New Religious Spaces in the Megacity : The Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus and its Temple of Solomon in São Paulo, Brazil[1]

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Der Artikel nimmt mittels der Methode der virtuellen Ethnographie eine kontextualisierte Analyse der Repräsentation eines aktuellen Bauprojekts einer brasilianischen Neopfingstkirche, der Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus, vor. Im Fokus der Analyse stehen dabei die Webseiten dieser Kirche. Der Kirche zufolge handelt es sich bei diesem Projekt um einen Wiederaufbau des biblischen Tempel Salomos. Ausgehend von einer theoretischen Herangehensweise, die medienbezogene und räumliche Religionstheorien mit einer sozialwissenschaftlichen Raumtheorie verbindet, zeigt der Artikel zum einen, wie durch einen solchen Bau religiöse Räume für die Gläubigen erschlossen werden und letztere dazu aufgefordert werden, hierdurch das Transzendente sinnlich zu erfahren. Darüber hinaus werden die Relevanz dieses Bauvorhabens für das institutionelle Projekt der Kirche, deren räumliche Strategien und die Beziehung des Bauprojekts zu den Ansprüchen der Kirche auf religiöse Universalität erörtert.

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Using the method of virtual ethnography, this article provides a contextualized analysis of the representation of a current construction project of a Brazilian neopentecostal church, the Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus, on the church's websites. According to the church, this project is a rebuilding of the biblical Temple of Solomon. Based on a theoretical approach linking media-related and spatial theories of religion with a social scientific theory of space, the article shows, on the one side, how religious spaces are made accessible for believers and how the latter are invited to experience the transcendental with their senses via these spaces. On the other side, it is debated what importance this construction project has for the mentioned religious organization's institutional project, as well as what kind of spatial strategies are being acted out by it and how it relates to the church's claims to religious universality.

Inhaltsübersicht

Introduction

¶1 In July 2010 bishop Edir Macedo, the leader of the Brazilian neopentecostal church Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus (Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, henceforth abbreviated as Igreja Universal), announced on his *blog* that his church would shortly begin with the construction of a replica of the biblical Temple of Solomon in a commercial district of the megacity[2] of São Paulo (entry of July 15th, 2010). Of course this would not be a perfect replica, since our modern times make necessary much larger buildings than what was needed 2500 years ago. The new Temple of Solomon (*Templo de Salomão*, in Portuguese) is going to be as high as an eighteen-story building, i.e. twice as high as Rio de Janeiro's Christ the Redeemer, and take up an area larger than five soccer fields. It will have enough space to accommodate more than 10 000 believers for religious services and it will provide 1100 parking spaces in two underground stories. Besides its function as a Temple, the complex will also provide rooms for 36 bible schools, Radio and TV

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2 Although the term »megacity« is usually defined quantitatively – for some UN agencies, for instance, it comprises cities with more than 8 million inhabitants (Gilbert 1996, 2ff) –, I use it here mainly to suggest the importance of taking into account the complexity of such especially large urban settings while qualitatively analyzing religious phenomena.

studios, 85 apartments, an auditorium for an audience of 500 as well as a memorial which will tell the history of the Igreja Universal. Not only its large dimensions are striking, but the entire façade of the Temple will be surrounded by large columns covered in stone specifically brought from the Holy Land, using the state-of-the-art building technique of ventilated façade. The total cost is estimated by a press report at 200 million Reais (»Réplica do Templo de Salomão deve custar R$200 milhões«, accessed 08.09.11), i.e. about 85 million Euro, and the construction is expected to be concluded in 2014. Any progress on the construction site can be followed live via webcam on the project's website.

¶2   In what follows, I will analyze this remarkable building project as a religious space which is, on the one side, produced by the Igreja Universal in the course of its religious practice, and, on the other side, functions as a medium which is supposed to attract believers' senses, and, situated in space and time, bring them in touch with this church's religious ideas.

¶3   As sources for my analysis, I rely mainly on the representation of the project in the Internet, i.e. on websites. Drawing on the work of virtual ethnographer Christine Hine, I conceptualize them as »performances in relation to both online and offline contexts, which are thoroughly imbued with understandings of what the technology is for and how it fits into the author's institutional and personal goals« (Hine 2001, 195). One notion is central here, namely that »web pages are instances of self-presentation which it is hoped will be accepted as appropriate and plausible performances« (Hine 2000, 122). This implies the use of certain strategies by website authors, who may or may not wish to show their identity to online audiences (ibid., 142).

