

# 9

## Axis of incoherence: Engagement and failure between two material regimes of Christianity

*Timothy Carroll*

In the opening chapter, the editors outlined a general theory of failure such that 'material failure' can be understood to occur when 'objectification ceases to adhere'. The language used in this definition assumes a processual decomposition: a shoe falling apart, moving from a state wherein the subject can be seen to successfully concretize themselves into an object to one wherein the agentive work of the subject may no longer be the master over the material indexicalities of the thing. In this chapter, I work with a more processual phenomenon of 'failure'. Rather than the material conforming and then not, the materials discussed in this chapter – a parish church building, to be exact – never fully matches the aspirations of the community. Each week, the Orthodox Christian parish of St Æthelwald's enters the space of a homonymous<sup>1</sup> Church of England building in order to set up the space for their weekly liturgy. And while the transformation of the space is successful, such that each week the liturgy is carried out, I argue that the sensual quality of

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<sup>1</sup> The Orthodox parish and the Anglican parish, both of which have the same patronage and name, are given the same pseudonym here.

the space is not able to cohere to the Anglican material ecology<sup>2</sup> of the place. Both the Anglican and Orthodox spaces are coterminous with the physical place of the parish church in East London, but I argue that they are not the same space. Rather, what emerges are (at least) two 'axes of coherence' (Gell 1998), such that the Orthodox Christian objectification fails to fully cohere to the otherwise Anglican material. As a result, these two incommensurable attitudes towards and reception of space produce a tension – an 'axis of incoherence' – in the material register.

The Orthodox parish of St Æthelwald's rents the nave and adjacent parish hall from St Æthelwald's Church of England from 9.00 am in the morning till 3.00 pm in the afternoon each Sunday. As is laid out in this chapter, furniture and various items of soft furnishings must be arranged in order to reorganize the space. The chapter follows this phenomenon, then turns to unpack some of the disjunctures between Orthodox and Anglican space. The material ecology in which the Orthodox Christians place themselves produces an affective space of worship that is different from – both less than and greater than – that of the Anglican space. The chapter then turns to address these contiguous, yet non-overlapping spaces in terms of the Orthodox Christian use and assessment of the space. Drawing on Gregg and Seigworth's (2010) idea of 'bloom-spaces', taken here as any potent affective space in which people and things may transform, I highlight the transformations which produce the space as a coherent Orthodox temple within otherwise Anglican space.

## The Orthodox temple

The Orthodox temple is understood to be an ikon of the universe. Eliade's (1954, 1987) and Köllner's (2013) respective works on the Orthodox temple, gives the impression that the temple serves as a religious, civic and social anchor for the community. Köllner's work in post-socialist Russia stresses the corner stone and the consecration of the temple as key points in its establishment as a sacred space. However, when the building and the Holy Table are not consecrated it becomes more obvious what material element is required in order for a temple to function. As Antohin's (2014) recent work on Ethiopian Orthodoxy has observed, when, in that context, the *tabot* – or tablet of the Ark – is taken out of the parish veiled in ornate wrapping, as is done each *Timkat* (Epiphany, lit. 'baptism'), the church leaves the building and the edifice is no longer sacred. It is the *tabot* – not the building – that makes the church a church. Boylston (2012: 171), also working in an Ethiopian

<sup>2</sup> I use 'material ecology' to denote the set of all *relata* (person and thing, object and substance, tangible and intangible) with which the subject relates in a given space.

Orthodox context, has similarly noted the perseverance of a church despite its destruction by fire. As the fire did not destroy the *tabot*, the *tabot* (and hence the church) was simply moved into a tent down the hill while reconstruction work was carried out. While in Eastern Orthodoxy, the building and Holy Table are both consecrated and thus perpetually sacred spaces, the Holy Table cannot be served upon by a priest without canonical permission to do so. This canonical permission is given in the form of an antimimension.<sup>3</sup> Its literal meaning, 'instead of table', speaks for the fact that this object, not a consecrated Holy Table, is the thing that lets a church be used for Orthodox worship.<sup>4</sup> This next subsection follows the churchwarden, Chris, as he and a few others arrange the temple one Sunday morning during the forty days of Pascha, which follow the Feast of the Resurrection. Along with the movement and arrangement of furniture and ikons, the Anglican building is transformed into space suitable for Orthodox worship through the emplacement of the antimimension, which transforms the ontology of space.

## Vesting the temple

In late Pascha 2011, I arrive to the parish early, as the Orthodox churchwarden, Chris, had agreed to meet me and walk me through the process by which he sets up the temple. I arrive at 8.50 am as the caretaker, Harvey, who is hired by the Anglican parish from which the Orthodox congregation of St Æthelwald's rents its space, opens the great doors. St Æthelwald's Church of England parish church is a twentieth-century restoration of an eighteenth-century reconstruction of a parish church dating to the Roman period.

