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From the Selected Works of Gerald B. Guest

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Space

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SPACE

Gerald B. Guest

It would seem irrefutable that notions of space stand at the heart of what we do as art historians, especially if one takes a broad definition of the term as I intend to do here. In what follows, the term “space” will refer variously to the virtual spaces of two-dimensional images, to the social spaces inhabited by art objects, and to the constructed spaces of buildings and other environments.¹ This essay will also be concerned with both space *and* place, and the notion that you cannot consider one without the other.² I will mostly, however, use the term “space” to encapsulate this pairing. In considering the spaces of medieval art as bearers of meaning, I would like to argue for an approach that is explicitly object focused but takes into account recent theoretical work in the humanities and social sciences (the so-called “spatial turn,” considered below).

The English word “space” comes from the French *espace* (the *Oxford English Dictionary* lists multiple spellings here) and ultimately from the Latin word *spatium* (*OED*, s.v. “space,” etymology). The original Latin term can refer to space either as “area or extension” (II) or to space as “time or duration” (I).³ Thus across the centuries the very word “space” itself has intertwined the temporal and spatial. Both usages can be found, for example, in the Latin Vulgate text of the Bible. Joshua 3:4 states, “And let there be between you and the ark the space [*spatium*] of two thousand cubits”; but Joshua 10:13 states, “So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down the space [*spatio*] of one day.” A similar usage can be found in Middle English texts. Chaucer uses the word “space” in the two senses of the word noted above. In the Clerk’s Tale one reads, “I dar the bettre aske of yow a space / Of audience” (lines 103–4), while in *Troilus and Criseyde* one reads, “Certeynly no more harde grace / May sitte on me, for-why ther is no space” (I, lines 713–14). Similarly, in the *Divine Comedy* Dante uses the word “spazio” to indicate both time and space. In *Purgatory* 11:106–8 the word indicates time: “Before a thousand years have passed—a span / that, for eternity, is less space than / an eyeblink for the slowest sphere in heaven”;⁴ whereas in 29:106–8 the word refers to an area: “The space between the four of them contained / a chariot—triumphal—on two wheels, / tied to a griffin’s neck and drawn by him.”

Further consideration of this intertwining of the notions of time and space in medieval culture is beyond the scope of this essay. Suffice it to say, however, that greater investigation of the topic might yield fruitful results for those of us who study the visual cultures of this period. Certainly the theme has a venerable tradition in postmedieval philosophy and aesthetics; Lessing's *Laocöon* of 1766 is perhaps the seminal text in this vein.

In looking specifically at the spaces of medieval art, this essay can also be said to be concerned with notions of spatiality. The *Oxford English Dictionary* includes that word within its definition of the adjective "spatial," defining spatiality as "spatial character, quality, or property" (*OED*, s.v. "spatial," derivatives). The term can be found in English usage as early as 1887, and it also has a venerable academic pedigree. It is used, for example, in French (*spatialité*) in Henri Bergson's *Creative Evolution* of 1907 and Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* of 1945.⁵ I believe that this word, "spatiality," gets to the heart of what I want to consider in this essay—namely, space as a quantifiable medium, but also a subjectively inflected component of lived experience and a bearer and shaper of meanings and ideologies.

Such considerations have featured prominently in recent academic research. In fact, one now regularly reads of a "spatial turn" within cultural studies, a phrase that has been used for at least a decade.⁶ For Edward W. Soja, the spatial turn "is fundamentally an attempt to develop a more creative and critically effective balancing of the spatial/geographical and the temporal/historical imaginations."⁷ At its best, work in this new field of spatial studies is rigorously interdisciplinary, blending theoretical reflection with considerations of the social and the material. I believe that this body of scholarship offers us a wealth of insights for our own art historical work on the art of the Middle Ages. This new body of thought asks how space interweaves social norms and subjective experience, about the ways in which meaning is created by ritual and performance in space, and how these concerns get bound up with individual and collective memory. In this way of thinking, space is not just a blank canvas or an empty vessel but a socially constructed sphere that must be considered by those wishing to understand cultures historically. Space emerges in this manner of investigation as both abstract and concrete, lived and conceived, an arena of practice and an arena of thought.

