

A SPACE FOR PLACE IN SOCIOLOGY

Thomas F. Gieryn

Department of Sociology, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana 47405;

e-mail: gieryn@indiana.edu

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■ **Abstract** Sociological studies sensitive to the issue of place are rarely labeled thus, and at the same time there are far too many of them to fit in this review. It may be a good thing that this research is seldom gathered up as a “sociology of place,” for that could ghettoize the subject as something of interest only to geographers, architects, or environmental historians. The point of this review is to indicate that sociologists have a stake in place no matter what they analyze, or how: The works cited below *emplace* inequality, difference, power, politics, interaction, community, social movements, deviance, crime, life course, science, identity, memory, history. After a prologue of definitions and methodological ruminations, I ask: How do places come to be the way they are, and how do places matter for social practices and historical change?

INTRODUCTION

This may or may not be a propitious moment to review the sociological literatures on place. We have been told about the “transcendence of place” (Coleman 1993), the “placelessness of place” (Relph 1976), cities “without a place” (Sorkin 1992), and how place becomes, with modernity, “phantasmagoric” (Giddens 1990). Technological revolutions in transportation and communication, it is said, have all but eliminated the drag once imposed by location and distance on human interaction and on the flow of goods, capital, or information. Social life now moves through nodes in one or another network, through points of power or convergence or translation but not anchored at any place necessarily. The places we build appear as clones of places elsewhere: suburban tracts, shopping malls, freeway interchanges, office complexes, and gussied up old neighborhoods vary less and less. As places lose their distinctiveness, place loses its reality and significance, some believe. The uniqueness of New York, New York, gets packaged for reassembly in Las Vegas, next to pyramids and the Eiffel Tower. Disneyland is in France.

Could it be that place just does not matter anymore? I think it does. In spite of (and perhaps because of) the jet, the 'net, and the fast-food outlet, place persists as a constituent element of social life and historical change (Friedland & Boden

1994). And that significance is measured by an enduring tradition of robust sociological studies of place that remains invisible only because it is rarely framed that way. Sociologists have given the appearance of not being interested in place—perhaps preferring to leave the matter to specialists from geography, or fearing that environmental determinism would rob social and cultural variables of their explanatory oomph, or worrying that the particularities of discrete places might compromise the generalizing and abstracting ambitions of the discipline (Agnew 1989, Entekin 1991). My task is to reveal the riches of a place-sensitive sociology and propel it forward.

I begin with some definitional necessities and illustrate these with one sociological study that takes place for all that it is worth. Next I consider the sociology of how places come to be, and, after that, how place matters for social life. Rather than pursue an exhaustive review of work on place from collateral disciplines of geography (Gregory 1994, Soja 1989), architecture and planning, environmental psychology, anthropology (Lawrence & Low 1990, Low 1996), environmental history, and philosophy (Casey 1997), I have instead been cavalier in choosing books and articles that inform themes and issues already somewhere on the sociological agenda. Wherever available, I cite only the good trailhead to a path of inquiry—that is, something recently published with a long bibliography.

GROUND RULES

Some definition of place is needed if only to restrict the domain of work under review. But more: the definition offered here is designed to bring together several literatures now rarely connected. For present purposes, place will have three necessary and sufficient features:

(1) Geographic Location

A place is a unique spot in the universe. Place is the distinction between here and there, and it is what allows people to appreciate near and far. Places have finitude, but they nest logically because the boundaries are (analytically and phenomenologically) elastic. A place could be your favorite armchair, a room, building, neighborhood, district, village, city, county, metropolitan area, region (Entekin 1989, 1991), state, province, nation, continent, planet—or a forest glade, the seaside, a mountaintop. This gradient of place is one reason why it is difficult to appreciate what sociologists in particular have written about place because the discipline chops up the phenomena into incommunicado bits: urban sociology, rural sociology, suburban sociology, home, the environment, neighborhood, workplaces, ecology. To pursue place itself is to ask what these places of varying scale have in common and how they differ.

(2) Material Form

Place has physicality. Whether built or just come upon, artificial or natural, streets and doors or rocks and trees, place is stuff. It is a compilation of things or objects at some particular spot in the universe. Places are worked by people: we make places and probably invest as much effort in making the supposedly pristine places of Nature as we do in cities or buildings (DuPuis & Vandergeest 1996, Schama 1995). Sociologists are again alive to the significance of material culture in social life. A thriving literature on technology (not just on its social effects but its physical guts) has generated concepts and theories for discussing places as assemblages of things (Bijker et al 1987, Latour 1996, MacKenzie 1990). Social processes (difference, power, inequality, collective action) happen *through* the material forms that we design, build, use, and protest (Habraken 1998).