Inside, the wood-panelled central nave and balcony are inscribed with the names of clergy serving back into the thirteenth century. The outer brick walls are, on the inside, plastered over with a number of war memorials inset into the walls and window recesses. An eastern-facing high altar<sup>5</sup> is flanked with mosaics of St. John the Apostle and Moses, and a large stained-glass window shows an assemblage of the crucifixion, not so much as an historical scene, but as it is venerated by an Anglican bishop, a young girl and St Longinus. A small Lady Chapel hosts an ikon of the Russian Mother of God, Our Lady of the Don, and at the back of the parish, facing this ikon, is another of the

<sup>3</sup> Several terms, such as antimimension, ikonostasis and terms for parts of the temple, are borrowed from the Greek. They are presented in this chapter, however, not in italics, in recognition that they are used as English terms by the Orthodox Christians at St Æthelwald's.

<sup>4</sup> For historical links between the *tabot* and the *antimimension*, see Januarius Izzo (1981: 4).

<sup>5</sup> Eastern facing altars are arranged such that the priest faces away from the people. An altar table may be called 'eastern facing' even if the direction on the compass rose is in fact not East.

Virgin Mary, but of rather more modern rendering. Beyond these three representational pieces of art, the next most noticeable features are the organ pipes, the chandeliers and the small copula – described by one informant as the ‘church cupcake’.

As is typical of many Anglican buildings, St Æthelwald’s nave is long and slender. While the area in which there are pews is not particularly long, it is the same distance from the back of the nave up to the first pew as it is from there up to the Anglican high altar. A stark black and white stone floor in the main nave gives way to grey and white, and eventually white and yellow marble as one walks from the back of the building towards the front. The patterning on the floor, the narrow construction of the walls and the slight elevation increase towards the front of the St Æthelwald’s parish building together give the sense of looking up and at a distance towards a source of light and divine inspiration.

Chris arrives at just after 9.00 am, makes his greetings and gets right to work. Gathering the keys, he opens the various closets and storage spaces that the Anglican parish has let the Orthodox parish use. Chris rearranges a large oak table in the centre of the raised Anglican quire and then brings the ikons, processional crucifix and fans, tabernacle and candle stands out from where they are stored behind the Anglican high altar. He arranges these about the quire, the space that will be transformed into the Holy Altar.<sup>6</sup> He then takes one of the large high-back chairs and places it front-and-centre, with its back against the Anglican high altar. On either side of this, he sets two low-backed chairs, forming the three seats of the bema (Seat of Judgement), reserved for the bishop. He then goes and collects the items and boxes from a broom closet below the bell tower. With a few trips he has carried the censor; the candles which will be set before Christ and the Theotokos on the ikonostasis; the folding table used for the prothesis; the two blue Tupperware® boxes containing the utensils of Proskomedia<sup>7</sup> and those of the Holy Table, respectively; and the wooden ‘fire box’ with the incense and utensils for the lighting and care of the censor.

From the closet under the stairs he pulls the music-stand used by the reader; the two large wooden stands used for the right and left portion of the ikonostasis; and the folding frame upon which is set the sand box for votive candles. Each of these items of furniture he carries to their place within the slowly assembled space of the temple. Seraphim, a young man who came to

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<sup>6</sup> N.b. Following the two different sets of Christian terminology, ‘high altar’ is here an Anglican term for the table upon which the priest performs the mass; ‘Holy Altar’ is an Orthodox term for the area behind the ikonostasis. In the Orthodox St Æthelwald community ‘altar’ was used with reference to this space and, in some cases, loosely referring to the table in front of which the priest performed the Liturgy. To keep confusion to a minimum, in this chapter I use the other term more commonly used to speak of this table, the ‘Holy Table’.

<sup>7</sup> The service of preparation for the wine, bread and water that will be used in the Eucharist.

help Chris, arrives during this stage and helps arrange the ikonostasis with the four ikons, showing: Christ, the Theotokos, John the Forerunner and the patron of the parish. It is only with the placement of the ikons of the ikonostasis that the building begins to look discernibly Orthodox, and, even so, the large stained-glass window still dominates the visual field of the building.

Standing back from the small ikonostasis, Seraphim turns to me and says: 'If I had my way, if we owned the building, the first thing I'd do is build a right-proper ikonostasis.' He then proceeds to explain the architectural renovation that would be needed – which walls to move, where to add this, where to get rid of that. His primary critique of the building is twofold. First, it is too long, and, as such, there was wasted space up front. The Lady Chapel should be changed into the vestry; the most easterly portion of the nave, with the stained-glass window and the Anglican high altar, should be gutted and made an office for the priest. His second critique is that the building is visually sparse. 'We need to get an ikonographer in here', he tells me, 'the walls should be covered in ikons. The ikonostasis', and here he lifts his hands taking into account the great expanse of imagined architectural emendations, 'the ikonostasis first and foremost'.

Even in the up-distant motion of the imagined ikonostasis, Seraphim did not imagine it going up particularly far. Up to the level of the banister of the loft, yes, but an ikonostasis should never, I was told, be so tall that one cannot see who it is in the ikons along the top. Seraphim's desire to see the whole parish covered in ikons was not uniquely his own, and for the forty days of Pascha, the extra effort was made to make visible the saints. During this period, ikons were placed on the ledges, lining the walls, around each pillar and any other flat surface large enough to host a Blu-Tack® mounting. For most of the year, however, the parish made do with the small ikonostasis, an ikon placed at each of the four main pillars of the church and three analogia<sup>8</sup> arranged at the entrance to the nave.

