Toward a New Hermeneutics of Space:
Remapping the Religious and the Carceral in the American Imagination

Maggie Goddard

April 18, 2011

Religion
Abstract

Religion is often predicated on a central division between the sacred and the profane. However, this traditional conception excludes the possibility of overlaps between these two categories. By introducing the notion of human space, a theory reflective of our lived experiences and dynamic interactions with our environments, we can complicate this conceptualization of religious space. By extending this theoretical framework, we can similarly approach the issue of carceral space—also traditionally defined by a dichotomous conception of the inside and the outside of prisons. In order to dismantle this division and render the problem of mass incarceration relevant to a broader public, we must locate points of permeability in this spatial account. The historical example of Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia illustrates an alternative penal philosophy that incorporates skylights and the Quaker belief in inner light to resist and question traditional dichotomous conceptions of carceral space. By extending the metaphorical and theoretical example of light, we can begin to imagine illuminating alternatives to polarized spaces and remap the religious and the carceral in the American imagination.
Introduction

Car nous sommes où nous ne sommes pas.

(Pierre-Jean Jouve, *Lyrique*, p. 59)

(For we are where we are not.)

Through our experiences of structures and interactions with landscapes, these forms assume dynamic and relational identities. Whether stepping into a place of worship or entering a prison facility, we cross boundaries and create our own paths, thus intersecting space with movement. However, traditional conceptions of the religious and the carceral define these spaces based on dichotomies between the sacred and the profane and the inside and the outside, respectively. Rather than affirm these divisions, the translocative dimension of spatiality suggests that these polarities are more permeable than initially imagined. Across the borders between the sacred and the profane in religious space and the inside and the outside of prisons, there is more room for overlap; our paths illustrate the complexity and heterogeneity of the spaces that we inhabit. By reimagining and remapping such spaces, we can challenge traditional dichotomies and rework our spatial theories to include rather than exclude. We can develop more nuanced understandings of our environments and recognize our innate similarities as opposed to our differences. The model of human space deconstructs the sacred/profane and inside/outside dichotomies of the religious and the carceral respectively and provides a way to remap these spaces in the American imagination.

In this essay, I investigate dynamic conceptions of space, as opposed to geophysical constructions. Drawing from various theorists, including philosopher Larry Shiner, I will advance the notion of human or lived space, a relational model that incorporates human

---

interactions and experiences. Defined by a system of paths (from the Greek, *hodos*), this theory of hodological space exemplifies how we negotiate limits and cross boundaries. I will then extend this theory to the case of religious space. In many accounts that incorporate spatial metaphors, religious space is predicated on the polar opposition between the sacred and the profane. This stark and static dichotomy, however, excludes the possibility of overlaps between these categories, and I hope to establish a more dynamic, relational model—like the concept of lived space—that reflects the fluidity of religious spatiality. Historian Thomas Tweed offers a particularly rich interpretation of religion through crossing and dwelling, and his account provides a foundation for this alternative model.

This conceptualization of religious space also helps to challenge traditional notions of carceral space. In the United States—particularly within the voting majority, a predominately white and upper-to-middle-class demographic—many imagine prisons as separate spheres, areas closed off and removed from their particular contexts. As illustrated through the rise of mass incarceration and the election of tough-on-crime candidates, the voting majority has significantly shaped the penal process by separating themselves from the prison population. This sharp contrast between the inside and the outside is comparable to the proposed dichotomy inherent to religious space, the divide between the sacred and the profane. However, as with alternative understandings of both space in general and religious space, there is also another way to imagine carceral space. The divide between the inside and the outside is more permeable than we typically envision. Although not always realized by the voting majority, the insides of prisons are relevant to the broader public, and carceral space affects and shapes American life.

In order to remap carceral space in the American imagination and more significantly connect the voting majority with those directly affected by the prison system, I will turn to an
historical example whose creative construction illustrates a dynamic approach to reform. The history and ideology of Eastern State Penitentiary—an historic site in Philadelphia and the country’s first true penitentiary, started through the efforts of the first prison reform group in the world—offers a potential way to rethink carceral space. Eastern State Penitentiary confined prisoners to solitary cells based on the penal philosophy of the Pennsylvania system. Although this practice was psychologically destructive and only heightened the inside/outside dichotomy, the early reformers did offer a compelling ideological alternative to current carceral practices. Their philosophy is rooted in the Quaker beliefs of nonviolence and inner light and in the theory of environmentalism, which posits that individuals are essentially good and so by removing them from their bad environments, they will repent and return to their natural good states.

From this trajectory, we can extend the possibility of rethinking our spatial frameworks—for the religious and the carceral. Other dynamic models offer potential alternatives that promote dynamic and relational theories. Through the use of skylights and the Quaker notion of inner light, Eastern State Penitentiary’s reformers sought to locate points of permeability between the inside and the outside, thus humanizing the prisoners and deconstructing carceral space through the central theme of unity. By penetrating surfaces and crossing boundaries, light acts as a viable metaphor for remapping the religious and the carceral through human space. In Quaker artist James Turrell’s light installations, he addresses light’s potential to allow the broader public to understand dynamism and crossing—and a shared sense of humanity and the divine through the notion of inner light. After the terrorist attacks on 9/11, several artists and architects collaboratively envisioned two white beams of light that rise above the lower Manhattan skyline as symbols of strength and solidarity. A Tribute in Light illustrates the powerful connection between illumination and unity—making some sense of chaos and loss. By overlapping the
sacred with the profane and the outside with the inside, these examples use light to provide a compelling metaphor for a new hermeneutics of space. By juxtaposing these models, we can remap the religious and the carceral in the American imagination and find connection across traditional dichotomies.
I. Imagining Space

The issue of spatiality occupies a pressing position in the current milieu, and numerous academics and intellectuals attempt to address this complex concept. In the 1967 lecture “On Other Spaces,” Michel Foucault comments on the increased spatialization of thought and experience: “The great haunting obsession of the nineteenth century was, as we know, history.... It is in the second principle of thermodynamics that the nineteenth century found its essential mythological resources. The present epoch would perhaps rather be the epoch of space.”\(^2\) Like Foucault, geographer Edward Soja reasserts the role of space in critical social theory. As he observes, “[Sp]atiality is socially produced and, like society itself, exists in both substantial forms (concrete spatialities) and as a set of relations between individuals and groups, an ‘embodiment’ and medium of social life itself.”\(^3\) Many spatial models incorporate these two different notions, both the geophysical and the relational.

Indeed, the notion of spatiality is imagined in various ways, whether based on the physical space occupied by cityscapes and scenery or as a dynamic and relational concept. As the geophysical, space amasses to skylines and structures, the built environment and the natural terrain that form place. While buildings and landscapes play a central role in constructing spatial milieus, spatial accounts must simultaneously synthesize people’s dynamic interactions with their environments. Space thus operates on a multi-dimensional level, at once abstract, concrete, and instrumental. Neo-Marxist sociologist and philosopher Henri Lefebvre understands space to embody social relationships. According to Lefebvre, the production of space reproduces the social relations of material production. As he writes, “(Social) space is a (social) product... the

---


\(^3\) Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies* (London: Verso, 1989), 120.
space thus produced also serves as a tool of thought and of action; that in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence of domination, of power.”

However, Lefebvre contends, the social and political (state) forces that engendered this space do not entirely understand how to use this power. Still, spatiality here is predicated on relations and production; space is a method of mapping human geography.

Space is thus a composite of physical, symbolic, and abstract forces, structural forms situated within the built environment, experienced and appropriated by humans. Expanding on this notion of space as a dynamic, relational concept, philosopher Larry Shiner advances the theory of lived space, defined by human interactions. As Shiner writes, “Far from appearing as an abstract continuum, human space is perceived as a *horizon* peopled with familiar beings whose distances and directions are impregnated with meanings.” Shiner’s model thus offers a viable alternative to reducing spatiality to its architectural components, thereby avoiding, as writer Sylvia Wynter cautions against, mistaking the map for the territory. Instead of simplifying a spatial account to its structures and coordinates, the notion of lived space incorporates the dynamics and relations implicit in spatiality. Spatial metaphors can potentially promote a misleading image that represents space in a static, reified way. The concept of lived space, however, resolves this issue by recognizing human interactions with environments and territoriality.