¶4   On different websites, where Igreja Universal is the institutional author, different aspects of the project are presented or discussed. There are the website of the Temple of Solomon project itself, the church's official website, and the already mentioned *blog* of church leader Edir Macedo. Taken together, they constitute a »web sphere«, i.e. »...a set of dynamically defined digital resources spanning multiple web sites deemed relevant or related to a central event, concept or theme« (Schneider & Foot 2005, 158).[3]

¶5   When contrasted with ethnographic descriptions of the practices and beliefs of the Igreja Universal, the virtual representation of the Temple of Solomon building project in the relevant web sphere allows me to make some important points. Those concern the religious ideas this church invites its believers to experience sensorily in the building, the question how it hereby situates them in time and space, and what this future Temple means for the Igreja Universal's project as religious organization.

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3   All the websites constituting the web sphere relevant for this paper's topic were accessed September 5th, 2011.

¶6   In the following section I discuss the theoretical basis of my approach, which links media-related and spatial theories of religion with social scientific space theory. In a second section I provide contextual data drawn from several ethnographies of the Igreja Universal, and in the ensuing two sections I analyze the Temple of Solomon project. I conclude by suggesting how the Temple of Solomon might be related to current developments of religion and religious spaces in present-day megacities.

Religions, media, and space

¶7 Recently, there has been a *turn* in the social scientific study of religion towards considering religions as practices of mediation, which implies focusing on »the middle grounds that substantiate them.« (Engelke 2010, 371) One of the scholars most prominent in this ongoing debate is anthropologist Birgit Meyer, who has developed an approach to the sensory and medial aspects of religious practice which I find very useful for understanding religious spaces such as that brought about by the Temple of Solomon project.

¶8   Meyer's approach, which takes »religion« to refer to »the ways in which people link up with, or even feel touched by, a meta-empirical sphere« (2006, 6), focuses on what she calls »sensational forms.« These are »authorized modes of invoking, and organizing access to the transcendental, thereby creating and sustaining links between religious practitioners in the context of particular religious organizations.« (ibid., 9) Any material religious object – from images to books to buildings – can therefore be considered a sensational form. What turns it into such is first and foremost the context of usage, which for Meyer (2009) means considering religions also as »aesthetic formations.« Taking as basis a broad understanding of »aesthetics« this concept refers to

> »the formative impact of a shared aesthetics through which subjects are shaped by tuning their senses, inducing experiences, molding their bodies, and making sense, and which materializes in things [i.e. sensational forms, R.A.].« (ibid., 7)

¶9   It will therefore be one point in my analysis of the Temple of Solomon project to show how this future building and its representation on websites can be considered as sensational forms in Meyer's sense, and as such as part of an encompassing aesthetic formation: the Igreja Universal, whose adherents are invited to experience the transcendental with their senses *via* this religious building and the surrounding paraphernalia.

¶10   Further enhancing my theoretical approach I draw on the work of Thomas Tweed, whose assertion, that theorists in the social scientific study of religion only have access to »the narratives, artifacts, and practices of religious women and men« as objects of study (Tweed 2006, 17), links up well with Birgit Meyer's focus on the materiality of religious media. Tweed's (2006) own theory addresses spatial

aspects of religion. It focuses especially on two main spatial dynamics of religious practice identified by him: »crossing« and »dwelling«. Whereas »crossing« here refers to the literal or metaphorical crossing of terrestrial, corporeal, or cosmic borders which religions prescribe to their followers, the concept of »dwelling«, for Tweed, relates to the ways in which »...religions orient individuals and groups in time and space, transform the natural environment, and allow devotees to inhabit the worlds they construct.« (ibid., 82) Borrowing a concept from literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1981, cited ibid., 222, En 14), Tweed posits that religions orient their followers especially in relation to different »*chronotopes*« (ibid., 97) or »space-times« (Tweed 2011, 122) in which spatial and temporal orientation intersect. These *chronotopes* go from small ones like the individual body, which is imagined, constructed and formed differently within different religious traditions, to all-encompassing cosmological concepts of how the universe is formed, how it developed and where its borders are. Adding this theoretical perspective to the aforementioned focus on religions as practices of mediation, the second point in my analysis will be to find out in relation to which *chronotope* or space-time the Igreja Universal's followers are being situated by the Temple of Solomon building project and how this, in turn, is expressed in religious media.