By 9.20 am, Reader Romanos arrived, ready to arrange his texts for the day on the stand recently pulled from storage. Meanwhile, Chris, having finished moving the furniture stored downstairs, heads up the narrow wooden stairs to the loft. He grabs an analogion, wrapped in rich brocade – the same fabric used to dress the three tables in the Altar. He lifts it carefully, not wanting to topple the ikon that rests atop the inclined surface. Feeling his way with the heel of his shoe, he walks blind down the staircase and carries the ikon stand to the back of the nave. He straightens the cloth cover and heads back upstairs for the next. One by one he carries them down the stairs, setting them in place: one at the main entrance with the festal ikon; one to the south at the back of the centre isle with Christ and St John the Forerunner; one

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<sup>8</sup> These are slanted plinths upon which ikons are set; sing. analogion.

to the north, across from the latter, with the Theotokos and St Æthelwald. He sets these in place and immediately turns to fetch the next. Later in the morning, after everything is in place, I see him go back to venerate each with a low bow, the sign of the cross and a kiss. I ask him why he does not do this before, combining his two tasks and venerating each as he arranges them; he pauses. Upon reflection he ascribes a didactic meaning to my question I did not intend and says, 'You know you're right, I probably should kiss them before I move them, and after I have set them in place – Father's always talking about the importance of that sort of thing. But, you know, it doesn't feel like the temple till they're in place and the Holy Table is arranged, and I find it nice to wait till it's the temple to say my prayers. When I'm setting things up I wanna get it done.'

By this time, at about 9.25 am, other members of the choir begin to arrive, greeting both each other and the ikons as they do so. As it is the Paschal season, there are a number of additional items to arrange, including the epitaphios. Chris pulls this large embroidered cloth ikon out from its protective plastic cover from atop the shelf where it is kept. This he rests over the ledge of the choir stalls, ready to be placed on the Holy Table once the altar vestments have been laid out. After fetching these down from upstairs, he begins to lay them out over the various furnishings. Over the lectern he drapes a long analogion cover. Over the large table he carefully unfolds the custom-made white satin vestment which Anna, the sub-deacon's wife, made when they first started renting the building in the late 1990s. He carefully situates it to be smooth and aligned such that the cross, embroidered on the front flap, falls even and centred. Once these white garments are in place, Chris positions an embroidered ikon (the epitaphios) showing Christ being taken down from the cross, into place on the soon-to-be Holy Table. He then moves the candles up onto the table, along with the small brass tabernacle.

At this point (roughly 9.50 am), Sub-deacon Nicholas arrives and begins to arrange items on the Holy Table and on two small tables, which Chris had set up off to the side of the Holy Table. Sdn Nicholas pulls items out of two blue Tupperware® boxes and places them on the tables. Most items he places on the midsized table of prothesis (a setting forth). Having set up the tables and prepared the vestments, Chris leaves this stage of the preparation to the sub-deacon. Some of the artefacts he cannot touch, but he tells me that he is allowed to be in there, as an Orthodox man with a priest's blessing to do so, but, and he wriggles his shoulders, 'I just don't like being in *there* once it's ...' and he trails off, with a long gaze towards the space in which he had not ten minutes prior bustled about, taking full command of the space. He snaps back from the gaze. 'Well', he says, 'follow me, there's more work to be done.'

Again dashing up the stairs and back down again, Chris unrolls a Persian rug, situating it in the centre of the solea.<sup>9</sup> This item is only brought out for feasts, to create a space for the veneration of a festal ikon or for the positioning of a small table for a special service. Still in the season of Pascha, the rug is now used to create the space for the ikon of the resurrection. As far as I was able to discern, no one knows where the rug came from, one person suggested it was gifted to the parish early in its history; another suggested Fr Gabriel gave it to the parish from one of his travels; Fr Gabriel's wife thought it belonged to the Anglicans and suspected it was not theirs at all. Ultimately, the provenance did not appear to be important in the slightest. In contrast to the Anglican environment around them which claimed heritage with the war memorials and the line of clergy traced back seven centuries, what was important to the Orthodox congregation was that the festal ikon of the resurrection needed something special to be placed under it in order for its placement to be accorded a dignity worthy of its own holy status. To accomplish this, Chris uses a litany desk from the Anglican sanctuary as an analogion to position the ikon at a low, slanted position allowing for its veneration during a low bow. This stand, made of a simple wooden design, is further augmented with a white altar vestment. The vestment used was made for a small table and does not fit the litany desk perfectly. However, whoever is dressing the table, Chris in this case, folds the vestment to fit the purpose as an analogion cover. Thus, while the fabric is not ideal for the situation, the congregation makes do with what they have, adjusting for what is most appropriate as they decorate their temple for the feast.

Chris finishes arranging the festal ikon atop the analogia cover, vested over the litany desk, upon the rug on the solea about 9.55 am. This coincides with Fr Theophan arriving and Sdn Nicholas completing the arrangement of the Holy Table, the table of Prothesis and the server's table.

