

Introduction: Defining Place

Place is one of the two or three most important terms for my discipline – geography. If pushed, I would argue that it is the most important of them all. Geography is about place and places. But place is not the property of geography – it is a concept that travels quite freely between disciplines and the study of place benefits from an interdisciplinary approach. Indeed, the philosopher Jeff Malpas (2010) has argued that “place is perhaps the key term for interdisciplinary research in the arts, humanities and social sciences in the twenty-first century.”

This book is, therefore, both a disciplinary account of a key geographical concept and an interdisciplinary introduction to an issue that transcends geography, philosophy, or any other discipline. Regardless of the discipline we are rooted in, and despite this general enthusiasm for the study of places, there has been very little considered understanding of what the word “place” means. This is as true in theory and philosophy as it is among the new students signing up for university geography courses. Place is a word that seems to speak for itself.

Given geography’s long history of grappling with the issue of place, the relatively recent resurgence in interest in place across disciplines and in the wider world presents an opportunity for geography to situate itself at the center of a lively interdisciplinary debate. Discussions of place are popping up everywhere. Creative writers and literary scholars have been busy rediscovering and “re-enchanting” place. In the English-speaking world there has been a resurgence in creative non-fiction which puts place at the heart of things. Writing on both “wild” and urban places has become more visible

with the popularity of forms of “psychogeography” and nature-writing (Sinclair 2009, Macfarlane 2007). A recent collection of essays and poems about places across Britain was titled *Towards Re-Enchantment: Place and Its Meanings* (Evans and Robson 2010). The text on the cover reads “Here are paths, offered like an open hand, towards a new way of being in the world, At a time when multiple alienations of modern society threaten our sense of belonging, the importance of ‘place’ to creative possibility in life and art cannot be underestimated.” Artists, too, are grappling with place. Gstaad, in Switzerland, is a small alpine town visited regularly by the richest people in the world. It is a place for the 1 percent. Recently it was also the site of an array of artistic interventions by some of the world’s leading conceptual artists. One of the installations, by the British artist Christian Marclay, is a video screen installed in a cable car which shows extracts from Bollywood movies which are set in the immediate vicinity. Gstaad, it turns out, is frequently used as a setting for escapist dream and dance sequences in Bollywood movies. The idea for the exhibition was Neville Wakefield’s. Wakefield is a curator for the British art fair Frieze. His rationale for the project is outlined in an article in the *New York Times*.

But the show...is also a response to their frustration with seeing so much art “set in these jewel box architectural spaces, and you really can’t tell whether you are in Singapore, Shanghai, Berlin, London or whatever,” Mr. Wakefield said, adding, “What’s happened in terms of making art accessible is that it’s homogenized.”

Their exhibition, he said, is meant to be an antidote to the “art-fair, urban, white-cube gallery experience.”

“It is difficult to get to,” Mr. Wakefield added, “but because of that, it also demands a different kind of attention. You discover the art through the place and the place through the art” (Donadio 2014, C2).

The exhibition at Gstaad reflects a wider interest in how art and place interact on the part of both artists and art theorists (Doherty 2009, Hawkins 2010, Kwon 2002).

It is not just the creative world of writers and artists that are engaging place. At the other end of subjective-objective spectrum, place has also entered the lexicon of businesses and scholars who use geographic information systems (GIS). GIS are sophisticated computational software systems that can represent data spatially in the form of maps. Since their origin they have largely been centered on the manipulation and representation of

quantifiable things in a spatial form. To many writers on the theme of place (as we shall see later), this has been the opposite of an interest in place. Recently, however, the fusion of mapping software with social media software has led to a new level of what we might think of as “augmented” place. Our phones (at least the smart phones that many of us, usually living in the Global North now have) know where we are. They are linked to data that knows where other people or things are too. They provide a level of information about place. Apps such as Foursquare are premised on an interest in place. They ask what we think of a place (public square, restaurant, etc.) and tell us what other people think of it. They even allow us to become “Mayor” of our favorite hangout, if we go there and log in frequently enough. This merging of GIS and social media apps has not gone unnoticed by GIS scholars who have started to engage more fully with place as a concept. Consider just one example:

