

Introduction: [SPACE]

Editorial Team 2026

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Thinking of space, a natural paradox unfolds—space as an ever-expanding, boundless plane of matter, yet also something we know can be exhausted, limited, enclosed. How can these meanings coexist within a single concept? We move through space, inhabit it, depend on it, and yet rarely pause to question it. It remains so constant, so omnipresent, that it escapes scrutiny. In this sixth issue of the *Leiden Elective Academic Periodical (LEAP)*, we dwell within space more deliberately, to stretch its limits until its contradictions begin to speak. We follow its origins through territorial and other confining definitions, and inspect what emerges when those limits begin to loosen. We ask: Did we arrive within it, or did space precede us long before we tried to name and contain it? What does it mean to navigate space, and how does it influence us? How is it constructed and experienced with human senses? In this edition of LEAP, we explore these and many other spatial questions, playing with its conceptual elasticity.

If space resists a singular definition, this becomes especially visible across the disciplines represented in this issue. Fields such as linguistics, literary studies, disability studies, psychology, international relations, sound studies, digital media studies, philosophy, urban studies, and cultural analysis each approach space through different conceptual frameworks. In disability studies, for example, attention to bodily and cognitive variation shifts the focus towards the structures and infrastructures that act as barriers, rendering environments hostile for individuals with disabilities. In

linguistics, discourses surrounding language reveal how linguistic variation is tied to social and cultural evaluation, often shaping political dynamics. Sound studies inherently engage with space, as sound travels through different media that may alter its form. The connection between sound and space can shape how people perceive and relate to places, which play a crucial role in asserting space for diverse identities. Urbanism conceptualises space as a socially produced battleground shaped across time, and where actors, through an engagement with creation, can lean towards a re-appropriation of space from hegemonic structures. Similarly, in international relations, questions of space often involve acts of reclamation tied to identity. Whether through individual resistance to regimes that regulate intimate life or through transitional justice processes in which victims claim political space, these dynamics demonstrate how space can be actively reappropriated. While these perspectives sometimes overlap, they can also reveal tensions. Both guide us towards a better understanding of space, of its experience and of its representation. This journal is a project centred around the interdisciplinary conceptions of space and uses them to form a line of connection that links our work with one another. In exploring space, we are exploring possibilities and limits alike, delving into the omnipresence of a concept that affects each and every one of us.

This exploration of space is divided into three thematic blocks: “Navigating the World”, “Between Reality and Representation”, and “Territorial Contestations”. “Navigating the World”, with contributions by Roberto Ochoa, Patrīcija Bauze, and Simona Bizunovičiūtė, shows, through proprioception and through ideological and epistemological frameworks, that space is socially and historically constructed. In “Between Reality and Representation”, Eline Balster, Stephanie Lones, and Zuzia Dzierzędzka demonstrate how media is an interactive and unfolding space that shapes and is shaped by its contents, creators, and consumers. These authors thus play an active role in this process with their work. Finally, in “Territorial Contestations”, Matthijs Verzijden, Katharina Eder, Farah Pahlevan, and Daniëlle Baan and David Sary show that this spatial production is a political process shaping our identities and everyday lives. Similarly, the construction

of this edition of LEAP has been a shared process of personal and academic development.

Navigating the World

The contributions in this first thematic block approach the conceptualisation of space not as a unified problem but as a field of tensions unfolding across different levels of inquiry. Instead of treating space as given, they interrogate the conditions under which it is thought, perceived, and practiced. Taken together, these first three articles articulate a dialectical movement between epistemological critique, embodied experience and everyday spatial practice under a shared concern over the legacy of modernity's impact on understanding space and its claim to universality.

Roberto Ochoa opens this block with his article "Space Agnosticism as a Challenge to Modernity: A Comment on Jean Robert's Article 'Place in the Space Age'", which situates space within a broader historical and epistemological critique, interrogating its apparent universality. Ochoa follows Swiss architect and urban planner Jean Robert. Engaging with Robert's argument that space is not a universal *a priori* but a socio-historical construct, the article reveals how modernity abstracts and standardises spatial experience, producing environments that are epistemologically neat but experientially flattened. In this context, modernity appears not simply as a historical period, but as a regime in which space becomes central to the ordering of the world. By foregrounding the emergence of space as a dominant conceptual theory, Ochoa destabilises the assumption that space functions as an objective container of phenomena, arguing instead that the concept of space is produced within specific configurations of knowledge and power.