Now, towards the front-centre of the Altar stands the Holy Table. Atop the white vestments used in Pascha rests the epitaphios. On this the clergy place the antimimension, then the Gospel book above that. The Gospel book is covered with another cloth ikon, that of Mary and John the Apostle beneath the crucifixion. Here, inside the Altar, one is surrounded with sacred things; holy things are layered one atop the other, and the space is transformed – my informants tell me – into heaven on earth. And while twenty minutes before Chris was bustling about like he owned the place, at this point he does not enter.

The change of space happens specifically with the placement of the antimimension. It is a simple item of fabric, a cloth ikon, roughly 25x30 inches, signed by the local bishop granting to the parish community the authority to conduct itself as a canonical Orthodox parish. When not in use, the antimimension sits on the Holy Table, underneath the Gospel book. During the course of

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<sup>9</sup> The open space in front of the ikonostasis, towards the people.



**FIGURE 9.1** *Fr Theophan standing before the Holy Table. The antimimension lies open atop the epitaphios. Photo by author.*

the Liturgy, the Gospel is opened, read and moved off to the side. Then the antimimension, which is kept folded within a satin coverlet (the eileton), is unfolded, showing the ikon of Christ being taken down from the Cross (Figure 9.1). It is over this item of fabric that the consecration of the Holy Gifts is performed, and, as such, there are strong correlations understood between this textile artefact and the body of Christ; it is both an image of and a component in the making of its prototype. In most parishes this is a rather understated piece of fabric, because it rests atop the consecrated Holy Table, which, with its holy relic, is a very stable, governing anchor within the cosmological groundings of the temple as heaven, the created cosmos and throne of God.

## Sensible coherence

In the slow assemblage of the Orthodox temple within the space of the Anglican building, it is the placement of the antimimension that transforms the space from the mundane to the sacred. In a normal Orthodox temple there would be a consecrated Holy Table. The elaborate rite of consecration conducted by a bishop sets a permanent anchor within the built environment. Such Holy Tables contain within them a holy relic and are a fixed feature in the



sacred landscape. Even without vestments, such a table is always sacred. The Orthodox temple holds a very important role within the religious life of a community, and, as Mircea Eliade (1987) emphasizes, the temple is an ikon of the universe. Eliade (1954: 20) argues that through ritual ‘every consecrated space coincides with the center of the world’, however I argue that the Orthodox temple is not the ‘centre’; it is the ‘totality’. The circular pattern that can be seen in the arrangement of ikons – and in the circular motion carried out in ritual procession – encompasses the entire universe. What arises out of the Orthodox use of the space is an ‘axis of coherence’ that values an intersubjective ocular proximity (being face to face with each other and with ikons) and processual circularity.

While Orthodox temple buildings are considered holy objects in their own right, Orthodox congregants of St Æthelwald’s understand the Anglican edifice to be in no way sacred. It is, according to church canon law, a ‘synagogue<sup>10</sup> of the heretic’. What changed the space into sacred space was the placement of the antimimension.

In this way, St Æthelwald’s stands in contrast to the temple as ideal-type as seen in the writings of Eliade and Köllner. Eliade and Köllner each demonstrate the importance of the material ecology in which Orthodox worship and the particular importance of a consecrated Holy Table that acts as an important anchor in community life; but St Æthelwald’s has no such anchor. The magnitude of affective change the antimimension creates within the building cannot be stressed enough: it flips a quaint old building into the Temple of God, Heaven on Earth. The manner in which Chris and then other members of St Æthelwald’s arrive and begin the transformation of St Æthelwald’s Church of England parish into St Æthelwald’s Antiochian Orthodox parish has been outlined above. During the process of preparation anyone can move through this space. Often Anna arrives early with her husband in order to arrange the altar vestments; likewise, catechumen may come to help Chris set up and could do so with no problems. But once the antimimension is placed on the table, it becomes the Holy Table, and the area behind (to the east of) the little ikon screen becomes the Altar, and Heaven is made on Earth. This shift affects the space, access and body practice.

This is key. It is the position of the fabric that renders the space an affective space of sacred action.<sup>11</sup> The formal orientation of the ikonostasis and other moveable furniture, however, work to produce the temple as a visible and

<sup>10</sup> ‘Synagogue’ (συναγωγή) simply means ‘assembly’, implying ‘meetinghouse’. In many older sources (the Apostolic Canons date from at least the mid-fourth century [Erickson 1997]), ‘synagogue’ is used in a broad sense, with no necessary implication towards Judaism.

<sup>11</sup> For an extended argument on the qualities that allow fabric to help make sacred space, see Carroll (2017).

tangible ikon of the universe. As an aggregation around the otherwise hidden artefact of the antimimension, the moveable furnishings and ikons placed about the space of the temple augment the visible field of the building in order to facilitate the interocularity and intersubjectivity of Orthodox worship.

After the Liturgy, the priest, or other member of clergy – because only members of clergy may touch this item – remove the sacred fabric, place it in a blue Tupperware® box and it is carted off to be stored in the broom closet from which Chris took it earlier in the morning. Often catechumens<sup>12</sup> help with putting away the church furnishings. As neophytes, they are not permitted access to the Altar and, as such, must wait until the clergy remove the antimimension from the Holy Table. Once this occurs, the nature of place as sacred domain switches off, and it is, once again, simply a building that needs to be cleaned up before the clock shows their use-rights have expired for that week. Once the clergy place the antimimension and Gospel in the Tupperware® box, it may be carried by anyone.