Formalizing place in the GIS context will be both interesting and challenging; until recently, place has been off the intellectual radar screen of GIScientists, many of whom appear to use the two terms *place* and *space* somewhat interchangeably. Preliminary work has begun in the digital gazetteer literature... In a broader sense, the emerging GIS literature of the past 15 years has caused a subtle shift of focus from space to place, with its rich cultural dimensions; yet in GIScience, we still do not have an overarching theory of place or how to work with the concept. (Sui and Goodchild 2011, 1744)

The interest of GIS scholars in place reflects the profound way in which software developers in the corporate world have been engaging in place in sometimes sinister ways. Politicians want to know about place to finely target their funds at swing voters. Supermarkets want to know about our shopping habits so they can encourage us to buy more. Police forces and security services want to know about the links between crime and place so that they can more effectively discipline and survey. Google Maps purports to tell us about the places around us in objective ways but, in fact, is filtering place for us – directing us towards businesses that have engineered their appearance on the first page of a Google search. Software is *producing* DigiPlace (Zook and Graham 2007).

And place is central to forms of struggle and resistance too. Recognizing the danger in Google mapping the world, others are producing an open source map (OpenStreetMap) project that does not allow corporations a monopoly on the production of place. An article in *The Guardian* online

reported on these efforts under the subheading “Geography is big business.”

The modern daytime dilemma is geography, and everyone is looking to be the definitive source. Google spends \$1bn annually maintaining their maps, and that does not include the \$1.5bn Google spent buying the navigation company Waze. Google is far from the only company trying to own everywhere, as Nokia purchased Navteq and TomTom and Tele Atlas try to merge. All of these companies want to become the definitive source of what’s on the ground.

That’s because what’s on the ground has become big business. With GPSes in every car, and a smartphone in every pocket, the market for telling you where you are and where to go has become fierce.

With all these companies, why do we need a project like OpenStreetMap? The answer is simply that as a society, no one company should have a monopoly on place, just as no one company had a monopoly on time in the 1800s. Place is a shared resource, and when you give all that power to a single entity, you are giving them the power not only to tell you about your location, but to shape it. (Wroclawski 2014, npn)

This struggle over virtual place reflects longstanding struggles over place by protest movements around the world. In 1989 protesters all over the world took over prominent places and brought about political change of historic significance. The crossing and demolition of the Berlin Wall was perhaps the most significant example. In China, up to a million student protestors and their supporters occupied Tiananmen Square in Beijing before they were brutally removed on June 3 and 4. The fact that it was Tiananmen Square (named after Tiananmen Gate, the Gate of Heavenly Peace) was significant as this was and is a prominent place in the symbolism of the Chinese nation, surrounded by important buildings, such as the Great Hall of the People, signifying the Chinese state and nation. More recently we have seen waves of protest in Tahrir Square in Egypt as part of the so-called “Arab Spring.” First the longstanding leader of Egypt, President Mubarak, was forced to step down in 2011 and then, in June 2013, possibly the largest public protest in history occurred, leading the military to remove the elected president, Mohammed Morsi. The square became an important place for protest. During the occupations a Facebook page called “Tahrir Square” was set up to counter official news outlets’ representations of the protest. In 2013 a documentary film, *The Square*, was released, tracking a number of protestors through the period 2011 to 2013. In each case



Figure 1.1 Demonstrations in Tahrir Square, Cairo, Egypt demanding the removal of President Mubarak and his regime in 2011. Source: photo by Jonathan Rashad (Flickr) [CC-BY-2.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0>)], via Wikimedia Commons.

it was clear that the square as a place played a significant role in the various protest movements.

The politics of place was also clear in the tactics of the Occupy movement which made the occupation of prominent places the central tactic in its practice of protest against a range of economic and social injustices. Images of encampments in Zuccotti Park in New York City or outside St. Paul's Cathedral in the City of London spoke to the need to contest the ability of the powerful to have a "monopoly on place." The *New York Times* journalist, Michael Kimmelman, noted the significance of place.

We tend to underestimate the political power of physical places. Then Tahrir Square comes along. Now it's Zuccotti Park, until four weeks ago an utterly obscure city-block-size downtown plaza with a few trees and concrete benches, around the corner from ground zero and two blocks north of Wall Street on Broadway. A few hundred people with ponchos and sleeping bags have put it on the map.

