Fifty Shades of Grey?

Contemporary Churches as Lived Liturgies that Mediate Mysteries

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These things are not intended to serve liturgy but to be liturgy, even if in a modest way.¹

1. Introduction. The Accusation of Relativist Space

In recent years, some Roman Catholic architects and architectural historians have provided a harsh critique against the "beigification" of contemporary church architecture as "theologically unsound" and thus "harmful to the Church."² According to them, architectural Modernism could only lead to "large, empty spaces, marked by very little symbolism, narrativity, art, statuary or painting."² Indeed, many contemporary buildings—think of Tadao Ando's well-acknowledged Church on the Water (1988) and Church of the Light (1989), Kister, Scheithauer, and Gross's St. Maria Magdalenae in Freiburg-Rieselfeld (2004), Massimiliano and Doriana Fuksas's San Paolo in Foligno (2009), Renzo Piano's domestic chapel at the Poor Clare convent in Ronchamp (2011), and Patrick Berger and Jacques Anzurini's St. Paul-de-la-Plaine in Saint-Denis (2014)—are empty spaces of bare concrete, as if they were nothing more than mere 'shades of grey.'


³ Barron, Beyond Beige Churches, 14.
If the problem were but stylistic, the only thing to be done should be “to render beautiful the bare concrete, the exposed steel beams, and the barren brickwork” in order to “look like a church” that is, to bring in the “traditional architectural markers of churchliness,” which are “a cross, tower, dome, conventional shapes, and proportions.” But the problem, according to these authors, is the underlying Modernist rationale: “The church architecture of the past forty years, precisely in the measure that it has been shaped by modern presuppositions, is incapable of bearing the weight of Christianity.” Grey dissolves both black and white, and thus serves as a good metaphor for what these authors abhor as “relativist space,” which is “homogenous, directionless, and value-free.” Because no place can have more meaning than another place, “sacred space, by definition, cannot exist.” In conclusion, “by adopting the Modernist style, the Church has incorporated heresy into her very fabric.” In the wake of relativism emerge subjectivism, rationalism, dualism, and anti-traditionalism. Because relativist space is considered incapable of conveying any sense of transcendence, the Modernist style is dismissed as “ugly as sin.” As a result, these authors go back to Gothic architecture as the “right” way to build and to think theologically.

Although I do not follow these critics in their severe option of style, I entirely adopt their appeal for “church structures that not only house but gather the worshipping assembly, but that tell the Christian story boldly, unapologetically, and with panache.” My answer to the accusation of contemporary churches as mere ‘shades of grey’ is that the theological depth of architecture should not be reduced to matters of norms or style but brought to life by examining how worshipping communities are and appropriate their churches. I have used ‘fifty shades of grey’ in a literal and metaphorical sense. The question is: could we recover, in reference to the popular novel, the embodied sensuousness of these shades of grey? This can only be done, I believe, when we are attentive to our body, that is, to both our individual and communal body.

4 Dooley, The Denial of the Transcendent in Modern Church Architecture, 4.
5 Denis R. McNamara, Catholic Church Architecture and the Spirit of the Liturgy (Chicago, Munden, IL: Hellenbrand, 2009), 27.
6 Barron, Beyond Beige Churches, 14.
7 Dooley, The Denial of the Transcendent in Modern Church Architecture, 4.
8 Barron, Beyond Beige Churches, 14-18.
10 See McNamara, 3, 109. With Gothic architecture as paradigm, Michael S. Rose proposes three “sacramental laws of church architecture”: vericality, permanence, and iconography.
11 Barron, Beyond Beige Churches, 22.
12 I have done so more extensively in my Spiritus loxi: A Theological Method for Contemporary Church Architecture (Boston, Leiden: Brill, 2015). In order to be theological, our analysis of church buildings should include the kerygmatic, kerygmatic, and Eucharistic dimensions of mystagogic space. The first dimension pays attention to the individual body, the last to communian appropriation.