---

Spatiality is not defined by blocks and buildings but by ideologies, meanings, and human experience. Foucault describes this conception based on its relational aspects: “In other words, we do not live in a kind of void, inside which we could place individuals and things. We do not live inside a void that could be coloured with diverse shades of light; we live inside a set of relations that delineate emplacements that cannot be equated or in any way superimposed.”

Our relations and experiences shape space. In conceptualizing spatiality, Shiner’s notion of human space offers a useful framework, supplemented by other theorists’ accounts to develop a working model. As Shiner writes, “Space is a populated environment we inhabit…Through our bodies we are intimately intermingled with our surroundings.” Indeed, the environing aspects of spatiality influence the human construction of territoriality. Instead of imagining space as a void or through its geophysical configurations, space is defined by a set of relations within an interactive and experienced environment.

This conceptualization of territory, based on relational and environmental models, emphasizes space’s dynamic aspects. Philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari speak directly to this dynamic model; they describe territory through re- and de-territorialization, processes of disassembling and remapping decoded fragments and milieus. As they write, “Deterritorialization must be thought of as a perfectly positive power that has degrees and thresholds (epistrata), is always relative, and has reterritorialization as its flipside or complement. An organism that is deterritorialized in relation to the exterior necessarily reterritorializes on its interior milieus.”

Deleuze and Guattari construct a notion of spatiality predicated on a dynamic relationship between individuals and their surroundings. Shiner would agree that change is

7 Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” 16.
inherent to space. As he writes, “Human space is this separation of things which gives the possibility of movement, of coming closer and bringing closer, of a ‘here’ and ‘there.’”\textsuperscript{10} Fluidity and relation are essential to territoriality, and human interactions shape and define space.

When imagining territorial environments, the relations between people and places—and the here and there—shape the experience of spatiality. Again, as Shiner rightly observes, “Rather than an empty receptacle in which objects are located, space begins to appear as something which is given by the relation of the trees and houses, of the highways, mountains and rivers which define our possibilities of vision and movement.”\textsuperscript{11} His relational conceptualization of space speaks to social psychologist Kurt Lewin’s notion of a hodological life space (hodological from the Greek \textit{hodos}, or path). As Lewin writes, “The hodological space is a finitely structured space, that is, its parts are not infinitely divisible but are composed of certain units or regions. Direction and distance are defined by ‘distinguished paths,’ which can be easily coordinated to psychological locomotion.”\textsuperscript{12} This notion of “psychological locomotion” speaks to the intimate connections people make with their surrounding environments and strikes on two different conceptions of the relational spatial model.

While people cultivate personal relationships with spaces, spatiality is also defined by the distance and placement of objects, buildings, and humans. In both ways, space acts in a relational way, whether through close connections or comparative physical locations. In search of a “unitary theory of space,” Lefebvre develops different “fields” of space, which offer a helpful conceptualization of mapping these different relational models. “The project he coins \textit{spatiology} (POS, p. 404) and involves, among other things, a rapprochement between physical space

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid, 428.
(nature), mental space (formal abstractions about space), and social space (the space of human interaction). These different accounts illustrate the multi-dimensionality of space and the various levels on which a relational account can, in fact, relate. In an effort to expose and decode space, Lefebvre—like Foucault, Soja, Shiner, and the other philosophical theorists who posit different accounts of space—demonstrates the many ways humans relate to place.

While a unitary model of space is not a realistic concept, a dynamic, relational notion of spatiality offers the possibility of reimagining and remapping our environments—and fundamentally questioning certain spatial divides. In the cases of religious space and carceral space respectively, many religious theories and penal philosophies posit that these notions are predicated on central dichotomies. In the case of religious space, the spatial model depends on the distinction between the sacred and the profane. In the case of carceral space, people imagine a fundamental division between the inside and outside of prisons. While I do not intend to dismantle prison walls (even metaphorically) or to theologize, through spatial theory, I will question these definitional dichotomies and suggest a degree of permeability between the two polar sides.

By deconstructing these dichotomies, I hope to open up the possibility of remapping space—religious and carceral—in the American imagination. In the case of religious space, I will emphasize the case of the sacred overlapping with the profane and, instead of the current dichotomy, suggest a more dynamic, relational model, inspired by Shiner’s notion of human space. Applying a similar theoretical move to carceral space, I will demonstrate how the inside of prisons fundamentally affects the outside, thus opening the possibility of a reconsideration of penal philosophy. By structuring space through fluid relationships and paths crossed, Lewin’s

---

hodological understanding of spatiality offers a viable model for approaching issues of religious space and carceral space, which I will use to creatively reimagine alternatives to our current spatial models.
II. Religious Space

In order to negotiate religion's spatial dimensions, a working definition of religion is necessary. Like defining space, defining religion is a complicated task, attempted by many theologians, historians, anthropologists, and others, which remains unresolved. In *Crossing and Dwelling*, religious theorist and ethnographer Thomas Tweed provides a broad overview of religious research in this specific area. According to Tweed, "Religion has been analogized as: capacity, organism, system, worldview, illness, narcotic, picture, form of life, society, institution, projection, and space." While each of these categories has its limitations, the spatial interpretations of religion offer a viable model to illuminate the construction of sacred space.

Sociologist Emile Durkheim, historian Mircea Eliade, and philosopher of religion Gerardus van der Leeuw propose definitions of religion that appeal to spatial metaphors. While Eliade also offers an experiential account and Durkheim draws from natural science as well as the psychic capacities of religion, their conceptualizations particularly appeal to spatiality. These three authors address and incorporate the spatial dimensions of religion.

Emile Durkheim predicates his definition, replete with spatial metaphors, on a central dichotomy: religion is defined by a fundamental distinction between the sacred and the profane. He effectively summarizes his theory:

> All known religious beliefs, whether simple or complex, present one common characteristic: they presuppose a classification of all the things, real and ideal, of which men think, into two classes or opposed groups, generally designated by two distinct terms which are translated well enough by the words *profane* and *sacred* (*profane*, *sacré*). This division of the world into two domains, the one containing all that is sacred, the other all that is profane, is the distinctive trait of religious thought.  

---

As Durkheim defines religiosity through a division of the sacred and the profane, Eliade similarly contends, "Man becomes aware of the sacred because it manifests itself, as something wholly different from the profane."\textsuperscript{16} This fundamental dichotomy patterns space into two distinct entities: places embodied by the homogeneous profane and places embodied by the distinct sacred. In other words, the sacred is categorized by its fundamental difference from the profane—hence its normative heterogeneity.

While the spatial orientation that follows from these authors' conceptualizations of religion is predicated on this polarity between the sacred and the profane, this dichotomous distinction is more dynamic than they assume. A redefinition of religion, or at least a reorientation, offers a model open to change based on the shifting nature of religious space. This alternative conceptualization is more apparent in Tweed's notion of sacroscapes (defined below) than it is in Eliade's theory of the hierophany or van der Leeuw's understanding of sacred space. Eliade posits that religious space is defined by the manifestation of the sacred. As he writes, "Every sacred space implies a hierophany, an irruption of the sacred that results in detaching a territory from the surrounding cosmic milieu and making it qualitatively different."\textsuperscript{17} Similarly, Gerardus van der Leeuw defines sacred space as "that locality that becomes a position by the effects of power repeating themselves there, or being repeated by man."\textsuperscript{18} While this latter construction does not depend on the categorical delineation between the sacred and the profane, van der Leeuw does posit a spatial theory centered on the manifestation of power as the definition of the sacred. Alternative accounts offer more dynamic models of religious space.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid, 26.
The manifest nature of the hierophany and van der Leeuw’s notion of sacred space deny the possibility of overlap between the sacred and the profane, or that elements of the sacred can encompass and contain components of the profane. This spatial hierarchy through “the religious valorization of space”¹⁹ is problematic when approaching issues of human spatiality, which comprises both sides of this polarity. By complicating the sacred/profane divide, other theorists acknowledge and incorporate the dynamic nature of religious space and the transmutational properties of territoriality. Thomas Tweed advances his notion of sacroscapes, religious confluences that adopt this dynamic demand. According to Tweed, “[Sacroscapes] are not fixed, built environments—as the allusion to landscape in the term might imply—although religions do transform the built environment.”²⁰ Rather than rooting sacroscapes in metaphysical claims or implying, as with Eliade’s hierophanies and van der Leeuw’s sacred spaces, that sacroscapes mark some spaces as distinct, Tweed produces an effective alternative model to understand religious space through confluences and flows.