Kent State, Tiananmen Square, the Berlin Wall: we clearly use locales, edifices, architecture to house our memories and political energy. Politics troubles our consciences. But places haunt our imaginations. (Kimmelman 2011)

Kimmelman was struck by the way a physical being-together accentuated the efficacy of the Occupy camp in New York City. While forms of networking over a distance through social media were undeniably a key part of the protest movement it was equally clear that its physical presence – as a place – both bound the protestors together in a concrete way and sent more of a message to the watching world.

The protesters have set up a kitchen, for serving food, a legal desk and a sanitation department, a library of donated books, an area where the general assembly meets, a medical station, a media center where people can recharge their laptops using portable generators, and even a general store, called the comfort center, stocked with donated clothing, bedding, toothpaste and deodorant – like the food, all free for the taking. (Kimmelman 2011)

Place pops up everywhere. In this brief account we have already encountered creative writings, the world of conceptual art, computational mapping and forms of protest. In each case we have seen a recognition of the often mentioned “power of place.” Most of these are encountered from reading the paper (or browsing websites) over coffee. You do not have to try too hard to find examples of the ways in which place is important. We could add, for instance, the evocation of place in the production of local food, the reference to *terroir* on the back of the wine bottle at dinner, the promotion of place in the marketing of a new housing development or a holiday destination or the call to place in the efforts of environmentalists protecting watersheds.

Given the ubiquity of place, it is a problem that no one quite knows what they are talking about when they are talking about place. Place is not a specialized piece of academic terminology. It is a word we use daily in the English-speaking world. It can be evoked in so many disparate ways because it is a word wrapped in common sense. In one sense this makes it easier to grasp, as it is familiar. In another sense, however, this makes it more slippery as the subject of a book. As we already think we know what it means, it is hard to get beyond that common-sense level in order to understand it in a more developed way. Place, then, is both simple (and that is part of its appeal) and complicated. It is the purpose of this book to scrutinize the

concept of place and its centrality to both interdisciplinary academic endeavor and everyday life.

Think of the ways place is used in everyday speech. “Would you like to come round to my place?” This suggests ownership or some kind of connection between a person and a particular location or building. It also suggests a notion of privacy and belonging. “My place” is not “your place” – you and I have different places. “Brisbane is a nice place.” Here “place” is referring to a city in a common-sense kind of way and the fact that it is nice suggests something of the way it looks and what it is like to be there. “She put me in my place” refers to more of a sense of position in a social hierarchy. “A place for everything and everything in its place” is another well-known phrase that suggests that there are particular orderings of things in the world that have a socio-geographical basis. Place is everywhere. This makes it different from other terms in geography like “territory,” which announces itself as a specialized term, or “landscape” which is not a word that permeates through our everyday encounters. So what is this “place”?

Cast your mind back to the first time you moved into a particular space – a room in college accommodation is a good example. You are confronted with a particular area of floor space and a certain volume of air. In that room there may be a few rudimentary pieces of furniture such as a bed, a desk, a set of drawers and a closet. These are common to all the rooms in the complex. They are not unique and mean nothing to you beyond the provision of certain necessities of student life. Even these bare essentials have a history. A close inspection may reveal that a former owner has inscribed her name on the desk in an idle moment between classes. There on the carpet you notice a stain where someone has spilt some coffee. Some of the paint on the wall is missing. Perhaps someone had used putty to put up a poster. These are the hauntings of past inhabitation. This anonymous space has a history – it meant something to other people. Now what do you do? A common strategy is to make the space say something about you. You add your own possessions, rearrange the furniture within the limits of the space, put your own posters on the wall, arrange a few books purposefully on the desk. Thus space is turned into place. Your place.

The term 40.46°N 73.58°W does not mean much to most people. Some people with a sound knowledge of the globe may be able to tell you what this signifies but to most of us these are just numbers indicating a location – a site without meaning. These coordinates mark the location of New York City – somewhere south of Central Park in Manhattan. Immediately many images come into our heads. New York or Manhattan are place names rich

with meaning. We might think of skyscrapers, of 9/11, of shopping or of any number of movie locations. Replacing a set of numbers with a name means that we begin to approach “place.” If we heard that two planes had flown into 40.46°N 73.58°W it would not have quite the same impact as hearing that they had flown into New York, into Manhattan, into the Twin Towers. Cruise missiles are programmed with locations and spatial referents. If they could be programmed with “place” instead, with all the understanding that implies, they might decide to ditch in the desert.

