The study of spatial concepts among the Hopi Indians of Arizona is a complicated affair. Because the evidence is rich and highly diversified, the interpretations tend to be so as well.

Hopi spatial concepts can roughly be divided into two general categories: 1. cosmological space as revealed through mythology, and the ritual space of the ceremonials, and 2. terrestrial space as revealed through language, village layouts, agricultural holdings, and other social, political or geographical referents.

This paper will concentrate upon the first general category. But it should be emphasized that mythological models also serve as a basis for a number of referents belonging to the second group, and therefore due reference will be made when necessary.

There are a number of specialized studies relating to the second group which should be mentioned. Hopi linguistic space has been given a rigorous scientific investigation by E. Malotki. Studies of village layouts were made by C. Mindeleff and recently by S. A. Stubbs (an aerial photographic study). Studies of agricultural holdings have been made by R. M. Bradfield and C. D. Forde among others. Other studies concerning related topics are F. H. Ellis' study of boundary markers and M. Titiev's studies of social space.

Efforts have been made to systematize the evidence for Hopi cosmological space and ritual space. But all of the attempts hitherto published have been simplistic. Titiev's opinion that duality is the basis of all Hopi ceremonial systematization has been accepted without question by later research. For example, L. Hieb built upon this theory in his unpublished dissertation in 1972 and reiterated it in 1979. He considered the Hopi six-directional system (consisting of the horizontal and vertical world points) as being a group of binary units—which is correct—but he has delineated an
elaborate bipartite system—which is incorrect. R. M. Bradfield postulates the same theory. He added depth to his analysis by introducing the mythological personae associated with directional ideology. But the very complexity of the historical end-product forced him to explain certain aspects away in order to fit his theory.7

A system reduced to elaborate bipartitions is highly arbitrary. It postulates a simplicity which the indigenous evidence does not allow. There is no strict duality in Hopi life as with, for example, the Tewa.8 Hopi duality is, in fact, only one aspect of an excitingly complex picture.

The Hopi use both the quadripartite and the sexpartite divisions of the world. These two must be considered as being two independent systems. The sexpartite system, i.e., horizontal-vertical orientation, I will call the “Astrosphere Orientation.” This system is peculiar to the Pueblo Culture, and furthermore, the semantic content of this ideology differs from pueblo to pueblo. This division of the world represents a systematization of the known world for a tribe like the Zuni, as Durkheim and Mauss noted, but does not apply to the Hopi as they wrongly surmised. Zoological, biological, geological and cultural systematization is to be found intimately linked with the Hopi clan system.9

The six-directional tables constructed by Lévi-Strauss and again by Bradfield10 require comment, but before I do, the reader must be made aware of the state of the data before us.11 In the first place, it cannot be overemphasized that the people called “Hopi” are actually a loosely organized group of independent matrilineal clans. Each clan has its own traditions about how things came to be as they are. And each clan has its own set of rituals and ceremonies with each their origin, efficacy, area of responsibility and method of performance. Within each clan are individuals of varying age and status who can produce varying degrees of accurate statements concerning their religious ideas when interviewed. Not only are there disagreements between clan traditions, but one also finds conflicting traditions and institutions peculiar to Mesa and village affiliations.

In the second place, we find that the early ethnographic data is of varying quality depending upon the researcher’s knowledge of the