

## Place

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### What Is Place?

Place lies at the center of geography's interests. In a commonsense way geography is about places. But the commonsense uses of the word place belie its conceptual complexity. While the word 'place' has been used as long as geography has been written, it is only since the 1970s that it has been conceptualized as a particular location that has acquired a set of meanings and attachments. Place is a meaningful site that combines location, locale, and sense of place. Location refers to an absolute point in space with a specific set of coordinates and measurable distances from other locations. Location refers to the 'where' of place. Locale refers to the material setting for social relations – the way a place looks. Locale includes the buildings, streets, parks, and other visible and tangible aspects of a place. Sense of place refers to the more nebulous meanings associated with a place: the feelings and emotions a place evokes. These meanings can be individual and based on personal biography or they can be shared. Shared senses of place are based on mediation and representation. When we write 'Calcutta' or 'Rio' or 'Manchester' for instance, even those of us who have not been to these places have some sense of them – sets of meanings produced in films, literature, advertising, and other forms of mediation.

Consider the location 33.325° 44.422°. This location in abstract space marks the city of Baghdad in Iraq. While its location tells us where Baghdad is and enables us to locate it on a map or program it into a Global Positioning System, it does not really tell us much else. Baghdad is also a locale. It has mosques, homes, markets, barricades, and the Green Zone. It has a material structure that, in part, makes it a place. And finally Baghdad has senses of place. Some of the meanings associated with Baghdad are personal and vary according to whether you are an occupying soldier, a Sunni or Shi-ite Muslim, someone who is trying to make a living, or a tourist who visited in the 1970s. But other meanings are shared and are not dependent on having been there. As Baghdad appears on our TV screens almost nightly, many of us in the Western world only know Baghdad as a war zone and a place of danger. Baghdad, like all places, has a location, a locale, and senses of place.

In any given place we encounter a combination of materiality, meaning, and practice. Most obviously, perhaps, places have a material structure. New York has its skyscrapers, Paris its boulevards, Los Angeles its freeways, and Sao Paulo its shanties. Places are often recognized in terms of their material structures which come to stand for place. Think of the Eiffel Tower. Think of the Sydney Opera House. On a more everyday level, towns and city neighborhoods across the world have their material form – libraries, shops, places of worship, streets, and sidewalks. In addition, places have all the material things that pass through them – commodities, vehicles, waste, and people. Even a totally imaginary place has an imaginary form in order to make it place-like. The sense of place evoked by fantasy novels, for instance, is usually based on a description of the material environs. Think of the hobbit holes of *The Lord of the Rings* or the magic staircases of *Hogwarts*.

The idea of meaning has been central to notions of place since the 1970s in Human Geography. Location became place when it became meaningful. Meaning marks the most obvious difference between 33.325° 44.422° (a mere location) and 'Baghdad' – the place that occupies that location. Cruise missiles can be loaded with information like 33.325° 44.422° but not with 'Baghdad' and all the meanings that that place implies. Meanings can be very personal and connected to individuals and their personal biographies – places where we fell in love, or where loved ones are buried, or where we went to school. But meanings are also shared and, in some important ways, social. The Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York for instance had many shared meanings as they projected American power, the importance of capitalism, phallic masculinity, and so on. It is at least in part for this reason that they were attacked. While crashing four planes into empty fields would no doubt have been a disaster, it would have had a completely different impact from the destruction of such well-known places. It was not just an attack on material structures but an attack on place – on meaning. Now of course, the site of the Twin Towers is acquiring new meanings which are still being contested. Will it be a quiet site of remembrance or a new site of American power projected across the world? While meanings are shared they are never fixed once and for all, and always

open to counter meanings produced through other representations.

Finally, places are practiced. People do things in place. What they do, in part, is responsible for the meanings that a place might have. Most obviously places are left with the imprint of notable events such as battles and signings of treaties. A field in Belgium becomes a different place once we learn of the battles that were fought there in World War I. But more mundane practices are, perhaps, a more significant ingredient in place. Places are continuously enacted as people go about their everyday lives – going to work, doing the shopping, spending leisure time, and hanging out on street corners. The sense we get of a place is heavily dependent on practice and, particularly, the reiteration of practice on a regular basis. Space becomes a place when it is used and lived. Experience is at the heart of what place means.