Arguably, the field of study that can most claim responsibility for fostering this spatial turn is cultural geography.⁸ Key figures in this discipline include Edward Soja, David Harvey, and Derek Gregory.⁹ These are writers with whom medieval art historians are probably not familiar but I believe that we could benefit from an examination of their work. As Soja has noted, "the unprecedented transdisciplinarity of the spatial turn is making almost every scholar a geographer to some degree, in much the same way that every scholar is to some degree a

historian.”¹⁰ What I have found especially useful in their work is the careful consideration of key theoretical texts coupled with a commitment to putting theory into practice within their discipline; each of the aforementioned scholars was trained in the traditional methodologies of cultural geography and then went on to rethink the assumptions of their discipline using critical theory. This is what I am advocating for historians of medieval art—a productive synthesis of our discipline’s established commitment to spatial analysis with an awareness of important theoretical developments that have taken place in the humanities since the 1960s.

Space, of course, has always featured prominently in the study of medieval art. An accounting of the theme’s various manifestations in the scholarship would be a particularly useful project but one that cannot be undertaken here. Nevertheless, I believe it fair to say that among the foundational figures in the field of art history, virtually every major scholar evinced some interest in the social or artistic construction of space in either figural art or in architecture. As formalist art history developed at the end of the nineteenth century, it was concerned fundamentally with what might now be called the virtual space of figural art. Riegl’s *Spätromische Kunstindustrie* of 1901 is perhaps one of the most relevant examples one could cite in this vein. Later scholars expanded the discussion. Erwin Panofsky, Otto von Simson, and Hans Jantzen, among others, attuned us to the sophistication of Gothic architectural space.¹¹ Focillon’s “law of the frame” transformed our perception of Romanesque figural imagery.¹² Meyer Schapiro alerted us to the semiotics of the visual field and to the complex virtual spaces of Romanesque sculpture.¹³ Otto Pächt intertwined notions of narrative, time, and space in his *Rise of Pictorial Narrative in Twelfth-Century England*.¹⁴ John White, among others, has considered the prehistory of linear perspective in late medieval painting.¹⁵

If anything, recent histories of medieval art have emphasized to an even greater extent the complexity of imagined and created spaces in the art and architecture of the medieval period. Historians of architecture continue to unravel the geometric complexity of medieval buildings.¹⁶ Architectural sculpture and art objects have been interpreted within their spatial contexts.¹⁷ The role of space in the construction of gender has been investigated.¹⁸ Cities have been subjected to spatial analyses.¹⁹ Maps and itineraries have been looked at for their contributions to medieval attitudes toward the spatial world.²⁰ Scholars of manuscript culture have revealed the complex *mise-en-page* of premodern books with their bringing together of word and image, center and margin.²¹ Late medieval painting has been mined for its virtual complexity.²² Beyond the history of art, more broadly in medieval studies the 1990s marked an important period of examinations of space across the disciplines. The well-known collection *Medieval Practices of Space* appeared in 2000, but before that similar volumes appeared in French and German: the Spring 1990 issue of the journal *Médiévales* was devoted to “Espaces

du Moyen Age,” and the collection *Raum und Raumvorstellungen im Mittelalter* appeared in 1998.²³

Historians of medieval art wishing to more fully engage in the current spatial turn might find inspiration in some of the seminal texts in the field. One such work that could be usefully mined is Henri Lefebvre’s *Production of Space*, arguably the theoretical text most influential on current work on space and place.²⁴ Lefebvre considered space from a neo-Marxist perspective, asking how it is produced in relation to other social and economic factors. Space might be thought of in his work as the key medium for the naturalization of political ideologies. In seeking to characterize the production of space, Lefebvre offers a very useful, if slightly confusing, conceptual triptych. He considers (1) spatial practices, or processes that produce the spaces of society; (2) representations of space, which involves conceptualizations and especially dominant models of spatiality; and (3) representational spaces, or lived spaces, spaces of the everyday. Thus, for example, Lefebvre writes that in the Middle Ages:

spatial practice embraced not only the network of local roads close to peasant communities, monasteries and castles, but also the main roads between towns and the great pilgrims’ and crusaders’ ways. As for representations of space, these were borrowed from Aristotelian and Ptolemaic conceptions, as modified by Christianity.²⁵

In Lefebvre’s rich and sprawling study, space emerges as both a product and a medium, an object and a frame.

Turning to the application of cultural theory to our own field, Lefebvre’s work on space might help us to rewrite, say, the history of the Gothic cathedral and some of the spatial practices that are intrinsic to its functioning and meaningfulness. In his way of thinking, a spatial practice might be said to mediate between the conceptual and the lived.²⁶ I would argue that two of the key spatial practices of the Gothic cathedral were its iconography and its liturgy. It might be said that these two objects of study, one material and the other performative, come together in the ways in which they make the spaces of the medieval church and the medieval city meaningful. In the remainder of this essay I offer two brief case studies of liturgy and iconography and ways in which they can be thought to remap the spaces of the medieval world, investing them with layers of meaning.