Tucked away in closets and cupboards and hidden behind Anglican fixtures, the material components of the Liturgy are stored from week to week. As the congregation begins to assemble each Sunday, they pull forth the boxes, candles, processional cross and fans, ikons, vestments, water, bread and wine necessary to produce the Liturgy. The resulting bloom-space of people and things rests on many nodes to be present: there must be a priest, there must be people; ikons and candle stands constitute sites of prayer; tables and chairs must be arranged. Each of these items help form a coherent sense of Orthodox sacred space. The analogia covers and rug create spaces for the holy things to be placed and venerated. Like the analogia covers, the altar vestments create a space for holy things to be prepared. As vestments, they dress the church as a bride in matrimony, showing her relation to Christ – embodied in the ikon of the priest (cf. Woodfin 2012; West 2013).

In this argument arises the sense of relational affect. As writers in affect theory quickly point out, the body itself is in a state of ‘perpetual *becoming*’, characterized by a constant ‘in-betweenity’ (Gregg and Seigworth 2010: 3; emphasis original) in relation to things, people, emotions and so forth. The continual ‘in-betweenity’ of the body, as it is affected in dynamic ‘bloom-spaces’, is a quality, however, of not only the body, but the other materials within the space as well. The argument here is that the aggregation of the Orthodox paraphernalia within the Anglican space pushes the affective bloom-space into alignment with a radically different axis of coherence.

As the aggregation of soft furnishings, assembled around the antimimension, push the flow of the space it affords spiritual transcendence (or spiritual immanence) by bringing together issues of the material ecology and sensible

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<sup>12</sup> That is, those studying to become Orthodox Christians.

space in a potent, sensible way. The idea that space fosters transformation is not a novel one. Either as bloom-spaces (Gregg and Seigworth 2010), or affectual geographies (Navaro-Yashin 2012; Tolia-Kelly 2006), or fused with the person in 'the meld' (Garrett 2013), space is an indisputable part of the experience of the self. In terms of the built environment, Verkaaik (2013) has observed that for all the effort many religious informants exert to impress upon researchers that buildings are not important to their religious pursuit, they are nonetheless potent components within religious devotion and often demand a significant portion of time and money within belief-practice, across traditions. Orthodox Christians, on the other hand, often are very upfront concerning the importance of religious buildings and express the role that the built environment plays within the experience of the holy.

Van de Port (2013), in his work on baroque churches in Brazil, speaks of the ways religious architecture can produce ecstatic experiences. He takes ecstasy, *ek-stasis* 'outside the self', as a type of *jouissance* (as apposed<sup>13</sup> to *plaisir*, Barthes 1975) – an ego-disrupting pleasure 'in conflict with canons of culture' (Gallop 1984: 111, in van de Port 2013: 77), and argues that 'religious buildings have a power of their own that is not illustrative of religious knowledge already in place, but that one might call "ecstatic" ... The vacillation between plaisir and jouissance, consciousness and flesh, a body of religious knowledge and the-rest-of-what-is is characteristic of many mystical traditions and techniques' (van de Port 2013: 78).

However, whereas van de Port identifies the ecstatic to be the end of many mystical traditions, this is not the case with Orthodox Christianity. As the theologian Vladimir Lossky (1976: 208) explains, ecstatic states 'are particularly typical of the early stages of the mystical life'. Instead, the Orthodox mystic 'has the constant experience of the divine reality in which [the mystic] lives' (209). Thus, leaving ecstasy aside, the Orthodox Christian is understood to seek something beyond the 'outside the self': a state of constant living-with-God, which is understood to be done in and with the body (224). Taking this intersubjective idea of living-with-God, not *ek-stasis*, as the purpose of the material culture of Orthodox worship. As such, while I agree with the points made by van de Port and Verkaaik concerning the central role of ecclesiastical architecture, I emphasize the role of the built environment in making spaces which cohere to the motive and sense of the religious intention to achieve, in the Orthodox case, a different subjectivity than that pursued by the Anglicans.

This next section looks at parishioners' perception of their temple. While body practice is changed in response to the nature of the building as an Orthodox, rather than Anglican, space of worship, the Anglican material

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<sup>13</sup> That is, 'next to' not opposition – Barthes does not see *jouissance* and *plaisir* to be in a relationship of opposition.

culture is still present within the texture of the building. The remainder of this chapter examines this failure in objectification and seeks to understand it in light of Gell's (1998) work on axis of coherence. In so doing, the chapter unpacks the Orthodox understanding of what St Æthelwald's temple is and its position within, and in tension against, its physical location.