(3) Investment with Meaning and Value

Without naming (on toponyms: Feld & Basso 1996), identification, or representation by ordinary people, a place is not a place. Places are doubly constructed: most are built or in some way physically carved out. They are also interpreted, narrated, perceived, felt, understood, and imagined (Soja 1996). A spot in the universe, with a gathering of physical stuff there, becomes a place only when it ensconces history or utopia, danger or security, identity or memory. In spite of its relatively enduring and imposing materiality, the meaning or value of the same place is labile—flexible in the hands of different people or cultures, malleable over time, and inevitably contested.

What Place is Not

To define place this way excludes several phenomena potentially of keen interest to sociologists. First, place is not space—which is more properly conceived as abstract geometries (distance, direction, size, shape, volume) detached from material form and cultural interpretation (Hillier & Hanson 1984). Space is what place becomes when the unique gathering of things, meanings, and values are sucked out (de Certeau 1984, Harvey 1996; for contrasting definitions: Lefebvre 1991). Put positively, place is space filled up by people, practices, objects, and representations. In particular, place should not be confused with the use of geographic or cartographic metaphors (boundaries, territories) that define conceptual or analytical spaces—as the title of this piece makes plain (also: Gieryn 1999). Neither is place to be found in cyberspace: virtual it is not, at least for purposes of this review. Websites on the internet are not places in the same way that the room, building, campus, and city that house and locate a certain server is a place (S Graham 1998, Purcell 1997). Still, it is fascinating to watch geography and architecture become the means through which cyberspace is reckoned by designers and users (Boyer 1996, Jones 1998, King 1998, Mitchell 1995).

Second, place is not just a setting, backdrop, stage, or context for something else that becomes the focus of sociological attention, nor is it a proxy for demographic, structural, economic, or behavior variables. Nothing of interest to sociologists is nowhere (Casey 1993): Everything that we study is emplaced; it happens somewhere and involves material stuff, which means that every published piece of sociology legitimately belongs in this review. No: in much research, pseudo-places are identified only as a means to bound the unit of analysis (as when a survey asks questions of respondents who happen to live in Kalamazoo or Kankakee, but nothing more is said about those cities). Place is equally irrelevant to studies that compare Kalamazoo and Kankakee in terms of behavior patterns, structural changes, or attitudes—if nothing more is hypothesized about the effects of the geographic location, material form, or attributed meanings of the two cities. A sensitivity to place must be more than using two “places” simply to get a comparative wedge. The strong form of the argument is this: place is not merely a setting or backdrop, but an agentic player in the game—a force with detectable and independent effects on social life (Werlen 1993).

In the same way, place must be more than (say) racial proportions of neighborhoods, unemployment rates in cities, birth rates in nation-states. Here, place becomes a stand-in for clusters of variables located in spaces chosen for their analytic utility but generally denuded of architecture, landscape, and actors’ own narrations. Perhaps the classic example from sociology is the census tract, used so effectively in research on the persistence of poverty, violence, and residential segregation in urban neighborhoods (e.g. Bergeson & Harman 1998, Jargowsky 1997, South & Crowder 1999). If the census tract is simply a bundle of analytic variables used to distinguish one neighborhood from another in terms of its economic or demographic features, then it is not place. Such studies become place-sensitive as they feed in information about relative location of the census tract in a metropolitan area, the patterns of streets or significance of particular buildings like churches or markets, and the perceptions and understandings of the place by people who might live there or not.

Working Metatheoretical Premises

A sociology informed by place will be most effective, I think, if it is neither reductionist nor determinist. That is, the three defining features of place—location, material form, and meaningfulness—should remain bundled. They cannot be ranked into greater or lesser significance for social life, nor can one be reduced down to an expression of another. Place has a plenitude, a completeness, such that the phenomenon is analytically and substantively destroyed if the three become unraveled or one of them forgotten (Entrikin 1991, Sack 1997, Thrift 1996). This anti-reductionism precludes geographical fetishism and environmental determinism, just as it precludes an unbridled social constructivism. “If you build it, they will come” is good Hollywood (or Iowa), but bad social theory; equally bad is “If you perceive it so, it is thus.” Place is, at once, the buildings, streets, monuments, and

open spaces assembled at a certain geographic spot *and* actors' interpretations, representations, and identifications. Both domains (the material and the interpretive, the physical and the semiotic) work autonomously *and* in a mutually dependent way (Bourdieu 1990).