Such an approach to liturgy might attend to the fragmentation of sacred space around altars, chapels, relics, and other sites as well as how these various places allowed for the creation of sacred networks and itineraries. Continued examination of stational liturgies and how they linked cathedrals to other spaces (streets, city gates, cemeteries, and other churches) might show us some of the ways in which cities were made meaningful as physical sites. For example, at Chartres the feast

days known collectively as Rogations functioned in part to redefine the spaces of the medieval city.²⁷ These feasts originated in the early Middle Ages, seemingly for penitential purposes and to pray for a bountiful harvest.

At Chartres various churches were visited in processions during the three days of the minor Rogations (Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday) that preceded Ascension Thursday.²⁸ One of the surviving thirteenth-century ordinals from the cathedral tells us that on the first of these days, the readings for the mass included Luke 11:5–13 and James 5:16–20.²⁹ The latter begins:

Confess therefore your sins one to another: and pray one for another, that you may be saved. For the continual prayer of a just man availeth much. Elias was a man passible like unto us: and with prayer he prayed that it might not rain upon the earth, and it rained not for three years and six months. And he prayed again: and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit. My brethren, if any of you err from the truth, and one convert him: He must know that he who causeth a sinner to be converted from the error of his way, shall save his soul from death, and shall cover a multitude of sins.

This reading is especially apt for these feasts in that it stresses the relationship of the people to the land, the need for penitence and prayer, and the hope for bountiful crops; themes prominent across the Rogation days' liturgies.³⁰ Following the mass at Chartres Cathedral on Monday, processions were made to the Churches of St. John in the Valley, St. Maurice, and St. Andrew (Fig. 1). According to the ordinal cited above, the antiphon "De ierusalem" was sung when the cathedral chapter exited the choir and when they then exited the cathedral itself. The text for this piece begins, "Out of Jerusalem go the remnants and from Mount Sion, the survivor[s]; for protection shall be given to this city, and it shall be saved for the sake of his servant, David, Alleluia."³¹ A spatialized typology is thus set into play here; the city in which the antiphon was chanted became a new Jerusalem. Other prayers were recited and other churches were visited on Tuesday and Wednesday of the same week.

Just as the cathedral was itself a series of discrete sacred sites (altars, relics/reliquaries, etc.), so the city became a network of sacred sites in the liturgies for Rogations (this is true of other feast days as well). The sacred geography at Chartres was remapped through these performances, creating a fluid spatiality of sanctity that was brought to life through liturgical performance. The citizens of the medieval city, both clerical and lay, were consequently implicated within this cultural geography as contingent subjects of God and the Church.

In related fashion, figural art, such as stained glass windows, might be subjected to similar spatial analyses. Like liturgical performances, narrative windows