¶11   Finally, besides considering them as »sensational forms« which situate believers in relation to different religious *chronotopes*, in my view religious buildings such as the Temple of Solomon have to be conceptualized also as products of the social practice of a specific actor, in this case the Igreja Universal, who brings about religious space in the first place. Here I build on one of the most important foundations of the social scientific theory of space: the work of the French philosopher Henri Lefebvre (1991), which was the main reference for the so-called »spatial turn« in social sciences. Lefebvre takes »space« to be not only something that contains social or productive action, but which is itself a »product« (ibid., 26). Building on this insight he posits a conceptual triad for analyzing or interpreting (social) space: »spatial practice«, »representations of space« and »spaces of representation« – »the triad of the perceived, the conceived, and the lived« (ibid., 38-39). There is a dialectical relationship between the elements of this triad, each one of which contributes in different ways to the actual production of spaces (ibid., 39, 46). A crucial aspect in this regard is the issue of power, which is reflected in Lefebvre's assertion that representations of space – i.e. spaces as they are conceived and conceptualized by urbanists, planners and the like – are the dominant space in any society (ibid., 38-39).

¶12   Lefebvre gives special attention to what he calls »monumental spaces«. On the level of the spaces of representation, spaces of this type are differentiated from the ordinary spaces of everyday life (ibid., 220). They give the members of a society an image of this very membership and thus contribute to their identification with a group (ibid.). On the level of the representation of space, on the other side, monumental spaces testify to the will for power of their constructors (ibid., 221).

For Lefebvre, monumental spaces – worldly or religious – are thus important nodes in wider spatial »textures«, and in turn they condensate the characteristics of these textures on a single point (ibid., 222).

¶13   Although Lefebvre intended his theory to apply to whole societies or, in his words, modes of production, I will show it can fruitfully be applied to religious organizations and the spaces they produce too. Bringing Lefebvre's approach into it, the third point in my analysis will be to carve out how the Temple of Solomon fits into the production of spaces by the Igreja Universal and which spatial texture it therefore reflects.

The Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus

¶14   The Igreja Universal was founded in 1977 in a suburb of the Brazilian megacity Rio de Janeiro. It is part of the »third wave« of church foundations in the development of Brazilian pentecostalism, which was initiated originally by classical pentecostalism brought to Brazil by European missionaries at the outset of its worldwide expansion in the beginning of the twentieth century (Freston 1994, 70ff). Amongst the church's founders there was *bispo* (bishop) Edir Macedo, a former white-collar employee, who continues to be the defining figure of this hierarchically organized and strongly centralized church. Since its foundation, the Igreja Universal has grown so fast that it now is the third largest pentecostal church in Brazil, with more than 1,8 million adherents according to official statistics (IBGE 2010, Table 1.4.1). It is considered by various scholars (Freston 1994, Mariano 2004, Almeida 2009a) to be the paradigmatic example for the Brazilian pentecostal churches of the »third wave«, which is mainly characterized by preaching the prosperity gospel and a Manichean world view dominated by the struggle between good and evil. In this world view, as it is preached by the Igreja Universal, infirmity, poverty, affective problems and the like are interpreted as diabolic works and the only solution for them lies in expelling the Devil from one's life, be it through exorcisms or by following the precepts of prosperity theology (Almeida 2009a, 109f). In the latter interpretation of the gospel, in turn, believers are expected to express their blind faith in the power of God, principally by tithing or paying monetary offerings to the Igreja Universal. According to this church, by giving they become involved in a reciprocal gift exchange with God and can thus expect to get this-worldly rewards of health, richness, etc. to which they are entitled but which until then were denied to them by diabolic intercession (Mariano 2003, 206f).

