

Beyond Physical Boundaries: How 22 Scholars Have Transformed Our Understanding of Space

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Abstract

The concept of space has long been a focal point of scholarly inquiry, but its meaning has evolved beyond traditional geographic and physical understandings. This paper examines the multidimensional nature of space by synthesizing the works of 22 influential scholars, including Henri Lefebvre, Michel Foucault, David Harvey, and Doreen Massey. These theorists have redefined space as a dynamic, relational force, shaped by and shaping social, political, and economic processes. The paper categorizes their contributions into key thematic areas—physical, social, political, economic, virtual, and cultural spaces—and explores the progression of spatial theory through these lenses. Drawing on insights from sociology, urban studies, political theory, and geography, the paper highlights how space functions not merely as a passive backdrop for human activity but as an active agent influencing and influenced by power, identity, and social relations. The evolving nature of space is discussed in relation to contemporary issues such as globalization, urbanization, the rights of the city movement, and the emergence of digital spaces. By reviewing these scholars' work, the paper also examines the fluidity of space as both a medium and product of human interaction, encompassing physical environments, psychological effects, and cultural identity formation. This thematic approach allows for a critical engagement with the concept of space and provides insights into how space is a key element in understanding modern societal structures and power dynamics. Ultimately, the paper offers a comprehensive review of the theoretical landscape of space, contributing to ongoing discussions in social sciences and urban studies about the complex interplay between space and human experience.

Keywords: Space, scholars, power dynamics, globalization, postcolonialism, digital spaces, inequality, resistance, social structures.

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Introduction

I have been intrigued by the concept of space for a long time. In my own research humble journey, I have explored this idea in several contexts: the effect of spatial arrangements on prison life for inmates, residential transitions of slum-dwellers relocated to rehousing sites, and how street vendors relate to public space, as they work incessantly to place a claim against law enforcement. These studies expose a basic common feature: space is multi-dimensional and flexible.

The space correlatively shapes social actors, as they are shaping it with their practices and interpersonal interactions. The duality of space has made me wonder how space affects its human subjects and observers. I have had this in mind for a long time; I am convinced that the answer can only lie in an extensive review of the work accomplished on the question, notably through contributions from social science researchers.

As argued here, the meaning of "space" is significantly different in the social sciences in comparison to its traditional understanding of geography and physical environments. Space is not an abstract or neutral stage upon which human events are played out but a dynamic force that in itself influences and is influenced by different forms of social relations, political agendas, economic functions, and cultural constructions. Several scholars working across disciplines have also contributed to this redefinition of space, each adding their perspective on how space functions in society.

In answer to this call, this paper attempts to summarize 22 renowned scholars who have written about the idea of space. It critically employs some key theoretical frameworks (social space, urban space, relational space, virtual space, political space, and economic space) to unpack the production and experiences of the spaces in question. The paper discusses the concept of space and its progression through works and figures such as Henri Lefebvre, Michel Foucault, David Harvey, and Doreen Massey about modern issues like globalization, urbanization/rights of the city movement, and even the emergence of digital spaces. The incorporation of these multiple views illustrates the various ways space functions, within a very intricate web in terms of both solid and liquid nature of power, social hierarchy, class division, and economic exploitation.

Indeed the concept of space in this paper exceeds its physical dimensions, including social and even symbolic layers that help shape how individual people and communities feel about their environment. Furthermore, as the studies discussed in this article demonstrate, space functions both as a medium and product of human activity be it the psychological effects of urban life, the commodification of space within capitalist societies, or cultural identity building within post-colonial contexts. The paper, in the end, seeks to present an organized compilation of these

contributions that provides insight into a contemporary theoretical engagement with space in relation to the modern world.

The primary focus of this paper's methodology is on qualitative and thematic research. It is based on a comparative analysis of various academic works on the concept of space, including scholars from sociology, geography, political theory, and urban studies. The paper organizes the theoretical frameworks on space into distinct clusters, including physical, social, digital, political, economic, and cultural space. By organizing the contributions around these categories, the study allows for a nuanced understanding of how each scholar's views contribute to the broader discourse on space.

The data for this research are derived from secondary sources, specifically the writings of 22 renowned scholars, which include Henri Lefebvre, Michel Foucault, David Harvey, and Doreen Massey. The papers, books, and articles authored by these scholars are reviewed and analyzed for key insights, concepts, and theoretical approaches. They examine the evolution of space as a theoretical concept and how it has been applied to contemporary social problems such as urbanization, globalization and the digital revolution.