Towards the southern tip of Manhattan and to the east of center is an area – a place – known as the Lower East Side. This is an area which has been known as a place of successive immigrant groups – Irish, Jewish, German, Italian, Eastern European, Haitian, Puerto Rican, Chinese. It is a little to the north of the infamous Five Corners – the setting for the film *The Gangs of New York* (2002). It is a place of closely knit tenement blocks south of Houston Street – buildings once crammed with large families in small rooms. A succession of moral panics over immigration has focused on this place. It has also been a place of political uprisings and police riots. In the middle of this place is Tompkins Square Park, a little piece of nature in the city built to provide a place of calm in the hurly burly of metropolitan life. It was built in the 1830s and named after the US vice-president Daniel Tompkins. Later the park became a place of demonstrations by unions and anarchists as well as a place for children to play and the preaching of temperance. By the 1960s it was the epicenter of a Lower East Side dominated by bohemian counter-cultures, squatters and artists and by the 1980s it was newly respectable – a place where the new cultural elite could savor city life. Needless to say, property prices meant that the buildings were now out of the reach of most people. Homeless people began to sleep in the park. Some of the newly respectable residents were scared by this and supported the removal of homeless people by the police. Once again, in 1986, the park was the site of a demonstration and riot. In the area around the park, from the 1960s on, residents were busy building 84 community gardens in vacant lots. In 1997 Mayor Giuliani transferred responsibility for the gardens from the City Parks Department to the Housing, Preservation and Development Department with the intention that they be sold off for development. The first four gardens were auctioned in July 1997 together with a local community center. In May 1999, 114 community gardens across New York were saved from development when they were bought by Bette Midler’s New York Restoration Fund and Trust for Public Land for a combined total of \$4.2 million. However the policy of privatization has continued, and gardens continued to be demolished.



Figure 1.2 A Manhattan community garden. These were built on vacant lots by local residents when the land had been abandoned by the government. When land became valuable the city government demolished many of these in the East Village in order to build apartments and parking lots. Source: the photo was taken by participant/team Corn Fed Chicks as part of the Commons:Wikis Take Manhattan project on October 4, 2008. Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license. <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0> CC-BY-SA-3.0 Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 true true (Contributed by author) [CC-BY-SA-3.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0>)], via Wikimedia Commons.

If you visit the Lower East Side now you can dine in any number of fancy and not-so-fancy restaurants, bars and cafés, you can shop in boutiques and admire the brownstone architecture. You can stroll through Tompkins Square Park and visit the remaining community gardens. Crossing over Houston Street to the south you can visit the Lower East Side

Tenement Museum in one of the old buildings that formally housed new immigrants. You could, in other words, see many manifestations of “place.” The museum is an attempt to produce a “place of memory” where the experiences of immigrants will not be forgotten. The gardens are the result of the efforts of immigrants and others to carve out a place from a little piece of Manhattan for their community to enjoy nature. Some of the community gardens – often the first to be leveled – are the sites of *casitas* – little houses made by the Puerto Rican community to replicate similar buildings from “home.” They are draped with Puerto Rican flags and other symbols of elsewhere. Old men sit out in the sun watching baseball. Community meetings take place around these 8 ft × 10 ft buildings. They are, as the urban historian Delores Hayden puts it:

a conscious choice by community organizers to construct the rural, preindustrial *bohio*...from the island as a new kind of community center in devastated tenement districts such as Lower Harlem, the South Bronx, and the Lower East Side...Painted in coral, turquoise, or lemon yellow, these dwellings recall the colors of the Caribbean and evoke a memory of the homeland for immigrants who find themselves in Alphabet City or Spanish Harlem. (Hayden 1995, 35–36)

Other gardens, ones not planted by Puerto Rican immigrants, are more bucolic, replicating some ideal of an English garden. Yet others are wild nature reserves set aside for local school lessons on biology and ecology. All of these are examples of the ongoing and diverse creation of places – sites of history and identity in the city.