Materiality, meaning, and practice are all linked. The material topography of place is made by people doing things according to the meanings they might wish a place to evoke. Meanings gain a measure of persistence when they are inscribed into the material landscape but are open to contestation by practices that do not conform to the expectations that come with place. Practices often do conform to some sense of what is appropriate in a particular place and are limited by the affordances particular material structures offer. While it is possible to skateboard on park benches, it is not possible to walk through walls.

While we most often think of place as the kinds of places mentioned so far – Baghdad, New York, Sydney – places can in fact exist at many scales. The corner of a favorite room is a place for a child who has little say in the constitution of the wider world. At the opposite extreme, the whole earth is a place when seen from outer space. Astronauts often commented on how the earth looks like home when it is seen from afar.

## Chora and Topos

While it is the case that place was only formally conceptualized as a meaningful segment of geographical space by humanistic geographers in the 1970s, it is not true to say that the concept of place was invented by geographers. The origins of a philosophy of place can be seen in classical Greek philosophy and particularly in the writings of Plato and Aristotle. Plato (428–348 BC) developed the loosely defined notions of ‘chora’ and ‘topos’ in the context of an account of the origins of existence and the process of ‘becoming’. Becoming, in Plato’s terms, is a process that involves three elements – that which becomes, that which is the model for becoming, and the place or setting for becoming. This final element is ‘chora’, a term which implies both extent in space and the

thing in that space that is in the process of ‘becoming’. It is often translated as a receptacle and differs from the void of ‘kenon’ (abstract space) in that it always refers to a thing within it – it is not empty. *Topos* is often used interchangeably with *chora* in Plato but is usually more specific. While *chora* most often referred to a place in the process of becoming, *topos* would refer to an achieved place. Later Aristotle would use *chora* to describe a country while *topos* would describe a particular region or place within it. Both *chora* and *topos* would become part of geographical language through the notion of *chorology* (study of regions) and *topography* (the shape of the land surface). Both *chora* and *topos* are different from the notion of *kenon* (the void) in that they refer to something more particular – more like place than space. While *kenon* is limitless space *chora* and *topos* are finite and contain things.

If anything, Plato’s student, Aristotle (384–322 BC) had even more fundamental things to say about place. To Aristotle, place was a necessary starting point from which it is possible to understand both space (the infinite, the void) and movement and change. Place, he wrote “takes precedence over all other things” (Casey, 1997: 71). To understand change and motion, for instance, it was first necessary to acknowledge that the “most general and basic kind [of] change is change in respect of place, which we call locomotion” (Casey, 1997: 51). The geographical question of ‘where’ is absolutely fundamental to Aristotle for everything that exists must be somewhere “because what is not is nowhere – where for instance is a goat-stag or a sphinx?” (Aristotle in Casey, 1997; 51). To Aristotle, place comes first because everything that exists has to have a place – has to be located. Thus “that without which nothing else can exist, while it can exist without the others, must needs be first” (Casey, 1997: 52). So in Aristotle then we have a very powerful philosophy of place as the starting point for all other forms of existence. Philosophically, Aristotle marked a high point for thinking about place as philosophers turned to the seemingly more profound notion of space. Indeed, it was not until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that place reemerged as a central philosophical concept – particularly in the work of Martin Heidegger.

## Being There and Dwelling

Place was not completely forgotten about in the long centuries between Aristotle and Heidegger. In the thirteenth century, for instance, Albertus Magnus, a German Dominican scholar who taught Thomas Aquinas, studied the work of Aristotle (when many versions were banned by the church) and developed theories of the nature of places suggesting, for instance, that things (people, plants, stones) work best when they are in the place in which

