

Ex-position Feature Topic Call for Papers

Community Dynamics: Urban Spaces, Rural Places, and the In-Between

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Space multifariously reflects and shapes the human experience. Space is imbued with all kinds of events, memories, and stories. Human action unfolds within space, human perception defines it, and human behavior molds and is molded by it. Space is mutually constitutive of human culture. From ancient Jericho and Renaissance London to today's New York, communal gatherings have transformed the natural environment and given rise to interconnected communities. The conscious use and transformation of spatial resources lie at the heart of the dynamic relationship between nature and humankind.

The division of space into categories such as cities, suburbs, and rural areas plays a pivotal role in the human experience. In the *Iliad*, the high walls of Troy guard the city, besieged by an army encamped on the seashore. Vergil composed his *Aeneid* as Augustus wrote his new regime onto the city of Rome through art and architecture. Medieval London was often compared to celestial Jerusalem, while Florence was the Athens of the Middle Ages. Suburbs, with their theaters, brothels, and inns, were fertile ground for intriguing encounters in the 16th century and beyond. Speculative fiction imagines the dystopian or utopian transformations of these spaces. These examples illustrate the critical role of space emerging time and again as humans strive to make sense of and represent their existence.

Even in the most urbanized periods, most premodern people lived outside cities. In the *Works and Days*, Hesiod praises the worthiness of agrarian toil. In the Bible, Esau, a man of the field, has a power struggle with Jacob, a man dwelling in tents. Chaucer's pilgrims hail from diverse corners of England, converging in a suburban tavern *en route* to a shrine at Canterbury. In Arthurian legend, knights venture from castles and courts to seek adventures in enchanting forests. Still, the rural is often imagined from an urban perspective, such as when shepherds amidst idyllic landscapes embody the human connection to nature. Societies do not merely

document space; they imagine it. The spatial play in the Utopian imagination manifests humans' desire for alternative models of society. Dante wove together geography and landscape in the *Divine Comedy* to align with his poetics of redemption. From Herodotus to Marco Polo to eighteenth-century travel literature, distant lands provided fertile grounds to imagine the other. Closer to home, Virginia Woolf argued for a room of one's own as a space for shaping the imagination.

Space also transcends the physical. Space, per Henri Lefebvre, is a "social morphology" that is "intimately bound up with function and structure" (*Production of Space*, 94). Urban and communal spaces birthed intricate social relationships, some codified, like the law codes of Ancient Greece, the *Rule of St Benedict* for monasteries, or the municipal charter books of medieval free cities, but others, such as Victorian drawing rooms or Jazz Age clubs, not. Indeed, social interactions within the ecosystem of a community, as highlighted by Pierre Bourdieu, depend on the relative position of social actors within the spaces they collectively fashion. Still, as the rise of ecocriticism has shown, the importance of space applies beyond our limited human experience.

Understanding space, therefore, necessitates an interdisciplinary approach. We warmly invite contributions from scholars working in art history, literature, philosophy, history, classical studies, cultural studies, and beyond. We also welcome studies on the cultural dialogue between East and West. Topics may include, but are not limited to:

- The archaeology of space
- Intersectionality of urban/suburban/ rural spaces
- Space and ecocriticism
- Boundaries and borders
- Space as an anchor for communities
- Gender and/in space
- Artistic exploration and exploitation of space
- Space and Utopia/Nowhere
- Space and migration
- Space and sound/music
- Thinking space and society

This Feature Topic collaborates with the Chinese journal *Chung-Wai Literary Quarterly*. We also welcome submissions from the participants of The Eighteen International Conference of the Taiwan Association of Classical, Medieval and Renaissance Studies, which will be held at National Taiwan University on November 1-2, 2024.

**In addition to themed sections, each issue of *Ex-position* includes a “General Topics” section that welcomes submissions year-round.

**For the journal submission guidelines, please visit <http://ex-position.org>.