Thematic analysis is employed as the primary technique to categorize the material, where recurring themes across different works are identified, compared, and contrasted. This allows for an exploration of how the meaning and function of space have shifted over time, in response to social, political, and economic changes. In addition, a synthesis of the scholars' contributions is made to understand the broader implications of space as not just a physical entity, but as a construct shaped by and shaping human experiences.

Given the qualitative nature of the study, thematic analysis is an appropriate methodological approach. The thematic analysis allows for the systematic identification and categorization of key themes across the work of various scholars. This approach not only helps in understanding the theoretical evolution of the concept of space, but also provides a comprehensive framework for exploring how space is produced, experienced, and represented across different socio-political contexts.

In addition to thematic analysis, a comparative analysis of different theoretical perspectives is essential for highlighting the nuances and contradictions within the academic discourse on space. This comparison will demonstrate the interconnections between spatial theory and contemporary societal issues like globalization, urbanization, and digitalization.

The current paper will be addressing the following question guided henceforth by the subsequent hypotheses:

How does the concept of space, as theorized by key scholars across different disciplines, evolve in its understanding and function, and how does this evolution reflect the changing dynamics of power, social relations, and identity in contemporary society?

- Theories of space, particularly those rooted in social and cultural theory, have shifted from viewing space as a passive backdrop to human activity to seeing it as a dynamic, relational force that both shapes and is shaped by human practices.
- The redefinition of space, as presented by scholars like Lefebvre, Foucault, and Massey, reveals a growing recognition of space as an essential element in understanding power dynamics, social inequalities, and cultural identities.

Historical Development of the Concept of Space

Over time, the ideas of “space” among social sciences have experienced numerous metamorphoses due to developments in society, technology, and academic thinking. At first, the interpretation of space was influenced mainly by geography and physical environments. Scholars like Friedrich Ratzel and Ellen Churchill Semple highlighted the concept of environmental determinism as if human societies and cultures were created simply by their physical context. In this perspective, space was essentially understood as physical geography, highlighting how natural landscapes impact social development (Peet 1998, p. 54).

The rise of urban sociology with the work of The Chicago School in the 20th century constituted a further watershed, tilting the stabilized understanding of social space on its head. The concentric zone theory proposes that urban environments are structured in certain ways that influence the nature of social relations and communities. Robert Park, Ernest Burgess, and others developed this theoretical framework. The sociological interest in space (now cities) went beyond places where people interact, conflict, and develop (Park & Burgess 1925, 50).

Newer perspectives of space, including Henri Lefebvre in the 1970s, illuminated a critical view that space is not given but constructed socially. In *The Production of Space*, he presents a critique challenging earlier understandings, conceptualizing then space as an active element within Western hegemony and the perpetuation of Capitalism. Lefebvre (1991) was credited with putting space at the center of appropriate focus on how societies work, as a concept that is politically shaped, socially structured and economically produced (Lefebvre 1991, 33).

This brings us to how Michel Foucault then developed a relation between space and power. His analysis of the “Panopticon” in *Discipline and Punish* and *The Birth of the Prison* shed light on how spatial configurations can be used as means to restrain society by framing it with space and surveillance that influence behavior. On the other hand, Foucault’s notion of “heterotopias”

broadened our view on space that may potentially make alternative social arrangements or serve as sites of resistance (Foucault 1977, 12).

The concept of space took a new form in the late 20th century when Manuel Castells theorized, based on globalization and technology, how “space of things” turned into “space of flows.” According to Castells, numerous economic, social, and political interactions are now occurring outside of a physical framework in the network society through information technologies. This idea of space removes human interaction from physical closeness, focusing instead on the global enmeshed nature of modern life (Castells 1996, 412).

Nowadays with the ubiquitous rise of digital technologies and virtual spaces, the concept of space goes far beyond what a room can house. Virtual spaces like social media and online communities have introduced a new layer for sociological examination. They also challenge traditional notions of geography and social relations, creating complex environments where physical boundaries become irrelevant through post-territorial systems of interaction and social dynamics (Rheingold, H. (1993).

Theoretical Frameworks

This paper explores how different scholars' contributions to the concept of space are grounded in a number of key theoretical frameworks. Henri Lefebvre sees *social space* as the production of space through human interaction and power (Lefebvre 1991, 68). Space is not empty, according to him; space is socially formed and influenced by capitalism, politics and culture. Space becomes hence a battleground, in which power is fought over by different groups.

The image of *urban space*, partially shaped by the Chicago School's framework, captures how cities facilitate social interaction and organize class relations and community life. Cities are viewed by many as microcosms that reflect greater social trends, with urban structures that replicate disparities and polarities. The analysis of the urban environment as a primary space for social examination, in particular where it is most densely populated, finds its roots in scholars such as Robert Park and Louis Wirth (Park & Burgess 1925, 75).

