral thus manifested an essential societal value: to pay tribute to the past, present and future of the city.¹⁸

St. Paul’s must be saved ‘at all costs’

If in the previous project the interior was brought outside through the projected stained glass experience, in the next project the same procedure is achieved by making alive forgotten or bringing visibility upon materials that are not available to public: after hours of research and sourcing archive material from Historic England, St. Paul’s and the Imperial War Museum a new light show was created by the same mentioned team above. The original archival materials were digitized and then were blended with text from London-based Keith Jarrett’s poem merging images with hand-drawing textures into digital animations. Jarrett held workshops with local schoolchildren, older writers, refugees and migrants who have experienced conflict and included their thoughts in his work. Inside the cathedral poets brought the stories of the war heroes to life.

Illuminating stories from the archive onto the façade of the St. Paul’s Cathedral to pay tribute to ‘The Watch’, who worked bravely to protect St. Paul’s at all costs on Winston Churchill’s instructions and uncover inspirational hidden wartime courage. St. Paul’s Watch first formed in June 1915 to protect the cathedral from bombing in the First World War. It was reformed at the start of the Second World War. The archive photographs were creating a visual experience to complement the words of ‘From the Log Book’ by Keith Jarrett. “Poets are used to working within the constraints of the page – a line of poetry is not usually longer than the width of a book. The ‘*Where Light Falls*’ poets had a different set of instructions. Their poetry had to allow us to fit the words around the shapes of windows and doors in the cathedral

17 *Double Take Projections*. Retrieved from <https://doubletakeprojections.com/st-pauls-cathedral-england-projection-mapping/> (accessed July 17, 2020).

18 *Where Light Falls*, St Paul’s Cathedral. Retrieved from <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-7609051/Incredible-illuminations-projected-St-Pauls-Cathedral-remember-Londons-war-dead.html> (all accessed July 17, 2020).

walls.”¹⁹ During the projection the architectural details were converted into typographical ones: words shattered like broken glass, or collapsed and grew like bombed and rebuilt walls. The program lasted for 15 minutes and ran on a loop for 3 hours each evening to allow as many members of the public as possible to access it. The projection mapping show was set to an original atmospheric soundtrack by Barnaby Smith and the spoken words of ‘From The Log Book’. The projections included archive images of King George VI and also Winston Churchill, prime minister during most of the Second World War, was also projected onto the cathedral as part of the commemoration. A history that doesn’t get told in museums gets alive on the surface of the cathedral that became a symbol of resilience and hope. Untold stories are taking the audience through the blitz with St Paul’s bombed and damaged to a sensational finale with the firebomb turning to fireweed, a wildflower symbolizing release, rebirth, and potential for something innovative and new.²⁰

William Blake celebrated on the dome of St. Paul’s Cathedral

William Blake always dreamed of making vast works for churches and palaces but to his bitter disappointment he never achieved it. More than two centuries after his death Tate has announced it is going some way to making up for that by projecting his final work on to the giant dome of St Paul’s Cathedral. Martin Myrone, the senior curator of pre-1800 art at Tate Britain, said Blake always had grand ambitions as an artist, proposing huge frescoes that were never realized. “Everything that survives of his work is very small.

Many of his works are just a few inches high,” he said. “What he said he wanted to do was produce altarpieces and large-scale pictorial schemes in churches and palaces. This is a moment to realize a version at least of that lifelong dream of Blake’s to be an artist with real public impact who was being seen on a large scale.”²¹ Blake is regarded as a visionary, radical artist who was ahead of his time and unappreciated

19 *Double Take Projections*. Retrieved from <https://doubletakeprojections.com/st-pauls-cathedral-england-projection-mapping/> (accessed July 17, 2020).