## Axis of incoherence

While three religious groups and three commercial groups used the facilities at different points in the week, there was little contact between the various parties. Apart from fulfilling fiscal duties, there is no regular correspondence made between the Orthodox parish and their Anglican counterpart. But within the material ecology of the space there are certain qualities evoked that cohere with certain ideals celebrated by the Anglican community. As material anchors of their own affective coherence, the war memorials and evidence of the edifice as a City Church speaks of a long line of national and civic heritage; its broad central isle, well lit, leading up to a welcoming gesture in the stained-glass window provides a movement forward to light a votive candle or partake of the Anglican Eucharist. In each aspect, there are certain kinds of relations between material objects which suggest what Alfred Gell (1998: 215 ff) in his work on Marquesan art called an 'axis of coherence'. Gell's use of the term spoke of relations between relations specific to the motivic qualities of a society's artistic production. The argument here shifts the focus slightly to speak of the sensibility that arises out of a physical environment in terms of the driving motivation or epiphenomenal quality of the space as a social environment. As a sense-ability, the 'axis of coherence' is what intuitive understanding apprehends as the cohering logic of a social space. In taking this interpretation, I make explicit what appears to be a tacit play on words within Gell's theoretical framework. The etymological kinship between motif and motive, cohere and coherence, sensible and sensibility links the material aspects (pattern, media, etc.) and relations of thought and intentions (cf. Jones 1856), possibly even virtue and value (Lambek 2008; Miller 2008). This claim, that architectural space may have an 'axis of coherence', should not be read in all too essentializing a manner. Many spaces may have more than one cohering factor. In the context of St Æthelwald's, not only did there exist multiple factors, but even contradictory ones.

Take, for example, the contrast between the civic and liturgical aspects of the Anglican architecture and the weekly Orthodox reorganization of it. For the current Anglican parish of St Æthelwald's, the relationship with the holy codified in the building is not felt to be ideal. While the quire is oftentimes employed as such, and the high altar is used on special occasions,

most masses are 'low', said masses (as opposed to 'sung masses') with a west-facing altar,<sup>14</sup> using the large oak table near the congregation. Around the edifice other moveable furnishings also speak of the adaption of space needed by its present occupants. Moveable bulletin boards show adverts for Weight Watchers' meetings, Anglican goodwill and development missions in Africa, and ask for donations from tourists, reminding them of the cost to keep such houses of prayer open in Central London. The guildsmen keep a large wine cask by the modern Madonna, something used as the lectern in their annual meetings. By the main door, a wide selection of brochures advertise the building for event hire; ask for funds for various ministries of help among disabled persons; and advertise festival and arts events. On the back wall a marble clamshell holds (Anglican) holy water and a wrought iron frame, with accompanying votive candles, sits awkwardly off to the side – unused by the Orthodox parish, but both marked evidence that the building is still also an Anglican house of prayer open to tourists.

These are just some examples of the material ecology of the parish church. These diverse objects relate together producing a particular sensibility to the space. It is a beautiful building, standing in stark contrast to the surrounding office buildings and, as such, attracts tourists year round. Most tourists who enter the building go in and notice one or two paintings and stop to look at the war memorials; some glance at the notice boards; a few dip their hands in the marble clamshell and cross themselves with a little curtsy towards the altar before heading out. But, as more time is spent in the building, and particularly as people are tasked with making the space suitable for communal rituals, certain epistemological assertions which are made in the inter-artefactual domain become increasingly recognizable and, in some cases, problematic. It is this problematic aspect that is now addressed.

This description of the parish building is given at length in order to draw out a specific kind of ocular phenomenon and its relation to the ritual processions made in the space as a metaphor of the spiritual pursuit central to those who make use of such spaces. Richard Kieckhefer (2004), in his work on the theology of Christian architectural forms, speaks of the correlation between the length of the building and spiritual pursuit in Western Christianity. This length and spiritual insight observed by Kieckhefer is colluded in the ethnography of Anna Strhan (2013), who points out that in many forms of Western Christianity, height and clarity of sight go hand in hand. Traditional spatial metaphors of longitudinal spiritual pursuit, such as the 'mystical ascent',<sup>15</sup> are recurrent

<sup>14</sup> That is, an altar wherefrom the priest faces the people.

<sup>15</sup> This language can be seen in both Greek and Latin Christianity, following from Origin's neo-platonic language. In the West it can be seen to follow from Bonaventure's mystical theology, exemplified in his *Journey of the Mind into God*.

within the Evangelical Anglican parish of St John's, who use skyscrapers as a motif with which to speak of a distanced (and divine) appraisal of the city below. In my reading of Strhan's work, one can make an analogy between the up-ness of the skyscraper from whence her informants can gain the clear sight to 'read' the city (340) and the idea of the transcendent God of Protestant Christianity. Strhan reads this 'view from above' 'as constructing a position that allows [those at St John's] to read the city as peopled by the "lost"' (340). This upward-distant perspective is, within the parish of St John's, also a material inscribed motif. Like the skyscraper, the pulpit is placed high above the congregation, requiring an upward gaze to receive the words of the Gospel message (337; pers comm). St John's parish is, in its Evangelical character, logocentric. But while there is a switch from the Eucharist (in High-Church Anglicanism) to the Word (in Evangelical Anglicanism) as the central cohering thing of the congregation's Christian worship, the material form of the worship is still similar.

