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PLACE AS MULTIPLICITY

Kim Dovey

I began my academic career when I decided as a young architect that I was poorly educated for the tasks that I faced. These seemed to me more about practices and experiences of dwelling than the fixations on built form that so preoccupied the architecture profession - about relations between people and spaces rather than formal objects. I returned to university to undertake a research masters degree, and in those golden days when enrolment was free I also enrolled in a parallel philosophy degree. An interest in Heideggerian phenomenology soon led to Edward Relph's (1977) recently published *Place and Placelessness*. This really was a revelation, a wonderfully clear introduction to phenomenology and a seminal application to issues of built form and the city. I remain indebted to this work, even as I have moved on. I later continued to a PhD at Berkeley in the early 1980s, where a number of people who seemed to be thinking in this way were working - Christopher Alexander, Clare Cooper Marcus, Donald Appleyard and Lars Lerup. Alexander had recently published "A Pattern Language" and "The Timeless Way of Building", Cooper Marcus was writing on the "House as Symbol of Self", Appleyard on the concept of "home" and Lerup on "Building the Unfinished" (Alexander 1977, 1979; Cooper 1974; Appleyard 1979; Lerup 1977). I discovered that none of them (excepting Lerup) had read phenomenology and I suspect this is also true of other major figures of the North American scene such as Jane Jacobs on the "Death and Life" of cities (Jacobs 1961) and Kevin Lynch on concepts of image and place (Lynch 1969; 1972). They did not need the philosophy or social theory to do what they were doing; a sensibility for place was embedded in such thinking rather than foregrounded as a discourse of the "sense of place". I have become ambivalent about the use of the word "place" which is a loaded and somewhat dangerous term, for reasons I will get to. Yet the discourse of "place" remains because it is such an everyday term that is so widely used and seemingly understood by people in their everyday life, and is of such concern at an ontological level. This was a key Heideggerian insight - that there is no "being" separate from our "world"; our existence is always already "being-in-the-world" (Heidegger 1962, 1971).

When I returned to Melbourne in the mid-1980s, I co-organised a conference entitled "Place and Placemaking", to which we invited Relph as a keynote speaker (Dovey et al 1985). While this was early in the move toward place-based thinking, it was already seen as a contested discourse and Relph was part of a triangle of different approaches with the other keynote addresses by Leonie Sandercock (political economy) and Amos Rapoport (environment-behaviour studies) (Sandercock 1975; Rapoport 1982). In those days, in order to get brochures printed, you had to send them off to a "copy-setter" and when it came back it was spelled "lacemaking". I didn't notice at the time that this might be more than a typographical error. Lace is something you put together intricately with quite a lot of patience, you thread one thing through another to make connections and loops, and the result is relatively transparent - not altogether unlike placemaking.

As I became involved in urban projects the complexities involved in both the discourses and practices of place and placemaking multiplied. During the 1990s, I was hired by an urban design consultant to work as a sub-consultant to provide advice on a proposed development adjacent to the Sydney Opera House at Circular Quay. Now the Opera House caps a small peninsula at the end of a steep promontory of botanical gardens. Circular Quay is of course Sydney's centrepiece, framed by the Opera House and Botanical Gardens on one side and by the steep escarpment known as The Rocks and the Harbour Bridge on the other - a very dramatic sense of place indeed. The consultant wanted to pick my brain about place theory as applied to Circular Quay and I soon realised that he wanted an argument as to how Circular Quay would be improved by being more fully enclosed by buildings like a European plaza; "Can't you do a Norberg-Schulz on it?", he asked. Norberg-Schulz was the foremost architectural phenomenologist of the time. His 1980 book "Genius Loci" argued for a concept of "place" as an existential foothold that stabilizes who we are and where we are, where architecture is "grounded" in a deep and unchanging "spirit of place". It wasn't necessary to believe in such a theory to figure out that my employer was in turn hired by developers who wanted to insert a new building between the harbour and the Botanical Gardens, also blocking some views to the Opera House. My advice was not useful - the building was built and famously christened by the art critic Robert Hughes (1998) as "the Toaster, that dully

brash, intrusive apartment block that now obscures the view of the Opera House from three directions". There are some lessons in this about the ways that knowledge might be used and in whose interests the discourses of place might operate. Place is a nebulous and somewhat dangerous concept that can be used to argue for more buildings or less of them, a bit like "community", "home" and "character" - motherhood concepts that carry a positive charge that one can't easily argue with. In this place can be a legitimating discourse.