they belong and weaken the further they are removed from it. In the Arab world, geographers such as Ibn Batuta (1304–68) and Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406) made exhaustive travels throughout north Africa and as far afield as China describing the landscapes and customs of different places in great detail. They did, not however, develop general approaches to place in the process. Geographers such as Varanius (1622–50) argued strongly for the importance of a ‘general geography’ that concerned the whole world and its mathematics rather than the ‘special geography’ that focused on the particularities of regions and places. It was the works of Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), however, that proved to be particularly influential on the work of humanistic geographers who were to develop the notion of place in the 1970s. Heidegger, throughout his career, had struggled with the nature of ‘being’. To Heidegger to be was to be ‘somewhere’. The word he used to describe this was ‘dasein’ – or ‘being there’. Note this was not simply being in some abstract sense, as if in a vacuum, but being ‘there’. Human existence is existence ‘in the world’. This idea of being-in-the-world was developed in his notion of ‘dwelling’. A way of being-in-the-world was to build a world. Dwelling in this sense does not mean simply to dwell in (and build) a house, but to dwell in and build a whole world to which we are attached. Dwelling describes the way we exist in the world – the way we make the world meaningful, or place-like. Most famously, Heidegger used the image of a cabin in the Black Forest to describe both building and dwelling.

Let us think for a while of a farmhouse in the Black Forest, which was built some two hundred years ago by the dwelling of peasants. Here the self-sufficiency of the power to let earth and heaven, divinities and mortals enter *in simple oneness* into things, ordered the house. It placed the farm on the wind-sheltered mountain slope looking south, among the meadows close to the spring. It gave it the wide overhanging shingle roof whose proper slope bears up under the burden of snow, and which, reaching deep down, shields the chambers against the storms of the long winter nights. It did not forget the altar corner behind the community table; it made room in its chamber for the hallowed places of childbed and the “tree of the dead”-for that is what they call a coffin there: the *Totenbaum*-and in this way it designed for the different generations under one roof the character of their journey through time. A craft which, itself sprung from dwelling, still uses its tools and frames as things, built the farmhouse. (Heidegger, 1993: 300)

In this cabin everything seemed to have its place and the cabin sat almost organically in the natural world, linking the cosmological to the everyday. Here was the model kind of building and dwelling – a model kind of

being-in-the-world. Such a model, however, makes little sense to the modern, urban, hyperconnected life many of us lead. As a model it seems a little regressive and romantic. Indeed, this image has been connected by some to Heidegger’s well-known connections with the Nazi Party which often espoused a very similar ideology of rootedness in the deep soils of the Black Forest. The corollary of such a belief was that some kinds of people were unconnected to these deep soils and this manner of dwelling. Jews, gypsies, and urbanites, in general, were all seen as leading rootless and inauthentic existences. Jews, for instance, were symbolized as snakes crawling over the desert sands and the desert became a space where it was impossible to make roots. Authentic dwelling, Nazi ideology insisted, could not happen in the desert or the city.

### Place and Humanistic Geography

Despite its central role in human geography, place was not self-consciously written about until the 1970s and the advent of humanistic geography. The 1960s and early 1970s had been marked by spatial science, the quantitative revolution, and logical positivism, all of which had looked at the world and the people in it as objects rather than subjects. People were most often thought of as rational actors in a rational world. The lexicon of spatial science included terms like ‘location’, ‘spatial patterns’, ‘distance’, and ‘space’. Large parts of human geography had operated more or less as a pseudoscience. The focus on place was a central part of a humanistic critique of this way of thinking about the world and the human inhabitation of it. This critique is made clear in the final pages of Yi-Fu Tuan’s *Space and Place* (1977) where he compares the richness of an experiential perspective to more scientific approaches.

What we cannot say in an acceptable scientific language we tend to deny or forget. A geographer speaks as though his knowledge of space and place were derived exclusively from books, maps, aerial photographs, and structured field surveys. He writes as though people were endowed with mind and vision but no other sense with which to apprehend the world and find meaning in it. He and the architect-planner tend to assume familiarity – the fact that we are oriented in space and home in place – rather than describe and try to understand what “being-in-the-world” is truly like. (Yi-Fu Tuan, 1977: 200–201)

And later, “The simple being, a convenient postulate of science and deliberate paper figure of propaganda, is only too easy for the man in the street – that is, most of us – to accept” (203). The term ‘simple being’ brings to mind the ‘rational man’ of spatial science and economics:

the man who weighs up all options before making a rational choice about what to do next. Such a view of humanity has no place for meaning and is thus not concerned with place but only with 'location' or 'distance'.

