

Place

Gian Luigi Corinto

Destination Marketing

Place, (Relph E., 1976)

Place is apparently a simple concept, if you do not consider **experience**

As a geographical concept it refers to **named localities**, and it is this meaning which stands behind the frequently used definition of geography as the study of places, a definition with a robust life that has endured throughout the two-thousand-year history of the discipline.

For centuries it was unnecessary **giving a meaning** of the word 'place'.

About in 1960, geography, architecture, and psychology, started to give a more complex notion of place. This is an academic and a social and cultural change of vision.

Places increasingly became an experiential and social phenomenon consisting of **territories of meanings** and subject to all the inconsistencies of everyday life.

A strong shift in the character of actual places as their interconnections and identities have been dramatically alerted by a combination of electronic communications, mass travel, and the growth of global business.

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Philosophically and chronologically the changes in interpretations of place since 1960 reflect a trend from phenomenological approaches to the critical analyses of political economy.

Classical definition

In ordinary language the word 'place' serves as a nebulous catch-all which refers to where something is regardless of scale or type of environment.

The Sahara desert is a place, so is Manhattan, and Vallebona, where we are now, and a house in a village...

Even this short list suggests why Aristotle declared that

'The question, what is Place? presents many difficulties for analysis.'



A 2 WARREGO HIGHWAY	
Ipswich	36
Toowoomba	128
Dalby	211
Miles	339
Roma	479
Mitchell	566
Morven	665
Charleville	754

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Aristotle devoted a section of his Physics (Book 4, 209a–212b) to these difficulties, concluded that **place** refers to the precise dimensions of the **space which contains something**.

A place of a book on a shelf is the space which is exactly **occupied** by that book, and the place of a city is the area containing its buildings and roads.

This interpretation stood behind the old geographical idea of place as whatever occupies a location, culminating perhaps in **central place theory** in which places have **spatial attributes** and no particular content.

Space: *Stàdion Spanna Spazio Espacio Span*: distance; what is contained between two limits



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The Aristotelian view suggests a **place-container** and what is in it can easily be **separated**.

This is the philosophical foundation for policies of **dislocation** and **uprooting**, we can add **Borders and Identities, and Nationality**.

The notion of place as a detachable container is a gross reduction of **Plato's** earlier view, expressed in the *Timaeus*, that place is one of the great modes of being in the universe,

'as it were, the nurse of all becoming', and the receptacle of forms, powers and feelings (Plato, *Timaeus*).

This is an inestimably richer notion than the Aristotelian one, for it suggests that place is an **interactive environment** which influences and responds to whatever is within it.

Place is the location of experience.

Is a container, but of shapes, powers, feelings and meanings.

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This emphasis on meaning and experience indicates that there is a **deep connection between a place and those who occupy it**; the two cannot be separated without radically changing both of them.

Places are territories of **meaning** rather than containers of things.

This comes from Phenomenology considering the world as it is directly experienced, so a phenomenological understanding regards places as tightly **interconnected assemblages of buildings, landscapes, communities, activities, and meanings** which are constituted in the diverse experiences of their inhabitants and visitors.

From this perspective place is an **existential** phenomenon and places are not just geographical objects to be studied academically;

They are where we live.

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In some degree this recognition informs almost all the recent discussions of place, though different disciplines do bring their academic perspectives to bear on it.

Architecture: qualities of urban spaces in terms of their built forms and the ways in which people use and experience these.

Sociology: a concentration of people and economic activity: a cultural artifact of social conflict and cohesion.

Political Economy: the attributes of a place result from social action rather than the qualities in a piece of land.

Geographical approaches tend to be more inclusive and to understand places as combining landscapes, social and economic activities, and meanings, though the relative importance accorded to each of these elements can vary tremendously depending on the character of the place and the bias of the geographer.

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Subjectivity

A difficulty with definitions which stress meaning is that they expose accounts of place to the accusation of being subjective and having no broad relevance.

This is a false charge. Place experiences and meanings are not locked up in the minds of individuals, rather they must be considered to be **intersubjective**—in other words, shared, because they can be communicated and make clear sense to others.

The most pervasive expression of the intersubjective character of place experiences is probably found in the **sense of home**, which appears to be almost universally felt.

Wherever it may be, home is a center of meaning, a familiar setting in an uncertain world, it is the place where one belongs and is best known.

Homelessness, in contrast, describes both a socially unacceptable condition and the loss of a fundamental aspect of human existence.

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Proto-Indo-European

home (n.)

Old English *ham* "dwelling place, house, abode, fixed residence; estate; village; region, country," from Proto-Germanic **haimaz* "home" (source also of Old Frisian *hem* "home, village," Old Norse *heimr* "residence, world," *heima* "home," Danish *hjem*, Middle Dutch *heem*, German *heim* "home," Gothic *haims* "village"), from PIE **(t)koimo-*, suffixed form of root **tkei-* "to settle, dwell, be home." As an adjective from 1550s. The old Germanic sense of "village" is preserved in place names and in *hamlet*.

house (n.)