This is also the theological conviction at the basis of Richard Kieckhefer, Theology in Some Church Architecture from Byzantium to Berkeley (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

My gratitude goes to both parish communities and their respective worship leaders Paul Fromberg and Father Gabriel Delcor Laval for having so generously allowed me to take photographs during their celebrations. The following analyses reflect numerous visits during the years 2011 and 2012. The following websites give a good idea of the liturgies lived in and the mysteries mediated by these churches: http://www.stgregorys.org/ and http://sanfrancisco-molitor.org/.

In particular, the baptismal theology of St Gregory of Nyssa received a lot of critique, not in the least from an Episcopalian point of view. Their loc ecumeni is the hospitality of open communion to everyone, baptized or not. Effectively, as loc ecumeni, the baptismal font is relegated to the outside, behind the centrality of the altar, which is the most prominent welcome for any visitor. In this article, I will not discuss this critique, and focus instead on what a valuable use of the space during ordinary Eucharistic liturgy. For an exposition of the baptismal theology at St Gregory of Nyssa, see Donald Schell, "The Font Outside Our Walls," God’s Friends 12, no. 2 (August 2001): n.p. [http://www.allsaintscompany.org/resource/fonts-outside-our-walls]; See also Louis Van Tongeren, “St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church, San Francisco,” in Sacred Places in Modern Western Culture, eds. Paul Post, Arie L. Molendijk, and Jesper Kroesen (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 151–157.
appropriation. They can therefore serve as valuable paradigms for *domus ecclesiae* that are truly *domus Dei* in a contemporary way.

2. **Hermeneutic Framework. Spatial Configurations and Rhythmic Patterns**

Both churches reveal their surprising capacity for conveying transcendence precisely in communitarian celebration. That is exactly the point of this article: we must look at the lived liturgy before dismissing a church too quickly as ‘relativist space’ – or ‘shades of grey,’ in literal and/or metaphorical sense. Therefore, two sets of hermeneutic tools will prove helpful in focusing attention on the community (and not moving away to sterile and esoteric explorations of so-called hidden meanings in architecture): Rudolf Schwarz’s *spatial configurations* and Marcia McFee’s *rhythmic patterns*.

In the discussion of my case studies, it will become clear why I have previously chosen these as hermeneutic instruments. Few theories, in fact, point out the importance of communitarian movement in liturgical architecture. That is, in the limited scale of this study, the major point I would like to retrieve of their fruitful thought. Together, they serve well to counter the critique of relativist space, because they bring to light what cannot be discovered without bodily participating in the living liturgies: the meaningful mysteries that are mediated through the dynamic interaction between moving (individual and communitarian) body and building. Whereas the first is a German architect who elaborated his theory in the heydays of the Liturgical Movement but is now largely forgotten, the latter is a current Methodist worship consultant with a vivid interest in helping communities appropriate their liturgical spaces.

In the 1930s, the Roman Catholic architect Rudolf Schwarz presented six ‘plans,’ not as mere blueprints for building churches, but as stills of a changing, dynamic ‘seventh plan.’ More essential than the building is the spatial configuration of a worshipping community. Schwarz called his first ‘plan’ for church building a *ring*, because it is simply based on how a community gathers spontaneously in a ring around a central focus, be it an altar or a preacher. Schwarz warns that a literal and static interpretation of this plan could become “the most desolate of all forms,” a self-enclosed circle without any transcendence. Therefore, “the closed

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themselves remained its phase." This plan or 'whole' stands "above all plans" and brings them all to completion and recapitulating them over time. Schwartz's vision was an "ever-changing space" that made "the building run parallel to the action."

Schwarz's theory for church building is based on the organic concept of the human body. The building had to bring to light an "inner spatiality." "A higher life is at hand and it speaks from time to time in changing forms. But that which speaks is ever present." Church buildings had to "come into being solely out of the act of worship itself [...] welling forth from within." Schwarz would reject the presumption that 'shades of grey' are incapable of conveying transcendence: even an empty vessel "would have a form and this form would have a meaning."