Even though the humanistic engagement with place was the first attempt to define and conceptualize place as we know it today, it did not arise out of thin air. In addition to the work of continental philosophies of meaning, such as Heidegger's, these geographers looked to what might broadly be called the 'regional geography' of the early decades of the twentieth century that has seen geographers attempting to produce a science of chorology that focused on the way various variables were interlinked in unique ways in space. First, the soil and the climate, then the natural landscape, then the cultural landscape and finally habits, customs, and beliefs. Place as such was rarely the focus of such work, the related concept of 'region' was more central. Of particular significance was the work of Paul Vidal de la Blache (1845–1918) and his followers in France. Vidal's deeply human geography had sought to examine the regions of France in terms of their distinctive ways of life. Region (*pays*) in Vidal's geography had been about seeing everything together *in situ*. He connected the physical environment with the cultural way of life (*genre de vie*). He noted how regions were marked by particular natural environments and cultural forms (clothing, food, architecture, institutions, etc.) that together formed specific regional life-worlds. To put it most simply, you would know when you were in the Massif Central that you were in a different kind of place than if you were in northern France because of the unique combination of physical and cultural attributes that marked one place off from another. The physical landscape looks different, people wear different clothes, and people eat different food.

Inspired by philosophies of meaning such as phenomenology, the work of Vidal and elements of the earlier cultural geography of Carl Sauer, humanistic geographers insisted that geographers needed to think about people as knowing and feeling subjects rather than either objects or simply rational beings. To make geography fully human, they argued, geographers needed to be more aware of the ways in which we inhabit and experience the world. Central to this awareness is the concept of place. This conception of place describes a way of relating to the world. It insists that people have the burden of making their own meaning in the world through their own actions. Key here is the idea of 'experience'. It is this notion of experience that lies at the heart of the humanistic approach to place. Ideas such as 'experience' were not in the vocabulary of human geographers in the early 1970s. Spatial scientists were not very interested in how people related to the world through experience. People as objects or rational beings

are not 'experiencing' the world and geographers studying them are certainly not interested in how they experience the world. To focus on experience, therefore, was quite revolutionary. While the spatial scientists wanted to understand the world and treated people as part of that world (just like rocks, or cars, or ice but with the magic ingredient of rationality added), humanistic geographers focused on the relationship 'between' people and the world through the realm of 'experience'. Tuan writes "[t]he given cannot be known in itself. What can be known is a reality that is a construct of experience, a creation of feeling and thought" (Tuan, 1977: 9). The new focus on place, therefore, attends to how we, as humans, are in-the-world – how we relate to our environment and make it into place.

What experience does is transform a scientific notion of space into a relatively lived and meaningful notion of place. While space was the favored object of the spatial scientist (and is still the favored object of social theorists), it is the way space becomes endowed with human meaning and is transformed into place that lies at the heart of humanistic geography.

What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value ... the ideas "space" and "place" require each other for definition. From the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom and threat of space, and vice versa. Furthermore, if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place. (Tuan, 1977: 6)

This is the most important contribution of humanistic geography to the discipline – the distinction between an abstract realm of space and an experienced and felt world of place.

The humanistic division between space and place became a taken for granted distinction in human geography by the early 1980s. This distinction is still taught to students across the English-speaking world. Geographers have continued to develop broadly humanistic notions of place. Robert Sack, for instance, has considered the ways place as a center of human meaning ties together worlds that are normally held apart – the worlds of nature, meaning, and society. In addition, he has developed an ethical and moral framework for human action based on a humanistic notion of place. More importantly, perhaps, many of Tuan's ideas have traveled into geographies which are not explicitly humanistic and indeed to other disciplines entirely. The notion of place, for instance, has been developed by philosophers such as Edward Casey and J. E. Malpas.

## The Social Construction of Place

While humanistic geographers developed a rich idea of place as experienced, felt, and sensed, they did not, on the whole, have much to say about how power is implicated in the construction, reproduction, and contestation of places and their meanings. The humans in 'humanism' had a tendency to either remain determinedly individual or, alternatively, as but instances of a 'universal' humanist subject. Geographers inspired by both humanism and the radical approaches of Marxism, feminism, and post-structuralism began, in the 1980s, to develop a critical approach to place which sought to rectify this problem.