This notion of sacroscapes demonstrates the fluid nature of religious space, a changing terrain of religious flows—spatial and temporal, organic and cultural. According to Tweed, “Whatever else religions do, they move across time and space. They are not static. And they have effects. They leave traces.”²¹ This theme of movement—crossing and dwelling—is central to Tweed’s text, but Eliade does not overlook this issue in his work. As he writes, “But the irruption of the sacred does not only project a fixed point into the formless fluidity of profane space, a center into chaos; it also effects a break in plane, that is, it opens communication between the cosmic planes (between earth and heaven) and makes possible ontological passage

---
²⁰ Ibid, 62.
²¹ Ibid, 62.
from one mode of being to another."\textsuperscript{22} Here Eliade acknowledges that movement can occur within religious space, yet the dichotomous distinction between the sacred and the profane nonetheless defines and orders spatiality, thereby excluding the possibility of overlap and a fully dynamic interpretation of religious space. Tweed thus offers a viable alternative through his conceptualization of sacrosapes.

The religious incorporate spatial metaphors like Tweed’s central themes of crossing and dwelling to complicate the sacred/profane dichotomy and to challenge a polar conceptualization of religious space. In \textit{Crossing and Dwelling}, Tweed analyzes “how dwelling practices situate the religious in time and space, positioning them in four chronotopes: the body, the home, and the homeland, and the cosmos.”\textsuperscript{23} Religion thus spatially embodies both the physical and the abstract particular to individuals’ interactions with their surroundings. Simultaneously, Tweed contends, religion incorporates elements of crossing, “the kinetics of itinerancy.”\textsuperscript{24} According to Tweed, religions “employ tropes, artifacts, rituals, codes, and institutions to mark boundaries, and they prescribe and proscribe different kinds of movements across those boundaries.”\textsuperscript{25} The dynamic nature of religious space is thus apparent. Beyond a polarized model of the sacred and the profane, religions embody a shifting, changing, and transforming space through religious space’s interactive nature—like lived space itself.

In his lecture on spatiality, Foucault offers a full account of the theoretical development of space, an evolving model which positions these problems of polarity and dynamism within an historical context. According to Foucault, “One could say, by way of retracing very roughly this history of space, that in the Middle Ages it was a hierarchic ensemble of places: sacred places

\textsuperscript{22} Eliade, \textit{The Sacred and the Profane}, 63.
\textsuperscript{23} Tweed, \textit{Crossing and Dwelling}, 123.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid, 123.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid, 123.
and profane places...It was this complete hierarchy, this opposition, this intersection of places that constituted what could very roughly be called medieval space: the space of localization.\textsuperscript{26} From here, he continues to trace the historical trajectory of spatial theory, including the shift from localization to extension. Foucault posits that, through Galileo’s “constitution of an infinite and infinitely open space,”\textsuperscript{27} this model of extension supplanted the medieval conception of localization. However, today, Foucault contends, “the emplacement substitutes extension.”\textsuperscript{28} As he defines the term, “The emplacement is defined by relations of proximity between points or elements; formally, we can describe these relations as series, trees, or grids.”\textsuperscript{29} This relational model offers a viable alternative to the geophysical, localization, and extension models. Still, Foucault wonders whether the process has completely desacralized all modes of spatiality or whether certain oppositions remain; it is from here that the argument over dichotomy and overlapping emerges.

In a specific theological example, this spatial theorization assumes a more concrete form and illustrates the ways religious space includes the profane. In his travels and teachings, Jesus encounters many individuals outcast from society. The Gospel of Mark expresses Jesus’ messages of inclusion for those most excluded from society. In one particular parable, Jesus breaks bread with social outcasts—tax collectors and sinners, who “were despised by Jews for their presumed dishonesty, contact with Gentiles, and collaborating with Roman authorities”\textsuperscript{30} and “the notoriously wicked who flouted Jewish law,”\textsuperscript{31} respectively:

And as he sat at dinner in Levi’s house, many tax collectors and sinners were also sitting with Jesus and his disciples—for there were many who followed him. When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that he was

\textsuperscript{26} Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” 14-15.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid, 15.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid, 15.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid, 15.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.
eating with sinners and tax collectors, they said to his disciples, “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?” When Jesus heard this, he said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.”

Instead of accepting the Pharisees’ conceptualizations of the sacred and the profane and maintaining their division, Jesus intentionally rejects this dichotomous system and instead overlaps the two categories. By including the most “profane” in society, Jesus recognizes the permeability of the sacred/profane divide and asserts a theology that moves beyond this dichotomy.

This example illustrates the transmutational and transformative properties of religion, a dynamic and relational concept that moves between and beyond the categories of the sacred and the profane. In Crossing and Dwelling, Tweed identifies the ways religions negotiate and transcend limitations and boundaries, thereby producing a useful model to describe the spatial components of theology. As Tweed writes, “The religious want to negotiate the limits of embodied existence, confronting suffering and intensifying joy—and traversing the stages of life. And the religious seek ways to imagine and realize the zenith of human flourishing, however that is conceived. They draw on tropes, artifacts, and rituals to produce teleographies, representations of the ultimate horizon and the means of crossing it.”

Through transporting and transforming teleographies, Tweed provides the theoretical framework to spatially explain Jesus’ teachings.

Other theorists offer viable models to complicate the construction of religious space by challenging the sacred/profane polarity and introducing issues of dynamism and crossing. As discussed previously, Shiner provides a useful definition of human space as lived space. Drawing on Lewin, he also posits a hodological concept that traces our paths to construct a space built on interactions. Shiner directly challenges the sacred/profane divide by charging, “The typical

---

33 Tweed, Crossing and Dwelling, 151.
polarity of sacred and profane space has been overdrawn to the point of obscuring the actual character of human spatiality in its manifold dimensions.”

He thus argues against the sacred/profane dichotomy and instead advocates for the categorization of religious space as lived space. Shiner’s notion posits humans as central actors in constructing their own environments and interacting in a variety of dimensions: “Far from requiring a hierophany to found a world, man and world are correlative. Lived space is a world, it is there primordially as the human environment.”

Indeed, human paths traverse across the sacred and the profane; our hodological space is defined by its true, internal heterogeneity.

Therefore, any notion of religious space must remain open to the overlapping of the sacred and the profane and reject any stark dichotomy. A more dynamic definition of religion accounts for these additional dimensions of spatiality. In Tweed’s interpretation of the field’s constitutive term, he writes, “Religions are confluences of organic-cultural flows that intensify joy and confront suffering by drawing on human and suprahuman forces to make homes and cross boundaries.”

The final piece of his definition—“to make homes and cross boundaries”—incorporates these other dimensions and directly addresses the translocative and transtemporal components of religious space. Humans engage with religion across different planes; beyond buildings and architectural structures, humans create dynamic relationships with religious spaces based on their travel and homemaking. This relational dimension of spatiality illustrates the permeability of the sacred/profane divide and the potential for various permutations of religious space.

---

36 Tweed, Crossing and Dwelling, 54.
The multiplicity of architectural permutations also attests to the diversity of religious space and affirms the dynamic dimensions of religion's spatiality. In *Closer to God: Religious Architecture and Sacred Spaces*, Robert Klanten and Lukas Feireiss compile a photographic collection of the physical manifestations of religious space. If these structures are indeed “constructed symbols of the content they embody,” as Feireiss claims, the variability of this content is evident; each building transforms sacred space in a creative, original way, thereby attesting to the dynamic aspects of religious space. These modern structures still acknowledge historicist architectural traditions, yet these tropes are affected, altered, and contested through new spatial claims, ideas complicated by alternative modern design principles. As Feireiss writes, “And that, ultimately, is the strength of contemporary sacred architecture: the ability to show the cracks and ruptures, contrasts and contradictions between the past and present to co-exist.”