For Schwarz, architecture had to serve and even become liturgy: "Architecture lasts only in order to be left back into happening." That is exactly why "each of the great basic forms could be represented through the articulation of the people." Complementary to Schwarz's spatial configurations, and from a completely different starting point, the American liturgical scholar Marcia McFee has distinguished between four basic energy patterns, based on the human body. She related them to distinctive liturgical rituals, going from invigorating liveliness (thrust), ordering energy (shape), playful, interactive participation (swing) to contemplative, sustained stillness (hang):

We are formed through the rhythms and dynamics of our worship as people who come to their feet, who are ready for action, inspired for action. We are formed as people who name and claim God's reality, who embody the vision of the reign of God, who share with others the sure foundation that is God (Shape energy). We are formed as people who love deeply, relate personally and intimately, who feel the ebbs and flows of life and emotion and respond to a hurting world (Swing energy). And we are formed as those who can listen for the still small voice leading and guiding us, able simply to 'be' present, steeped in awe-filled moments, guiding others to the presence of the ever-mysterious God (Hang energy).

Both Schwarz's six spatial configurations and McFee's four rhythmic patterns will help focusing upon communitarian appropriation in the analysis of my two case studies. In order to counter the accusation of 'shades of grey' or 'relativist space,' I will proceed in two steps. First, I will show the fruitfulness of this simple hermeneutic framework for a perhaps obvious, but contemporary example of 'shades of color,' as an Episcopalian eye-opener for Roman Catholic critics, who would certainly dismiss this church as 'relativist space' for its apparent subjectivism and eclecticism. Second, once this approach proved useful, I will apply this framework to a typical Modernist 'shades of grey'-church. In doing so, both case studies, however different in living liturgies and mediating mysteries, will bring to light a profound dimension of all of our buildings and celebrations: they must lay bare the eschatological truth of our liturgical gatherings. This is, at least, my growing conviction over the years.

The French theologian and liturgical scholar Louis Bouyer has argued that liturgical architecture should direct towards the parousia, the victorious coming of the Lord. In order to explore the other metaphor of the title: liturgical architecture should shed (eschatological) light upon the shades of our time, or, in other words, the shades of liturgical architecture should orient towards eschatological Light. Let me explain this briefly, before proceeding to the case studies.

3. Shades of Light. Eschatological Heterotopias

The theological depth that this exercise will reveal in the case of both churches will be, as we will see, eschatological. A brief word on this theological truth is at stake before starting the exercise. Eschatology, for Karl Rahner, is the "futurity of the present." Eschatology does not relegate important issues to the future, but places us really in this present world by revealing its eternal depth. Because such futurity is not easily visible, imagination comes to our aid: "Christian hope is not
imaginary, but it is irreducibly imaginative." Therefore, the German Protestant scholars Andrea Bieler and Luise Schottroff suggested "eschatological imagination" as an embodied practice of hope in the midst of a broken reality, opening windows that "show potential for life flourishing" by "reversing" and "thickening" ordinary experience. The French phenomenologist Jean-Yves Lacoste evoked an "eschatological reduction" of the liturgy: in phenomenology, reduction is used in order for the phenomenon to appear more clearly.

Hence, in liturgical enactment, the world is momentarily placed between brackets so that the eschatological Kingdom — or the eternal depth of our world — appears more clearly. Adopting the term hetertopia of the French philosopher Michel Foucault (who not precisely wrote on liturgy) I would call places in which the Kingdom becomes visible eschatological heterotopias that function as mirrors for our society:

Utopias are sites with no real place: [...] There are also [...] real places [...] which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. Because these places are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias.41

Like utopias, heterotopias create another world, another place we dream of. But contrary to utopias, heterotopias are real places embedded and embodied in this world. These real places give us already a sense of another place — call it Kingdom — but they are not yet this Kingdom. Hence, how can our churches be heterotopias for the eschatological imagination, that is, "effectively enacted utopias," real places embedded and embodied in our world, that give us a glimpse and a sense of the Kingdom by appealing at our imagination?