The idea of *relational space* is developed by Doreen Massey. Accordingly, space is not static, but changes because of dynamic social, economic and political processes. To this, Massey calls attention to the fact that territories are always relational and as such result from various types of movement: people, goods and ideas (Massey 2005, p.61). By adopting such a relational perspective, space is seen as fluid where barriers and distances are increasingly flexible in a globalized world.

Virtual space is a computer- simulated environment that becomes the primary space of interaction. In the age of online and the internet, where digital platforms have given birth to virtual real estate, people are free to construct an identity beyond their mere physical presence. Virtual spaces have none of these limits, but they come with a different form of sociality and power dynamics. Scholars such as Howard Rheingold (1993) explore how these spaces open up new layers of sociality and power dynamics.

Political geography emphasizes the importance of power and governance in producing spatial generalizations about geographic areas. Just as Michel Foucault would posit, the control of space is utilized by political forces in order to discipline and regulate individuals as well as populations. Space then acts as an instrument of power and hegemony echoing larger political structures in society. It deals with the influence of economic forces, especially those that drive capitalism and the class system, on spatial use and organization. According to scholars such as David Harvey, space is produced and controlled by capitalist systems, with urban and rural landscapes reflecting the economic divisions that are associated with this producer/consumer relationship (Harvey 1973). How space is differently distributed, commodified, and contested speaks to the nature of the economic system as well.

The 22 scholars introduced:

Here we present a selection of scholars who have paved the way for creating an understanding of the concept of space. However, this list, while not comprehensive, includes key figures with a short biography, main idea contributions, their definitions of space, and some quotes that illustrate where they highlight their theoretical position. These scholars work on the ground to analyze space as shaped by a range of social, political, economic, and cultural forces. Georg Simmel ponders the psychological impact of urban living; Henri Lefebvre defiantly retorts to capitalist space. While Michel Foucault and Erving Goffman discuss how power and social interaction shape space, Homi K. Bhabha and Doreen Massey theorise the cultural hybridity and relational space. Coming together, their work offers an intricate and genuinely thick understanding of how space is produced, lived, and contested.

1. Georg Simmel (1858-1918)

As a German sociologist, Simmel penned his pioneering works on this subject at the turn of the 20th century and during an era in which European cities were undergoing a paradigmatic urbanization. In addition, his studies are centered on the psychological impact on people having to live in a city. Simmel claims in *The Metropolis and Mental Life* (1903) that urban spaces shape individual psychological experiences, fostering thus detachment and intellectualization. Here, space is defined as both physical and social. In cities, physical proximity does not necessarily lead

to meaningful social interaction, creating hence both opportunities for freedom and alienation. He explains, "The relationships and concerns of the typical metropolitan person are not confined by the narrow circle of closely knit exclusive social groups... Instead metropolitan life takes place in a much more fluid and anonymous space" (Simmel 1903, p.12).

2. Henri Lefebvre (1901-1991)

Writing at the mid-point of the 20th century, Lefebvre (a French Marxist sociologist and philosopher) critiqued capitalist formations that shaped urban life. He argues in his key text *The Production of Space* (1974) that space is made by the actions and power dynamics of men. He designed a threefold framework of spatial practice, representations of space, and representational spaces. To be more specific, Lefebvre describes space as a social product (not merely physical or abstract) that is never neutral and always mediated by political and economic forces. He wrote, "Space is a (social) product... it is also a means of control and hence of domination of power" (Lefebvre 1974, p. 26).

3. Norbert Elias (1897-1990)

Elias was a German sociologist who lived and wrote in the first half of the 20th century. He focused mainly on social change in Western society. Elias wrote *The Civilizing Process* (1939) where he analyzed the regulation of social behaviors in response to society's development, and how the space is managed accordingly. For Elias, space correlates with social structures and power relations through spatial boundaries and the control of bodies. He argues, "The physical distance between people became the most graphic way of expressing this hierarchical power relationship and social order".

4. Michel Foucault (1926-1984)

In the mid-20th century, the French philosopher, Foucault argued that power and knowledge are embedded in spatial arrangements. In *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963) and *Discipline and Punish* (1975), Foucault argues that space is used as a contrivance for discipline through structures such as the "Panopticon" where space has been designed for control. Space for Foucault is intertwined with power, wherein institutions determine what subjects are visible and thus controlled. "The Panopticon is a machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad" (Foucault 1975, 201).

