

# The Rhetoric of Space and How It Applies to Yoga and Meditation

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## Abstract

Upon initial observation, one might not immediately associate the rhetoric of spaces, both real and imagined, with the practice of yoga and meditation. However, while practicing with these two subjects everyday as a yoga teacher and as a writing student, I noticed several similarities connecting these two distance subjects together. Utilizing Michael Foucault's article "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias" and Nedra Reynolds' article "Composition Imagined Geographies: The Politics of Space in the Frontier, City, and Cyberspace" along with several other resources, I discuss the link between the real and imagined spaces of the world around us in a rhetorical context and how these same spaces apply to the spaces yoga and meditation provide within a regular practice.

The concept of space exists in many different planes: physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. Its essence is both real and imagined. When speaking about space, Michel Foucault states:

Super celestial places existed, in contrast to the celestial place, opposed in its turn to the terrestrial place; there were places where things could be found because they had been shifted there by violence and there were other places where, on the contrary, things found their natural position and rest. This hierarchy, contrast, and mingling of place made up that which might, very approximately, be called medieval space. That is to say, the space of localization. Localization is the assertion of an infinite and infinitely open space. In modern day terms, localization is the relationship between points and elements like a series or network. (330)

Rhetoric is intimately connected to spaces, both real and imagined. Rhetoric exists in the super celestial spaces, where concepts are theoretical and metaphorical in nature. Writers use this space often in quiet review of ideas, language, and composition. This is the place of our thoughts. Rhetoric also exists

in terrestrial spaces. We see this in the tangible world where rhetorical debate can stir up emotions and reactions in an audience or in the physical places in which we engage with rhetoric such as libraries and bookstores. The concept of “space” is also intimately connected in the sphere of yoga and meditation. This term is often brought up by yoga teachers when you are practicing asanas, or physical postures; you can physically feel space opening up within your body, joints, and muscles. In meditation, “space” is also brought up, referring to the space inside our hearts and minds, but can also refer to the space within our physical bodies, too. Within both yoga and meditation, you are instructed to hold space for yourself, but also hold space for others. In order to understand the concept of space within yoga and meditation, we must look at the rhetorical concepts discussed by Foucault and Nedra Reynolds and the concepts of *techné* and *kairos* discussed by Kelly Pender.

Reynolds and Foucault both agreed that space can be both an imaginary, metaphorical place and a real, tangible place. I propose that yoga and meditation can occupy both the non-physical, imaginative space and the real, physical, space Foucault and Reynolds speak about. I argue yoga and meditation also involves *techné* and *kairos*, two concepts discussed by Pender. I will specifically touch one definition of *techné* as a “how-to” guide with respect to a dedicated yoga and meditation practice and how this practice relates to space. I will also touch on *kairos*, its involvement in a yoga and meditation practice, and how *kairos* ties in with the concept of space.

To fully understand how the two worlds of yoga and space overlay, we must first understand the basis of yoga and meditation. The word yoga means “to yoke” or “unite.” The ultimate goal of yoga is to unite the mind, body, and spirit into one towards a state of enlightenment. Meditation means “to engage in contemplation or reflection.” Meditation helps train the mind to achieve mental and emotional stability and clarity. Both yoga and meditation utilize this practice of reflection to allow for the creation of an internal space for which no one else has access. This internal space allows for yourself to be inside of a state where you can be open to whatever might come up within your quiet reveries. This space of internal reflection opens when we close our eyes and go inward, shifting you from a physical space to non-physical space. This non-physical space can be defined by Foucault as an “infinitely open space” (330). He states:

Phenomenologists have taught us that we do not live in a homogeneous and empty space, but in a space that is saturated with qualities, and that may even be pervaded by a spectral aura. The space of our primary perception, of our dreams and of our passions, holds within itself almost intrinsic qualities: it is light, ethereal, transparent, or dark, uneven, cluttered. Again, it is a space of height, of peaks, or on the contrary, of the depths of mud; space that flows, like spring water, or fixed space, like stone or crystal. (Foucault 331)

This internal space within your mind can hold some or all of these qualities Foucault mentions. It is infinite in space, time, and qualities. The purpose of a regular yoga practice is to help you along your journey into regular meditation and reflection. This meditation practice holds all the qualities Foucault touches on because humans embody all of these qualities which make up who we are. Through yoga and meditation, we are able to create this non-physical space for reflection. We can then translate this work within ourselves to beyond ourselves into our outside world. Clair Lalande states in her article, “Why Yoga is All About Creating Space”:

By bringing mindfulness in our lives, we create space to think, to practice yamas, to care for others, to feel connected to ourselves and to the universe. This space that we free up in our minds also enables us to listen to ourselves and to others. It gives room for wisdom. (8)