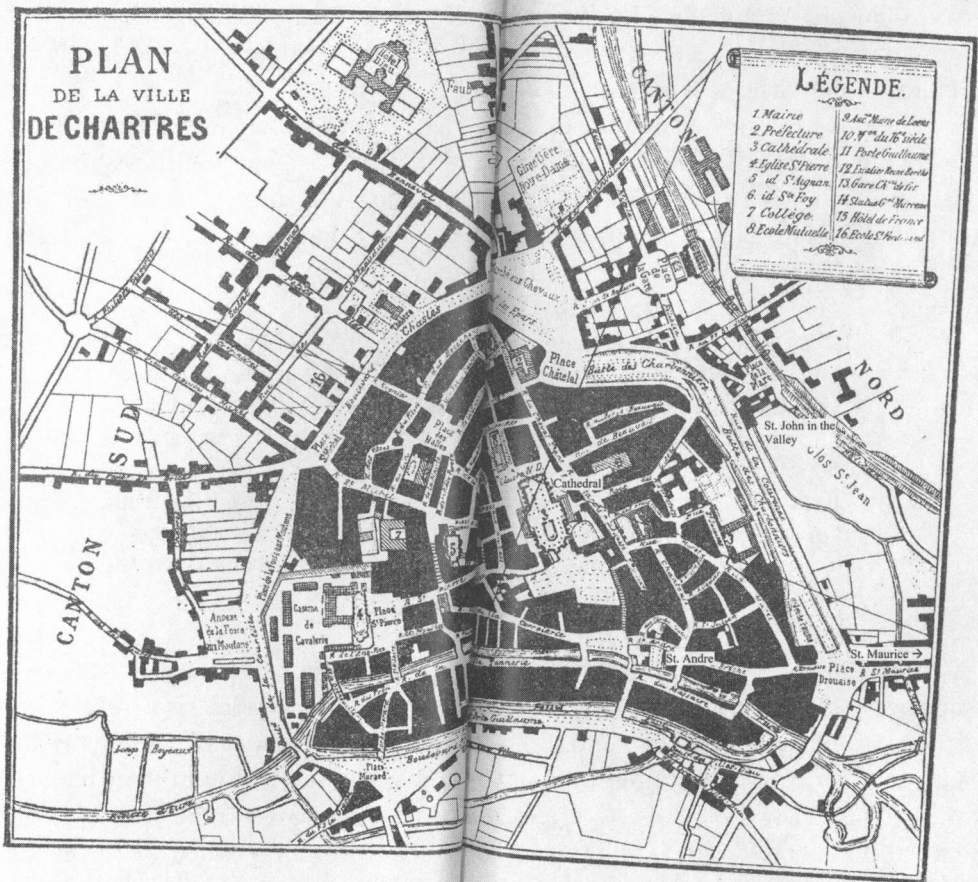


Fig. 1. Plan of Chartres. (Photo: Taken from A. Clerval, *A Guide Book of Chartres* [Chartres: Librairie Paul Renier, 1926].)

create sacred maps of the medieval world. Thus a window like that dedicated to Charlemagne at Chartres, probably created in the early thirteenth century, is animated by sophisticated typologies of space.³² This window focuses on Charlemagne's legendary expeditions to the Holy Land and to Iberia. In Aachen, at the window's start, Charlemagne is urged by a visiting bishop to journey to the Holy Land in order to liberate it from the Muslims (Fig. 2, lower left). In Jerusalem Charlemagne wins the city for Christendom, and in Constantinople the Emperor Constantine, anachronistically, gives Charlemagne relics to take back to Aachen (Fig. 2, upper left and upper right). In Aachen he is visited in a vision by the apostle James, who instructs him to go to Iberia to free his burial site (Fig. 3, lower right). In Iberia Charlemagne is shown with Roland and others battling the enemy, taking cities, and building a church (Figs. 4 and 5, throughout).

The window's narrative depicts a range of sacred spaces from the city of Jerusalem to churches in Aachen and Spain. It is through the diverse actions