5. Erving Goffman (1922-1982)

The Canadian sociologist Goffman developed his work in the mid-20th Century. His major work is done on symbolic interaction (how people present themselves in a social environment). In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1956) and *Behavior in Public Places* (1963), Goffman

examines the way people use symbols to control their lives and interactions based on a social "performance". Space is central in constructing the nature of these performances, notably in the distinction between public (front stage) and private (backstage) behavior. Goffman recognizes space as being both physical and symbolic. He claims that settings feature prominently in shaping behavior, with social interactions differing based on whether they occur in public or private spaces. "In public places, the regulation of personal space is crucial to maintaining both social harmony and the privacy of the self" (Goffman 1963, 29).

6. Michel de Certeau (1925-1986)

The French philosopher and sociologist, Michel de Certeau, concerned himself with everyday life and power structures. In *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1980), De Certeau explores the ways people resist and subvert the dominant structure in their quotidian practices. De Certeau sets the difference between "strategies" (systematically organized operations on spatial practices) and "tactics" (the practice of individual re-appropriation and personalization of space). De Certeau sees space as fluid and socially constructed. Nevertheless, the space is not just a passive background, it constantly transforms human activities and movements. He says, "Space is a practiced place. Thus the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into a space by walkers" (De Certeau 1980, 117).

7. Yi-Fu Tuan (1930-2022)

Tuan, a Chinese American geographer has been one of the most influential figures in the development of humanistic geography during the late 20th century. He worked on the relationship between space, place, and human experience. In *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (1977), Tuan separates space (abstract, blank) from place (space charged with meaning because of human experience). Tuan describes space as an "abstract and infinite" concept that becomes a "place" when the interaction of human beings makes it meaningful. According to him, "Space is more abstract than place. What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value" (Tuan 1977, 6).

8. Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002)

Bourdieu was a French social theorist and sociologist known for his work on social capital, habitus, and power. He formulated his theories in the mid to late 20th century and laid great emphasis on the relation between social structures and individual behavior. In *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1979), Bourdieu uses the metaphor of "social space" to describe how individuals occupy positions based on their accumulation of economic, cultural, and social capital. Bourdieu's "social space" refers to structured relationships and power dynamics rather than physical environments.

9. Jane Jacobs (1916-2006)

Jacobs was an American-Canadian journalist and urbanist who ended up fundamentally reshaping the way mid-century town planning was viewed through her popular work, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961). Jacobs argued for more human-centered approaches to urban design, emphasizing the importance of mixed-use neighborhoods and community engagement. She introduced concepts like "eyes on the street," which highlight the role of public interaction in creating safe, lively spaces. Through her eyes, urban space is a living, breathing thing; it is formed through human interactions and movements. She describes the public sphere as giving birth to community as social performance. She believes that "Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody only because and only when they are created by everybody" (Jacobs 1961, 238).

10. David Harvey (1935-present)

Harvey is a British geographer and Marxist theorist who developed his ideas during the latter half of the 20th century, focusing on how capitalism was both produced and shaped by capitalist society and urbanization. In *Social Justice and the City* (1973), Harvey critiques urban spaces as products of capitalist forces, arguing for spatial justice and equitable distribution of resources. His work investigates the manifestation of economic inequalities and social stratification through urban spaces. In other words, Harvey sees space as molded within capitalist dynamics whereby spatial injustice reflects broader economic injustices. "The right to the city is a right to change ourselves by changing the city" (Harvey 1973, 315).

11. Manuel Castells (1942 - present)

Castells, a Spanish sociologist, is best known for his work on the role of cities in the global economy. His theories in the second half of the 20th century are mainly concerned about how information technology and globalization impact our urban environments. Perhaps one of Castell's most famous contributions to urban sociology comes through his argument in *The Urban Question* (1972) that urban spaces are produced according to the needs of capitalist forces; a system in which cities become sites for production and labor as well as consumption. Castells defines space as a social product created by economic forces and state policies. Urban space is organized to meet the needs of capital, particularly through housing markets and infrastructure. He argues, "Urban space is not a reflection of the social structure but is itself a means of production, reproduction, and social control" (Castells 1972, 94).

12. Doreen Massey (1944-2016)

Massey, a British geographer, worked mainly on spatial theory and feminist geography in the late 20th century. In *Space, Place, and Gender* (1994), Massey argues that space is relational, dynamic, and socially constructed. Questioning fixed ideas of space and place, she argues that space is something continually shaped by social practices, power configurations, and gendered relations. For Massey, space is relational; it is incessantly produced through economic, social, and political processes. She emphasized that gender is key to how we perceive and design space. "Space is not a flat surface waiting for things to be placed on it but is constantly being made and remade through interactions and relationships" (Massey 1994:5).