In both St John's and St Æthelwald's Anglican parishes, the material ecology posit a longitudinal progression for the pious Western Christian in her pursuit of God, salvation and Heaven as a transcendent other. The altar, as the focal anchor of sacramental Christianity, invites the pious worshipper to approach the place of God with holy fear. While the altar itself is not accessible, that which it offers is given to whoever will make the long journey up. This is the *ek-stasis* spoken of by van de Port (2013). Following in this tradition, the parish building of St Æthelwald's was constructed in such a manner so as to make an ocular and processional movement up and back, so the pious Anglican might receive the sacred elements, mediated for them by the priest, and return to their space among the people.

The longitudinal and processional quality of the building is at harmony with the Anglican use. For the Orthodox parish, however, the material environment of the Anglican church is inadequate for the ocular and ritual use of the space. The ikonostasis is placed close to the unused pews to foster a visual proximity to the saints. Other ikons are arranged throughout the building, by the door, by the candle stand and on the four main pillars of the church in order to foster a more enclosed, circular quality of veneration. As mentioned earlier, during Pascha an extra effort is taken to increase the circular quality of inter-ocular veneration, placing ikons on any ledge available around the skirting and pillars. Consequently, as is common in most purpose-built temples, looking in any direction the eye is met with the eye of an ikon. Similarly, a circular movement is made in processions, which take place each liturgy, as the clergy circle around the pews.

It is not uncommon for Orthodox parishes in the United Kingdom to take over Anglican spaces of worship. In most cases, however, some adjustment is made to the building, such as the installation of a 'right-proper ikonostasis'

and the painting of or hanging of ikons around the building. Many also remove some or all pews, as Orthodox Christians tend to stand for almost the entirety of their services. In these situations, the material ecology is renovated and made compliant with the sensibility of Orthodox liturgy and theology. This, however, is not an option for the St Æthelwald's parish. As I spoke to various members about their relationship to the edifice, the large stained-glass window was a recurrent problem. As a commissioned piece to repair damage done after political violence, the piece evokes, I was told, an odd mix of traditional iconographic technique and modernizing influences. 'It's just awful', one woman tells me, 'I can't bear to look at it.' Another tells me he stands in the front and a bit off to the side, specifically so that as he looks towards the priest he cuts the window out of his line of sight.

What is so wrong with it? Christabel, an ikonographer in the parish, explains it to me most succinctly. Within Orthodox Christianity, images are extremely important; ikons are visual theology. As an ikonographer, she must follow careful guidelines and live a life of prayer, in observation of the fasts of the Church, in order to make ikons suitable for use in worship (Carroll 2015). Images are theological statements; but the image in question, she asserts, is heretical. Rather than positioning the saint in a frontal position, such that the viewing person may enter into an inter-ocular mode of veneration, the window is populated with a number of faces which engage different directional gazes: St Longinus and a bishop look up towards a down-cast Christ, both their faces obscured; the gospel writer St Matthew is shown in profile, looking up to the left; only an unidentified (so far as anyone could tell) little girl returned the gaze of the onlooker. Whereas Orthodox images are designed to create a space between the viewer and the image, the window draws the attention up, into the light beyond.

Such a visual practice runs counter to the formal sensibility of Orthodox visual culture. While many Western forms of Christianity, as exemplified in van de Port's description of Christian architecture, are designed to facilitate an out-of-self experience, such mysticism is not the idea in Orthodox spirituality. In this sense, the longitudinal perspective, towards an image which further encourages meditative movements further afield, run at counter purpose to the Orthodox ideal of 'living with'. While there are exceptions to this rule, most Orthodox ikons present the subject in a quite frontal perspective, often allowing the eyes of the viewer to lock gaze with the eye of the saint. Such an orientation, fitting within the wider practice of circular ocularity, fosters an intersubjective relationship of being with the saints and God.

While, as Seraphim expressed, the blank walls without ikons are an absence in need of filling, the stained-glass window is worse than nothing. In this context, it can be seen that what the image wants is sensibly distinct from what the Orthodox parish wants from an image. This 'heretical' image invites

the viewer to gaze up, away from the ocular circularity of the ikonostasis. The image incites the viewer to the contemplation of a sociality and spirituality foreign to the Orthodox temple. There is a preference for bare walls over an image that asks the viewer to contemplate an overly emotional rendering of the crucifixion at a height and distance. There is nothing beneficial from an image of Christ that seeks to engage the viewer in something other than the face-to-face intersubjective gaze traditional of ikons. A blank wall is preferable to an alternative spirituality. This wilful blanking is also seen in the man's practice, mentioned above, who stands in a way as to occlude the stained-glass window from his gaze.