Antideterminism applies as well to the analytical relationship between place and the other ontological realms that sociologists routinely study: behavior, belief, institutions, change. Place saturates social life: it is one medium (along with historical time) through which social life happens. The analogy is to gender: to code a respondent male or female is not the same as grasping how social institutions (and places) are gendered. The task ahead is to see all social phenomena as emplaced, as being constituted in part through location, material form, and their imaginings (Appadurai 1996). Put more tractably, place stands in a recursive relation to other social and cultural entities: places are made through human practices and institutions even as they help to make those practices and institutions (Giddens 1984). Place mediates social life; it is something more than just another independent variable (Abu-Lughod 1968).

Exemplar

To bring this flighty prolegomena down to earth, consider *Childerley*. Bell's (1994) ethnographic study of a pseudonymous exurban English village in Hampshire (pop. 475) epitomizes a sociology sensitive to place. Its topics read like the table of contents from an intro text: values, morality, class, gender, deviance, power, change, culture, politics—but these are all emplaced, and we learn about them in and through Childerley. Almost every chapter starts out by situating the reader there: “Childerley . . . is best known for the Horse and Hound, a genuine sixteenth-century pub at the end of the village. Visitors come from miles away to take a pint of good ale in front of its huge fireplace, ten feet wide and five feet deep, and to soak in the ambiance of the head-bashing-low timbered ceiling and rude board tables and benches” (Bell 1994:27). Incidental detail? Hardly. Pubs (along with council houses, tied cottages, manor houses—and how fireplaces or televisions are differently arranged therein) (Halle 1993) contribute to the reproduction of class distinctions in Childerley: the Horse and Hound is favored by the moneyed, the Fox (described as “a bit grotty”) is favored by ordinary working-class folks. Even the concepts that Bell devises to analyze class in Childerley are place-terms: the moneyed are “front-door” people (formal, distanced, individualistic), the ordinary folks are “back-door” (local, informal, group-oriented, experiential).

But social class is distrusted among residents of Childerley, and it is rarely chosen by them as a legitimate source of identity and motivation or seen as a guarantee of morality and sincerity—too easily polluted by materialist self-interest, they might say. Bell finds instead that place itself—Childerley the village and even more the nature found in the surrounding pastoral countryside—becomes the interpretive frame through which people there measure their lives, evaluate others, take political positions, and just make sense. The countryside itself becomes a

“moral rock” (1994:8) for Childerleyans, as they see themselves in and from this “good” place (where patient, sincere, and friendly people respect nature on a first-name basis), distant from the evil metropole. People are ranked and trusted by how authentically “country” they are, though not everyone agrees on its determinants. For ordinary folks, the country village that Childerley was imagined to be has been lost to gentrifying arrivistes from London who build huge new homes and want to clean the place up. Place is as vital for securing tradition as for manifesting class difference: “The stories we tell take place in places, and most ordinary Childerleyans live right in the setting of most of their lifetime’s accumulated stories” (Bell 1994:170). Geographic location, material forms, Childerleyan’s representations of their home—these are the means through which readers learn about inequality, morality, capitalism, and other squarely sociological matters.

A space for place in sociology is not to be found in a sociology *of* place, with its own ASA section and specialty journal. Rather, it will come from sociological studies of anything and everything that are informed by a sense of place—as with Childerley (which was chosen as exemplar not because the village evokes nostalgia or tradition but because it is one of many sites where battles over the authenticity and even existence of “the local” are waged). How do geographic locations, material forms, and the cultural conjurings of them intersect with social practices and structures, norms and values, power and inequality, difference and distinction? There are two ways to answer this question: the first is explore how places come into being, the second is to find out what places accomplish. In the Real World, the construction of places and their social achievements or consequences are tough to disentangle—so consider it an arbitrary distinction good only for immediate organizational ends.

PLACE-MAKING

The making of places—identifying, designating, designing, building, using, interpreting, remembering—has been examined in three sociological literatures, only sometimes brought together: upstream forces that drive the creation of place with power and wealth; professional practices of place-experts; perceptions and attributions by ordinary people who experience places (and act on those understandings).