13. Richard Sennett (1943- present)

The American sociologist and urbanist Sennett has extensively explored the link between cities and social life. His work emerged in the late 20th century to study how cities physically manifest human interaction and behavior. In *The Fall of Public Man* (1977) and *The Conscience of the Eye* (1990), Sennett argues that urban life has irreparably compromised public life. Urban spaces that were once locations of civic engagement have changed into privatized places, where individuals have been isolated and social cohesion destroyed. Sennett focuses on the distinction between public and private space, arguing that vibrant public spaces are crucial for social interaction, democracy, and diversity. He argues, "Public life has become a matter of avoiding the stranger, a retreat into private life as a haven from the complexity and unpredictability of urban interaction" (Sennett 1977, p. 27).

14. Sharon Zukin (1946-present)

American sociologist Zukin writes about the cultural and economic processes of urban neighborhoods. She is critical of the commodification and gentrification of cities in her later 20th-century and early 21st-century writing. She examines how gentrification and commercialism erase the "authentic" qualities of urban places in her book, *Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places* (2010). She denounces the commercialization of cultural symbols of diversity and heritage, which contribute to the displacement of marginalized communities. Space, according to Zukin, is indeed a mirror of social practices, cultural identity, and economic forces. She investigates the ways that market forces have pressed diverse spaces into more commodified and homogeneous environments of consumption. "Authenticity as a cultural form is produced through social practices that take place in space. Yet in cities like New York, these authentic spaces are being systematically dismantled" (Zukin 2010: 23).

15. Saskia Sassen (1949-present)

Dutch-American sociologist Sassen is an expert in globalization, cities, and migration. In *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (1991), she introduced the concept of “global cities”, which refers to a city forming a node in the global economic system that concentrates on financial and corporate services. She examines how they act as gateways to global flows of capital, labor, and information; thus producing new types of spatial inequality. For Sassen, urban space is fluid and interconnected, shaped by global flows of capital and labor. Global cities are spaces where extreme wealth and poverty coexist, reflecting the polarization inherent in the global economy. She believes that "The global city is a space where the dynamics of global capital come into sharp relief with the juxtaposition of extreme wealth and poverty" (Sassen 1991, 45).

16. Edward Soja (1940-2015)

As an American urban theorist and geographer, Soja developed his work in the late 20th century. He was interested in the theory of space, urban development, and the relation between society and spaces. In *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (1996), he builds on Henri Lefebvre's theory of social space by introducing the concept of “third space”. Soja describes the 'rest' of the spaces that one inhabits as third space.

He characterizes space as three-dimensional: Firstspace (material/physical), Secondspace (mental/representational), and Thirdspace (the two combining to form all lived experience). According to Soja, space is a simultaneity of real and imagined dimensional entities. His "Thirdspace" is a hybrid of physical and mental spaces where social practices and interactions take place. "Thirdspace is a space of extraordinary openness, a space that is constantly evolving where the real and imagined, the physical and the symbolic intersect and interact" (Soja 1996:57).

17. Mark Gottdiener (born 1943)

Gottdiener, an American sociologist, wrote theoretically and empirically from the perspective of urban sociology and the production of space during the last decade of the 20th century. His work blends Marxist theory with urban studies. Urban space, he contends in *The Social Production of Urban Space* (1985), is not a passive or neutral backdrop on which human activity occurs, but is actively produced by social, political, and economic power. He criticizes functionalist perspectives about urban planning and provides insights into the capitalist production of space. Gottdiener argues that space is socially produced and therefore it is "socially constructed" through interactions of societal forces, particularly capitalist dynamics. "Space is a social product. It is shaped and given meaning by the economic, political, and cultural forces that organize and control society" (Gottdiener 1985, p. 74).

18. Edward T. Hall (1914-2009)

Edward Hall was an American anthropologist who introduced the field of Proxemics, which is one of his greatest contributions to understanding human behavior in different cultures. During the mid-20th century, his research focused on spatial behavior in social interaction. In *The Hidden Dimension* (1966), he invents the concept of proxemics, which distinguishes four spatial zones (intimate, personal, social and public), and describes how the way people use space in social interactions can be influenced by cultural norms. He states, "Man's sense of space is closely related to his sense of self and is culturally conditioned. The way individuals use and perceive space defines their relationships with others" (Hall 1966, p. 105).

19. Marc Augé (1935-present)

Augé, was a French anthropologist who proposed the idea of "non-places" in the early 1990s. His work focuses on modernity, globalization, and the experience of space in supermodern societies. In *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (1992), Augé contrasts "places," which are meaningful and relational, with "non-places," which are transient, functional spaces like airports, shopping malls, and highways that lack social connections and identity. Space is defined by Augé with reference to supermodernity, through non-places as site-specific void of identity, past, and relationality. He believes, "If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place" (Augé 1992, 77).

