

Sacred Space, Profane Space, Human Space: Larry E. Shiner, 1972

pp. 429-430

The most fundamental mark of sacred is also the preeminent characteristic of lived space: it is heterogenous.

There may indeed be a tendency to find centers of significance and orientation more dispersed and more specialized, e.g., the "capitals" of politics, finance, art, mode. But even though the "centers" and their symbolism have developed specialized functions the spatial landscape is not a chaos. On the contrary the surface of the earth is just as ordered and specified symbolically in modern as it is in archaic societies.

Even at the most elementary level of human experience, space is organized as a world, as a meaningful environment. One could argue that "being-in-the-world"(Heidegger) or being-toward the world (Merleau-Ponty) are fundamental structures of the human mode of being rather than peculiarities of religious man.

Far from requiring a hierophany to found a world, man and world are correlative.

"Architecture is the first manifestation of man creating his own universe."

Lived space is a world, it is there primordially as the human environment. Of course, **Mircea Eliade** (1907 – 1986) recognizes that modern man still experiences some orientation and some privileged places. But he treats these as mere survivals since heterogeneity is, in his words, "peculiar to the religious experience of space".

Although modern building, siting, and town planning has produced much that reflects mere economic and political expediency, there are places and buildings which do embody and define spaces of great power. To take an unlikely example, consider the ascent in the Eiffel Tower, that product of mechanical industry and pure engineering. As a result of the interplay of inner and outer space through the open framework, the lightness of the whole as compared to the massive steel beams, the constantly changing perspective as we move to a vantage looking over the whole of the city lying astride the Seine, we look down on the order and unity of the city like gods and we find this most mechanistic of structures on which we stand, to be an expression of spirit, of light, of air, of constantly interpenetrating spaces.

p. 432

There are two characteristics of sacred space in Eliade's formulation which are only faintly reflected in contemporary lived space. One is the notion of a break in plane which opens a communication between cosmic levels, the other is the idea that the act of foundation is a repetition of a divine establishment. Both these concern aspects of sacred space which assure to its centeredness an absolute character and reference to another world.

The mere absence of an absolute point of reference which connects us with the world(s) beyond does not leave in a spatial chaos, without orientation or places of intrinsic significance. That one no longer sees his own temple or his own capital as the absolute center or as paradigmatically linked to a transcendent world, does not mean that there are no places of awe where we feel compelled to "take off our shoes."

Nor does it mean there are no center which embody in their name and spatial order recollections of "other" human worlds now passed into memory. No doubt there are some tendencies toward the disorientation and flattening of human spatial experience to day. But it is unacceptable to oppose the sacred space of "homo religious" to the supposedly profanized and disoriented spatiality of modern industrial man and then dismiss the spiritual content of modern spatiality as a mere vestige or survival.

pp. 435-436

Although modern spatiality lacks the sense of absoluteness and communication with other worlds which characterizes some spatial orders of past societies, modern space is not a kind of chaos, lacking orientation or intrinsic significance. The spatial experience of modern man is not profane but merely human.

The interpretive I have proposed is to regard both the picture of nature constructed by the scientific tradition and the symbolism of nature emerging from the religious tradition as equally grounded in the "life-world," in the fundamentals structures of the human experience of temporality and spatiality.