Let us turn to two contemporary examples for showing how this eschatological Kingdom can be brought to light in community appropriation. Especially the last case will respond to the accusation that 'shades of grey' can only lead to 'rela-

tivist space.' Examining what communities actually do with their spaces, how they use and appropriate them will reveal their hidden meaning hence, these spaces are not 'relativist' but 'meaningful,' 'shades of grey' should be, in any case, 'shades of Light.' This basically eschatological meaning is not uncrusted statically in the bare concrete but comes to light only dynamically in community appropriation. The aforementioned hermeneutic instruments of spatial configurations and rhythmical patterns are a help to bring this to light. That the 'shades of grey' of contemporary church architecture convey transcendent meaning and mystery can only be perceived when being attentive to the moving (individual and community) body. In short, liturgical architecture is basically a question of embodied sensuousness. Let me first demonstrate this with a proudly contemporary example of shades of color, imagery, playfulness, mysteriousness, narrativity, art, and painting.


The exotic, fairytale shape of St Gregory of Nyssa creates a playful mysteriousness that is fitting for an eschatological heterotopia because it is so unfamiliar, and this precisely appeals to the imagination.42 Instead of the dull reproduction of familiar church schemes, unfamiliar styles and shapes release an eschatological imagination that is much more appropriate for our broken world today. Playful unfamiliarity might well be a condition for the contemporary character of a church, in order to be truly a heterotopia, a mirror for our world.

The spatial configuration of St Gregory of Nyssa is built around a well-forged liturgical pattern attuned over the years to the needs of a specific and fairly eclectic Episcopal community. The complementary spaces for Word and Eucharist go back to early models of Syrian churches.43 The Sunday liturgy begins in the octagonal rotunda around a simple wooden altar-table, on which stand earthen cups. People gather spontaneously around this altar-table in what Schwarz had called a ring-configuration. The familiar distinction between nave and sanctuary is abol-

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43 Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diamirii 16* (1986): 22-27. Not only churches may function as eschatological heterotopias: there are so many places in our world that give us a glimpse of the Kingdom, in prisons, in hospitals, in schools, in homes.

42 For many people, it might be a space for an imagination let loose, drifting away from clear liturgical norms that keep things tight and clean and controllable. However, if one is willing to approach, to enter, and to appropriate the eclectic, exotic, seemingly esoteric language, one discovers an unexpected balance between clear limits and free space, between instruction and charisma that other churches are only dreaming about.
ished. This is not a holy place where one should shut up and remain unnoticed. The Eucharistic space, the sacred heart of this place, comes first of all to the fore in the disarming dimension of simple human encounter. It is truly a domus vicaria, a house where a community feels at home. There is a lot of space for gathering and moving around.

When we enter this meeting place, newcomers are welcomed, people chat, and the choir rehearses in a contagiously confident way, without the need of instruments. Everyone wears a nametag, in order to foster encounter. Everyone is welcome in this family of sisters and brothers in Christ. Above our heads, eighty-eight historical and legendary figures, as one unlikely family lead by Christ, lift their hands in a welcoming gesture. This colorful fresco expresses the maxims of the church father Gregory of Nyssa written in the lantern above our heads: “The one thing truly worthwhile is becoming God’s friend.” This friendship mysticism is the hermeneutic key to the whole liturgical event, in which table fellowship has a central place. Encounter is part of the worship in St Gregory of Nyssa. But this is only one dimension, which corresponds to what the Evangelical theologian Mark A. Torgerson rightly has called “an architecture of immanence.”

Because of this colorful fresco and the meaningful maxims of Gregory of Nyssa, we can recognize Schwarz’s second configuration of the statuses of light: a ring that does not remain enclosed upon itself but opens vertically to another space, becoming eschatological heterotopia because it makes visible a Kingdom of God, a heavenly Church of dancing brothers and sisters, God’s friends in communion.