20. John Urry (1946-2016)

Urry was a sociologist from the UK who wrote about mobility and its social implications. His late 20th and early 21st-century work also challenged conventional notions of space by focusing on fluidity and mobility. *Sociology Beyond Societies* (2000) and *Mobilities* (2007) demonstrate how Urry understood social life as being organized more through networks of mobility than by fixed and territorially bound communities. He uses the term 'sociology of mobility' to describe what is happening as people, goods and information move around the globe. Urry sees space as fluid and networked, shaped by the constant movement of people, goods, and ideas across global networks. "Spaces are increasingly experienced as points in a network of flows rather than as fixed, bounded places" (Urry 2007, 116).

21. Homi K. Bhabha (1949-present)

Bhabha, an Indian-British postcolonial theorist, developed his ideas in the late 20th century, with an emphasis on cultural hybridity, colonialism, and identity negotiation in postcolonial geographies. In *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha presents the notion of a "Third Space", a

liminal space where cultural exchanges and negotiations occur. He argues that identities are formed in these in-between spaces, where colonial and postcolonial forces interact. Bhabha believes that space is fluid and hybrid, especially in regards to colonialism and post-colonialism. He has called it the "third space" where cultural identities are negotiated and redefined. He states, "It is that Third Space, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity" (Bhabha 1994, 37).

22. Ananya Roy (1969-present)

Ananya Roy is an Indian-American urban studies theorist whose work focuses on issues of poverty, urban informality, and gender in global cities. Her work, which is influenced by postcolonial studies and critical urbanism, was written in the first years of the 21st century. Her books *City Requiem, Calcutta: Gender and the Politics of Poverty* (2003) and *Urban Informality: Transnational Perspectives from the Middle East, Latin America, and South Asia* (2004) examine urban poverty/informality as a gendered phenomenon and as a terrain of struggle. She argues that informality is a central mode of urbanization in the Global South, rather than a marginal or exceptional phenomenon. Roy defines space as socially produced and contested, especially in relation to poverty and informality. She emphasizes how marginalized groups, particularly women, navigate urban spaces that are shaped by exclusionary policies and practices. She believes, "Urban space in Calcutta is continuously produced and reproduced through processes of dispossession where the poor, particularly women, are rendered invisible even as they struggle to hold on to the city" (Roy 2003,78).

Synthesis of the Contributions

The ideas of these 22 scholars can be woven together by looking at how they contribute to the concept of space. Their views can be categorized around themes like urban space, social or relational space, political space, and economic space. Scholars like Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey, Jane Jacobs, Manuel Castells, and Saskia Sassen are concerned with urban spaces. For instance, Lefebvre suggests that space is the product of capitalist forces and therefore a site for contestation and political struggle. Harvey and Sassen argue this further by highlighting spatial justice and the role of global capitalism that leads to urban inequality. Jacobs, on the other hand, critiques modern urban planning, calling for cities that are developed with people in mind. Castells argues that cities are key nodes in global networks of power and economy.

By contrast, theorists such as Pierre Bourdieu, Erving Goffman, Michel Foucault, and Doreen Massey argue for social and relational spaces. Goffman, investigates the symbolic aspects of interaction within social space, whereas Bourdieu, his idea of 'social space' is metaphorical and constructed by social hierarchies. Foucault brings another layer into the discussion because space

is a tool for surveillance and control. Massey sees that space is always transformed by the dynamic relationship between social, economic, and political forces. These scholars tend to zoom in on micro-level interpersonal dynamics, while urban theorists focus more on how physical spaces are organized and shaped by large-scale political and economic forces. However, both groups agree on one thing: space is not just a neutral backdrop but a powerful, dynamic force shaped by power relations, whether globally, in cities, or in everyday life.

Foucault and Edward Soja offer relevant political interpretations with respect to the economic dimensions of space. Foucault's notion of *heterotopias* highlights the role played by space in societal discipline and control, whereas Soja's theory of third space combines real and imagined spaces into a contingent situated practice with political relevance. That is not the approach of scholars like Massey and Harvey. Massey's concept of relational space highlights how economic forces, gender, and social inequality shape the spaces we live in, while Harvey reviews how capitalist development results in uneven urban spaces. Although their perspectives differ, all these thinkers recognize that space plays a key role in maintaining power dynamics, whether through political or economic control.

Increasingly, scholars such as Castells and John Urry bring the discussion into the realm of globalization (and to some extent to virtual space). Castells introduces the concept of the *space of flows*, showing how digital networks and global capital reshape human interaction and the spaces in which we live. Urry adds that mobility in both physical and virtual realms redefines our traditional ideas of space, making it more fluid and less bound by geographic limits. Both scholars allow us to grasp how spaces change in the digital era when virtual relationships stretch beyond physical boundaries and new opportunities for economic, social and cultural interactions are established.