Meanwhile back in Tompkins Square Park there are still tensions between the needs of the homeless to have even the smallest and most insecure “place for the night” and the desires of some local residents to have what they see as an attractive and safe place to live and raise families – one that does not include the homeless. Again places are being made, maintained, and contested. New York and Manhattan are places. The Lower East Side is a place. The Tenement Museum, community gardens, and Tompkins Square Park are all part of the rich tapestry of place-making that makes up the area in and around 40.46°N 73.58°W. We will return to the Lower East Side throughout the book to illustrate the many facets of the use of “place” in geography.

All over the world people are engaged in place-making activities. Homeowners redecorate, build additions, manicure the lawn. Neighborhood



Figure 1.3 Tompkins Square Park, New York City. Here sunbathers relax on the central knoll but this place has been the site of numerous protests and struggles. Source: photo by David Shankbone [CC-BY-SA-3.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0>) or GFDL (<http://www.gnu.org/copyleft/fdl.html>)], via Wikimedia Commons.

organizations put pressure on people to tidy their yards; city governments legislate for new public buildings to express the spirit of particular places. Nations project themselves to the rest of the world through postage stamps, money, parliament buildings, national stadia, tourist brochures, etc. Within nation-states, oppressed groups attempt to assert their own identities. Just as the new student climbs on the bed to put the poster on the wall so the Kosovan Muslim flies a new flag, erects a new monument, and redraws the map. Graffiti artists write their tags in flowing script on the walls of the city. This is their place too.

So what links these examples: a child's room, an urban garden, a market town, New York City, Kosovo and the Earth? What makes them all places



Figure 1.4 St. Mark's Place in Manhattan's East Village. A busy shopping street full of boutiques, coffee shops, and other signs of a gentrified place. Source: photo by Beyond My Ken (own work) [GFDL (<http://www.gnu.org/copyleft/fdl.html>) or CC-BY-SA-3.0-2.5-2.0-1.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0>)], via Wikimedia Commons.

and not simply a room, a garden, a town, a world city, a new nation, and an inhabited planet? One answer is that they are all spaces which people have made meaningful. They are all spaces people are attached to in one way or another. This is the most straightforward and common definition of place – a meaningful location.

The political geographer John Agnew has outlined three fundamental aspects of place as a “meaningful location” (Agnew 1987):

- 1 location
- 2 locale
- 3 sense of place.



Figure 1.5 Graffiti on the Lower East Side, Manhattan. Some forms of place-making are less formal but are, nonetheless, important components in creating a sense of place. Source: photo by Summ (own work) [GFDL (<http://www.gnu.org/copyleft/fdl.html>), CC-BY-SA-3.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>) or CC-BY-SA-2.5-2.0-1.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.5-2.0-1.0/>)], via Wikimedia Commons.

Perhaps the most obvious point is that all of the places mentioned above are located. They have fixed objective coordinates on the Earth's surface (or in the Earth's case a specific location vis-à-vis other planets and the sun). New York is "here" and Kosovo is "there." Given the appropriate scale, we could find them on a map. The word place is often used in everyday language to simply refer to location. When we use place as a verb for instance (where should I place this?) we are usually referring to some notion of location – the simple notion of "where." But places are not always stationary. A ship, for instance, may become a special kind of place for people who share it on a long voyage, even though its location is constantly changing. By "locale" Agnew means the material setting for social relations – the actual shape of

place within which people conduct their lives as individuals, as men or women, as white or black, straight or gay. It is clear that places almost always have a concrete form. New York is a collection of buildings and roads and public spaces including the community gardens which are themselves material – made of plants and statues and little sheds and houses with fences around them. The child's room has four walls, a window, a door, and a closet. Places then, are material things. Even imaginary places, like Hogwarts School in the Harry Potter novels, have an imaginary materiality of rooms, staircases, and tunnels that make the novel work. As well as being located and having a material visual form, places must have some relationship to humans and the human capacity to produce and consume meaning. By “sense of place” Agnew means the subjective and emotional attachment people have to place. Novels and films (at least successful ones) often evoke a sense of place – a feeling that we the reader/viewer know what it is like to “be there.” We often have a sense of place about where we live, or where we lived when we were children. This is what the author Lucy Lippard has called *The Lure of the Local* (Lippard 1997). It is commonplace in Western societies in the twenty-first century to bemoan a loss of a sense of place as the forces of globalization have eroded local cultures and produced homogenized global spaces. We will return to this issue of “placelessness” in Chapter 3.