Patricija Bauze's article "Our Place in Space: An Experienced rather than a Positioned Reality" takes this problem up from the standpoint of lived experience, shifting the focus from epistemological construction to embodied perception. Drawing on French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, as well as on empirical research in cognitive science, she examines the body as a primary site through which spatial relations are constituted. The systematic distortions observed in what is called *body image*, such as overestimation of length and underestimation

of volume, are approached in the article not as failures of measurement but as indications of a more fundamental mismatch between lived space and its “objective” representations. In this sense, the body is not simply located in space but operates as the very condition for spatial orientation. If Ochoa challenges the objectivity of space at a level of epistemic notion, Bauze demonstrates its instability at the level of subjective perception and cognition: space is not only conceptualised but also enacted through a body that ultimately resists being reduced to seemingly objective metric systems.

Simona Bizunovičiūtė’s contribution “Species of Scriptures: An Infraordinary Methodology for Urban Observation” extends this tension into the domain of everyday spatial practice under conditions of contemporary digital mediation. If space is neither epistemologically neutral, according to Ochoa, nor perceptually stable, as Bauze notes, the question then becomes how it is navigated, reproduced, and contested in lived environments. Drawing on Perec’s notion of the infraordinary, in dialogue with French theorists Henri Lefebvre’s and Michel de Certeau’s accounts of socially produced and practiced space, the article proposes a methodological response to this problem. Through ethnographic fieldwork centered around unauthorized inscriptions in The Hague, Bizunovičiūtė explores how attention ecologies, especially those shaped by digital infrastructures and algorithmic curation, constitute what becomes visible, valuable and meaningful in urban spaces. In this context, the infraordinary emerges as a counter-practice—a way of attending to the aspects of spatial experience that evade patterns of consumption enforced by algorithmic mediation of images.

Read together, these three contributions do not converge on a single definition of space. Rather, they discuss its ambiguities across three interconnected levels: the critique of conceptual foundations for understanding space, the instability of its embodied perception, and the methodological challenge of apprehending it in practice. What unfolds is not a rejection of spatial thinking but a reconfiguration of it. Space does not appear as a fixed object or a purely subjective experience; it emerges as a dynamic process constituted through the interplay of knowledge, perception, and everyday actions. Ultimately, space remains irreducible to any one

single mode of analysis and opens towards manifold possibilities of analytic interaction—not easily pinned down, nor exhaustible, space paradoxically reaches outward instead of closing in and delimiting its potentials.

Between Reality and Representation

The realm of media emerges as a key site in which these dynamics of spatiality can be observed. In this section, our writers critically engage with media in the form of a medieval autohagiography,¹ a 20th-century classic, and a digital documentary. Through their analyses of media, they explore a virtual space where the real and imagined meet each other.² Marshall McLuhan summarised media as “extensions of man,”³ capturing this in-between-ness that makes it such a powerful tool, rooted in reality and at the same time departing from it. Media can discuss space, but more often than that, *provide* space for the expression and negotiation of humanity. The media space is constantly shaping and being shaped by its contents, creators, and consumers, and our authors become participants in these processes. Their analyses interact with the media space as new interpretations are drawn from and projected onto it. Yet space is not simply a canvas waiting to be projected upon. In fact, few media spaces illustrate the back-and-forth process of modification between the medium object, content, and participant as well as the internet.

Eline Balster’s article “Grieving Without Soil: Digital spectrality and the necessity of physical space in *_when_scrolling_becomes_screaming_* (2023),” demonstrates how far the interaction with the internet as contemporary media stretches into our lives. In her analysis of the desktop documentary made by visual artist Janilda Bartolomeu after the death of her father, Balster investigates how the digital space dominates the modern everyday, both allowing for and prohibiting a feeling of loss—and through that,

¹ In her article, Stephanie Lones combines the concepts of hagiography, i.e. the story of a saint’s life, and autobiography to describe the media object of her research.

² Shekh Moinuddin, *Media Space and Gender Construction: A Comparative Study of State Owned and Private Channels in the Post Liberalisation Period* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2010).

³ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: Extensions of Man* (Ark, 1964).

of grief. After all, how may we feel loss if the lost one can be found just a click away? Balster investigates this question in relation to space, looking at the mechanisms of grieving that are provided in the digital space but discovering the necessity of physical ground in order to find closure. Her analysis illustrates media as an in-between space—the ability to constantly find traces of lost ones, resulting in an imagined world in which they never left. With special consideration of the Dutch-Cape Verdean artist’s family history, Balster brings together the notions of physical and digital space to paint a picture of how the modern-day grieving process is shaped by the unforgetting internet.