Bhabha & Roy's contributions lie in some forms of postcolonial critiques of space. The *Third Space* of Bhabha is the space between colonial and post-colonial identities shaped and reshaped by cultural hybridity and negotiation. Roy, on the other hand, writes about what she calls the shadow spaces in Global South cities; those that are planned and created by society's lateral population sectors, outside the formal planning trajectories. While Bhabha focuses on how cultural identities are negotiated in these spaces, Roy focuses on the economic and political marginalization that characterizes these informal areas. Though these scholars approach their work with different emphases, they both challenge the larger narrative of space by discussing how marginalized and postcolonial communities experience that same place.

The concept of *space* has considerably changed over time. Early classical thinkers gave a modernist perspective to space, understanding it as simply a geographical aspect conditioning social action (Simmel & Park; 1950; Elias; 1978). Simmel studied the way in which the fact of being

rooted in an urban environment affects psychological experience, and Elias was analyzing how norms of civility and social organization shape spatial layout. Nevertheless, as thinkers like Lefebvre, Foucault, and Michel de Certeau stepped onto the stage, the conversation shifted. These postmodern thinkers suggested that space is not only physical but also social and thus always contested. Lefebvre's focus on capitalism, Foucault's emphasis on power and surveillance, and de Certeau's exploration of everyday resistance helped reshape how space was understood in this new era. With globalization and postcolonial perspectives added by figures like Castells, Bhabha, Roy, and Sassen, spatial theory expanded further to cover global cities, informal spaces as well as cultural hybridity.

These varied perspectives can be integrated by recognizing that space operates on multiple levels. Harvey and Lefebvre write about how cities are structured by massive capitalist processes, Bourdieu and Goffman on the other hand give us a perspective into the personal-space experiences of people. The idea of relational space as presented by Massey can be used in conjunction with Castells and Urry's work around virtual space to highlight how our physical and digital spaces are intertwined, constructed, and influenced by social, political, and economic forces of our times. These spaces often overlap, especially in the context of global capitalism and technological progress.

In summary, these 22 scholars collectively provide a broad and multifaceted portrait of space. They show how space is socially produced, contested, and influenced by economic, political, cultural, and relational dynamics. This rich body of work is crucial for analyzing contemporary issues like globalization, urbanization, inequality, and digital transformation, making space thus an essential concept in modern social thought.

Reflection and Discussion

The insights of these 22 scholars provide a rich and varied understanding of space, covering political, economic, social, and cultural dimensions. However, when we delve deeper into their ideas, certain gaps, contradictions, and tensions start to appear. For instance, scholars like Manuel Castells and John Urry focus on how globalization and digital networks reshape space through concepts like the "space of flows" and mobility. These ideas reflect the profound impact that technology and global systems have on our interaction with space. Yet, earlier thinkers like Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey did not place much emphasis on virtual space, despite the fact that digital interactions have become integral to our daily lives. As we move forward in this digital age, there is a growing need to understand how physical and digital spaces influence one another and how they shape our experiences.

When we turn to urban space, the contrasting views of Jane Jacobs and David Harvey highlight an ongoing debate about how cities should evolve. Jacobs favors a decentralized approach to urban planning that is bottom-up and community-driven, arguing for the vibrancy of cities resulting from people actually owning (both symbolically and literally) their neighbourhoods. Harvey, in contrast, points out how capitalism controls the urban process to make an argument that any meaningful change really needs to address systemic inequalities on a broader scale. This tension between grassroots self-organization and top-down structural reform raises fundamental questions of who should really lead the future of our cities and how those cities should be shaped.

The discourse becomes more nuanced when we turn to postcolonial and global perspectives, as explored by Homi K. Bhabha and Ananya Roy, respectively. Bhabha, for example, displays his theory of the *Third Space* as a crucial character of cultural hybridity where mixed identities and traditions intersperse to create something new. Meanwhile, Roy, in turn, centers the economic hardship of informal spaces across cities of the Global South where marginalized communities find their own means of subsistence amidst their exclusion from formal urban infrastructural networks. These two conceptualizations of the same phenomenon (one of cultural fusion and the other of economic exclusion) are not easy to square. They underscore how difficult it is to grasp the realities of life for marginalized communities in cities influenced by a mix of cultural and financial dynamics.

Another contentious area in which scholars differ is the examination of power within space. For Michel Foucault, space is a mechanism of domination; spatial assemblages underpin the power of institutions over the body. Michel de Certeau, on the other hand, does not bother with any of this; he is all about how regular people can resist this control through daily practices. The former dynamic raises the question: to what extent can individuals resist structures that define and govern the spaces in which they live?