We can see this combination of location, locale, and sense of place in the account of the Lower East Side. We could repeat this exercise anywhere. Latitude 51°30'18" N Longitude 0°1'9" W is a location but London's Docklands is a place. While they share the same objective position, London Docklands is a place that includes Canary Wharf, a Docklands Museum, office blocks, smart restaurants, and a light rail line. Like the Lower East Side and East Village, this place has a past. In this case it is a working-class and immigrant past associated with the docks and with slavery. It is part of my past. My maternal grandmother lived there before she was evacuated with her children in World War II. The street she lived on no longer exists. Outside of the museum, very little of the past is apparent in this shiny new glass and steel place. You have to work hard to find it. As well as being a location, then, this place, like any place, has a physical landscape (buildings, infrastructure, etc.) and a “sense of place” – meanings, both personal and shared, that are associated with a particular locale.

Agnew's three-part definition of place certainly accounts for most examples of place. In addition, however, it helps to think of place in distinction to two other familiar concepts – “space” and “landscape” – both of which are occasionally substituted with the word “place.”

Space and Place

An advertisement for a large furniture shop in my Sunday paper read “Transforming space into place.” Such an advertisement cannot rely on an in-depth understanding of the development of the concept of place and yet it speaks to one of the central themes in work on place. The ad suggests that we might want to take the rooms we have recently bought or rented and make them mean something to us by arranging furniture in them – making them comfortable literally and experientially. Humanistic geographers are unlikely to agree that the mere purchase of furniture is going to enact such a transformation but they will recognize the intent.

Space is a more abstract concept than place. When we speak of space we tend to think of outer-space or the spaces of geometry. Spaces have areas and volumes. Places have space between them. Yi-Fu Tuan has likened space to movement and place to pauses – stops along the way.

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)

Consider the relationship between the sea and land along the coast between Seattle and Vancouver. In his book *Passage to Juneau* the travel writer Jonathan Raban tells of his trip by boat along that shore (Raban 1999). Alongside his travel narrative he tells of the voyage of the explorer Captain Vancouver in his ship HMS *Discovery* in 1792. Vancouver’s task was to map the coast and name it as he went – making it a place of empire. Naming is one of the ways space can be given meaning and become place. Vancouver’s journal reports the seemingly nonsensical movements of natives in their canoes in the sea around them. Rather than taking a direct line from point A to point B the natives would take complicated routes that had no apparent logic. To the native canoeists their movements made perfect sense as they read the sea as a set of places associated with particular spirits and particular dangers. While the colonialists looked at the sea and saw blank space, the natives saw place.

Two world-views were in collision; and the poverty of white accounts of these canoe journeys reflects the colonialists' blindness to the native sea. They didn't get it – couldn't grasp the fact that for Indians the water was a place, and the great bulk of the land was undifferentiated space.

The whites had entered a looking-glass world, where their own most basic terms were reversed. Their whole focus was directed toward the land: its natural harbours, its timber, its likely spots for settlement and agriculture. They travelled everywhere equipped with mental chainsaws and at a glance could strip a hill of its covering forest...and see there a future of hedges, fields, houses, churches. They viewed the sea as a medium of access to the all-important land.

Substitute "sea" for "land" and vice-versa, in that paragraph, and one is very close to the world that emerges from Indian stories, where the forest is the realm of danger, darkness, exile, solitude, and self-extinction, while the sea and its beaches represent safety, light, home, society, and the continuation of life. (Raban 1999, 103)

Raban recounts the visit of the German geographer Aurel Krause while working for the Breman Geographical Society in 1881. He was astonished by what he saw as the local Tlingits' ignorance of their place in the world, which to him was dominated by the enormous mountains that towered behind the small strip of land they inhabited beside the sea.

In spite of the fact that the Tlingit is constantly surrounded by nature, he is only acquainted with it as it offers him the necessities of life. He knows every bay that lends itself to fishing or the beaching of a canoe...and for these he has names; but the mountain peaks themselves, even though they are outstanding on account of their shape and size, are scarcely noticed by him. (Raban 1999, 106)

The Tlingits had many names for the sea, but the land remained unnamed and seemingly invisible. To the explorers the sea was empty space and the land full of potential places waiting to be mapped and named, but this was the mirror image of the Tlinget "sense of place."