Like these cotemnous architectural styles, the sacred and the profane simultaneously inhabit the same space. These permeable boundaries and crossings are central components in interpreting religion and identifying the overlap of the sacred and the profane. Through Tweed’s conception of religions as organic-cultural flows, he asserts that they are “confluences of organic channels and cultural currents that conjoin to create institutional networks that, in turn, prescribe, transmit, and transform tropes, beliefs, values, emotions, artifacts, and rituals.” These transmutational and transformative properties of religions exemplify their implicit dynamism, which enables religions to cross the sacred/profane divide. Through these processes, Tweed contends, “I argue

---

38 Ibid, 7.
39 Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 69.
that religions enable and constrain terrestrial crossings, as devotees traverse natural terrain and social space beyond the home and across the homeland; corporeal crossings, as the religious fix their attention on the limits of embodied existence; and cosmic crossings, as the pious imagine and cross the ultimate horizon of human life. Furthermore, these three categories—terrestrial, corporeal, and cosmic—express the permeability of religion, even across the sacred/profane divide, by interpreting limits and promoting crossings.

By developing a working interpretation of religion and effectively illustrating the inherent permeability across the sacred/profane divide, this alternative theoretical framework opens the possibility of remapping religious space in the American imagination. While explaining the components of cosmic crossing, Tweed moves toward a geography of religion that encompasses these dynamic, relational, and fluid characteristics. As he writes, "On the other hand, for transporting traditions cosmic crossing is imagined as a change in location: it is ascent or descent—or transversal movement across some border. It is rebirth in another realm, up or down, or it is an encounter or communication with supernatural agents or suprapersonal forces that inhabit some other celestial, terrestrial, or subterranean world." This trans-temporal and trans-spatial account incorporates a fluid traversal across the sacred/profane divide, thereby complicating this dichotomy and highlighting the shifts and changes inherent to religion.

Even more than this fluidity and crossing, however, the overlapping of the sacred and the profane prevents a notion of distinction from fundamentally defining religion. Religious studies professors David Chidester and Edward Linenthal reflect on these categories thus: "Sacred space is inevitably entangled with the entrepreneurial, the social, the political, and other 'profane' forces. In fact, a space or place is often experienced as most sacred by those who perceive it at

---

40 Ibid, 123 (emphasis in original).
41 Ibid, 155 (emphasis in original).
risk of being desecrated by the very forces—economic, social, and political—that made its consecration possible in the first place." While the sacred and the profane are still important categories in their description of religion, religious space is not solely predicated on the manifestation of the sacred and the exclusion of the profane; these categories are overlapping and nonexclusive. While these authors do distinguish between these two concepts, the profane affects and shapes the sacred, and the sacred incorporates the profane.

Like this alternative conception of religion as dynamic, relational, and a composite of the sacred and the profane, other forms of space connect with this model. The example of carceral space closely parallels the theoretical map of religious space. Other parables found in the gospel texts further exemplify the overlapping of the sacred and the profane in religious space while also explicitly lifting up this carceral connection. In Matthew 25, Jesus encourages his followers to aid those less fortunate while recognizing the divine in the human—again overlapping the sacred and the profane. As he says, "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me." While inserting his divine self into the human identity of social outcasts, Jesus connects the sacred/profane divide with the inside/outside dichotomy, which—like how the sacred/profane polarity defined religious space—defines the current conception of carceral space. By overlaying the model of religious space with a carceral context, Jesus' teachings connect the similar spatial theories. Both are predicated on a central divide, yet by recognizing the permeability of these divisions, we can remap both the religious and the carceral in the American imagination.

III. Carceral Space

Like the theorization of dichotomous religious space, carceral space is predicated on the divide between the inside and the outside. However, like the illustrated dynamism of religious space, this polarity is more permeable than initially imagined. The model of human space complicates stark, static contrasts and—as with religious space—necessarily demands a reconceptualization of (penal) theory. Rather than imagining prisons as simply architectural structures, “merely terrains of definite geophysical location and size,”\textsuperscript{44} the notion of human space posits that these carceral areas are “territories whose symbolic meanings define their location and significance in human space.”\textsuperscript{45} While not losing sight of the major dichotomy between being locked up and not being locked up, we can locate points of permeability between the inside and the outside. Rendered relevant to a broader context, carceral space does affect those outside the prisons’ walls in significant ways. Simultaneously, the innate humanity of individuals across the inside/outside divide affirms the permeability of this dichotomy. Through the notion of human space, carceral space—like religious space—is no longer predicated on a polarized distinction but involves overlapping, dynamism, and crossing.

In remapping carceral space in the American imagination, it is necessary to recognize the effects of the inside on the outside and see the relationships across prison walls. Currently, the inside of prisons significantly affects the outside—through policy and legislation, in the ways the public perceives issues of safety, and by directly impacting families of those incarcerated. Along with the advent of Richard Nixon’s declared War on Drugs, many Americans responded to a perceived increase in criminal activity and expressed concern for their safety by voting in candidates with tough-on-crime attitudes. Three strikes laws and other mandatory minimum

\textsuperscript{44} Shiner, “Sacred Space, Profane Space, Human Space,” 429.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid, 429.
sentencing guidelines indicate a public demand for change at the legislative level: “The public not only elected the officials who drafted these laws and campaigned for their passage but also approved new taxes to fund new prisons. In many cases, this was tied to the public’s decreasing tolerance of crime, and the subsequent pressures on lawmakers to more directly and completely control the dangerous segment of society.”\textsuperscript{46} Still, these effects are based on a perceived separation between the inside and the outside—and the necessity to remove a certain “dangerous segment” from that outside.

Indeed, despite significant connections across prison walls, the broader American public, namely the voting majority, has not yet fully recognized that issues of incarceration are relevant to their contexts and that they should care deeply about mass incarceration extant in the United States. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 154,472 thousand white Americans voted in the 2008 presidential election—approximately 66.1 percent of the total white population.\textsuperscript{47} While whites represent over 68.5 percent of the total U.S. population, their voting percentage also exceeds any other racial group. Along with this white majority, approximately 91.8 percent of voters with annual family incomes of $100,000 and over also voted. Within annual income brackets, this group voted at the highest rate and also represented the largest unit within the voting population. With these statistics, we can infer that the voting majority includes white Americans with annual family incomes of $100,000 and over. Within the past twenty-five years, the prison population in the United States has leapt from approximately 350,000 to 2.3 million.\textsuperscript{48}

This voting majority has elected legislators and public officials with tough-on-crime attitudes who enacted laws with significant effects on incarceration policy.

However, these constituencies do not feel the direct effects of the carceral structure at a rate nearly comparable to people living below the poverty line and people of color. Historian Heather Ann Thompson attributes this disparity to “the ‘criminalization of urban space,’ a process by which increasing numbers of urban dwellers—overwhelmingly men and women of color—became subject to a growing number of laws that not only regulated bodies and communities in thoroughly new ways but also subjected violators to unprecedented time behind bars.” Sociologist Loïc Wacquant also describes the criminalization of urban space by focusing on the “deadly symbiosis” between ghetto and prison:

Soon the black ghetto, converted into an instrument of naked exclusion by the concurrent retrenchment of wage labor and social protection, and further destabilized by the increasing penetration of the penal arm of the state, became bound to the jail and prison system by a triple relationship of functional equivalency, structural homology, and cultural syncretism, such that they now constitute a single carceral continuum which entraps a redundant population of younger black men (and increasingly women) who circulate in closed circuit between its two poles in a self-perpetuating cycle of social and legal marginality with devastating personal and social consequences.}

Incarceration may be extremely routine for many communities, especially poor, urban, minority communities—but it is also always shattering.

The criminalization of urban space and Wacquant’s “deadly symbiosis” between ghetto and prison are achieved through the destruction of public space to reduce contact with poor communities of color. By examining the case of Los Angeles, Mike Davis describes the devaluation of public space: “To reduce contact with untouchables, urban redevelopment has converted once vital pedestrian streets into traffic sewers and transformed public parks into

---


temporary receptacles for the homeless and wretched. The American city, as many critics have recognized, is being systematically turned inside out—or, rather, outside in.51 In The New Jim Crow, civil rights advocate and litigator Michelle Alexander connects the rate of incarceration of black men with a redesigned racial caste in America. As Alexander writes, “The racial bias inherent in the drug war is a major reason that 1 in every 14 black men was behind bars in 2006, compared with 1 in 106 white men.”52 Based on which substances are illegal and which forms of those substances carry higher penalties, legislators have manipulated the definition of crime, which disproportionately affects people of color. The United States prison complex thus functions as a system of racial control. The racialization of incarceration criminalizes urban space while devastating communities of color.