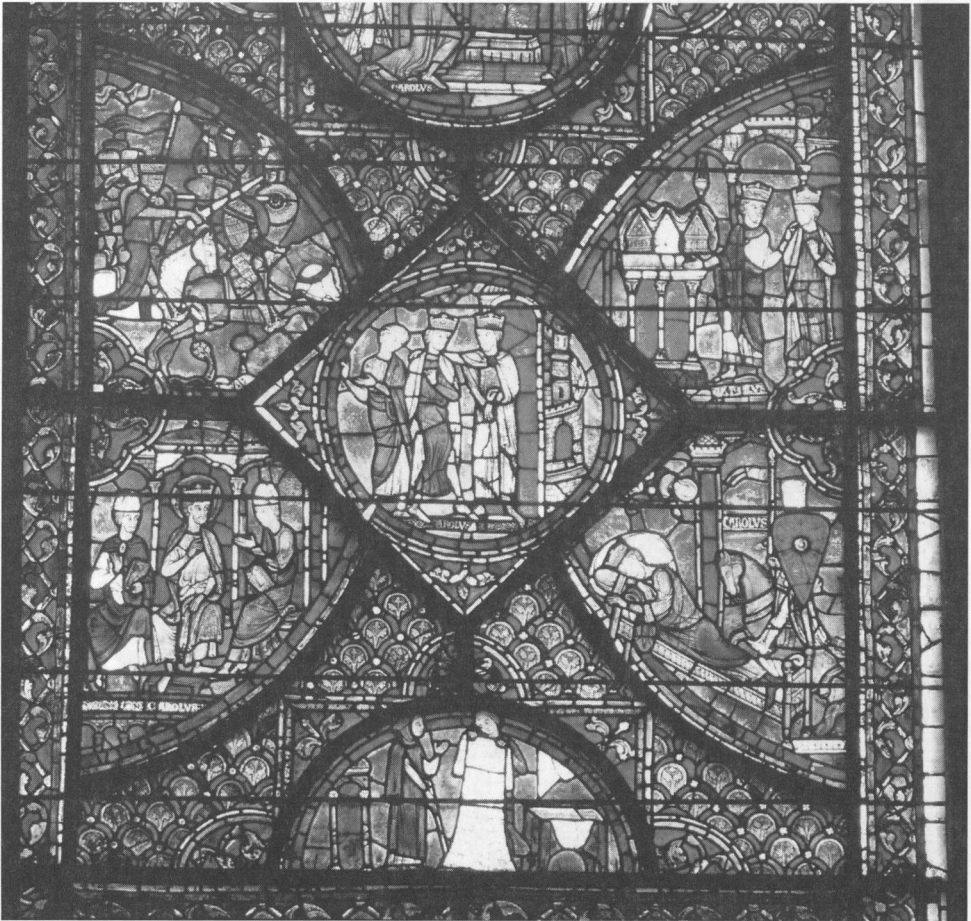


Fig. 2. Charlemagne window (scenes 1–6). Chartres cathedral. (Photo: Author.)

represented throughout the panels that these spaces are made meaningful and inscribed within institutional memory. The exchange of relics, the building of churches, the taking of cities, the deaths of warriors, the depictions of piety and prayer—all work to exemplify Charlemagne and simultaneously to contextualize and valorize the church's ongoing struggles with heretics and non-Christians in the Holy Land, France, and Iberia. The overall spatiality of the window might thus be characterized as one structured around a cluster of interconnected sacred sites made or transformed through human action. In this fashion an engaged spatial analysis of the narrative must consider first the representational semiotics of the window's individual spaces and then branch out to look at place as a social construction that intertwines ideology with history. Such an approach to spatiality does not necessarily negate the traditional work of art history with its grounding in formal and stylistic issues but recognizes that the formal poetics of visual culture

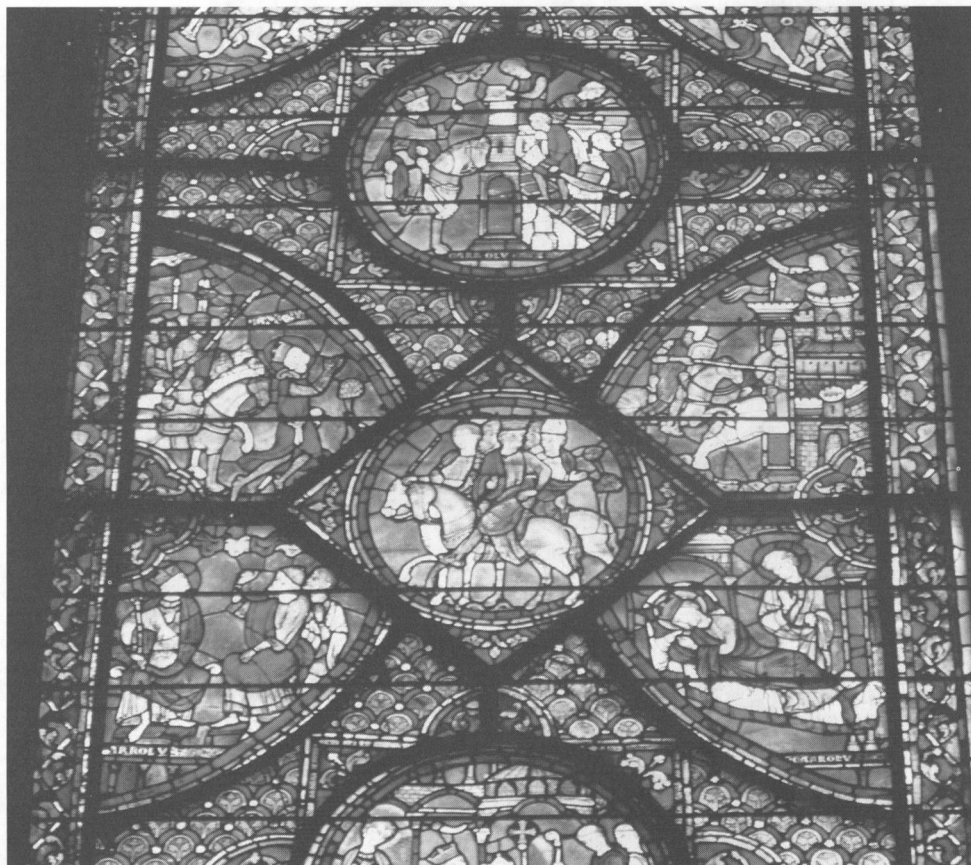


Fig. 3. Charlemagne window (scenes 8–13). Chartres cathedral. (Photo: Author.)

reflect the cultural geography of the time, and that this broader notion of spatiality is an essential context for understanding medieval art. Overall, I would argue that the spatial turn enfolds traditional art historical concerns into a larger discourse that has at its heart the work of ideology critique.