The kind of organic, rooted, and bounded place evoked by Heidegger's notion of dwelling began to be seen as limiting and exclusionary. It was also perceived as a very ecological way of thinking about place as though human places were natural, authentic – the way they were supposed to be. Marxists in particular began to point to the social processes (particularly under capitalism) that are involved in the construction of places. Places, they argue, may seem natural but are in fact anything but that. The material structure of a place, even a log cabin in the Black Forest, is often the result of decisions made by the very powerful to serve their ends. Most of us, after all, only get to build places on a relatively small (but nonetheless important) scale. The meanings associated with these places, insofar as they are shared, are also more likely than not to be meanings assigned to place by people with the power to do so – the people who build the buildings and monuments and inscribe texts on to the material fabric of place. All of these involved choices that exclude people and the meanings they represent. It is observations such as this that led David Harvey to write that: "The first step down the road is to insist that place in whatever guise, is like space and time, a social construct. The only interesting question that can be asked is, by what social process(es) is place constructed?" (Harvey, 1993: 5). While humanists sought to show how place was a fundamental and universal ingredient in the 'being-in-the-world' in a way that transcended particular social identities and divisions, Harvey insisted that place was often used in quite regressive and reactionary ways. He points to the rise of gated communities in the United States and other defensive place-based definitions of community (such as emergent nationalism in the Balkans at the time) that are, more often than not, based on some threatening outside that is being kept out. This, then, is the dark side of Heideggerean notions of place inherited by humanistic geography.

These tensions can be best illustrated by the notion of home. To humanistic geographers home is a particularly ideal kind of place – the location where meanings and attachments are most intense. Heidegger's cabin is one example of this kind of home-place – where everything is

where it should be and all is right with the world. Home-place is a center of meaning and field of care – a place where (in an ideal world) we feel safe, secure, and loved. Home is frequently used by humanistic geographers as a symbol for universal attachment. Home, like place, can exist on many scales from our individual abodes to the whole earth. Critical human geographers concerned with the way power operated geographically had a very different view of home. To feminist geographers home frequently features as a site of patriarchal authority often associated with extremes of abuse, boredom, and back-breaking labor. To others, home is a place associated with violence against and abuse of children. Home is a place of order where even the children that inhabit it are symptoms of disorder. Consider the following from David Sibley:

Inside the home and the immediate locality, social and spatial order may be obvious and enduring characteristics of the environment. For those who do not fit, either children whose conceptions of space and time are at variance with those of controlling adults or the homeless, nomadic, or black in a homogeneously white, middle class space, such environments may be inherently exclusionary. (Sibley, 1995: 99)

Here home as place is symptomatic of the ways in which the social production of place as a site of belonging can reinforce social relations of systematically asymmetrical power relations.

It was questions such as these that led critical cultural geographers to explore how places and their associated meanings have been implicated in processes of exclusion. The mapping of particular meanings, practices, and identities on to place, they have argued, leads to the construction of normative places where it is possible to be either 'in place' or 'out of place'. Things, practices, and people labeled out of place are said to have transgressed often invisible boundaries that define what is appropriate and what is inappropriate. We all know that we are not supposed to shout in a library or walk naked down a public highway. These unspoken rules exist in the world of commonsense. It is this very commonsense nature of place-based norms that make them so powerful an ideological tool. To take one example, the ex-Mayor of New York City, Mayor Koch, responded to homeless people in Grand Central Station by asking the police to remove them. When this course of action was thrown out by the Courts he declared the following:

These homeless people, you can tell who they are. They're sitting on the floor, occasionally defecating, urinating, talking to themselves....We thought it would be reasonable for the authorities to say, "you can't stay here unless you're here for transportation." Reasonable,

rational people would come to that conclusion, right?  
(Mayor Koch in Cresswell, 1996: 4)

Here, Koch links the place, Grand Central Station, to particular practices and meanings as though such connections were natural and obvious and any other practices and meanings were simply out of place. In so doing he disconnects the station from the surrounding context of New York City in the 1980s, a place marked by high levels of homelessness contrasting with expensive urban development projects and the intense gentrification of areas such as the Lower East Side where people on low incomes could no longer afford to live.