For many in the built environment fields a critical approach to practices of power led to a retreat from the language of place, on the premise that if we stop using the word then its potency might be neutralized. Yet such linguistic politics did little but insulate critics from attack by other critics, a retreat from the everyday that left the city exposed to attack in the name of placemaking. During the property boom of the early 1990s I worked with resident groups and local governments in Melbourne where vital inner-city urban neighbourhoods were often threatened with transformational change. In urban planning tribunals, developers with expensive lawyers and consultants, would utilise the discourse of place to say how much they were going to contribute to the city with a 14 storey building in a 2 storey neighbourhood. There was particular interest in the theory of "landmarks" and "gateways". The city it seemed, misquoting Lynch, needed more landmarks in the form of buildings that can rise to a greater height and bulk than their neighbours with a special status and protected views. Gateways were very popular because here the celebration of place required not one but two taller buildings to enhance the sense of entrance. I was once faced with the argument by an urban design consultant in a legal tribunal that a tall building on the waterfront, overshadowing the beach indeed, should be approved as part of a symbolic "gateway" that would frame the view of the city from a yacht in the bay.

This was perhaps the worst argument for placemaking I have encountered, and while the standards of argument have improved overtime, the planning decisions have not. In a recent satirical Australian television series on the development industry called "Utopia" (Working Dog Productions, 2014), a developer wanted to build a 55 storey waterfront tower in order to give something back to the city, to contribute to the public realm. The planner asks: "Can we ask him to contribute a little bit less?" In the critical academic literature we call this "uneven" development, sometimes "gentrification" or "creative destruction" - part of a neoliberal political and economic agenda for deregulated urban development that has taken such a powerful hold in most cities since the 1970s.

What is the scope for placemaking in a political context of neo-liberalism? I would suggest that the discourses of place and placemaking are thoroughly interwoven with practices that can also be described as place destruction. A brief look at the advertising for any major urban development project shows it to be driven by desires for particular forms of place-identity - shopping malls, residential enclaves, corporate towers. The "Toaster" is surely a great place to live; it was not produced by desires to block views to the harbour, Opera House and Botanical Gardens, but rather to capture and to privatize them. Deregulated uneven development and creative destruction is a practice of placemaking.

In most of my work I have been committed to the idea of trying to reframe what it is that "place" means - away from any exclusively positive, closed or backward-looking ideal and towards one that incorporates practices of power (Dovey 2005, 2008, 2010). I have been worried by the ease with which "place" gets appropriated into discourses of privatisation and political power. We need to be alert to the ways gated communities, shopping malls and formularized global mega-projects construct an instant but privatized sense of place as well as to the ways urban design in the public realm can work to legitimate tyranny and construct new forms of docile subjectivity. I would describe all of this as a form of anti-urban placemaking but not as "placelessness".

PLACELESSNESS

Places such as parking lots, fast-food restaurants, corporate towers and shopping malls are often described as placeless because they lack a rooted sense of identity and authenticity; they are bland and anonymous. If we view the concept of place as a positive sense of identification with valued places, then placelessness is the absence of such place identity. An alternate view, that the "non-place" can be highly valued derives originally from Webber (1964) who argued for a conception of the "non-place urban realm" where everyone drives everywhere in a "community without propinquity". However, this vision of how social networks can be achieved at a larger scale without walkable neighbourhoods simply increases the scale of place identification and is now clearly obsolete. Augé (1995) defines the non-place in an even more positive manner as those parts of the urban and architectural environment without unique identity but where we nonetheless feel at home. Here non-places are mostly identified with travel environments such as airports. In an era of shrinking space and accelerating sense of time, levels of travel and the circulation of images, we see the emergence of locations

where we spend a lot of time and are quite comfortable but where we don't invest any sense of identity. Both Relph and Augé define the concept of place as sites identified with particular identities or groups; but while Relph's placelessness is portrayed as bland and dull, Augé's concept of the non-place has an openness that is less suffocating.