20 Ibid.

21 William Blake, *St Paul’s Cathedral*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2019/nov/28/william-blake-final-work-ancient-of-days-projected-st-pauls-cathedral> (accessed July 17, 2020).

for most of his life. The project, which marks his birthday, stems from Tate Britain's current exhibition of Blake, the biggest for a generation, which runs until February and includes digital enlargements of works he imagined as vast frescoes on public buildings. The St. Paul's dome takes it to another level and is an appropriate venue because it is home to a memorial to Blake. His body was buried in an unmarked grave in Bunhill Fields burial ground near Old Street in London. A projection of Blake's final masterpiece entitled *The Ancient of Days 1827* onto the cathedral's dome from the 28th November to 1st December 2019 took place.²²

Polyphonic acoustic: real and virtual sonic imaginations

The organ is one of the oldest instruments still used in European classical music that has commonly been credited as having derived from Greece. Pipe organs are unique instruments in that the entire building is designed to be the resonance chamber.²³ Many artistic projects bring attention on these instruments. Vancouver's largest pipe organ²⁴ was connected with custom digital controls, allowing for real-time manipulation of all pipes and stops. Through this process of hybridizing acoustic and digital sonic imaginations, the project explores new sonic terrains that emerge through a digital approach to the world's oldest mechanical synthesizer. Similarly, the interactive installation entitled *Archifon*²⁵ functions as a large interactive virtual musical instrument controlled by laser pointers originally made for the Olomouc Baroque de-baptized chapel.

Architectonical objects are re-interpreted by virtual layer via projection and sound. This is made possible by the mapping of the virtual surface of the chapel's interior. Up to ten visitors at a time can interact with *Archifon* by using the laser pointers. By pointing to any of the more than 100 elements, different audiovisual reactions are initiated. In another project at the Basilica of St. Michael in Bordeaux, France

22 William Blake, St Paul's Cathedral. Retrieved from <https://www.stpauls.co.uk/history-collections/the-collections/arts-programme/william-blake-at-st-pauls-cathedral> (accessed July 17, 2020).

23 Harper, Douglas, 2001. *Organ. Online Etymology Dictionary*. Retrieved from <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=organum> (accessed July 17, 2020).

24 *Pacific Spirit Church*, Vancouver pipe organ. Retrieved from <https://www.hfour.ca/portfolio-item/pacific-spirit-church-projection-mapping/> (accessed July 17, 2020).

25 *Archifon*. Retrieved from <https://vimeo.com/37920250> (accessed July 17, 2020).

artists²⁶ created a live show that encompassed live organ music, electronic sounds and extensive projection mapping onto the church's pipe organs and surrounding gothic architecture. Statues, ornaments, paintings and windows are becoming polyphonic sounds, depending on how many participants are interacting with the architectural parts. What kind of synesthesia does sound in conjunction with architecture echo to us?

Conclusions

Sacral buildings are all around us inviting to participate and take action. Placed in our cities these churches constantly remind us and connect the contemporary generations with their ancestors. The diverse artistic and cultural involvements act as cultural strategies for passing on these memories to future generations. Working with state-of-art technologies and transforming the sacral buildings materials, the projects involve the community through multisensorial experiences. All the mentioned projects have in common the use of archive materials, past historical events, personalities, oral histories and current topics. New technologies and the community involving projects draw attention and create impact of these processes. Placing the information within a new context is to be interpreted by the viewer. The rapid emergence of digital media makes possible and necessary a new form of public cultural memory: the analyzed projects are devoted to establish a creative framework that reanimates the past and creates access to cultural memories. Developing a creative attitude toward the past that challenges the audience to think of sacral spaces in ways never tried before is the main quest of these gestures, to help audiences to adopt a critical approach, to reflect upon the medium itself and the cultural formation of these buildings; and also to seek further knowledge and understanding. Light, sounds and movements keep the Spirit alive.

26 *Basilica of St. Michael in Bordeaux*, France. Retrieved from <https://www.digitalprojection.com/emea/dp-case-studies/projection-mapping-at-basilique-saint-michel/> (accessed July 17, 2020).

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<https://www.standard.co.uk/comment/comment/join-st-pauls-cathedral-in-remembrance-of-every-person-we-have-lost-a4448381.html>

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