This process of identifying how normative constructions of place exclude 'others' both physically and existentially has been identified across a whole range of identities including class, race, sexuality, gender, and physical (dis)ability. Geographers and others have also revealed how these social constructions of place are constantly contested, transgressed, and resisted by the excluded. Young people gather on street corners or skateboard on street furniture; the homeless finds ways to live in inhospitable places; artists redecorate well-known monuments to invert their established meanings; gay, lesbian, and bisexual people hold kiss-ins in public space. Whatever kinds of places are constructed they are never truly finished and always open to question and transformation.

### Placelessness and Nonplace

In 1976, the humanistic geographer Edward Relph wrote *Place and Placelessness*. In this book he argued that places were becoming placeless. He gives many reasons for this – mass production, an increasingly mobile world, an emphasis on 'disneyfied' and 'museumified' places that were fake copies of more worthy originals. He described these places as 'inauthentic'. They are inauthentic, he argues, because it is impossible to be an existential insider in Disneyworld, or McDonalds or on a mass-produced housing estate. It is also impossible, he argues, to make significant attachments to place if we move about too much, never stopping to linger and create roots. Variations of this argument are now quite commonplace and have been variously described as 'McDonaldization' or 'Americanization'. More recently, the French anthropologist Marc Auge has used the term 'nonplace' to refer to sites such as motorway service stations, airports, and places of transit which never actually go anywhere but endlessly refer to other places indirectly. Auge does not believe such 'nonplaces' are inauthentic but simply a condition of the way we lead our lives now. Auge considers conventional conceptions of place as bounded, rooted, organic, and associated with modes of dwelling

that are embedded in history. As an anthropologist Auge notes how his discipline has traditionally thought of its purpose as a kind of deep description, excavating all the particularities of a culture *in situ*. What, he asks, could such a discipline make of a mobile world in which all these characteristics (bounded, rooted, etc.) are absent or weak? A world of shopping malls, motorways, airports, and service stations, he suggests, demands a different kind of anthropology – an anthropology of nonplace. The world of 'supermodernity', he argues is marked by three new characteristics. First, the world is marked by a speeding up of communications and information flows that leads to a bombardment of images of spaces and times other than the one a person may be immediately located in. Second, a shrinking of the planet due to time-space compression and third, increased individualism as people, exposed to so much, withdraw into themselves and fail to make sustained social relationships. All of these characteristics of supermodernity, he suggests, can be found in 'nonplace'.

Nonplace is very different from a traditional humanistic conception of place as a location full of meaning to which people become profoundly attached. Nonplaces are marked by a lack of attachment, by constant circulation, communication, and consumption that act against developing social bonds and bonds between people and the world. These nonplaces are marked by a plethora of texts, screens, and signs which facilitate mediated relationships between people and places rather than direct ones.

One of the alleged prime causes of placelessness and nonplace is increased mobility. This mobility has led some to go as far as to declare the 'end of geography' as though mobility itself was not geographical. While it is clearly the case that we live (in the West at least) in a way that is increasingly mobile and uprooted it is surely not the case that place is no longer important. Even Auge remarks that nonplace in pure form does not exist. Rather it is at the end of a continuum with the traditional notion of place at the other end. Real-world locations contain varying degrees of both. Even airports have their inhabitants, people that work there, the homeless or frequent fliers who see the same people, at the same time, every workday. The link between the characteristics of nonplace and what Auge calls 'super-modernity' is also tenuous as many of these characteristics have been commented upon for a very long time in reference to the effects of phenomena such as the stagecoach, the railroad, and the telegraph among others.

### Place, Process, and Mobility

The concepts of nonplace and placelessness raise the issue of the relations between place and mobilities.