Stephanie Lones returns to a much earlier form of media, as the object of her study is what some consider the first English-language autobiography. It stands in purposely stark contrast to the digital medium analysed in the previous article, to show that modern perceptions cannot simply be applied to past media objects. In her work “Navigating Space as a Disabled Creature: Undergoing Medieval Womanhood, Disability, and Spiritualism in *The Book of Margery Kempe*,” Lones analyses the writings of a 14th-century mystic and pilgrim through the lens of gendered medieval disability studies. By considering the medium object a product of its time, she argues that Margery Kempe should be considered a disabled woman, disabled both by her own body and by the society around her. Evidence for this lies in Kempe’s engagement in the practice of *imitatio Christi* and her referral to herself as “creatur,” as well as in embodied symptoms of disability. Most prominently, however, Lones argues that the *Book* itself is proof of Kempe’s disability: written in response to her ableist and discriminatory environment, the *Book* provides a space for the mystic to express her disability. In her line of argumentation, Lones thus leaves behind anachronistic medicalised analyses of Kempe’s disabilities but rather applies a more inclusive framework to accurately capture Kempe’s multifaceted identity as expressed in the mystic’s own space.

Remaining in the literary realm, Zuzia Dzierzędzka’s “Sound of Subscendence: Navigating Soundscapes in George Orwell’s 1984” turns towards a more modern work. Her article revolves around the power of sound in Orwell’s literary classic, how it functions both as a mechanism of oppression but also carries the

potential for brief moments of freedom and even rebellion. Drawing on the philosophical concept of subsistence, developed by ecocritical scholar Timothy Morton, which refers to how parts may become bigger than the whole they make up, Dzierżdzka demonstrates how sound allows the individuals participating in the prison-like world of *1984* to supersede the oppression—through sound, the parts become bigger than the whole. In a close reading of five scenes, she illustrates how the oppressor utilises both loudness and silence as instruments of control. At the same time, however, she uncovers the paradoxical potential of this sounded environment, which—despite aiming to achieve total control—allows moments of reprieve and autonomy through subsistence. Dzierżdzka’s article serves as a bridge leading to the third section: While no media is apolitical, her explicit discussion of the political implications of sound is taken up in the final section.

Territorial Contestations

The third and final block engages with the politics of space, examining how space is produced, navigated, and contested through political processes. These dynamics emerge from tensions between imposed structures of spatial control and lived practices of space. In line with the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, these planes of reference in themselves can be understood as spaces where power and identity are contested, negotiated and exercised.⁴ Space is subjected to processes that are dynamic and create tangible effects.⁵ From migration flows to urban development to questions of justice and identity, space is never neutral but always shaped by competing forces and interests. In this sense, this last section focuses on space as being an arena in which different forms of agency interact, sometimes in the pursuit of hegemony, and sometimes simply to assert existence.

In "Sounding Hakka Spaces in Taiwan," Matthijs Verzijden explores how notions of space are crafted and contested through

⁴ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Qu'est ce que la philosophie ?* (Les Editions de Minuit, 2011), 39-62.

⁵ Mustafa Dikeç, "Space as a Mode of Political Thinking," (Geoforum 43, no. 4, 2012): 669–76, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2012.01.008>

singing and listening to Hakka mountain songs in Taiwan. Analysing five case studies, he shows how local initiatives craft space to sing mountain songs in reaction to national policies, how local space to sing mountain songs is contested by transnational developments, how audible differences between Chinese and Taiwanese mountain songs are used to distinguish between China and Taiwan as different spaces; and how Hakka people claim their space in Taiwanese history and contemporary society through singing and listening to mountain songs. He then discusses how his analysis contributes to the concept of the Sinophone, arguing that music and sonic culture in general is central in understanding what it means to be Chinese. The struggle of Hakka people for space in Taiwan is part of a larger effort to contest space for Taiwan in the world.