In the process of criminalizing urban space, public spectacle significantly shapes the American imagination. In The Executed God, Mark Lewis Taylor quotes Molly, a prison educator at Rikers Island in Jonathan Kozol’s Amazing Grace: “Short-term terror or revulsion are more powerful than long-term wisdom or self-interest.”53 This statement reflects the broader carceral project: a commitment to creating a spectacle of terror that asserts and maintains power. This use of spectacle promotes an increasingly punitive regime of public space that treats citizens as potential transgressors. As Taylor writes, “We see here the commitment to employ that which terrorizes and repels, and does so powerfully, in order to have an effect of keeping certain people in place or moving them from one place to another. All of this is to commit those with governing

51 Mike Davis, City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles (London: Verso, 1990), 226.
52 Alexander, The New Jim Crow, 98.
powers to a show, a spectacle that displays power and creates motivating terror."\(^{54}\) Indeed, this theatrics of terror permeates throughout American culture and commits the public imagination to a racialized vision of crime, heavily shaped by popular media and fed by arresting visuals played out in public places.

Contemporary media influences a heightened public fear of crime and fuels pressure to increase incarceration. Television shows like *Law & Order* or *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* depict police procedures and the legal system in extreme cases, which dramatize criminal cases and promote public support for the current carceral system. Various other media sources confirm these misconceptions. In *Good Punishment?*, James Samuel Logan also notices this alarming phenomenon while observing that "the media" is a broad category, all of whom contribute to misleading the American public: ""The media' represents a broad and complex array of competing interests: the *New York Times*, the *National Inquirer, Newsweek*; CNN, National Public Radio, MTV; various 'reality' crime shows like *COPS, America's Most Wanted, Court TV*; a feast of crime dramas, and countless other outlets of crime-based information and entertainment."\(^{55}\) Despite their heterogeneity, "the media" still almost universally "have converged to shape public perceptions of crime, offenders, and incarceration policy, often in ways that are misleading."\(^{56}\) By constructing a false and racialized account of crime, the media perpetuates stereotypes while heightening public fears and demands for incarceration.

As a result, increased rates of imprisonment literally re-pattern public space by transforming districts while changing politics, relationships, and landscapes. Many politicians advocate for erecting prisons in their districts because their approval rates rise with the influx of

---

\(^{54}\) Ibid, 19.


\(^{56}\) Ibid, 45.
jobs while the increased population size creates the false sense of a larger constituency—yet politicians do not have to appeal to those imprisoned. As Michelle Alexander stresses, mass incarceration is re-creating an underclass of American “citizens,” a re-enactment of the Jim Crow laws through disenfranchising prisoners. According to Alexander, “Less than two decades after the War on Drugs began, one in seven black men nationally had lost the right to vote, and as many as one in four in those states with the highest African American disenfranchisement rate.” This startling statistic reflects the real effects of imprisonment and the ways the inside influences the outside. An estimated 2.3 million children in the United States have a parent in prison. Prisons fundamentally affect the outside by transforming individuals, relationships, and space.

Rather than accept this destructive relationship, however, perhaps the broader public can work to reimagine carceral space and relate in more significant ways to prisoners. By rendering issues of incarceration relevant to their contexts, the voting majority can enact change and support prison reform projects. In order to relate this group to penal problems, we turn to a spatial account to dismantle the inside/outside divide. Traditional theories of carceral space and religious space act as comparable models; they both construct heterogeneous places with polar distinctions. In his lecture on space, Foucault describes heterotopias, literally other places (from the Greek hetero, or other, and topos, or place). According to Foucault, heterotopias are “real places, effective places, places that are written into the institution of society itself, and that are a sort of counter-emplacements, a sort of effectively realized utopias in which the real emplacements...that can be found within culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and

---

57 Alexander, The New Jim Crow, 188.
58 Cynthia Martone, Loving Through Bars: Children with Parents in Prison (Santa Monica: Santa Monica Press, 2005), 15.
inverted; a kind of places that are outside all places, even though they are actually localizable.”

In his examples of heterotopias, Foucault directly compares religious space and carceral space, which he contends are “absolutely other than all the emplacements that they reflect, and of which they speak.” However, this fundamental distinction between these other places and our everyday lives contradicts claims to a more dynamic, relational model of spatiality.

The implementation of a fluid form of space demands reconciliation between Foucault’s heterotopias and common places. This is a process of penetration, a deconstruction of the sacred/profane and inside/outside dichotomies. In his lecture, Foucault recognizes a certain level of permeability through ritualized shifts in emplacement: “Heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable. In general, one does not access a heterotopian emplacement as if it were a pub. Either one is constrained, as in the case of entering a barracks or a prison, or else one has to submit to rites and to purifications,” as when entering a temple. Still, this conceptualization demands exclusive positionality; one can either be inside or outside, or in a sacred space or profane space. Foucault excludes the possibility of overlap between these different spaces. Instead, we can imagine the carceral and the religious not as other spaces but as integral parts of human space. By dismantling the inside/outside divide definitive of carceral space, the connections between these “separate” spheres becomes apparent. Through a reconsideration of permeability and the relationships across prison walls, different understandings of carceral space can create the possibility of rethinking penal philosophy.

60 Ibid. 17.
61 Ibid, 21.
First, however, we must develop a working understanding of traditional conceptualizations of carceral space. In addition to the inside/outside dichotomy, carceral space is often conceptualized as a state of exception, the manifestation of ultimate power over corporal bodies. In order to reconnect the inside and the outside, this state of exception demands revisiting. According to philosopher Giorgio Agamben, "The state of exception is not a dictatorship (whether constitutional or unconstitutional, commissarial or sovereign) but a space devoid of law, a zone of anomie in which all legal determinations—and above all the very distinction between public and private—are deactivated."⁶² Prisons assume the power to discipline and punish, the central concepts of Foucault's often-cited text by that name, and thus carceral space features as a place of containing and confining through rigid order. Through the progression of penal history, in Discipline and Punish, Foucault charts the increasingly controlled means of punishment in Western society that replaced sensational public displays of torture and execution, which often elicited sympathy and caused riots. The emergence of regulated prisons marks the rise of standardized sentencing, the repetitious violence of carceral space, and the central dichotomy between the inside and the outside.

The Foucauldian model offers a viable framework in spatially conceptualizing prisons, and its application reveals the manipulative power of discipline. As Foucault describes, "Discipline 'makes' individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise."⁶³ These individuals then suffer the pervasive effects of discipline, which assume spatial and temporal forms: "Discipline sometimes requires enclosure, the specification of a place heterogeneous to all others and closed in upon itself. It is

the protected place of disciplinary monotony."\textsuperscript{64} Carceral space thus acts within a state of exception; the enclosure is unique, separate, and differentiated from all other spaces. This spatial heterogeneity serves to allow and justify the infliction of discipline, the manipulation of bodies, and the objectification of human beings.

The confining, regulated nature of prisons combines with the sheer monotony of life inside to suppress the very souls of individuals. As death row inmate Mumia Abu-Jamal writes, "The mind-numbing, soul-killing savage sameness that makes each day an echo of the day before, with neither thought nor hope of growth, makes prison the abode of spirit death that it is for over a million men and women now held in U.S. hellholes."\textsuperscript{65} This notion of "spirit death" articulates the horrific conditions of carceral space and signals the pervasive effects of the formalized discipline system in modern prisons at a spatial and temporal level. As Abu-Jamal writes, "The most profound horror of prisons lives in the day-to-day banal occurrences that turn days into months, and months into years, and years into decades. Prison is a second-by-second assault on the soul, a day-to-day degradation of the self, an oppressive steel and brick umbrella that transforms seconds into hours and hours into days."\textsuperscript{66} This tortuous process is not evoked through the building or the geophysical but through carceral space—\textit{carceral space} enacts the spirit death.