Suddenly, the door of the vesting room opens. A small colorful procession comes out, the presider with an Ethiopian cross, the lay deacon with the Gospel book, moving hastily and cheerfully under colorful Ethiopian umbrellas among the quieted congregation. “Christ is Risen!” exclaims the presider, immediately responded by the assembly: “He is risen indeed!” From the beginning, it is the Lord who invites, as depicted in the fresco above our heads. What is most striking is the Paschal urgency of this entrance ritual, which could be understood as a thrust pattern in McFee’s categories. Because of its energetic intensity, thrust energy does not usually last long. McFee suggests that thrust energy goes with the image of “a transformational God – a God on the move.”

Indeed, three elements make this entrance ritual at St Gregory of Nyssa so meaningful: First, the liturgical dimension or lex orandi. We are welcomed with a Paschal greeting. Our Christian faith starts with the Risen Christ, who calls us together, who is the transformational God on the move inviting us to move with Him. Although He is not visible among us, does our heart not burn from what has been told to us, have our eyes not been opened (Lk 24:32)? Is this central altar-table not a symbol of the Risen Christ present in our midst, such as it was for the disciples of Emmaus? It is so meaningful to start the Sunday liturgy in the exact same spatial configuration as we will bring it to an end. Second, the theological dimension or lex condendi. The encounter with the Risen Christ occurs on the basis of simple human encounter. Standing around this altar-table, we are the Body of Christ, locally visible here and now. Third, the architectural dimension or lex adiungendi. Above our heads are the ones who live in God’s friendship and invite us to be one Church on earth, one vision of the eschatological Kingdom, in which the one thing truly worthwhile is becoming God’s friend.

Now the ring breaks open and becomes an open ring: we move, in a sort of ordered procession behind the presider and his deacon, to the second pole of the liturgical ellipse, the elongated seating area. This procession reproduces Schwarz’s fourth plan, the way, until it comes to an end, as Schwarz’s dark shadow, ready, prepared, shaped for the liturgy of the Word, in what McFee called a stage pattern of balance, symmetry, clarity, repetition, moderation, and clearly defined functional zones. Due to its invariant stability, the inherent dynamism of this pattern could easily be overlooked, especially its power to shape a congregation. The oblong, ordered space is replete with furniture, antiphonal seating alongside a bema with ambo and presider chair at both ends as three signifiers for proclaiming (ambo), preaching (presider chair), and praising (antiphonal seating) one Word. The hierarchical roles are clearly laid out in the space. Behind the presider is a colorful fresco depicting Saint Gregory of Nyssa preaching. Above him, the friendship mysticism is made clear in the wedding of the human soul with the heavenly Bridegroom, in front of a depiction of the San Francisco church.

What is not clear from visiting this church outside of celebrations, but what can only be experienced during Sunday worship, is that this place is also used for what McFee called hang energy. After each of the two Biblical readings at the ambo, a well-chosen moment of silence is particularly dense, filled with the deep echoing sounds of Tibetan bells, which hold in suspense the divine Word that no one can fathom. Most of the people close their eyes in silent prayer or spiritual aftertaste.

They become aware of each other again, tasting the divine echoes of the proclaimed Word, hanging together in contemplation, waiting, focusing on being present rather than on doing and what’s going on. Sitting is appropriate for hang energy. There is no direction to go, there is but a place to be. Speech is totally unnecessary in this pattern, which speaks for itself and even fosters a certain ability to go with the flow. People just are for a moment, together in attentive stillness and intense connection. Such moments of hang energy are particularly apt for what I call ‘body-building,’ that is, for building the Body of Christ that we are. God is here the surrounding and grounding mystery in which we find and define ourselves again as community.