Both outside (e.g. the skyscrapers) and inside (e.g. the stained-glass window and the modern Madonna) there are aspects of the material ecology of the Orthodox Parish of St Æthelwald's that are simply ignored. Do people notice them? Yes, of course. As the newest skyscraper was being built in 2011 and 2012, an off-hand comment about the construction could be heard. If asked about the modern Madonna at the back of the parish, everyone would know which image was being spoken about ('Oh that awful thing?'), but while tourists gave these aspects attention these elements did not gain notice or enter into the worshipful imagination of the Orthodox parishioners. The coherence of the Anglican edifice, as a City Church, set among towers and transport lines, welcoming tourists, Guildsmen and Weight Watchers was not the same sensual space as the Orthodox Temple into which parishioners, like Chris and Seraphim, entered. Each week the parish successfully completed their communal worship, yet there was a recurrent attitude expressed which indicated the sensibility (and sensible aspects) of the building failed to match the sensibility of the congregation. And, not only was it a matter of insufficiency in terms, for example, of not enough open space, but also one of unacceptability such that parishioners and clergy alike spoke of consciously ignoring parts of the material ecology in which they found themselves. Returning to Gell's argument concerning relations between relations, then, it is argued here that an axis of incoherence arises between how the space is constituted in the material ecology of the Anglican edifice and how that material ecology is reconstituted, sublimated and altered in the religious praxis of the Orthodox congregation. This is not to say that the Orthodox or the Anglican praxis is 'incoherent', but rather that – in the material failure of the edifice – objectification does not adhere; the space of St Æthelwald's Anglican Church and the sensible space of St Æthelwald's Orthodox Church do not map one to one.

What can now be seen is that St Æthelwald's – as a place – is very different from St Æthelwald's as a space. It is, in fact, more than one bloom-space; it offers apposite affective qualities leading to distinct modes of subjective becoming. The Orthodox parishioners and the trickle of tourists, though in the edifice simultaneously, interact and come to engage in the material ecology to



very different results. It is the same physical environment, but the affect of the materiality within the sensible ecology of St Æthelwald's produces different successions of embodied engagement. This should be of no surprise. As Ahmed (2010: 32) has observed, 'to be affected "in a good way" involves an orientation toward something as being good' – to be affected at all, it might be added, requires an orientation of some kind. As Bourdieu (1984) convincingly shows, bodily orientation and response to an artefact of phenomenon is largely contingent on before-the-fact orientation and judgement. What is seen in this case study is that differing affective responses are not only a result of sensing different qualities of the phenomena, but also negotiate the material phenomena occurring. For the Orthodox parishioner, knowing of the antimimension, it serves as an anchor, and the cohering material ecology of Orthodox worship helps orient the space towards the totalizing effect of producing the temple. With this vision comes the blindness to artefactual aspects of this temple space. By contrast, the tourist, many of whom recognize the space as sacred and – whether by practice or courtesy – bow and cross themselves while visiting, engage the space in a very different manner. Their focus, on the memorials, or the advertisements, or the ikons, engage the space but without knowledge or acknowledgement of the antimimension. But as Chris's withdrawal from the Altar demonstrates, affective response to space is switched in reference to the position (orientation) of a piece of fabric within the material ecology. As a hidden artefact, tourists and the casual observer would not even know that there is such a textile to have an orientation towards. Thus while moving within the same physical space the two groups inhabit different material spaces. As the Orthodox rearrange the St Æthelwald environment to become the temple, they concretize the sensibility and redirect the coherence of the space along a distinct axis to that which is experienced by the non-Orthodox in the space.

The affective space of the Orthodox temple is not only different from its Anglican environment, but it also occludes some present aspects and highlights other, non-present aspects. Items like the iron votive candle stand and the marble seashell (which some informants had simply not noticed) are not present within the temple. Examining informants' engagement with the space, it becomes evident that these are 'consensual bloom spaces'.<sup>16</sup> Even glaring items, like the stained-glass window, are actively ignored, such that they do not feature within the visual field of parishioners' worshipful stance. While these items within the material ecology of St Æthelwald's parish church are ignored or go unnoticed, other materialities with which parishioners engage do not appear in the church building. Some items (ikons, furniture, etc.) are brought in for ritual use. However, in these materials, with their un-purified,

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<sup>16</sup> I am grateful to David Jeevendrampillai, who offered this phrase to help explain the dynamic role of affective spaces.

figural excess (Pinney 2005), it can be seen that other spaces are opened up to the Orthodox Christian. In making the temple, those at St Æthelwald's understand themselves to be making an ikon of the universe. Each ikon is not only a representation of the saint, but also a means of communing with that saint. Entering the temple and greeting the saints is a practice of entering into an embodied intersubjective relationship with fellow Orthodox Christians: both living and dead. It is a form of engagement that, as seen in the example of Chris, is best done fully only once the building is also the temple.

## Conclusion

In the context of this chapter, the transformation of space is explored following the movements of Chris, the churchwarden, as he arranges the temple one Sunday morning. Through his weekly routine and devotional practice, the radical transformation of space is seen to impact how people orientate themselves towards their built environment. The chapter then explores the nature of this transformation, looking at the gaps around the edges of the sensible space of the temple. Drawing on Gell's work concerning sensible and motivic coherence, the chapter argues for the presence of an axis of incoherence. In this way, the failure of the Orthodox temple to map into the Anglican edifice can be seen to be at once overlapping and utterly distinct. It is argued that the axis of Orthodox coherence within St Æthelwald's produces a space not entirely map-able into/onto the material space it inhabits. As such, it is argued that the material ecology of the temple extends past the Anglican environment, occluding parts, but also including aspects within the wider circle of material flows.

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