Space, then, has been seen in distinction to place as a realm without meaning – as a "fact of life" which, like time, produces the basic coordinates for human life. When humans invest meaning in a portion of space and then become attached to it in some way (naming is one such way) it becomes a place. Although this basic dualism of space and place runs through much of human geography since the 1970s it is confused some-

what by the idea of social space – or socially produced space – which, in many ways, plays the same role as place (Lefebvre 1991).

Place and Landscape

Another concept that frequently appears alongside place is landscape. The idea of landscape has a very particular history which dates back to the emergence of mercantile capitalism in Renaissance Venice and Flanders. Landscape painting emerged with the rediscovery of the science of optics, new techniques of navigation, and the development of a new class of traders. Landscape referred to a portion of the earth's surface that can be viewed from one spot (Cosgrove 1984, Jackson 1997). It combined a focus on the material topography of a portion of land (that which can be seen) with the notion of vision (the way it is seen). Landscape is an intensely visual idea. In most definitions of landscape the viewer is outside of it. This is the primary way in which it differs from place. Places are very much things to be inside of. Again a literary example illustrates this.

In Raymond Williams's (1960) novel *Border Country*, Matthew Price returns to the place of his childhood in the Welsh borders after spending many years at university in England. He is surprised at what he finds when he gets there. He has forgotten the qualities of life that made it a "place" and replaced it in his mind with a "landscape." What follows is an examination of the gap between the idea of the village as "landscape" and the idea of the village as a lived and felt "place." As Matthew realizes he has become an outsider in his own village he reflects on his change of perspective:

He realized as he watched what had happened in going away. The valley as landscape had been taken, but its work forgotten. The visitor sees beauty, the inhabitant a place where he works and has his friends. Far away, closing his eyes, he had been seeing this valley, but as the visitor sees it, as the guide book sees it. (Williams 1960, 75)

Later in the novel Matthew gets back into the routine of the village "It was no longer a landscape or view, but a valley that people were using." No longer a view from a hill, the valley was once again a place. Landscape refers to the shape – the material topography – of a piece of land. This may be apparently natural landscape (though few, if any, parts of the Earth's surface

are untouched by humans) or it might be the obviously human, or cultural, landscape of a city. We do not live in landscapes – we look at them.

Place as a Way of Understanding

An important theme of this book is that place is not just a thing in the world but a way of understanding the world. While we hold common-sense ideas of what places are, these are often quite vague when subjected to critical reflection. Most often the designation of place is given to something quite small in scale, but not too small. Neighborhoods, villages, towns, and cities are easily referred to as places and these are the kinds of places that most often appear in writing on place. There is little writing on the corner of a favorite room as place at one scale, or on the globe at another. Yet, as Tuan suggested, there is something of place in all of these. So, as it turns out, places as “things” are quite obscure and hard to grasp.

But place is also a way of seeing, knowing, and understanding the world. When we look at the world as a world of places, we see different things. We see attachments and connections between people and place. We see worlds of meaning and experience. Sometimes this way of seeing can seem to be an act of resistance against a rationalization of the world that focuses more on space than place. To think of an area of the world as a rich and complicated interplay of people and the environment – as a place – is to free us from thinking of it as facts and figures. To think of Baghdad as a place is in a different world to thinking of it as a location on which to drop bombs. At other times, however, seeing the world through the lens of place leads to reactionary and exclusionary xenophobia, racism, and bigotry. “Our place” is threatened and others have to be excluded. Here “place” is not so much a quality of things in the world as an aspect of the way we choose to think about it – what we decide to emphasize and what we decide to designate as unimportant. This book is as much about place as a way of knowing as it is about place as a thing in the world. It is as much about epistemology as it is about ontology.