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65 McFee, "Planar Patterns", 142.
After the Liturgy of the Word, the congregation moves a few times in a gentle, swinging dance around the altar, again as a ring, but a moving ring, repeating the same steps as depicted in the mural above our heads, as such connecting this earthly local church with the heavenly Church in one and the same divine liturgy presided by the dancing Risen Christ, and thus also as chalice of light. This move could be called swing energy in McFee’s kinesiethic hermeneutic. It is a playful, interactive, rhythmic, and swaying movement. The primary focus in swing energy is on the community as one dancing Body of Christ lead by Christ. Because of the dance and the accompanying song, this processional move is totally different than the earlier one. It is more festive, and at St Gregory of Nyssa it is always a long expected highlight of the liturgy – defining the particular liturgy of this local Church. At this moment, the lex edendi joins adequately the lex orandi, lex credendi. This dance bridges the Liturgy of the Word with the Liturgy of the Eucharist. It grows out of the Word we have proclaimed, preached, and praised. The Word has enriched us and invites us now into embodied celebration. Such dynamic configuration corresponds in my view to Schwarz’s sixth plan, which he called the dome of light. It is not easy to see how Schwarz’s ‘joyous vision’ of the wedding banquet of the Lamb in the new Jerusalem could otherwise find architectural expression. I suggest that the community of St Gregory of Nyssa has found in its dance an appropriate dynamic expression of Schwarz’s vision. The whole building becomes now an eschatological event, a true Temple of the Spirit.

This dance shapes the community into a ring of circumstantes around the altar-table for the Liturgy of the Eucharist, which unfolds according to a shape pattern. The sigma-(C)-shaped altar-table is reminiscent of the oldest Last Supper depictions, such as the sixth-century mosaic in Sant’ Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna or the sixth-century Rossano Gospels (Codex Purpureus Rossanensis, fol. 3), following a Mediterranean custom of reclining at the curved side of a (cenobium). At St Gregory of Nyssa, the presider serves adequately at the conventional place of the servants, in memory of Christ who is the diakonos in our midst (Lk 22:27). On Fridays, this same Eucharistic rounda hosts the food pantry, which distributes food to less fortunate citizens in the neighborhood. They move around the altar in exactly the same direction as the Dancing Saints and the community during Sunday worship, as such acquiring a Eucharistic dimension. This rounda is thus truly the sacred heart of this church, providing an eschatological vision of the Kingdom in its four dimensions of encounter, dance, Eucharist, and solidarity.

Having examined the architecture of this particular church through the lens of the liturgy, with the help of four energy patterns: thrust, shape, hang, and swing) and six spatial configurations (ring, chalice of light, open ring, way, dark chalice, dome of light), let me now formulate some conclusions before moving on to my next case study. First of all, these hermeneutic keys should not be applied rigidly. They allow the discovery of different tones or colors in our liturgies. The more we can recognize these patterns in our liturgies, the richer they are. Schwarz himself did not conceive of his ‘plans’ as blueprints for church building, but recognized that a “single movement flows uninterruptedly through all the ‘plans’ and one of its phases is set down in each of them.” That is why his seventh plan, the “Cathedral of All Times,” recapitulates the six plans and brings them to completion. This plan, however, is impossible to build. Therefore, if one has to choose, the open ring was Schwarz’s preferred vision for the everyday Eucharistic celebration. The issue at hand is not to stick to one static configuration or energy pattern alone but to recognize (and implement) different spatial configurations in our liturgies, such as my analysis of St Gregory of Nyssa has shown. Whereas McFee’s patterns allow one to focus on the rhythm of our celebrations, Schwarz’s plans translate the different shapes of a community. Both emphasize liturgical dynamism and communitarian appropriation. With this colorful Episcopal eye-opener in mind, let us now move to the ‘shades of grey’ of a recent Roman Catholic church building, and see if we can lay bare its embodied seriousness that would make it truly attractive, festive, contemporary, and eschatological – as ‘shades of Light.’


The Roman Catholic St François de Molitor (2005) in Paris presents a totally different situation, showing that liturgical dynamism is open to multiple expressions, really and fortunately depending on the local communities’ appropriation of their space. At first sight, this building gathers all the characteristics of ‘shades of grey’ and ‘relativist space’ so abhorred by the critics. If truth be told, ‘shades of grey’ would still only function metaphorically in this church. It would rather be dismissed as ‘shades of beige,’ but the point is clear. Its minimalist, empty, ‘beigeified’ space is “marked by very little symbolism, narrativity, art, statuary or painting.” In fact, three polychrome statues stand in the corners and are not visible at first


48 Schwarz, The Church Inmanate, 191.

49 Barone, Beyond Beige Church, 14.
sight. Prominent are the metallic crosses on the walls and the golden cross of glory in front of the glass wall, also without corpus. The global atmosphere could even be characterized as Protestant, when not attentive to communian appropriation.