Finally, when considering monumental church art, one would wish to extend the comparative analysis between art and liturgy even further, to the point where the parallel between the two breaks down. The two phenomena are homologous on a basic level but the correspondence is not entirely neat. Both invest the spaces of the medieval world with meaning through the visual and the aural, respectively.

By way of conclusion, I would like to offer one last idea. If space is made meaningful in part through ideological investments, and if ideology might be thought of as a “political unconscious” (to use Fredric Jameson’s phrase), might we not then speak of a spatial unconscious animating medieval art and architecture?³³ Such a notion might offer us new ways of thinking about our objects of study.

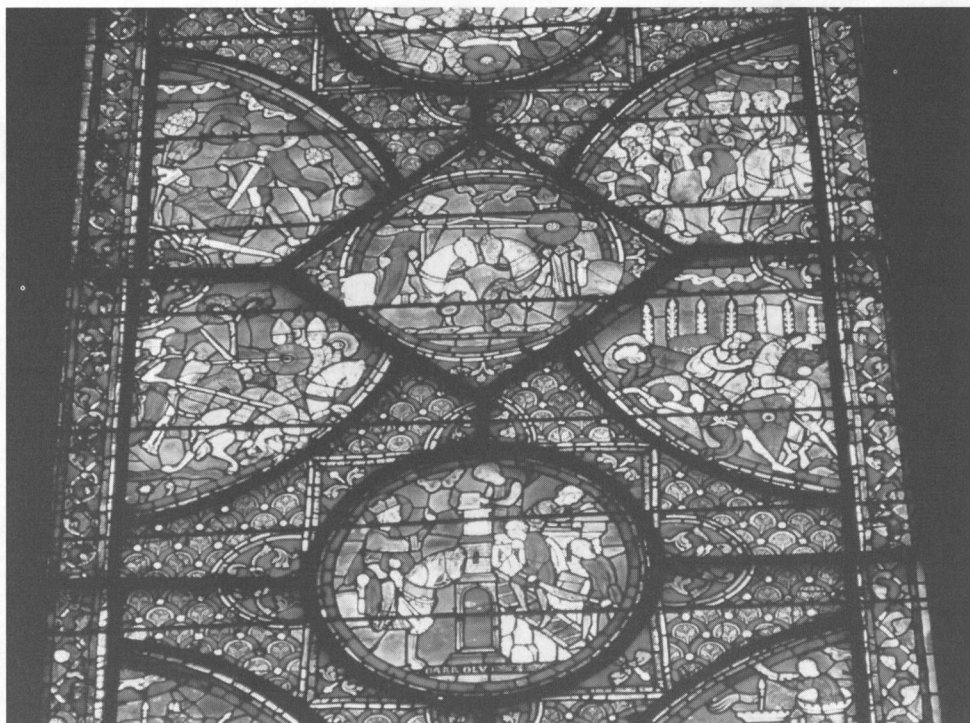


Fig 4. Charlemagne window (scenes 14–18). Chartres cathedral. (Photo: Author.)