¶15   One of the main reasons for the Igreja Universal's great success in Brazil, and in many (but not all) of the 180 countries it has supposedly reached (IURD 2010), is its massive use of media, both in the conventional sense of the word (i.e. »mass media«) as well as in the expanded sense discussed above (i.e. »sensational forms«). As far as the usage of »mass media« is concerned, the Igreja Universal owns Brazil's third largest TV network, dozens of radio stations, several newspapers and

publishing houses, as well as a record company (Mariano 2004, 135, Fn 16). These media are employed mainly in the church's evangelistic work. Although they do not play a decisive role in conversions to the Igreja Universal (ibid., 132), the media it owns allow the church to let its followers partake in a shared universe almost entirely closed in on itself (Fonseca 2003, 228). Far from only isolating them in an escapist fashion, the Igreja Universal thus performs for its followers what Appadurai (1996, 5-10) calls »work of the imagination«: Aided by its narrative machinery (Corten et al. 2003, 15), the Igreja Universal symbolically transforms them from poor, underprivileged individuals to partakers in a stock of social and religious »capital« (Bourdieu 1979) which allows them to get the social recognition they otherwise lack (Birman 2006, 53).

¶16   As for its use of media in the sense of sensational forms, there are numerous examples to be found in the Igreja Universal's ritual practices. The theological foundation for this is given in the church's belief in the possible immanence of the sacred in persons and objects (Almeida 2009a, 106). This is an expansion of main-stream pentecostal belief, which generally assumes the possibility of the Holy Ghost taking possession of human bodies (cf. Anderson 2004), which thereby become receptacles for the sacred (Almeida 2009a, 108). In its services and fundraising campaigns, the Igreja Universal further combines this belief in the immanence of the sacred in persons and objects with the use of »elaborate props and images linked with a global evangelical ›mediascape‹ (Appadurai, 1996: 35) whose thematic focus is on the Holy Land.« (Kramer 2005, 107) Besides the use of objects like oil from the biblical Mount of Olives or water from the River Jordan, which are thought to protect believers from the Devil, the influence of this evangelical mediascape is reflected in the names of many of the Igreja Universal's rituals, such as the Holy Bonfire of Israel or the Fasting of Daniel, to name just two. This deep link to the Holy Land thus structures the Igreja Universal's very idea of itself as a church (Gomes 2004, 13) and largely determines the aesthetic context in which the Temple of Solomon building project is inserted.

The Temple of Solomon and its virtual representation as religious media

¶17 The Temple of Solomon building project, one of the most recent projects carried out by the Igreja Universal, is remarkable in many ways and surely represents a major landmark in the church's history. In context of the mass media communication strategies discussed above, a whole website (www.otemplodesalomao.com) was devoted to it. There is a video with a three-dimensional simulation of the future Temple, accompanied by ethereally sounding music, welcoming the visitor, who can catch a virtual glimpse into the future interior of the Temple and be impressed by its grandeur. On several pages websurfers can get further information about technical aspects and about the motivations for the construction, as

well as about the man who had the inspiration to build a new Temple of Solomon in Brazil: bishop Edir Macedo, who is reported to have stated the following during a trip to the Holy Land:

> »Se eu não posso trazer todo o povo para cá, então vou levar pedaços desta terra para eles.«
> [»If I cannot bring the entire flock here, then I will take pieces of this land to them.«][4]

¶18   The Temple of Solomon is also the subject of several pages on the Igreja Universal's official website (www.arcauniversal.com/iurd) and on Macedo's personal blog (www.bispomacedo.com). The Igreja Universal's self-presentation on each of these websites is very telling about the conceptions the church fosters about this building project. The same goes for how the sites are linked with each other, since the existence (or the lack) of hyperlinks between websites has a symbolic dimension (Beaulieu 2005). In this regard, it is particularly noteworthy that there are almost no direct hyperlinks going from the Temple of Solomon website to the Igreja Universal's official website, as well as that there are only very few references to the church in the texts and audiovisual materials found on the website. Instead, there are numerous hyperlinks to bishop Macedo's personal website. In contrast, from the Igreja Universal's own websites, as well as from Macedo's *blog*, there are many hyperlinks to the Temple of Solomon website, often placed on publicity banners. In my view, there is a twofold strategic performance of identity in place on the Temple's website: on one side, the institutional authorship of the Igreja Universal is erased or made invisible, while on the other side the importance of bishop Macedo and of his religious messages is underlined. This helps to present the building project as over-denominational, as is stated on the website:

> »O bispo [Macedo] explica a importância que representará o local para a fé cristã: ›Não se trata de um projeto denominacional, muito menos pessoal, mas algo tão glorioso, do ponto de vista espiritual, que transcende a própria razão. Certamente, despertará a fé adormecida dos frios ou mornos e os arremeterá a um avivamento nacional e, em seguida, mundial.‹«
> [»The bishop [Macedo] explains the importance the building will have for Christian faith: ›It is not a denominational project, even less a personal one, but something so glorious, from the spiritual point of view, that it transcends reason itself. It will certainly awaken the sleeping faith of the cold and unde-cided and will bring them to a national and, then, worldwide awakening.‹«]

¶19   While the Temple of Solomon's link to the Igreja Universal is thus severed, its link to bishop Macedo is emphasized instead. As already mentioned, there are several pages on the Temple's website dedicated to the bishop, his career as evangel-ical preacher, his visits to the Holy Land, and his inspiration to build the new Temple of Solomon, as well as links to his blog. There spiritual aspects of the building project are discussed (e.g. the biblical story of the Temple of Solomon,

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4   All translations are my own.

the theological links of the Temple and the Tabernacle to Jesus Christ, etc.) and believers are convincingly called to donate:

> »A construção do Templo de Salomão teve as seguintes características:
> 1 – Projeto desenhado por Deus;
> 2 – Construção executada pelos Seus servos e
> 3 – Única em todo o mundo.
> As mesmas características se darão com o Templo a ser edificado em São Paulo – Brasil.
> Como na construção do Tabernáculo Deus *habilitou homens com sabedoria para elaborar e construir seus objetos sagrados*, da mesma forma Ele tem habilitado servos para nos ajudar com ofertas substanciais para a construção do Templo.«
> [»The construction of the Temple of Solomon had the following characteristics:
> 1 – Project designed by God;
> 2 – Construction carried out by His servants and
> 3 – unique in the whole world.
> The same characteristics will be given with the Temple that will be built in São Paulo – Brazil.
> As in the construction of the Tabernacle God *invested men with wisdom to make and construct His sacred objects*, likewise He has empowered servants to help us with substantial offerings for the construction of the Temple.«]

¶20   Thus, the Igreja Universal strategically focuses strongly on Macedo and at the same time erases its institutional authorship. In this way, it achieves to present the Temple of Solomon construction projects as God's will and Macedo as His legitimate interpreter.

¶21   As strategic performance of the Igreja Universal's institutional interests, the representation of the Temple of Solomon on its websites is thus a privileged vantage point to look at how this building project functions as a religious medium which involves believers sensorily and enables them to experience the transcendental. Being a material product of the Igreja Universal qua aesthetic formation, the Temple of Solomon is a sensational form per definition. Notwithstanding, there are at least two other reasons for considering it as such: First, the project is linked to the principles of prosperity theology, i.e. it gives believers a possibility to prove their faith contributing monetarily to the construction and thus to set in motion the circuit of giving and receiving. In a promotion video on the Temple of Solomon website, which shows a section of a sermon by bishop Macedo, he states:

> »E aqueles que contribuirem, aqueles que lutarem, aqueles que se esforçarem para contribuir, para nos ajudar, vão ser ricos, vão ser ricos, vão ser ricos!«
> [»And those who contribute, those who fight, those who make an effort to contribute, to help us, will be rich, will be rich, will be rich!«]

¶22   The underlying prerequisite in order for the gift exchange to work is, of course, that the building project is presented as following God's will. This – and this is the second reason why the Temple of Solomon is a sensational form – is provided for by the explicit link of the project to its biblical predecessor and to the Holy Land.

¶23   Having established the Temple of Solomon as being a sensational form, the question arises how to describe the chronotope in relation to which the Igreja Universal's followers are actually being situated by it. In my view, an important clue to answering this lies in the twelve stones that are going to be placed on the front of the altar podium. In contrast to most other items which are going to be used in the decoration of the Temple's interior (e.g. bronze sculptures representing objects present in the historical Temple on the side walls, a reproduction of the ark of the covenant in the rear of the altar and two pillars – one on each side of the altar podium – representing the biblical pillars Boaz and Jachin), they are not mentioned in the Old Testament books which describe the original Temple of Solomon (1 Kings 5-7, 2 Chronicles 2-4). Nevertheless, for the Igreja Universal, as is stated on the Temple of Solomon website, these twelve stones represent the twelve biblical Tribes of Israel, in a similar way as in the Cuban Catholic shrine described by Tweed (1997) six stones brought from different parts of the island represented the six pre-revolutionary Cuban provinces and situated exiles in relation to their lost homeland (ibid., 102f). Here the twelve stones placed on the inside, and the thousands of stones brought especially from the Holy Land covering the outside, bring a piece of the Holy Land directly into the heart of the Brazilian megacity of São Paulo and thus connect the present of the Igreja Universal's followers to biblical times. In this way, the chronotope in relation to which the Igreja Universal situates its believers is a global and universal Christianity with special emphasis on the Old Testament, whose most important transtemporal reference points are the Holy Scripture itself and the Holy Land. This chronotope also serves as main reference for the Igreja Universal's production of religious spaces, which will be discussed in the next section.