While conceptions of placelessness and non-place have a good deal of resonance with our experiences in everyday life, the opposition between place/placelessness or place/non-place is problematic. Only if we define place in terms of closure and rootedness does the idea of a non-place make sense. If we see place as an ontological condition of dwelling then the opposite of place is not emptiness but absence, there is nowhere without a sense of place and it is problematic to reserve the term 'place' for those places we wish to valorize. What is placeless to some people will not seem that way to others. Those parts of urban space that are least invested with identity often have the greatest capacity for appropriation - they are less invested in a stabilized sense of "being" and therefore more open to a sense of "becoming". In Deleuzian jargon they are "smooth" rather than "striated" (Deleuze & Guattari 1987). Carparks are used by weekend markets, by skateboarders and teenage lovers and sometimes it's the very dereliction from the mainstream point of view that renders them available to others and for other practices and meanings. For De Certeau (1984) "places are constructed through a thousand uses"; there is no consensual view of what place might mean. The idea that only some of the city has a sense of place is loosely but problematically linked to problems of essentialism and authenticity – who is to decide the difference between place and placelessness, who authorizes authenticity?

There is an important distinction between "place" and "space". When we say "this is a great place", or an "awful place", we mean something different to "this is a great space" which is somehow more formal than social. "Place" is a socio-spatial concept, intimately connecting people with space. We need approaches that cut across this subject/object divide and ultimately, and phenomenology alone, with a focus on subjectivity, is inadequate to this task. I have argued elsewhere that the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987; see also DeLanda 2006) offers the most sophisticated framework for a rethinking of place as a multi-scale assemblage that can link social theory and philosophy to architecture and geography on the one hand, and the sciences and humanities on the other (Dovey 2010: Ch 2).

ASSEMBLAGE

It is clear that place can mean many different things in different contexts and be used for different purposes. A key task is to avoid reductionism, particularly reductions to text and to essence. The reduction to text stems mainly from the discursive turn in social theory where a focus on the discourse of place leads into a deconstruction of place as text. The sense of place in everyday life is reduced to a constructed discourse. While discourse analysis is a crucial research tool, the reduction to text strips place of its ontological potency - in the best and worst senses of that word. Potency being, of course, about power - the power of place in our lives, the power of place to sustain us, but also the power of places to frame our lives in ways that are against our interests (Dovey 2008).

The other key form of reductionism is essentialism, the idea of place becoming an original source, the authentic source of meaning, the exclusive one right way. The anti-essentialist argument is a powerful one that has been most effectively put in the work of Doreen Massey who vehemently opposes Heideggerian thinking on place as backward-looking, closed and parochial (Massey 1993; see also Cresswell 2004). She argues instead for an open and global sense of place based in difference rather than singularity. Massey's critique is much more potent than those of Webber or Augé because it does not oppose the experience or concept of place, only the reactionary versions marked by closed identities, myths of authenticity and exclusionary boundaries. The progressive sense of place is defined by its relations with other places, by "routes" rather than "roots". Massey does not turn away from the concept of home as a place of safety and yearning, but also portrays it as the place of dark secrets and the unhomely (Massey 2000). In later work Massey explored some of the contradictions of place and the difficulty of any simple categorizations of open/closed and global/local. Her study of highly globalized and mobile workers in science parks near Cambridge (UK) found that a significant number of them lived in renovated cottages in local villages. These cottages were generally more open and housed a greater multiplicity of people and practices places than the global workplaces (Massey 2005).

Massey does not explicitly cite Relph's work as a target in her original critique but this was surely just academic politics. Yet the tension between Relph's and Massey's work is a productive tension and the deeper task is not simply over-turning Heidegger but of moving beyond binary thinking such as open/closed and global/local. Heidegger's work is essentialist but his insights about the spatial ontology of place need to be separated from the problematic essentialism. I suggest a move towards the idea of place as "assemblage", where place and placelessness are not binary opposites but are intertwined, where each becomes or folds into the other. In this conception Heidegger's "being-in-the-world" might be replaced with a more Deleuzian "becoming-in-the-world" – a more dynamic and open sense of place as a multiplicitous assemblage