The exterior façade of this church does not display the same exotic exuberance as St Gregory of Nyssa, and is more indistinguishable in the busy street. Therefore, if there is an eschatological quality to be brought to light, we must find it inside. After a dark passageway, we enter a bright open space. This surprising experience, which might remain unperceived or unconscious for most visitors who are not attentive to the synesthetic qualities of the space, is in my view definitely reminiscent of Schwars's Dox of light, in which one is taken in, especially in contrast with the darkness and confinement of the entrance. So, the first spatial configuration is actually this vision that Schwarz thought was impossible to build. Let us hang in there for a while. Indeed, McFee would speak here of hung energy. "We are formed as those who can listen for the still small voice leading and guiding us, able simply to 'be' present, steeped in awe-filled moments, guiding others to the presence of the ever-mysterious God." Similar to the beneficial hung moments in St Gregory of Nyssa, this Paristian church is propitious for contemplative listening. The smooth, diffuse light falling in from the glass wall helps to create the right atmosphere for contemplation and stillness.

The elliptical configuration of the pews around the central altar is a prominent expression of Schwarz's ring, very similar to how the rounda is used in St Gregory of Nyssa. Nave and sanctuary are not separated in a familiar basilical way, but the sanctuary is enclosed within the nave, it is the sacred heart that transfigures the assembly into the Body of Christ. One could even imagine that the main rhythmic pattern displayed in this building is shap energy: there is order, balance, symmetry, clarity, repetition, moderation, and clearly defined functional zones. The white, cubic Carrara-marble altar is so much moved to the center that people seem reduced to mere unmoving observers. At least, this is the extent of what we think we see when not looking at the architecture through the lens of living liturgy. But then we miss the mysteries it mediates! And we might dismiss it all together as mere shades of grey without embodied sensuousness, without imagination, such as the movie was dismissed in relation to the popular erotic novel.

It is surprisingly wonderful to see how the static ring breaks open as a Schwarzian open ring at the penitential and doxological rites, appropriately during

50 This being said, the marble planes are lit at night and thus shed mysterious Light on the streets. But the eschatological dimension of this church is definitely not reduced to this playful feature.
51 I discuss synesthetic space as the primary dimension addressed to the individual body in "Spiritus loe, 161-202.
52 McFee, "Primal Patterns", 154.
53 See also the Church Incarnate, 77.
54 Ibid.
come explicitly to the fore, probably due to the overpowering symbol of the luminous garden. Schwarz’s *dark chalice*, emphasizing God’s mysterious and threatening silence, may be evoked during evening celebrations, where the garden is clad in darkness, which is particularly apt for Good Friday and Easter Vigil celebrations. Another image for the *dark chalice* is the tabernacle, with its twelve Pentecostal flames, placed as the only light source in a dark chapel oriented towards the geographical East.

In contrast to *St Gregory of Nyssa*, the main energy patterns that are present are *shape* and *hang* energy. But I have suggested *swing* energy in the bodily move of the community during the penitential rites. One could also find interactive *swing* energy in the communitarian singing; this is yet another fundamental feature that one only perceives through repeated, embodied participation. The spatial *ring* configuration (that at first sight only fosters *shape* energy) helps enormously for this swing energy to be felt, because this subtle form of energy can only be perceived by and in one community. Together with *hang*-energy it is essential for communitarian ‘body-building’. In *St François de Molière*, the choir is situated in the ring, near the altar, and no clear distinctions separate the choir from the rest of the assembly. Playful, interactive *swing* energy would not be felt were only the choir singing and the assembly reduced to mere listening but not participating observers.