Powers Behind Places

Most research has been done on how urban places come to look the way that they do, with less on the powers shaping rural areas (on rusticity: Ching & Creed 1997, Cloke & Little 1997, Summers 1986), small towns (Hummon 1990), individual buildings and lightly built landscapes (Bantjes 1997). An enduring debate over factors driving the location and built form of cities pits urban ecologists vs. political economists (Feagin 1998, Flanagan 1993, Frisbie & Kasarda 1988, Gottdeiner 1994, Gottdeiner & Feagin 1988, Hughes 1993, Walton 1993). Urban ecologists

see cities as the result of a survival of the fittest, shaped by competitions for efficient locations among individuals and corporate actors of diverse means and powers to control the physical terrain in a self-interested way. "Natural" processes of competition and mobility lead to segregated niches of homogeneous activities or demographic characteristics. The spatial arrangement of these natural areas—central business district, residential, manufacturing, warehouses—have been described as a set of concentric zones, sectors that slice through the concentric zones and as a spatially distributed multiplicity of nuclei or centers (reviewed in Wilson 1984). More recent ecological perspectives (Hawley 1986) have explored patterns of ethnic segregation, changing population densities, decentralization and suburbanization, and sought to identify empirically socioeconomic and ethnic factors that underlie differences among residential niches (Berry & Kasarda 1977).

Political economic models of place-making find nothing "natural" about the architecture of urbanity: cities assume material forms (and cultural meanings) congruent with economic interests and political alignments in a resolutely capitalist world (for socialist alternatives: Blau 1999). The natural physical environment, technology, transportation, and the individual choices of self-interested actors are less consequential than the pursuit of profit (through production of goods and services, or—more immediately—investments in land) and political complicity with such enlargements of wealth (Lefebvre 1991). Capitalist industrial strategies are unavoidably territorial strategies, as geographic patterns in production and consumption create places of growth and decline (Clarke 1992, Storper & Walker 1989). Simultaneous decay in the urban core and sprawling suburbs (Baldassare 1992) is traced back, for example, to selective capital investments by banks and government (Harvey 1973) or to economic restructuring and the rise of high tech industries (Castells 1977) that find it more profitable to locate in (and spawn) "edge cities" (Garreau 1991), or to legal structures that set in motion economic competitions among fractured municipal sovereignties (Frug 1999). Theme parks represent a double commodification, as the place itself is consumed by tourists as they also consume schlock: "Sea World is a like a mall with fish" (Davis 1997:2; on themed places generally: Gottdeiner 1997, Wright & Hutchison 1997). Globalization of economic activity (Cox 1997, Knox 1993) has not made place unimportant but rather has given rise to new kinds of places such as the "global city" (AD King 1996, Knox & Taylor 1995, Sassen 1991) and dependent cities in the "third world" (Smith 1996), or total makeovers of extant places like Times Square (Reichl 1999), or massive changes among existing cities such as the tilt toward the American Sunbelt (Scott 1988).

A kind of structural determinism haunts these ecological and political economic models, leading them both to overlook the play of agency and contingency in place-making. Metropolitan areas are not shaped by faceless forces of natural succession-and-competition or capitalist logics of accumulation: people and groups organized into coalitions actively accomplish places, and the process is never the same from here to there (Logan & Molotch 1987). "Growth machines" of place-entrepreneurs—local rentiers, politicians, media, and utilities—pursue ever

more intensive land-use so that greater amounts of exchange-value may be extracted from commodified property (Rudel 1989). They sometimes face resistance from community organizers more concerned about the use-value of place, who oppose growth because of its detrimental consequences for neighborhood quality of life or environmental health. The struggle between those who produce places for profit and those who consume it in their daily rounds is played out against a global struggle *among* places for the wherewithal to grow. Cities compete nationally and globally for investors, jobs, spectacles, state-supported places like military bases (Hooks 1994), cultural treasures, shoppers and tourists by differentiating themselves from the rest. Artists drawn to Lower Manhattan by initially cheap digs in lofts soon found themselves in the midst of intense economic development, which has remade Soho into a tourist-and-shopping destination with astronomical rents (Zukin 1982). A century-old residential neighborhood in Brussels is transformed (not without opposition) into an administrative home for the European Community (Papadopolous 1996). On-the-ground case studies of Atlanta (Rutheiser 1996), Beijing (Sit 1995), Berlin (Ladd 1997, Strom 1996), Dallas (Fairbanks 1998), Los Angeles (Davis 1990, 1998, Dear et al 1996, Hayden 1995, Keil 1998, Scott & Soja 1996), Houston (Feagin 1988), Miami (Croucher 1997, Portes & Stepick 1993) Milwaukee (Orum 1995), and Minneapolis-St. Paul (Orfield 1997) put human faces on the winners and losers in these layered struggles over place-making.