CHARACTER

I now want to explore the idea of "character" as a partial synonym for place through the ways in which resident action groups often focus on urban or neighbourhood "character" as a form of place identity that needs to be defended against some kinds of development. I have long been studying what people mean when they say inappropriate development was damaging the "character" of their neighbourhood (Dovey 2013). There are consistencies in the answers - character is something that makes places different to others or authentic (as in "he's a real character"); character is seen as a form of depth or reliability (as in a "character-building exercise"); and urban character is always seen as both social and spatial at the same time. But urban character is also defended on two very different, even quite opposite, bases. In the first case, urban character is described as consistency of both built forms and people; the place has a history and a legacy that is worth protecting against change. In some cases, this is experienced as a purified sense of place, backward looking and closed. The defence of character can be a cover for class and race based privilege, using the planning scheme to keep out the wrong kinds of people under the cover of keeping out the wrong kinds of buildings; this is an essentialist notion of place (Dovey et al 2009a). The second basis for the defence of character is found in mixed inner-city locations where character is defined in terms of difference and mix. Here character is found in the juxtaposition of different people, buildings and activities where the mix is the thing that is threatened and is seen as worth preserving (Dovey et al 2009b). This is place as multiplicity and the threat comes from the one right way. In both cases character is a form of place identity that is threatened with placelessness - with becoming like anywhere else - yet these are almost polar opposite notions of what is threatened. The difference between them is exemplified by attitudes to graffiti, in the first case it represents a violation of place identity and in the latter it is often a contribution to it (Dovey et al 2012). Both are senses of place; one is exclusionary, essentialist and problematic while the other is not. One is a bounded and relatively static sense of place, the other is a space of flows - what Massey calls a progressive, open and global sense of place. Both involve a defence of the differences between places; only the latter defends the differences within places. Yet while Massey portrays the open sense of place as one where "routes" replace "roots", we found one where roots intertwined with routes.

In my home city of Melbourne urban character has long had a position of great importance in planning schemes. This dates from the 1990s when deregulatory neoliberal policies primarily took hold. Resident groups demanded that "urban character" be protected and the state responded by making "respect for neighbourhood character" the key criterion for all new development applications. In legal terms this was the proverbial hole that you can drive a truck through - the discourse of character was used to deregulate the development process. This was linked to the replacement of prescriptive urban codes (height limits, etc) with performance-based codes (respect for neighbourhood character). This is another binary we need to move beyond since in many cases it is often prescriptive codes that perform best.

MULTI-SCALE

A lot of the discourse around place ignores the fact that place is one of these wonderful multi-scalar concepts. It is experienced from the space of the armchair or desktop, to a room, building, street, neighbourhood, city, nation and planet. There are a lot of resonances between these scales that are rarely explored in the literature. The essentialist conception of place often translates into practices of border control. At the scale of the household, border control is practically universal - we lock the door for security. At the scale of the neighbourhood, border control is a highly contested notion - gated communities are anti-urban and the defence of urban character can be a form of border control or soft gating. The walled city is largely obsolete except where it operates like a city state - whether to keep people out (as in Hong Kong) or to imprison them (Gaza).

The gated community at the national scale is the way in which the defence of place is deployed to maintain the gap between rich and poor nations - to stop the flow of migrants and refugees.

One of the challenges with regard to scale is to overcome what I see as the hegemony of scale - the presumption that the important influences are those that cascade downwards hierarchically from above, like planning policies and politics. In this conception the global trumps the local and the abstract encompasses the everyday; geography encompasses planning which encompasses urban design which then encompasses architecture and everyday life. Places are a mix of top-down and bottom-up processes, while there are powerful tree-like hierarchies there are also powerful rhizomic networks. Cities emerge from buildings, streets and neighborhoods, as much from informal adaptations as from formal plans and founding fathers. The primary value of a city is found at the smaller scales, in its streets; the ways in which we encounter others in the street, the ways in which buildings frame that space and mediate its flows through pedestrian networks and constellations of attractions. If the streets work, then by and large other things work. Yet small scale analysis is not enough, understanding place requires multi-scalar analysis because the interconnections between scales are crucial.

DISCUSSION

To conclude, I want to outline three challenges for rethinking conceptions of place and placelessness in the 21st century, the first is theoretical and the other two are very practical. The first I have already mentioned and involves seeing place as multiplicity rather than singularity, moving beyond simple binaries such as place and placelessness, beyond any reduction of place to text or essence. Places are both/and phenomena rather than either/or; involving both roots and wings. In my mind this is not so far from Relph's original work where a multiplicity of place experiences was outlined including various types of insideness (existential, vicarious, empathetic) and outsideness (existential, objective) (Relph 1977). A part of the challenge here is to see the interconnections between different conceptions, the inter-twinings, alliances and synergies; place as a "between" condition and a set of relationships.