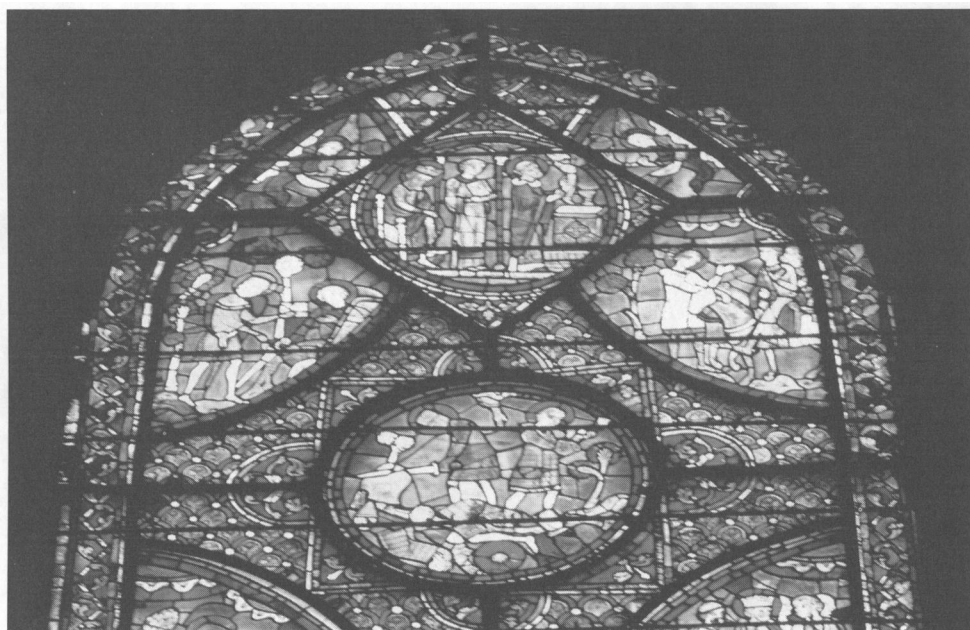


Fig. 5. Charlemagne window (scenes 19–24). Chartres cathedral. (Photo: Author.)

NOTES

1. That medieval people thought of virtual images as residing in space is confirmed in texts such as Hugh of St. Victor's *Mystic Ark*, in which such a notion is referenced several times in the opening sentences. See Mary J. Carruthers and Jan L. Ziolkowski, eds., *The Medieval Craft of Memory: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 41–70.

2. I take this notion from Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 317–48.

3. On the interrelationship of space and time, one starting point is W. J. T. Mitchell and Mark B. N. Hansen, "Time and Space," in *Critical Terms for Media Studies*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell and Mark B. N. Hansen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 101–13. Their essay, however, favors the temporal over the spatial.

4. See *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, trans. Allen Mandelbaum (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

5. Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (New York: H. Holt and Company, 1911), chap. 3; and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London and New York: Humanities Press, 1962).

6. See, for example, Barney Warf and Santa Arias, eds., *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2009). Especially useful as guides to this area of scholarship are Phil Hubbard, Rob Kitchin, and Gill Valentine, eds., *Key Thinkers on Space and Place* (London, UK; and Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2004); and Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift, eds., *Thinking Space* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

7. Edward W. Soja, "Taking Space Personally," in Warf and Arias, *The Spatial Turn*, 11–35, at 12.

8. For an introduction to the field, see Hubbard, Kitchin, and Valentine, *Key Thinkers on Space and Place*.

9. See, for example, Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London and New York: Verso, 1989); David Harvey, *Social Justice and the City* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973); and Derek Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994).

10. Soja, "Taking Space Personally," 24.

11. See, for example, Erwin Panofsky, *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism* (LaTrobe, PA: Archabbey Press, 1951); Otto von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral: Origins of Gothic Architecture and the Medieval Concept of Order* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1956); and Hans Jantzen, *High Gothic: The Classic Cathedrals of Chartres, Reims, Amiens*, trans. James Palmes (New York: Pantheon Books, 1957).

12. See, for example, Henri Focillon, *The Art of the West in the Middle Ages*, vol. 1, *Romanesque Art*, trans. Donald King (New York: Phaidon, 1963).

13. See, for example, Meyer Schapiro, "On Some Problems in the Semiotics of Visual Art: Field and Vehicle in Image-Signs," in *Theory and Philosophy of Art: Style, Artist, and Society* (New York: Braziller, 1994), 1–32; and the collected essays in Meyer Schapiro, *Romanesque Art* (New York: Braziller, 1977).

14. Otto Pächt, *The Rise of Pictorial Narrative in Twelfth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).

15. See John White, *The Birth and Rebirth of Pictorial Space* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957).

16. See, for example, the recent collection Nancy Y. Wu, ed., *Ad quadratum: The Practical Application of Geometry in Medieval Architecture* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2002). More holistic investigations of medieval church spaces can be found in works such as Paul Binski, *Becket's Crown: Art and Imagination in Gothic England, 1170–1300* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004); Stephen Murray, *Notre Dame, Cathedral of Amiens: The Power of Change in Gothic* (Cambridge:

Cambridge University Press, 1996); and Madeline H. Caviness, *Sumptuous Arts at the Royal Abbeys in Reims and Braine: Ornatus elegantiae, varietate stupendes* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990).