The Temple of Solomon in the context of the Igreja Universal's production of spaces

¶24 The Temple of Solomon is not an isolated phenomenon but stands in the context of the Igreja Universal's overall spatial practice. According to Almeida (2009b, 46), the Igreja Universal's religious buildings are distributed in urban spaces in a very similar way as are Roman Catholic churches, i.e. on central locations with much traffic, near to important junctions and mass transit nodes. This can be interpreted as a spatial strategy of overlaying existing centralities in the urban texture, a strategy which has helped the Igreja Universal to get much more public attention than any other, even larger pentecostal church in Brazil (ibid.). For a large part of its history the Igreja Universal did not pay much attention to the aesthetic qualities of the buildings it used – disused factory buildings, former cinemas or theaters –, they only had to be large enough to accommodate the dynamic of its rituals (Gomes 2009, 114). This subordination of spaces to rituals can be understood as a subordination of the representation of space, i.e. the concepts *about* the space

being used, under the space of representation, i.e. the space *in which* the Igreja Universal operated.

¶25 The relation of the Igreja Universal to the spaces it uses radically changed in 1996, however, when the »Era of Cathedrals« (*Era das Catedrais*) was proclaimed by church officials. This supposedly new era in the Igreja Universal's history started just during a time when the church was being massively put into question in the public sphere, following accusations of its supposed »mercantilization of faith« by many of its religious competitors – first of all the Catholic Church, which was itself publicly attacked by the Igreja Universal on several occasions (cf. Almeida 2009a, 139ff) – as well as by influential Brazilian media corporations. Therefore, for Gomes (2004; 2009) the construction of larger buildings (»Cathedrals«) conceived as monuments in the urban texture, as well as the remodeling and renaming of older temples (cf. Almeida 2009a, 64), reflects the Igreja Universal's attempt to counter its critics, who questioned it for occupying spaces not usually considered apt for religious services, and materially prove its religious authenticity. The latter is, evidently, associated with the biblical Holy Land and the Holy Scripture (Gomes 2004, 121) and expresses itself emically in the stylistic categories »eclecticism« (*ecletismo*) and »neoclassic« (*neoclássico*), which are used by the Igreja Universal to describe the aesthetic canon of its new Cathedrals (ibid., 113). Whereas »neoclassic« can be interpreted to represent the church's will to continuity and permanence, »eclecticism« is associated with the constant renewal and actualization of what is considered by the Igreja Universal the main source of its religious authenticity: the Bible and the Holy Land described in it (ibid., 113, 206ff).

¶26 In the Era of Cathedrals most of the characteristics of the Igreja Universal's spatial practice, principally its geographical distribution patterns, remain unaltered. Even so, it is significantly enriched by the new conceptions of authenticity, which are expressed in the aesthetic qualities of the new Cathedrals discussed above. Hence, by constructing these religious buildings of a new kind and by remodeling older buildings to fit new criteria, the Igreja Universal started to align its spatial practice much stronger than ever before with the precepts of a new representation of space, in which authenticity is expressed in architectonic references to religious ideas.