When we give ourselves this room, or namely space, for quiet contemplation, we are able to cultivate this sense of awareness of who we are and how we feel about the spaces around us. Space--as it relates to a meditative state--is a place we can go within our minds, a space where we have this internal monologue. We often use this internal monologue as rhetors. This is a space to contemplate and create our written works and parse out our potential ideas for future writing. Darsie Bowden states that “composition is rife with metaphors because composing involves complex cognitive activities that are difficult to talk about and understand” (364). These complex cognitive activities creating metaphors used in rhetoric can be compared to the complex thoughts and musings revealed to us through yoga and meditation. The complex thoughts found within the mind can be difficult to express to others because we have gone past the physical world into a non-physical space where others cannot visit. In this non-physical space, the thoughts are ours and ours alone. However, the longer we sit in this non-physical space in meditation, the clearer our thoughts become. Once our thoughts are clear enough, we can begin to translate them into real, tangible words through our conversations, our composition, and our work as writers. Foucault states:

It is, after all, a utopia, in that it is a place without a place. In it, I see myself where I am not, in an unreal space that opens up potentially beyond its surface; there I am down there where I am not, a sort of shadow that makes my appearance visible to myself, allowing me to look at myself where I do not exist: utopia of the mirror. At the same time, we are dealing with a heterotopia. The mirror really exists and has a kind of comeback effect on the place that I occupy: starting from it, in fact, I find myself absent from the place where I am, in that I see myself in there. (332)

Rhetors create and work with the space within this utopic space, or imaginative state. This utopic space is like your meditative state you visit while

practicing yoga or meditation--a place where you can open up into an unreal space beyond its surface, a space where you can create without limits. You open up beyond what you can physically see, touch, and feel, and into a new realm of possibilities and the utopias of your mind begin to reflect back to you the world you would like to see.

### How the Concept of Space Translates to Our Outside Selves

The work you do within yourselves through the process of reflection directly translates to you are on the outside and how you interact with others and your environment. Foucault names this intersection of the inside space of reflection and the outside space of the world around you a “heterotopia.” Heterotopia is a space that is both real and imagined. Your outside world gives way to your perceptions of what life is, whether this is your work, home life, familial law and order, stores, places of worship. Utopia feeds directly into heterotopia and heterotopia feeds into utopia. Yoga and meditation are stationed at this intersection of heterotopia. The practice of yoga and meditation gives time within both the real and imagined spaces for reflection upon your hopes, dreams, and aspirations. This reflection helps you align with your purpose within your physical and non-physical realities.

In her book, *Yoga Mind, Body & Spirit: A Return to Wholeness*, Donna Farhi speaks about moving from a physical place within yogic postures and poses into moving from an esoteric space. “Some teachers refer to this sensibility as moving from the core or moving from the center. When we talk about the body in these terms, we are talking about both a definite physical location (the organ system), and a psychological space within ourselves that has no specific locus” (65). Both spaces exist at the same place and at the same time, an example of heterotopias at work. The transition from one space into another is found when we use the above example. While holding a physical pose in yoga, you physically can feel the engagement of the center of your body, the muscles contracting to hold us in these positions. The transition into the utopic, non-tangible space then happens when you engage your awareness of your “center.” These spaces are not one without the other. Both must exist for this energy to flow in and out of each space. Shifting into the space of rhetoric, Foucault and Reynolds discuss the need of both utopia and heterotopia in our world. The real and imagined spaces influence the works and idea creation of many great rhetors. The ideas or spark of inspiration stem from your utopias or meditative space and your written words are created from the flow of creation into your physical space, or heterotopias. The same flow of energy between spaces is seen within yoga and meditation.

### Your Physical Environment Affects Your Cognitive Space

Most people who meditate regularly will have a dedicated physical space to meditate in. This physical space can take on zen-like qualities; exude a sense

of peace and tranquility to reflect. This space can be a room or a garden or a dedicated yoga studio. These physical spaces will usually have a calming energy surrounding them with minimal furniture or fixtures. There might be props to aid the body in mediation like blocks or blankets or bolsters commonly found in yoga studios. Meditation is usually done alone in a quiet space, although there can be music or natural sounds playing in the background, or you might hear a voice guiding you through meditation. Reynolds speaks of this need for a dedicated space to aid in improving writing and composition. The quality of space affects your thought processes and how you learn. She describes how a writing center can physically occupy a certain square footage, but also occupies an imaginary space where writing is taught and learnt.