The Remainder of the Book

Space, landscape, and place are clearly highly interrelated terms and each definition is contested. The French urban theorist Henri Lefebvre, for

instance, has produced a much more sophisticated account of space in which he distinguishes between more abstract kinds of space (absolute space) and lived and meaningful spaces (social space) (Lefebvre 1991). Social space is clearly very close to the definition of place. We will return to debates such as this as we consider the intellectual trajectory of place in the next chapter. For now it suffices to say that the majority of writing about place focuses on the realm of meaning and experience. Place is how we make the world meaningful and the way we experience the world. Place, at a basic level, is space invested with meaning in the context of power. This process of investing space with meaning happens across the globe at all scales, and has done throughout human history. It has been one of the central tasks of human geography to make sense of it.

This introduction has provided some provisional outlines of what place means. But this is just a starting point. If it were that easy I could stop now. The fact is that place is a contested concept and what it is that “place” means is very much the subject of decades of debate in human geography as well as philosophy, planning, architecture, and any number of other disciplines. To some in planning, place refers to the built environment. To ecologists, a place is rooted in a distinctive ecology – as a bioregion. To a philosopher, place is a way of being-in-the-world. The rest of this book is an extended investigation of what place means and how the concept has been and might be used across disciplines and in the wide world beyond.

To that end the remainder of this book is organized as follows. Chapter 2 traces the development of place as a concept, drawing largely on work in philosophy and geography. It situates the philosophical origins of the concept of place in Greek philosophy and sketches its trajectory to the present day, showing how place became a central term in North American geography during the late 1970s and early 1980s through the efforts of primarily humanistic geographers (Relph 1976, Tuan 1974). It traces the roots of this engagement back to the philosophies of meaning – particularly those of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. The chapter also accounts for the appropriation of the term by cultural geography, and the linking of place to politics and arguments over who gets to define the meaning of a place (Cresswell 1996). Chapter 3 considers the role of place in relation to mobility. We live in an increasingly mobile world and this has led some to describe increasing “placelessness” due to the effects of “time–space compression” (Augé 1995, Harvey 1989). Chapter 3 interrogates this idea through an exploration of the many ways in which mobility and place constitute each other, including accounts of the way senses of place are

constructed through bodily mobilities in place (Seamon 1980), Doreen Massey's conception of a "progressive sense of place" (Massey 1997) and anthropological accounts of cosmopolitanism and "friction" (Tsing 2005, Hannerz 1990).

Chapter 4 consists of a critical evaluation of Doreen Massey's paper "A global sense of place" (Massey 1997). Massey's paper has been widely cited as a plea for a new conceptualization of place as open and hybrid – a product of interconnecting flows – of routes rather than roots. This extroverted notion of place calls into question the whole history of place as a center of meaning connected to a rooted and "authentic" sense of identity forever challenged by mobility. It also makes a critical intervention into the widely held notions of time–space compression and the erosion of place through globalization. In this chapter Massey's paper is contrasted with a chapter by David Harvey which tackles similar issues in a very different way (Harvey 1996) and a paper by Jon May which mobilizes these understandings in a detailed piece of research into a particular place (May 1996).

Chapters 5 and 6 focus on examples of ways in which the concept of place has been mobilized in research, across disciplines and in the world beyond. Chapter 5 concerns the way people have created places. These include the idea of *genius loci* and the development of place in architecture; the way memory and place intersect in the production of heritage places such as museums; how particular visions of place are created in order to get people to live there; the relationship between art and place, and the role of place in the digital world. But places are not just small and local. Regions and nations are also places and some geographers have looked at the production of place at a larger scale. These examples reveal how the concept of place can still have salience in the contemporary world in widely divergent contexts. Chapter 6 concerns the use of notions of appropriate place to construct normative "moral geographies" that map particular kinds of people and practice to particular places. Here I draw on my own work on transgression in *In Place/Out of Place* (Cresswell 1996) and work on "people without place," such as the homeless and refugees, as well as how gay, lesbian and bisexual people are made to feel "out of place." Places are not just about people. Other living things form part of place and these too can be experienced as transgressive. The chapter also considers the role of place in animal geographies. This work shows how place is used in the construction of ideas about who and what belong where and when, and thus in the construction of those seen as "deviant" and outside of "normal" society. While both of these sets of examples concern the connections between

place, identity, and power, they use place in radically different ways and from different political perspectives.

Finally, in Chapter 7, I provide an annotated bibliography as well as lists of key readings and texts, and a survey of web resources, pedagogical resources, and possible student projects.

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