One of the connections I would like to see more of is between the sciences and humanities. I think there is a lot of research in the sciences at the moment which has great relevance for place - the key parts relate to complex adaptive systems thinking, complexity theory, resilience thinking and theories of emergence. From such a viewpoint, place can be seen as an emergent phenomenon rather than an original source; the practice of "placemaking" is really just the design of a material world in the hope that place will emerge, or the construction of such an illusion. A part of the challenge here lies in getting better at understanding urban morphologies - what I call the urban DMA: density, mix and access. This is the material basis of how cities concentrate activities in close proximity, how they mix different people, practices and built forms together, and how the access networks enable flows between them. I have become particularly interested in urban mapping as a form of spatial knowledge in this regard; knowledge about place cannot be contained to words, numbers and pictures but needs to extend to maps and diagrams as well as the interrelations between them. Ultimately places cannot be captured in images, words or numbers but also require an understanding of morphogenetic process of change.

The science of cities, however, will never be more than another form of reduction if it cannot connect to the humanities and particularly philosophy and social theory. My preferred framework here lies in the forms of assemblage thinking derived from the work of Deleuze and Guattari and particularly the book *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). While there is little scope here to outline such a model, it forms the basis for an understanding of place as multiplicity, as assemblage, as plateau. Gregory Bateson was the great anthropologist who theorised the notion of a plateau as a cybernetic system that escalates to a certain level, and then certain cultural controls become self-organised. A plateau is a level between levels that is held in place by different tensions, sharing an etymology with place (L: plateau). Place is neither pre-existing nor made by designers, but something that emerges from a multiplicity of forces.

The two practical challenges are those that we face at the global scale, threats to the place we all share. The first of these is global poverty and the growth of slums and informal settlements. We talk a lot about this being the age of urbanisation, with a majority of the global population living in cities due to massive rural to urban migration over the last 50 years. Do we imagine that they live in new towns or in the suburbs on the outer rims of cities? Most of the new urbanites are housed by and large in the informal settlements and slums of

developing cities of the global south - over a billion people and growing. This is where the action has been happening in architecture, urban design and urban planning but the built environment professions have been largely irrelevant to it. The scale of informal settlements and the degree to which they are now integrated with the cities they are housed in and the livelihoods of the poor, means that we need to accept that these informal settlements are here to stay. They cannot be erased but neither can we accept such unjust inequalities of wealth. We need to separate the slum conditions of overcrowding and poor sanitation from the informality which is best seen as a resource for managing poverty (Dovey 2012). While there are always problems - lack of open space, poor construction, lack of opportunity, closed to outsiders - they can embody a powerful sense of place that is potentially quite livable.

This leads in turn to that other major challenge of climate change. Informal settlements resonate to some degree with emerging models for the low-carbon city - car-free, walkable, mixed, compact and low-energy, with good access to jobs and shopping. The larger challenge here involves dramatic reductions in carbon emissions in the rich cities of the global north, particularly the car-based cultures of North America and Australia who lead the global league tables of carbon emissions per capita. Setting emission targets is a small challenge compared to redesigning our cities to meet them. A large part of this challenge lies in designing cities where it is faster and easier to get around by public transport than by car. This is a challenge of designing and managing transformational change through transit-oriented development; yet there are high levels of resistance to even the most minor forms of change. The fear is that livability and amenity will be damaged by increased densities and urban intensification; the reality is that the opportunities, if we get the design right, far outweigh the negatives and part of the challenge is to develop visions, scenarios and pilot projects that demonstrate the possibilities (Dovey and Woodcock 2014). It is hard to over-state how much is at stake here; the danger of climate change, and some believe we are already past the turning point, is that we will render the planet relatively uninhabitable for human life. Much of the damage continues to be done under the name of placemaking.

These problems cannot be addressed with singular approaches. Not only by articulating the deeper meanings of authentic places or the processes through which they emerge. Not only by showing how all local places are produced by interconnected networks. Not only by pointing out the place destructive force of global capitalism through a penetrating political economic critique. Not only by nourishing or reinforcing local practices of self-organization and resistance. Not only by deconstructing the deeper meanings of place and complicities with power. Not only by a critical focus on the materialities of everyday life and local adaptation. Place is a multiplicitous assemblage and it requires multiple responses.

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