Mumia Abu-Jamal's vivid descriptions of the actual experience of carceral space—a lived phenomenon—echo Foucault's theoretical conceptualization of discipline in a modern context, thereby illustrating the fact that carceral space is defined by the manipulation of individuals in a regimented enclosure—that is, by oppression. As Foucault writes, "The

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid, 141 (emphasis in original).
\textsuperscript{65} Mumia Abu-Jamal, \textit{Live from Death Row} (New York: Perennial, 1995), 54.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid, 53.
individual body becomes an element that may be placed, moved, articulated on others." Indeed, carceral space does act on the level of individual bodies. As theologian Mark Lewis Taylor observes, "The prison world is also one of sexual violation. The theater of terror is inscribed into the very bodies of the confined... What is often overlooked is that prison culture is a systematically maintained and nurtured rape culture." Beyond the level of corporal punishment—including systematic rape and prisoner abuse, which simultaneously and radically transforms the lives of inmates—carceral space pervades across barriers and boundaries to penetrate the entire social system. Foucault articulates the pervasive effects of prison, a form before an architectural structure:

The prison form antedates its systematic use in the penal system. It had already been constituted outside the legal apparatus when, throughout the social body, procedures were being elaborated for distributing individuals, fixing them in space, classifying them, extracting from them the maximum in time and forces, training their bodies, coding their continuous behaviour, maintaining them in perfect visibility, forming around them an apparatus of observation, registration and recording, constituting on them a body of knowledge that is accumulated and centralized.

The prison form innately possesses these qualities; the physical structure is only impregnated with these attributes by assuming the form of carceral space.

When inhabiting such structures, carceral space separates by differentiating the incarcerated from the free. In *Barbed Wire*, philosopher Olivier Razac describes this distinction as "fragmented space." Applying this concept, Razac analyzes both the symbolic and physical role of barbed wire in spatial delineation. By establishing territorial boundaries, barbed wire literally demarcates space while simultaneously fulfilling a thanatopolitical function—barbed wire determines the value of life and death. According to Razac, "Barbed wire clearly was, right from its inception, an active and efficient tool in determining who should live and who should

---

67 Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 164.
69 Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 231.
die."\textsuperscript{71} By participating in what philosopher and political scientist Achille Mbembe terms "necropower,"\textsuperscript{72} barbed wire enforces a radically dichotomous society in which humanity is defined in relation to barbed wire's construction. Barbed wire encircles, defines, and contains carceral space, thereby overlaying prisons with this dichotomy of the human and the inhuman. By delineating humanity itself, barbed wire—and the polar inside/outside divide of carceral space—screens off the possibility of permeability and prevents the broader public to relate issues of incarceration with their contexts.

Like barbed wire, the penal system enhances separation and makes social distinctions concrete. Throughout his text, Razac examines barbed wire's use in the American prairie, the World War I trenches, and the Nazi concentration camps to affirm its role in delimiting and polarizing space. The historical continuity of barbed wire reveals its social significance, which extends to the present. As a structural element, barbed wire plays a fundamental role in dehumanization, domination, and the delineation of space and power in our modern society. Through its use in prison architecture, barbed wire reinforces these acts of separation and subjugation. Still, even without barbed wire, "virtual surveillance,"\textsuperscript{73} a term used by Razac, assumes a crucial role in prisons. This tactic induces a prisoner into thinking that someone is always watching him so that he behaves as if he were being watched. Through invoking Jeremy Bentham's model prison, the panopticon, Razac highlights "one of modern power's main objectives: to reeducate and discipline the prisoners rather than simply incarcerate them."\textsuperscript{74} Both barbed wire and Bentham's panopticon model illustrate the demarcations of power and space in a

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid, 80.
\textsuperscript{73} Razac, \textit{Barbed Wire}, 91.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid, 91-92.
carceral context, which separates the population along the inside/outside division and human/inhuman dichotomy.

Through his panopticon project, Jeremy Bentham sought to design the model prison, the architectural manifestation of carceral space and the perfect prison form. Through *The Panopticon Letters*, Bentham documents his fictitious forays into prison architecture. Essentially, he constructs a model of the ultimate method of surveillance “to induce in the inmate a sense of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power.”\(^75\) In simple architectural terms, Bentham designs a circular structure with cells around the building’s circumference. The cells are divided from each other to seclude each prisoner and to prevent any communication. Partitions, in the form of radii, issue from the circumference to the center—“the inspector’s lodge.”\(^76\) An “intermediate or annular area”\(^77\) separates the center from the circumference—a distance reminiscent of the broader American public’s perceptions of carceral space. Indeed, this separation defines the conceptualized polar spatiality of prisons.

Through this architectural model of the ultimate surveillance, Bentham evokes and replicates the eye of the omnipresent God. This inclusion of religious space in the architectural composition of carceral space illustrates a central connection between them, as the inspector’s lodge becomes not only a human position but also a place occupied by the divine. The aforementioned distinction between the center and cells is illustrative of Emile Durkheim’s and Mircea Eliade’s notions of religion based on spatial metaphors. As previously discussed, both predicate religiosity on the polarization of the sacred and profane. These dichotomous categorizations—while compatible with a conception of carceral space based on the

\(^{75}\) Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 201.


\(^{77}\) Ibid, 35.
inside/outside divide—stand in tension with theories of spatiality as hodological and human—that is, as lived space. In order to create spatial models of the religious and the carceral that is compatible with human space, we must find points of permeability in these divisions and deconstruct their central dichotomies.

Carceral space cannot be defined solely by an inside/outside dichotomy; prisons change situations and circumstances on both sides. The divide is more permeable than initially imagined. According to Foucault, “there is no outside.”78 He describes how the penal process is normalized; the state of exception is internalized in the legal system and termed just: “But perhaps the most important effect of the carceral system and of its extension well beyond legal imprisonment is that it succeeds in making the power to punish natural and legitimate, in lowering at least the threshold of tolerance to penalty.”79 Indeed, the entire carceral structure is normalized and incorporated into modern society. Sociologist and anthropologist Michelle Brown also observes this phenomenon: “Punishment is increasingly prolific in everyday practice, well beyond formal institutions, but in a manner that is naturalized and largely invisible. Patterns of exclusion and technologies of confinement are extensive in late modern social life but appear as common features of everyday experience, conveniently and quickly naturalized and only rarely opposed, challenged, or interrogated.”80 This acceptance demands deconstruction, and we must challenge our conceptualizations of punishment.

The notion of human space offers a viable alternative to the stark contrasts of the carceral. Instead of predicating a definition on the inside/outside divide, largely defined through the use of punishment, another option must emerge. In order to reimagine and remap carceral

78 Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 301.
79 Ibid, 301.
space, “a cultural work is required,” writes Brown. For her, this cultural work “does not simply
set obligatory safeguards and precautionary reminders of the problem of punishment
but…challenges us more fundamentally and insists that we rethink our relationship to
punishment altogether.” By reapproaching punishment and penal theory, we can reconstruct
carceral space and situate this model based on notions of human space. The trajectory of penal
philosophy evidences divergences in paths and ideologies. By re-examining a discarded practice
of incarceration, perhaps we can remap carceral space in the American imagination.

81 Ibid, 11-12.
IV. Alternative Models: Eastern State Penitentiary

The history of penal philosophy in the United States assumes multiple forms and traces different trajectories. By focusing on a particular historical moment, however, we can locate the emergence of the current American penal theory. We can then find points of permeability in the inside/outside dichotomy and contest aspects that demand reimagining. During the late 18th century, America experienced a wave of Enlightenment thinking that radically reworked social processes. Among these changes was a fundamentally different approach to crime, discipline, and punishment. Through early reform projects, Philadelphia Quakers played prominent roles in advocating for prison reform. In 1829, after initial efforts to effect change in carceral spaces, Eastern State Penitentiary admitted its first inmate. Built on Cherry Hill in Philadelphia, this carceral structure embodies an alternative account of penal philosophy and a different way of approaching punishment. By examining the ideology and intent that helped construct this reform project, we can develop an alternative model to traditional practices of incarceration while also recognizing this structure’s inherent limitations. Through this, we can further develop our account of carceral space and continue to deconstruct the inside/outside dichotomy.

The Quaker reform project began before Eastern State Penitentiary opened its doors, and this tradition underlines the creative capacity to rethink penal philosophy. According to historian and librarian Larry Sullivan, “Philadelphia Quakers were the earliest Americans to advocate prison reform. In 1682, William Penn prescribed confinement as a corrective for criminal offenders in the newly formed province of Pennsylvania. In his Great Law, Penn abolished all capital offenses except murder and ordered labor as a punishment for crime.”