Relating the sonic space to the linguistic space, Katharina Eder's "It is not German, it is replacing German": Why a multiethnic youth variety is perceived as a threat to the German nation" examines public and media discourse surrounding *Kiezdeutsch* between 2009 and 2012. She situates debates about language within broader discussions of immigration, identity, and social belonging in Berlin, by investigating the variety *Kiezdeutsch*, spoken by both multilingual and monolingual youth, reflects the diversity of urban neighbourhoods. Through a corpus-based approach, the article analyses how discourse about *Kiezdeutsch* reproduces ideologies linking linguistic variation to social and cultural decline. It focuses on the belief that the variety threatens "standard" German and that its speakers pose a risk to German society. Three interconnected layers of this ideology are identified, each contributing to processes of othering, exclusion, and in-group/out-group construction. The study highlights how terms such as "immigrant" and "migration background" are racialised in German discourse, which reinforces hierarchies of belonging and notions of deservingness. By analysing a period preceding a key political shift with the rise of the far-right party *Alternative für Deutschland*, Eder demonstrates how contemporary xenophobic and racist narratives around immigration and language were already taking shape between 2009 and 2012, offering critical insight into the foundations of current debates.

Turning from linguistic to affective dimensions, Farah Pahlevan's "Affective Territories of Resistance in Iran's Women-Life-Freedom Movement" explores how resistance persists under authoritarian rule when public protest is violently suppressed. While large mobilisation has been met with severe repression, resistance persists beyond tangible protest sites. Pahlevan argues that political agency is sustained through "affective territories", which are relational spaces constituted of shared emotions such as grief, care, and solidarity. Going beyond conventional spatial analyses focused on streets or institutions, she highlights the intimate and embodied aspects of resistance. She develops a specific framework showing how authoritarian regimes seek to regulate not only public space but also emotional and interpersonal life. She then demonstrates how everyday relational practices reproduce solidarity and participate in maintaining the collective movement. Applying this framework to the Women-Life-Freedom movement as it came about in Iran, Pahlevan shows how affective forms of resistance enable movements to survive repression and concludes by showing how resistance is continuously reconstituted through emotional bonds, ensuring that it persists even when violently restrained in public space.

Finally, Daniëlle Baan and David Sary examine transitional justice and the remembrance of the Cambodian Genocide by conceptualising space as both a metaphor for political participation and the physical arenas in which such participation can occur. Adopting an actor-focused approach, the article highlights how actors' experiences and practices shape transitional justice in practice. While formal transitional justice mechanisms such as the ECCC have contributed to legal accountability, they also risk monopolising transitional justice and remembrance, thereby constraining political space. Moreover, such mechanisms may narrow the discourses and standardised conceptions of transitional justice, as well as narratives aligned with the interests of the Cambodian government. However, institutions do not exercise absolute control over the political space of the Cambodian Genocide. Cambodian communities continue to assert and expand it through bottom-up practices rooted in local, cultural, and communal dynamics. By examining initiatives including *FRAGMENTS #KH50*, and the work of Vann Nath and Rithy

Panh, the article explores how survivors and further generations both engage with and challenge institutional frameworks. In doing so, Cambodians contest institutional dominance and actively reclaim political spaces, blurring the distinction between victims and perpetrators, extending the notions of responsibility beyond the senior cadres responsible for the genocide, and practicing remembrance through everyday acts.

Transcending Boundaries

Our edition of LEAP demonstrates the sheer variety of ways in which space can be conceptualised. One conceptualisation that must not be overlooked, however, is the journal itself. It is a space shaped by interaction between disciplines, by an overcoming of the boundaries put upon us by our individual fields. The hours spent working on the journal provided us with a space for intense discussion, a space for new ideas to grow and flourish. It was constituted by an outward-reaching, ever-expanding plane that allowed us to broaden our horizons beyond the spaces we were used to, beyond what made up our everyday reality. At the same time, it was delineated by our common interests and concerns, which transcend the three themes outlined above. While Bizunovičiūtė discusses the urban landscape and Balster explores grief, both investigate the hypermediatisation of contemporary life and how it affects the modern living experience. And although Pahlevan's and Bauze's articles might seem very different from each other at first glance, they engage with the embodied experience of space and the consequences it has for our view of ourselves and others. Both Verzijden's and Eder's analyses, furthermore, revolve around how people negotiate contested spaces inside their nations. Finally, Dzierzędzka's, Ochoa's and Baan and Sary's articles, despite engaging with entirely different topics, all ask the question: Does space simply exist, or can it be made? Like the book Lones analyses in her work, this edition of LEAP provided us with a space of our own. Through discussing space, we created it. With this thought in mind, we invite you to begin reading our individual contributions.

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