In Reynolds' "Composition's Imagined Geographies," she speaks on the politics of space. In her words, "politics of space are the ways in which our surroundings or location affect the work that is done there" (30). While practicing a yoga flow or sitting in stillness during meditation, we are asked to be observant of our surroundings. Not only in the visual representation of reality which we can see with our eyes, but the sounds, smells, and touch of the surfaces surrounding us. Reynolds states, "there is scant attention to the condition and context affecting participants and researchers alike: the weather, the room, the amount of quality of space" (30). Reynolds brings to your attention how the condition and context of a space affects who is residing in the space.

Reynolds also notes, "to neglect material realities in qualitative studies of writing instruction is to ignore the politics of space, the ways in which our surroundings or location affect the work that is done there" (30). Our surroundings affect the work we produce as writers. It is important writers find a quality space to work. This relates to finding a quality space for quiet reflection in meditation or a yoga flow as the physical spaces we place ourselves in can either positively or negatively affect us.

### *Techné* and How it Relates to the Sphere of Yoga and Meditation

Pender discusses several definitions of *techné*, but I would like to focus on one that defines *techné* as a "how-to" guide:

At the heart of this definition lies the method, technique, or skill that the artists use to produce. Those methods, techniques, and skills must be accompanied by a deeper, more comprehensive understanding of the causes of success and failure if one is to claim possession of a genuine *techné*. Such an understanding endows the artist with the ability to teach his art and removes himself from dependence on habit and chance. Thus he is distinguished from the practitioner who possesses only a knack, that is, an unreflective habit attained through practice. (21-22)

Many people are invited to yoga classes for the social aspect of these

classes as well as the westernized approach of yoga which focuses solely on hitting every posture perfectly and its workout qualities. This unreflective habit, as referenced by Pender, is what many have come to experience with yoga and meditation in the western part of the world. However, practitioners of yoga can be anyone who wants to become more endowed in a regular yoga practice and is for anyone who wants to experience the deeper meaning behind yoga. The physical postures you tend to see as 'yoga' is actually a small branch of the many branches of yoga. The techniques, methods, and skills learned throughout yoga come from a deeper and more hands-on practice working on the self through the different branches of yoga, such as meditation, practicing of yogic codes, breathing techniques, and deep reflective focus. Dunne argues that "the artist's actions must also arise within a pattern of a certain kind of passivity and this passivity should be conceived as an element in his very *techné*" (Pender 127). The artist refers to yourself, and the *techné* refers to your yoga and meditation practice. The more you practice yoga and meditation, the more you use the methods and skills learned in these practices in other aspects of your life. Relating back to the intersection between utopia and heterotopia, the lessons regularly learned in reflective spaces of practice will directly influence how you interact with physical, tangible spaces in your everyday life.

Another concept which goes hand in hand with space is *kairos*, or a moment in time. Oftentimes, during a yoga practice or meditation session, a kairotic moment is experienced in the utopic space. This kairotic moment relates to the sudden moments of clarity experienced during a yoga or meditation practice. A yogic idea or concept can also spark this kairotic moment leading to great insights about yourself and the space around you. The non-physical meditative space bleeding into the physical, tangible space like your homes, workspace, and stores you visit regularly. These are the moments of divine intuition that help you make important decisions in your life; helps you trust in the universe and in yourselves that these opportunistic moments will move your lives in a forward trajectory. Using a certain degree of passivity within your practice can help you experience more of these inspirational moments, or *kairos*. The foundation of *kairos* is learning how to listen to your intuition. Learning how to listen to these quiet moments of inspiration through regular yoga and meditation practice.

## Conclusion

Rhetoric like yoga and meditation occupy space, but not in the way one would usually think. In regard to Foucault's *Of Space* and Reynolds' *Imagined Composition*, space is merely a concept with many definitions. Space can have a physical nature where there are many fixed loci of focus. Space can also have a non-physical nature taking on an imagined locus of focus. A yoga practice occupies this physical space and the mind in meditation occupies this non-physical space and writing can occupy both spaces. In regard to Pender, one can

view space through the lens of dedication to one's craft and the time one spends within these spaces, both real and imagined, as well as the moments of timely inspiration which comes within a dedicated practice--whether this practice is within the framework of yoga and meditation or the framework of writing and rhetoric.

Swami Krishnananda states, "The whole of life is a yoga. It is an art of communing oneself with Reality. Every moment of our life we are attuning ourselves to the reality of circumstance" (2). Communing, or the exchange of thoughts and feelings on the mental and spiritual plane, with yourself opens up the space for all of Foucault's, Reynolds', and Pender's attributes to be explored. Uniting the physical reality with the mental reality in the ultimate union of mind, body, and soul.

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