Lastly, let us finish with a brief word on *thrust* energy. If McFee is right about the necessity of all four forms of energy for community-building, and I believe he is, where would we find *thrust* energy in our Western celebrations anyway? She defines it as invigorating power that shapes us into “people who come to their feet, who are ready for action, inspired for action.” 55 *Thrust* energy seems totally absent (and perhaps unnecessary) in *St François de Molière*, because there is no room for processional movements. However, I suggest that it might be felt during an energetic and moving homily, for instance, or in passionate proclamation. Our communities deserve this as well. Let us enrich our drizzly celebrations!

In conclusion, what at first sight might appear a static and closed configuration of a *shape*-patterned *ring* and thus emphasizing the “architecture of immanence” of a *domus ecclesiae*, reveals the inherent transcendent dimension of a *domus Domini* or open *ring* during the *swing*-patterned penitential rites. Again, the architecture has to be analyzed through the lens of the particular liturgy of a local Church. This enriches the theological *lex credendi*, in this case especially the eschatological imagination – or expectation, symbolized by the luminous garden and the cross of glory.

55 McFee, “Primordial Patterns”, 153.
Even though sacred art appears to be in crisis today, some symbolic imagery comes theologically ‘alive’ in the liturgy — and, as lived liturgy, mediates mystery. These images define as much the liturgical space that they overflow the limits of their two-dimensionality in order to incorporate the liturgy by their tridimensional (or spatial) theology. In this article, I have only focused on particular images that receive a precise eschatological dimension in the liturgies celebrated. Sure, this is an imaginative way of understanding eschatology. Without a doubt, the eschatological imagination opened by these ‘effectively enacted utopias’ lays bare the ‘future’, or eternal depth, of the present — a hope our broken world longs for.

With this modest contribution, I hope to have countered both the harsh critique and the common opinion that contemporary churches are mere “shades of grey” — uninspiring, empty containers or multipurpose areas that mediate no sense of mystery and induce no lived liturgy. There is no need to go back to the Gothic style in order to convey transcendence. As an exercise in practical theology, I have written for any users of churches (visitors and worshippers), merely pointing out the embodied theology of our celebrations, already present by being bodily and sensuously present, by moving, acting, and celebrating. Our liturgical places should be more than mere empty rooms for gathering, more than mere ‘shades of grey’, more than multipurpose areas — even though some ad hoc places can occasionally be lived as extraordinary eschatological heinostopai or ‘shades of Light’.56

What have we gained with this short excursion in the living liturgies of contemporary church architecture? Both case studies, one European and Roman Catholic and the other American and Episcopalian, have proven very different, but also complementary eye-openers for parish communities today who wish to appropriate their buildings and discover their inherent potential. Both hermeneutic instruments, one from a European Roman Catholic architect and the other from an American Methodist liturgist, have proven very different as well, but also complementary tools for parish communities today. In short, this excursion has not led to a dismissal of the shades of grey of contemporary architecture as relativist space, but has reinstated the need for symbolic foci, such as the frescos and the wooden sigma-altar in St Gregory of Nyssa and the marble altar, cross of glory,

56 I remember a nurse recalling the impacting experience of a Christmas Eucharist celebrated in the most ordinary and grey hall of the hospital instead of the tiny chapel. For special occasions, it is good to transform the ordinary into the extraordinary, precisely in order to light up the inherent Kingdom already embedded in our world. A Eucharistic celebration is capable of transforming any place into a Eucharistic space if people are willing to enter the mysteries celebrated and appropriate them by living the liturgy. As regular times, our ordinary liturgical rhythm needs such compelling, extraordinary celebrations in order to be in touch again — albeit temporarily — with the bare essence of the mysteries we hope to mediate and the liturgies we attempt to live. It is precisely an architect who emphasized that liturgy does not need architecture: “Die Liturgie braucht den Kirchenbau nicht.” Rudolf Schwarz, Kirchenbau: Weit vor der Schwelle (Heidelberg: Karlo, 1960), 45.