This reform tradition continued into the 18th and 19th centuries. During this time, two rival prison systems

---

developed in America: the Auburn system in New York and the Pennsylvania system. Although both systems emphasized strict discipline and absolute silence, the Auburn system allowed prisoners to eat and work together while the Pennsylvania system relied on total solitary confinement. The Auburn system eventually dominated as the preferred penal model in the United States.

Still, by returning to the ideology and intent of the Pennsylvania system—and Eastern State Penitentiary in particular—we can articulate these early reformers’ alternative visions and begin to reimagine America’s current carceral complex. In 1797, Newgate Prison of New York opened as the first prison modeled on the Pennsylvania style, the system of solitary confinement and hard work. One of the pioneers of this project was Quaker businessman and philanthropist Thomas Eddy, who “like many of his philanthropist colleagues, believed that criminals were depraved but capable of improvement. His mission as he saw it was to eradicate the evil found in humans through discipline, education, and religion. Criminals could be reformed, he thought, if they were subjected to the proper methods.”83 A similar ideology helped to establish Eastern State. Within the penitentiary, this project of penal reform combined with Quaker belief to produce an alternative to corporal punishment and retribution.

The ultimate aim of Eastern State Penitentiary was to encourage penitence and thoughtful reflection, thus establishing the site as a true penitentiary in the fullest sense of the word. After visiting, Gustave de Beaumont and Alexis de Tocqueville praised the effectiveness of this system: “Thrown into solitude [the prisoner] reflects. Placed alone, in view of his crime, he learns to hate it; and if his soul be not yet surfeited with crime, and thus have lost all taste for

83 Ibid, 7.
anything better, it is in solitude, where remorse will come to assail him."84 While this account mostly remained an ideal, Quaker belief still helped to challenge the carceral system and to question the aims and effects of the penal process. The notion of inner light and a commitment to nonviolence are central to Quaker theology. While shifting away from more corporal forms of punishment, these early reformers evoked this concept of inner light to recognize God’s presence within each person—even criminals.

This theological framework provides another way to imagine spatiality, and this notion of inner light crosses the boundary between the inside and the outside. The reformers who constructed Eastern State approached the issue of penitence with the best intentions to elicit repentance and reform—efforts rooted in the theory of environmentalism. This theory contends that people are inherently good but polluted by negative outside factors. By removing individuals from their destructive environments and leaving them to their own solitude, the early reformers thought that prisoners would return to their natural good states. Established in 1787, the Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons is the first prison reform group in the world. According to Sullivan, “This organization’s goal was to reform prisons even before prisons existed in the modern sense of the word. In effect, its main purpose was to create a humanitarian penitentiary under the ‘obligations of benevolence.’”85 While attempting to elicit true remorse from prisoners, the society tried to improve conditions and reimagine the penal process: “Imbued both with the Quaker belief that solitary reflection cleanses the soul and with the knowledge of the deplorable congregate conditions [of jails], the society convinced officials

to build [Eastern State Penitentiary] with solitary cells. Through the process of reflection, the society hoped to reform the souls of criminals and restore them to their natural good state.

Designed by British architect John Haviland, Eastern State embodied an idealistic model that incorporated these themes of inner light and humanitarian values. Still, the design maintains a polar division between the inside and the outside and depends on the psychologically destructive system of solitary confinement. While its radical reimagining of carceral space offers a potential alternative to current methods of incarceration, its limitations result from its reification of the inside/outside dichotomy. While the prison maintained a forbidding exterior with massive towers and ominous gateways, the octagonal central rotunda offers a different carceral model. Challenging the traditional British penal system, Haviland imagined an alternative carceral space: "Haviland was obliged to create a new architecture to conform with the philosophy of separate confinement and implement it with the prevailing concepts of security and deterrence." In 1829, Haviland created the largest building in the United States at that time and arguably the first modern building in America.

86 Ibid, 11.
The view of cellblocks from the central rotunda also shows barrel-vaulted ceilings and skylights.

Based on the notion of Bentham’s panopticon, Haviland’s design integrated Quaker belief into the cells and central hub. With his distinctive design, Haviland adopted Bentham’s model of constant surveillance. From the penitentiary’s central rotunda, Center, all of the cellblocks could be viewed simply by turning one’s body. Like the omnipresent eye of God symbolically incorporated into the panopticon model, Haviland’s design included individual skylights in each cell. Literature refers to these openings as the dead eye or the eye of God, thereby cementing this association. The cells themselves ranged from seven and a half by twelve feet to seven and a half by sixteen feet. They included simple furnishings, including “an iron bedstead, a clothes rack, a stool, a tin cup, a food pan, a spoon, knife, and fork, a water can, a

---

brush for cleaning, a fine-toothed comb, a ‘wash-hand basin’ and a clean towel, supplied weekly. 89 In addition to a workbench, loom, or other equipment and a cast-iron funnel-shaped hopper used as a toilet, the cells remained basic and bare.

A cell with an iron bedstead and a cast-iron funnel-shaped hopper used as a toilet.

As in Bentham’s panopticon, the penal philosophy of Eastern State Penitentiary also depends on separation, thereby maintaining the distinction between the inside and the outside. Solitary confinement, the literal implementation of separation, is a psychologically destructive process, and the early reformers’ good intentions failed to address the dichotomy inherent to the conceptualization of carceral space. Perhaps ironically, the Quaker commitment to nonviolence and the subsequent aversion to more corporal forms of punishment created a system where

89 Ibid, 49.
mental torture replaced physical anguish. After visiting Eastern State, writer Charles Dickens recognized deep problems in their system of solitary confinement:

I hold this slow and daily tampering with the mysteries of the brain, to be immeasurably worse than any torture of the body: and because its ghastly signs and tokens are not so palpable to the eye and sense of touch as scars upon the flesh; because its wounds are not upon the surface, and it extorts few cries that human ears can hear; therefore I the more denounce it, as a secret punishment which slumbering humanity is not roused up to stay.90

This reification of the inside and the outside—and the maintenance of this dichotomy—is a fundamental flaw in the penal philosophy of Eastern State Penitentiary. Not only did the system of solitary confinement allegedly lead to insanity, spatially, this model also prevents any sort of dynamism and crossing. Rather than a relational model of space, Eastern State enforced a strict and static model of polarization. By maintaining the separation between the inside and the outside, the system screens off any possibility of connection across prison walls.

By 1913, however, Eastern State abandoned the Pennsylvania system of total solitary confinement. The increasing rate of incarceration and the sheer number of prisoners forced the city of Philadelphia to house at least two, and sometimes three, prisoners to a single cell. The construction of additional cellblocks detracted from the original intent of the facility. Although each prisoner originally had an individual exercise yard, double story cellblocks prevented the upstairs inmates from being outside. Issues of overcrowding and declining conditions eventually led to the closing of Eastern State in 1971. Despite the original reformers' earnest intentions to create a more humane alternative to contemporary incarceration practices, the problems of carceral space—primarily issues along the inside/outside divide—prevented the realization of their ideal. Eastern State Penitentiary was thus a well-intentioned but failed experiment—yet we can still learn from this model, especially by turning to the theme of light.

The skylight and exercise yard are integral architectural features in Eastern State Penitentiary.

The notion of inner light illustrates the potential for alternative models of imagining carceral space. Through Eastern State's Quaker ideology, the broader public can recognize the innate worth of every individual—thereby breaking down the inside/outside division—and feel connected to those more directly facing America's current carceral complex, a problem now rendered relevant to their own personal contexts through this shared humanity and the presence of God in every person. This concept of light offers another model of mapping space in general and reveals another way to incorporate themes of dynamism, crossing, and overlapping. While prisoners at Eastern State were secluded from society and other human interaction, their cells included thin slits of skylight, small openings to the outside and points of permeability. These windows offered solace and encouraged contemplation as they evoked the omnipresent eye of God within the panopticon staring down at the prisoner. Still, by shedding light on these cells,
these windows allowed exchange and experience, a relation between the inside and the outside. Like the skylights, the exercise yards allowed prisoners to leave their cells and feel the sun on their skin—the outside penetrating the inside—an illuminated point of permeability. By remapping light onto sacred spaces and carceral constructs, perhaps we can reimagine such systems without depending on a dualistic division. Light—including inner light—offers a way to both illuminate space and recognize the innate humanity and divinity of each person.
V. Remapping with Light: Illuminating Alternatives

Through the development of penal philosophy, and its divergences in theory and practice, we can trace alternative approaches to incarceration and reimagine carceral space. Like religious space and its sacred/profane dichotomy, traditional conceptions of carceral space are predicated on the inside/outside divide. However, by overlapping these categories, as in the case of religious space, we can connect these separate places and promote a dynamic, relational model. We can rethink our spatial frameworks through other theories of crossing permeable places, which offer potential alternatives that relate the inside and the outside, the sacred and the profane, and recognize their connectivity. Through models of illumination and spaces of light, we can imagine enlightened alternatives that seek to acknowledge the significant connections between the sacred and the profane, the outside and the inside. In “Sacred Landscapes and the Phenomenon of Light,” geographer Barbara Weightman recognizes light as an integral aspect of sacred landscapes, thereby affecting how a local geography is perceived. Reintegrating light into these divergent spaces acts as a metaphor for human space. This phenomenon highlights shared connections across traditional divides and unites the previously dichotomous spaces.