17. See, for example, Michael Camille, "At the Sign of the 'Spinning Sow': The 'Other' Chartres and Images of Everyday Life of the Medieval Street," in *History and Images: Towards a New Iconology*, ed. Axel Bolvig and Phillip Lindley (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), 249–76; Catherine E. Karkov, "Sheela-na-gigs and Other Unruly Women: Images of Land and Gender in Medieval Ireland," in *From Ireland Coming: Irish Art from the Early Christian to the Late Gothic Period and Its European Context*, ed. Colum Hourihane (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 313–31; Jacqueline E. Jung, "Seeing through Screens: The Gothic Choir Enclosure as Frame," in *Thresholds of the Sacred: Architectural, Art Historical, Liturgical, and Theological Perspectives on Religious Screens, East and West*, ed. Sharon E. J. Gerstel (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2006), 185–213.

18. See, for example, "Monastic Architecture for Women," special issue, *Gesta* 31, no. 2 (1992).

19. See, for example, Marvin Trachtenberg, *Dominion of the Eye: Urbanism, Art, and Power in Early Modern Florence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); and Keith D. Lilley, *City and Cosmos: The Medieval World in Urban Form* (London: Reaktion Books, 2009).

20. See, for example, Marcia Kupfer, "Medieval World Maps: Embedded Images, Interpretive Frames," *Word & Image* 10 (1994): 262–88; and Daniel K. Connolly, *The Maps of Matthew Paris: Medieval Journeys through Space, Time and Liturgy* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: Boydell Press, 2009).

21. Among the many possible citations one could make, see, for example, Adam S. Cohen, *The Uta Codex: Art, Philosophy, and Reform in Eleventh-Century Germany* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000); and Lucy Freeman Sandler, "The Word in the Text and the Image in the Margin: The Case of the Luttrell Psalter," *Journal of the Walters Art Gallery* 54 (1996): 87–99.

22. See, for example, Hans Belting, "The New Role of Narrative in Public Painting of the Trecento: *Historia* and Allegory," in *Pictorial Narrative in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, ed. Herbert L. Kessler and Marianna Shreve Simpson (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1985), 151–68; and Bret L. Rothstein, *Sight and Spirituality in Early Netherlandish Painting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

23. Barbara A. Hanawalt and Michal Kobialka, eds., *Medieval Practices of Space* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); "Espaces du Moyen-Âge," ed. Patrick Gautier Dalché, *Médiévales* 18 (Spring 1990); Jan A. Aertsen and Andreas Speer, eds., *Raum und Raumvorstellungen im Mittelalter* (Berlin and New York: W. de Gruyter, 1998).

24. Originally published as Henri Lefebvre, *La production de l'espace* (Paris: Éditions Anthropos, 1974). For an English translation see Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

25. Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 45.

26. See Andy Merrifield, "Henri Lefebvre: A Socialist in Space," in Crang and Thrift, *Thinking Space*, 167–82, at 175.

27. See Pierre-Marie Gy, "Rogations," in *Encyclopedia of the Middle Ages*, ed. André Vauchez (Cambridge, UK: J. Clarke, 2000), 2:1249.

28. For a parallel consideration of Palm Sunday at Chartres, see Craig Wright, "The Palm Sunday Procession in Medieval Chartres," in *The Divine Office in the Latin Middle Ages: Methodology and Source Studies, Regional Developments, Hagiography*, ed. Margot E. Fassler and Rebecca A. Baltzer (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 344–71.

29. See Yves Delaporte, *L'ordinaire chartrain du XIIIe siècle: Publié d'après le manuscrit original* (Chartres: Société archéologique d'Eure-et-Loir, 1953), 122.

30. I have found this reading listed in liturgical manuscripts for Paris (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 16038), Rouen (BnF, lat. 759), Amiens (Amiens, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 184), and Laon (Laon, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 215); it was likely used elsewhere as well.

31. The translation into English is taken from James Borders, ed., *Early Medieval Chants from Nonantola*, pt. 3, *Processional Chants*, Recent Researches in the Music of the Middle Ages and Early Renaissance, vol. 32 (Madison, WI: A-R Editions, 1996), liv.

32. Most recently, see Elizabeth Pastan, "Charlemagne as Saint? Relics and the Choice of Window Subjects at Chartres Cathedral," in *The Legend of Charlemagne in the Middle Ages: Power, Faith, and Crusade*, ed. Matthew Gabriele and Jace Stuckey (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 97–135.

33. See Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981). How might we define this "spatial unconscious"? A preliminary exposition would have to consider how space is made to seem transparent (something considered by Lefebvre), how people navigate spaces automatically through naturalized assumptions about how built environments work, and how a work of art is easily "read" because it is structured via familiar spatial semiotics.