Old English *hus* "dwelling, shelter, building designed to be used as a residence," from Proto-Germanic **hūsan* (source also of Old Norse, Old Frisian *hus*, Dutch *huis*, German *Haus*), of unknown origin,



càsa rum. prov. cat. sp. e port. casa (got. e ant. ted. hūs, mod. haus; ingl. house) dal lat. CÀSA = gr. KASA [che sta per CADSA o SCAD-SA] capanna, e propr. luogo coperto dalla rad. SKA (= sscr. C'HA) che talvolta trovasi determinata in SKAD (sscr. C'HAD ed ha il senso di coprire, onde il sscr. CHÂYÂ (= irl. SCÀTH, got. SKAD-us) ombra C'HAD-ATI coprire, C'HAT-TRAM parasole, ed

Place, (Relph E., 1976)

Discussions of home and **sense of home** are often conducted in the language of plants, especially in terms of roots.

To have a strong sense of home and belonging is to have roots;

to be forced to move is to be uprooted.

This organic language is scarcely incidental. It implies that to have a home place is natural; it is metaphorically to belong to the earth. This is the meaning which the philosopher Martin Heidegger and other existential writers have chosen to emphasize.

For Heidegger place was to be understood in terms of 'dwelling', which is a fundamental connection between human beings and the earth, and a manifestation of the very essence of existence.

To dwell in a place is to be in a world complete in itself; it is both to exist and to take responsibility for the existence of other beings; it is to be at home.

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This interpretation has to be qualified. If you happen to live in an anonymous apartment slab in suburban Moscow, or a squalid *favela* threatened by mud slides in São Paulo, such notions about home and place and the meaning of existence will be radically truncated.

One's home may still be a familiar shelter in an alien world, but it will not be cosy and nice.

Existence is not without its burdens and home, indeed all types of places, can be constraining and tedious.

Homes have to be maintained, and there is considerable drudgery in doing that, usually falling upon women.

Small towns and villages can be prisons to their younger inhabitants who wish for escape to the anonymous freedoms of big cities.

In short, experiences of home, as those of most places, are ambivalent.

They involve a fluctuating balance of feelings of attachment and of entrapment, though the former sentiment is perhaps the prevailing one.

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Genius Loci or Spirit of Place

In less agnostic cultures than those which now prevail in the urbanized world it was, and in some areas still is, believed that localities were occupied by **spirits** or **gods** who served both as their guardians and as a source of their identity.

Mount Olympus was the home of Zeus, and every mountain top, grove and spring was the home of some lesser deity who had to be acknowledged and propitiated.

The idea of spirit of place, often referred to by its **Latin name as 'genius loci'**, has its origins in this polytheistic sense of environments as consisting of diverse sites, each with its guardian spirit.

In its relatively secularized modern meaning, spirit of place refers simply to the **inherent and unique qualities of somewhere**.

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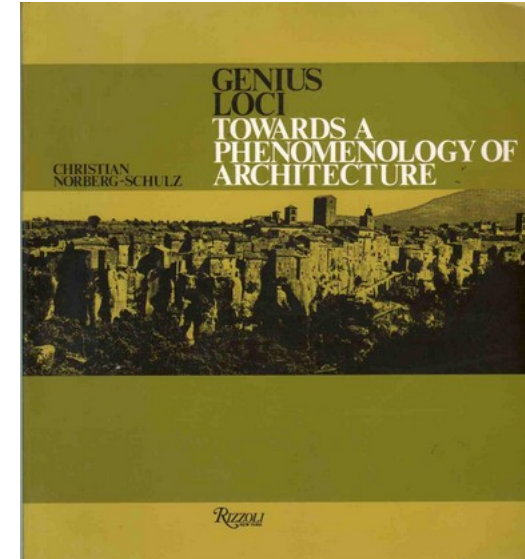
Genius Loci or Spirit of Place

It is this idea which is explored by the architect Christian Norberg-Schulz in his book *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* (1984).

He argues from Heidegger's philosophy that 'place is evidently an integral part of existence' which can be best understood phenomenologically, and using this approach he examines several distinctive landscapes including Prague, Khartoum and Rome.

These are locations with a strong spirit of place because they **have strong visual properties** which may reveal a sense of mystery about natural forces, or manifest rational order, or express some equilibrium of these.

Norberg-Schulz concludes with a familiar refrain—that modern architecture and town planning are deficient in these properties of distinctiveness, they are monotonous



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As a **secular concept** genius loci has a great deal to do with **aesthetic qualities**;

it is, in effect, a way of considering places as works of art.

Beauty, feelings, history,

A place can be designed, can have an **identity** given, recognizable, memorable, vivid, engaging of attention, **differentiated** from other locations.

And perhaps it can, given suitable social conditions and creative architects such as those of the old parts of Rome and Prague, be defined.

But the evidence is that, divine or secular, **genius loci is elusive**.

Even though we may recognize that somewhere has a powerful personality it is invariably difficult to identify how this is constituted and even more **difficult to reproduce it**.

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This is why new developments of buildings and urban areas so often seem utterly out of context.

This is fortunate. Humanity has sufficient powers of control without adding to them the ability to create the lesser deities of place.

What can be done is to protect distinctive places which now exist and then perhaps to find ways to create the conditions which will, in time, allow genius loci to emerge



Michenzani housing project, Ng'ambo, Zanzibar City, Tanzania



Part of the city of Camden, New Jersey suffering from urban decay



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