Traditionally, place has been quite a static concept. The focus on borders, rootedness, and singular identities has mitigated against notions of dynamism and process. Writers such as Tuan and Relph have frequently argued that too much mobility mitigates against senses of place. Nevertheless, since the advent of humanistic geography there have been attempts to think through the ways place is in process and how process makes place. Indeed, in Plato's and Aristotle's musings on *chora* and *topos* place was very much about the process of becoming – how things come to be. In the 1970s and 1980s, David Seamon, in a series of books and papers, developed the ideas of the phenomenological philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty to describe place as the product of everyday habitual mobilities. Merleau-Ponty is best known for his account of bodily intentionality. Perhaps the most fundamental insight of phenomenology is the notion proposed by the psychologist Franz Brentano and developed by philosopher Edmund Husserl that consciousness is always consciousness of something. Consciousness, in other words, includes within it some object that we are conscious of. There can be no judgment, for instance, without something being judged, no love without something being loved, no desire without something being desired (to paraphrase Brentano). Intentionality, therefore, describes 'aboutness'. This 'aboutness' refers to a relation between consciousness and the world and this relation between consciousness and the world is key to both humanistic geography and to the notion of place. Place, and particularly sense of place, differs from location (for instance) because of its insistence on the centrality of human consciousness and experience. To return to Merleau-Ponty, he developed intentionality by moving it away from the idea of a knowing subject where consciousness was purely a mental process. His innovation was to describe this process of aboutness as bodily and habitual – below the radar of consciousness. To be-in-the-world to Merleau-Ponty was not primarily about the mind but the body. He described the 'body-subject' as a body that has a kind of bodily intentionality toward the world. He described everyday actions, such as typing, as remarkable bodily knowledges. In fact the more we think about such things the less able we become. The body-in-the-world is, itself, knowing. The body does not just receive data but experiences the world through a certain openness to the outside – a sense of being in touch with the world. In this view, the movements of the human body constitute the most basic form of intentionality. So what does this say about place?

David Seamon developed Merleau-Ponty's ideas to provide a humanistic account of place which was full of movement. He used the term 'body-ballet' to refer to how the body moves habitually as it is performing some task such as driving, typing, or cooking. When these body-ballets are strung together through a day they produce

what Seamon called a time–space routine. Individuals, he argued, followed 'time–space routines' throughout the day. Often these routines are habitual. We drive to work, walk to the train, or go shopping on an almost daily basis. They are not often the product of great thought. This is what Seamon (following Merleau-Ponty) means by 'habitual'. When these individual 'time–space routines' coalesce they form a 'place-ballet'. In the town center or city square there are hundreds of people conducting their individual 'time–space routines' but they do so collectively in such a way that recognizable and regular patterns of practice emerge. Examples would be rush hour at a busy interchange, the 'school run' in the middle of the afternoon, or outside a workplace at the day's end. Seamon's argument is that places exhibit a kind of unchoreographed yet ordered practice that makes the place just as much as the place's more static and bounded qualities do. Indeed the meaning of a place may arise out of the constant reiteration of practices that are simultaneously individual and social. Places in this sense are intensely embodied and dramatic. While such a view shares many things with other humanistic geographers it is also different in its emphasis on bodily subjectivity and constant process.

Geographers inspired by structuration theory were also keen to develop a more process-oriented view of place. Allen Pred, for instance, argued that human geographers had tended to see places as objects that were essentially static.

Until recently, places and regions have usually been treated in ways that emphasize certain measurable or visible attributes of an area during some arbitrary period of observation. Thus, whether presented as elements of a spatial distribution, as unique assemblages of physical facts and human artifacts, or as localized spatial forms, places and regions have been portrayed as little more than frozen scenes for human activity. Even the "new humanist" geographers, who see place as an object for a subject, as a center of individually felt values and meanings, or as a locality of emotional attachment and felt significance, in essence conceive of place as an inert, experienced scene. (Pred, 1984: 279)

What Pred proposes is a view of place as process where the activities of people and institutions produce and are produced by social structures that are saturated with power. Place is produced through action and action is produced in place through a constant reiterative process. In a way that mirrors Seamon's discussion of time–space routines and body-ballets Pred introduces the notion of 'paths' from time-geography. Paths describe the way people and objects move through space and time over a given period of time. These paths produce human and object geographies that coalesce to produce places. "Place