Through the model of human space, a dynamic and relational model of spatiality replaced traditional conceptions of the religious and the carceral, both predicated on division. Shiner’s notion of human space offers a viable alternative to static geophysical forms. By applying this notion to religious space, we developed a model informed by Tweed’s theories of crossing and dwelling. By applying this move to carceral space, we recognized how the inside relates to the outside. Despite the limitations of Eastern State Penitentiary, this model illustrates one way to reimagine carceral space: through light. The skylights, architectural features in each solitary cell,

allow light to penetrate the prison and act as a metaphor for points of permeability. The Quaker belief in inner light theologically demonstrates the connection across prison walls: we are all endowed with God’s divine presence and thus share the ability to have a direct and personal experience of God.

The symbol of light enables and illustrates overlapping and crossing; it promotes a dynamic and relational model that avoids reification and separation. Light permeates and changes the built and natural environments by crossing spaces and places. As the sun rises and sets, as shadows shift, light changes our perceptions and connections with our environment. Still, through this example, there is the potential to establish a light/dark dichotomy, which Weightman actually emphasizes: “Light, through presence or absence, sets apart the sacred from the profane and, in its cognitive, aesthetic, and symbolic forms, reveals and delineates the world, fosters sensual and emotional awareness, and gives life a literal focus and meaning.”92 While I do want to emphasize light’s power to reveal and foster meaning, I want to resist the light/dark dichotomy, mapped onto the sacred/profane and inside/outside divides, by recognizing the ways light crosses the profane, enters the inside, and represents a truly dynamic force in our perception.

Spaces of light illuminate the connections across these different categories. In the case of Eastern State Penitentiary, the skylights offered some access to the outside world. Although still solitarily confined, the prisoners could watch the light travel across their cells. While the skylight is ultimately inconsequential, the image of illuminating carceral space is striking and invites further creative imagining of incarceration. The Quaker belief in inner light also provides a theological framework to recognize connection across prison walls. Light plays a central role in

92 Ibid, 59.
facilitating our experiences of the built and natural environments: "Were it not for light’s straightness, our vision would be muffled, smeared, and stunted. This is a fact of sight, the miracle of which, in all its expansive plenitude, depends on the unswerving uniformity of light’s propagation. Light is, after all, the ultimate geometric instrument."\footnote{Robin Evans, The Projective Cast: Architecture and Its Three Geometries (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1995), 108.} As a metaphor and theological tenet, light plays a central role in illuminating the notion of human space.

In addition to carceral space, light is also a critical component in religious architecture and its use highlights the connections between the sacred and the profane. In Takashi Yamaguchi & Associates’ White Temple in Kyoto, Japan, light creates a space to recognize one’s maternal ancestors, who are often overlooked in Japanese culture. “The light inside the building brightens and darkens with the sky above, so that the space seems to breathe, swelling and shrinking with each change in the intensity of the light.”\footnote{Robert Klanten and Lukas Feireiss, Closer to God: Religious Architecture and Sacred Spaces (Berlin: Die Gestalten Verlag GmbH & Co., 2010), 35.} This swelling and shrinking is comparable to the motion inside the womb. Light thus connects across temporal boundaries and returns individuals to prenatal states. This building thus allows visitors to honor maternal ancestors through its evocation of fetus experiences. In these ways, light allows us to rethink our spatial frameworks— for the religious and the carceral. Two other specific examples illustrate this potential in actuality: Tribute in Light, the temporary 9/11 World Trade Center memorial in New York City, and the light installations of Quaker artist James Turrell. By further examining these two models, perhaps we can cultivate another way of using light as a metaphor for human space to remap the religious and the carceral in the American imagination.

After the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 and the loss of 2,977 victims, the site of the World Trade Center became, in a sense, a sacred space. As the final resting place for 2,606
souls, the ground assumed many identities: a graveyard, a construction site, a political arena, and a memorial. In response, several artists and architects independently envisioned “twin white beacons of light that rose from lower Manhattan as a symbol of strength, hope, and resiliency; a reclamation of New York City’s skyline and identity; a tribute to rescue workers; and a mnemonic for all those who lost their lives.” 95 Architects John Bennett and Gustavo Bonevardi of PRONOUN Space Studio, artists Julian LaVerdiere and Paul Myoda, architect Richard Nash Gould, and lighting designer Paul Marantz combined their visions and first illuminated the New York sky on March 11, 2002 with their proposed design. Installed in an empty lot adjacent to the World Trade Center, “the project was an immediate and temporary artistic gesture proposed to foster hope, unity, healing, and comprehension of the mass devastation suffered on September 11 by New York City and the world at large.” 96 As a memorial, these two beams of light effectively honor the victims of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Light thus crosses contested space—whose identity remains to be fully articulated in the national memory—and also reunites the past with the present.

Like the designers of the Tribute in Light, Quaker artist James Turrell uses light to illustrate certain aspects of spatiality. Through light installations, Turrell creates literal spaces of light, colored expanses and illuminated rooms that transform the environment. Weightman captures these concepts and reflects on the transformative power of light through a Christian theological model: “Christians described conversion as illumination. The presence of light proved the eternal presence of an immaterial God. The Christian process of becoming and appreciating this pervasive force involved their extricating themselves from worldly desires and

96 Ibid, 137.
stepping beyond into the light." Drawing from this understanding of illumination, Turrell re-patterns space through the manipulation of light to assert an enlightened philosophical and visual experience. In “Awakening the Spiritual: James Turrell and Quaker Practice,” Lise Kjaer writes, “Turrell’s light installations aim to awaken a perceptual experience of light inside the viewer. While this concept developed through his interest in phenomenology and environmental psychology, it is also tied to Quaker theology and the Quaker founder George Fox’s suggestions of seeking a spiritual ‘light within.’ Through this process, Turrell connects inner light with outer representations, thereby collapsing the inside/outside dichotomy and presenting a potential alternative to current conceptions of carceral space.

While these models of light, although physically manifested, remain at an abstract level, a theoretical reconsideration of spatiality does present alternative ways to construct our environments and remap our paths. By questioning divisions between the sacred and the profane and the inside and the outside, these dichotomies become complicated, overlapping, and no longer exclusive. After recognizing the complexity in our spatial environments, we cannot isolate ourselves or ignore others’ problems. The current model of carceral space permits the broader American public to remain complacent toward our current prison system by maintaining the inside/outside divide. However, by deconstructing such divisions, as exemplified through the case of religious space, we open the possibility of connection and crossing. A truly dynamic and relational model of space allows us to engage and interact across boundaries and divides. Through illuminating such a model, light offers a metaphorical and theological alternative to

98 Lise Kjaer, “Awakening the Spiritual: James Turrell and Quaker Practice” (PhD diss., The City University of New York, 2008), iii.
polarization and division—a method of reimagining and experiencing our spatial environments and remapping the religion and the carceral in the American imagination.
Works Cited


Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the entire Religion Department—professors and fellow majors—for their humor and warmth, creative ingenuity, and thoughtful insights into this field. I also extend my sincere appreciation to the John B. Hurford ’60 Humanities Center, which provided me with financial support to visit Eastern State Penitentiary. I also want to thank my fellow students in the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program, especially the incarcerated women who so generously shared their stories. Finally, I want to thank my friends and family for their endless encouragement and patience. Thank you.