¶27 Hitherto the apex of the Era of Cathedrals was the construction of the »World Cathedral of Faith« (*Catedral Mundial da Fé*), the institutional center of the religious space posited by the Igreja Universal, in Rio de Janeiro in 1999. Many of the *chronotopic* references to the Holy Scripture and the Holy Land which are formative for the Temple of Solomon are already present in the World Cathedral. Nevertheless, the Temple of Solomon presents an important innovation in comparison with the series of religious buildings constructed since the beginning of the Era of Cathedrals: it is the first temple constructed by the Igreja Universal which explicitly follows the model of a biblical religious building. Accordingly, biblical verses are cited to imply a direct relation of this site to God, for instance on wallpapers

showing three-dimensional computer simulations of the future Temple of Solomon available on the Temple's website. Amongst them are the following:

> »Estarão abertos os meus olhos e atentos os meus ouvidos à oração que se fizer neste lugar.«
>
> [»Now mine eyes shall be open, and mine ears attent unto the prayer *that is made* in this place.« (2 Chronicles 7, 15, cited in a promotion video on the Temple of Solomon website)[5]]
>
> »Ouve, pois, a súplica do teu servo e do teu povo de Israel, quando orarem neste lugar.«
>
> [»And hearken thou to the supplication of thy servant, and of thy people of Israel, when they shall pray toward this place...« (1 Kings 8, 30, cited on the Temple of Solomon website)]

¶28   These and other, similar, citations are, in my view, an indication of the great importance ascribed by the Igreja Universal to the Temple of Solomon building project. It expresses the development the church has underwent since the Era of Cathedrals started: from its beginnings as a religious organization which acted principally in a space of representations, and arranged its spatial practice accordingly without bringing specific representations of space into being, the Igreja Universal is becoming ever more an organization which is itself creating media-based representations of space and produces monumental spaces by a carefully targeted spatial practice. The most recent of these monumental spaces is the Temple of Solomon. As a future monumental space, it fleshes out the Igreja Universal's self-concept and its claims to authenticity and power. The Temple of Solomon thus is one important node in the spatial texture both taken for granted and set by the Igreja Universal. Furthermore, by condensing this spatial texture into a sensational form, the Temple of Solomon aids the Igreja Universal in its consolidation as a religious organization that does not content itself with being one among many, but which wants to be the *only* and *universal* church (Gomes 2009).

Concluding remarks: Religious spaces and spaces of religion in the megacity

¶29 Throughout this article, I have shown how the production and construction of religious spaces and the use of religious media by religious organizations can be made accessible to scientific scrutiny via the ethnographically contextualized analysis of the virtual representation of a construction project such as the Temple of Solomon. I have conceptualized the latter as a sensational form that situates the followers of the Igreja Universal in relation to the *chronotope* of a global and transtemporal Bible-based religion in the context of the Igreja Universal's production of religious spaces. The representation of these spaces on websites, in turn, is

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5   The quotations of the Holy Scripture cited here in English follow the King James Version, Cambridge Edition.

an integral part of the Igreja Universal's use of religious media, which aims at enabling its followers to experience the transcendental with their senses.

¶30   The monumental character of such new religious spaces as the Temple of Solomon and other large religious buildings currently under construction in the megacity of São Paulo (including a Catholic church for one hundred thousand, cf. »Igreja Católica aposta em megatemplo para 100 mil«, accessed 08.09.11), which can be thought of as »monumental spaces« in Lefebvre's sense, certainly recalls the notion of »megachurches« designed »to embody the infinitude of the experience of God« (Goh 2008, 302), which has been gaining ground globally in the past decades. Thus, they also bear testimony to changes that religions are undergoing in cities worldwide. As Lanz (2010, 32) asserts, it is not necessarily a matter of religions *returning* into otherwise secularized cities, as much of secularization theory would have it, but a transformation of the religious organizations *in* the cities (which they never left in the first place) as well as a transformation *of* the cities themselves by new and powerful religious organizations, which also means the creation of new religious spaces. Accordingly, the spaces *of* religion in the megacities, i.e. its social significance, have also changed. This is seen especially in the case of the pentecostal movement: functionalist analyses, such as the classic study of Chilean pentecostalism by Lalive d'Epinay (1968), who suggested the importance of pentecostal churches in the overcoming of the social anomie produced by mass migration into urban centres in Latin America, are no longer satisfactory explanations of pentecostalism's success (Almeida 2009a, 45). Instead of providing a safe haven for the uprooted masses, where alternative models of *Gemeinschaft* can be lived out in the face of surrounding social insecurity, neopentecostal churches such as the Igreja Universal give their followers an image of their very membership in a mass society by aggressively positioning its monumental church buildings in the urban space. The creation of representations of space, such as the virtual representation of the Temple of Solomon, which are intended to blend into the believer's spaces of representation, and are a part of an overwhelming »aesthetics of persuasion« (Meyer 2010), is an integral part hereof.

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