is therefore a process whereby the reproduction of social and cultural forms, the formation of biographies, and the transformation of nature ceaselessly become one another at the same time that time-space specific activities and power relations ceaselessly become one another” (Pred, 1984: 282). Where Pred differs from Seamon is in his attentiveness to the operations of power. Pred’s paths exist within the context of social structures that provide the context for objects and humans in place. At the same time these social structures are produced through and by these paths. Pred refers to ‘institutional projects’ that have the power to direct and construct the paths of individuals. Some of these institutional projects have more of an impact than others on “the daily paths and life paths of specific people and, therefore, upon the details of individual consciousness development and socialization” (Pred, 1984: 282). These dominant institutional projects override both other such projects and individual paths that fall outside of the remit of any institutional project. Pred, then, thinks of place as produced through process but in a way which is at least partly structured by social relations that are systematically asymmetrical. Process and mobility in place is not just a matter of habit but a matter of power. So while Seamon saw place as produced through an unchoreographed coming together of mobile intentional body-subjects, Pred is keen to show how these body-subjects are differentiated by social divisions that allow some mobilities and force impediment on others. Men may be able to move through place in ways that women cannot for instance. Black people are often stopped while driving through cities in the United States on suspicion of having committed some crime. This has been called ‘driving while black’. People who appear to be of middle-eastern origin have to think twice before using public transport or taking a flight as they are frequently stopped and treated with suspicion. Young people in ‘hoodies’ are similarly frowned upon when gathered at a street corner.

### **A Progressive Sense of Place**

In both Seamon and Pred’s work the key to understanding place is through its relation to mobilities – to the dynamism and flow of objects and people through them. But what about the relationships between particular places and the mobilities of the wider world? Thinking about the world in terms of deeply rooted, fixed places with clear boundaries and stable associated identities can be characterized as a sedentarist metaphysics. Once the world is thought of as a world of such places then other ways of thinking tend to follow. People who lead mobile lives, either through choice or through compulsion are seen as necessarily threatening to this view of place. Thus, the homeless, refugees, gypsy-

travelers, traveling salesmen, and others who are perceived as mobile are labeled as a threat to place and the moral values associated with it. The more clearly the world is ordered into discrete places the more people and things that exist outside of these places are likely to be labeled as disorder – as out of place. The production of order is simultaneously the production of disorder and deviance.

To some geographers the humanistic conception of place, which has been the predominant understanding of place since the 1970s, is simply too fixed, too bounded, and too rooted in the distant past. As a consequence of these notions of fixity, boundedness, and rootedness, place too often becomes the locus of exclusionary practices. People connect a place with a particular identity and proceed to defend it against the threatening outside with its different identities.

Rather than thinking of mobility as a threat to place Doreen Massey has argued that places are actively constituted by mobility – particularly the movement of people but also commodities and ideas. Places to Massey are not clearly bounded, rooted in place, or connected to single homogeneous identities but produced through connections to the rest of the world and therefore are more about routes than roots. They are sites of heterogeneous, not homogeneous, identities. This conception of place, she variously calls, a ‘progressive sense of place’, a ‘global sense of place’, and an ‘extrovert sense of place’. Here there is no longer a clear inside and outside and therefore it is much harder to make judgments about insiders and outsiders. To illustrate this notion she describes Kilburn High Road in north London. On this street she encounters Irish pubs, Indian sari shops, and a Moslem newspaper seller. Planes from Heathrow fly overhead. The street is thoroughly constituted by its connections to the wider world. This progressive sense of place, which describes place constituted through mobility, can be contrasted with ideas of nonplace and placelessness which pitch mobility against place – as a threat to place. It also calls into question ideas of place which pitch insiders against outsiders. It is hard to exclude the outside when there is no clear outside but, instead, a set of constitutive connections. So while ideas of place as mobile and process oriented have focused on the mobilities internal to place and the way in which they constitute a sense of place, Massey expands this to consider the connections between place and wider world and this opens up place to a more global sensibility.

### **Conclusion**

While place is clearly central to human geography as well as to everyday life, it is equally clearly a changing and contested concept. Places range in scale from the corner



of a room to the whole planet. They are, in the broadest sense, locations imbued with meaning that are sites of everyday practice. Beyond that simple definition there is considerable debate about the nature of place. While some think of place as an essential and foundational fact of human existence others choose to focus on the social processes that produce places in particular ways that serve the interests of some over others. The relationship between place and mobility is also marked by disagreements between those who see mobility and process as antagonistic to place and those who think of place as created by both internal and external mobilities and processes. At the extreme there are those who argue that such are the processes of mobility and communication in the modern world that place is becoming insignificant in a world of placelessness and nonplace. It seems likely that these debates will continue and veer off in new directions.

See *also*: Humanistic geography; Landscape; Location; Migration; Mobility; Space; Structuration theory/structurationist geography; Time-geography.

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## Relevant Websites

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