The relevance of these scholars' ideas is clear when applied to contemporary issues. For instance, Castells and Saskia Sassen show us how cities such as New York London, or Tokyo are partially shaped by global networks where extreme wealth and deep poverty often exist side by side. Their work has begun to illuminate how migration, global trade, and international connections have always defined the physical landscape of the city. The Covid-19 pandemic has brought to the forefront the digital spaces. Urry and Castell's notion of mobilities and the virtual space are very important to understanding the digital world. For example, remote work and online interactions change our understanding of what space means. The works of Harvey, Sharon Zukin, and Jacobs on the other hand, deal with some of the complications associated with urbanization such as gentrification and housing inequality. Their critiques of capitalism's role in shaping cities encourage us to rethink urban planning so that it benefits all residents, not just the wealthy few.

The environmental crisis has seemingly added another layer of complexity to the study of space. The ideas of relational space proposed by Doreen Massey also provide a useful toolkit to show how ecosystems, cities, and societies are interconnected highlighting thus the environmental change. As the impacts of climate change are felt more and more, future research will need to examine further, how sustainability and climate adaptability reshape how we experience space, with an eye especially on cities.

Looking ahead, the increasing importance of digital and virtual spaces requires new theoretical approaches. We should actually extend Castells and Urry's insight into considering how digital platforms shape social relationships and varieties of economic networks, including a new chapter on aspects such as inequality, surveillance, and disciplinary power. Likewise, the environmental concerns that we have are now calling for a closer investigation into how cities might be created to promote social equity and environment justice alike. Scholars such as Harvey and Massey offer a critical lens for examining the processes that bring about these adjacent goals, and an understanding of how cities might be reimagined to accommodate them.

A further promising field to be tapped in future research would combine cultural and economic approaches towards space. By combining Bhabha's concept of cultural hybridity and Roy's emphasis on economic vulnerability, we can draw a more nuanced picture of how marginalized communities inhabit urban spaces, specifically in the Global South. The way we use public spaces has also changed during the COVID-19 pandemic and scholars, like Richard Sennett and Zukin, could be revisited to examine how the boundaries between public and private spaces have shifted. Future studies might explore how cities can promote both public health and social justice as we navigate a post-pandemic world.

Finally, any discussion of space must consider intersectionality. Factors like gender, race, class, and environmental justice all shape how space is used, controlled, and experienced. Expanding on Massey's work on relational space could help us better understand how these intersecting identities influence the ways marginalized communities navigate space. By broadening our perspective, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of how power, culture, and economics converge in the spaces we inhabit and how they shape the experiences of individuals across different communities.

Conclusion

The contributions of these 22 scholars present a multidimensional understanding of space, emphasizing thus its active role in shaping social, political, and economic realities. Space is not a passive or static entity, but a dynamic construct that is continuously produced and contested by human interactions, power relations, and global forces. Whether through the lens of social space,

urban space, relational space, virtual space, political space, or economic space, each framework reveals how space plays a critical role in shaping the lived experiences of individuals and communities.

Throughout this paper, key themes such as power, inequality, and resistance emerge as central to the scholars' analyses of space. From Henri Lefebvre's critique of capitalism's role in producing space to Michel Foucault's exploration of how spatial arrangements are used for control and surveillance, the works discussed here underscore the ways in which space is a battleground for competing interests. Urban theorists like Jane Jacobs and David Harvey highlight the complexities of urban space, where communities grapple with issues of gentrification, exclusion, and social justice. Similarly, postcolonial theorists like Homi K. Bhabha and Ananya Roy emphasize how marginalized groups navigate spaces shaped by historical and economic forces, often resisting and redefining the spaces they occupy.

In a world increasingly defined by globalization and digital technology, the relevance of spatial theory continues to grow. Scholars like Manuel Castells and John Urry bring attention to the rise of virtual spaces and the fluidity of space in the digital age, where traditional boundaries are blurred, and new forms of interaction and identity are created. Doreen Massey's relational space further reinforces the idea that space is continuously shaped by global flows of people, goods, and ideas, highlighting the interconnectedness of local and global dynamics.

As we face contemporary challenges such as climate change, urbanization, and the increasing importance of digital spaces, the need to integrate and expand upon these theoretical frameworks becomes clear. Future research should continue to explore how space is experienced and contested in new and evolving contexts, from the environmental impacts on urban planning to the implications of virtual interactions on social relations. By building on the insights provided by these scholars, we can gain a deeper understanding of how space operates as a central force in shaping the complexities of modern life.

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