Place-Professionals

From a different perspective, urban growth machines become *clients* for professions whose bailiwick is the design of built-places: architects (Blau 1984, Brain 1989, Cuff 1991, Gutman 1988, Sarfatti Larson 1993, Zeisel 1975); urban and regional planners (Boyer 1983, Cherry 1974, Forester 1989, Gans 1968, Hall 1988, Perin 1977, Sandercock 1998, Suttles 1990); landscape architects (Mukerji 1997); interior designers (Fehrenbacher-Zeiser 1996); cartographers (Buisseret 1998, G King 1996, Pickles 1995, Thrower 1996); surveyors, historic preservationists (Barthel 1996); even public relations specialists with expertise in promoting a place (Gold & Ward 1994). Design-experts mediate the relationship between political, economic, or mobilized powers and the built-places that they desire. Interests and agendas of diverse clients are filtered through a profession, a culture, and a “discipline” of design. The design of a place may involve planners, architects, policymakers, financial institutions, patrons, regulatory agencies, potential users, developers, engineers, and variously interested audiences. It is, at once, the making of a place *and* the negotiation, translation, and alignment of political and economic interests, technical skills and imperatives, aesthetic judgments and societal futures (Stieber 1998). The finished places that we see, inhabit, visit, and suffer are as much the consequence of decisions made by place-professionals as of the wishes of clients upon whom they depend for their livelihood.

The practice of architecture (for example) situates place-making within a profession that must defend its jurisdiction or market niche (Brain 1991), legitimate

its cultural authority, socialize its members, standardize its procedures, and reward its heroes and (infrequently: Hughes 1996) heroines. Buildings take shape as individual draftpersons seek promotion to project architects and then partners, as design firms hustle clients by specializing in a particular building type or by promoting a signature style, and as the profession patrols its porous boundaries from encroachments by engineers, developers, amateurs, and U-design-it software. All of these struggles—melded with emergent constraints from clients' preferences and budget, local building codes, the terrain of the physical site—get materialized in the built-form of a place. For instance, suburban shopping malls (Crawford 1992, Gottdeiner 1995, 1997; Zukin 1991, 1995) have a certain sameness to them not only because capitalist logic demands that the same retail chains locate in almost every one of them, but also because developers buy architectural plans from a small number of bureaucratically organized firms who save considerable time and money by hiring draftpersons to crank out (routinized by computer-assisted design) an effective and low-risk one-size-fits-all mall.

This routinization, standardization, and rationalization of design practice that makes architecture firms efficiently profitable and professionally accountable also raises questions about what it is exactly that architects provide. Architects survive because there are innumerable ways to translate “function” (selling goods) into built “form” (a mall). The profession's marketability depends upon convincing clients that architects alone possess the creative skills and artistic judgments necessary for making this transit from idea or need to place. Architects sell “style,” which—when built-in—becomes the look or feel that people associate with a place. Most everybody notices at some level that the big-box suburban mall landing like a spaceship in a sea of parking is not the same as the postmodern confection like Boston's Quincy Market or Baltimore's Harborplace that is contextualized into the surrounding urban fabric and decorated with appropriate historical referents. The stylistic turn from modernism to postmodernism [which has yielded vastly different places (R King 1996, Ley 1989)] is not just about changing tastes (or changing political economies: Harvey 1990); it is also about architects seeking to convince clients that they have hit upon a better way to move function to form amidst the changing political economy of urban areas (Ellin 1996). As the failed urban renewal programs of modernism gave way to gentrifying city neighborhoods (Ley 1997), postmodern emporiums became right not only for selling but for other social goals such as growing community or attracting capital.

A Sense of Place

Places are endlessly made, not just when the powerful pursue their ambition through brick and mortar, not just when design professionals give form to function, but also when ordinary people extract from continuous and abstract space a bounded, identified, meaningful, named, and significant place (de Certeau 1984, Etlin 1997). A place is *remarkable*, and what makes it so is an unwindable spiral of material form and interpretative understandings or experiences.

Something in the built-form of a place encourages people to distinguish this building or that patch of ground from its overlookable backdrop. Urban environments are designed and built in ways that either enhance or prevent their “imageability” and “legibility” (Lynch 1960). The perceived contrast between a place and its surrounding unidentified spaces may be achieved through continuity (when the architectural homogeneity of buildings in a neighborhood lead people to see it as Beacon Hill or Seaside), or through uniqueness (when a landmark stands out as utterly unlike any other thing in town, like New York’s Flatiron Building or the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington) (Milgram et al 1972). Research on mental (or cognitive) mapping—how individuals identify and locate a place when asked to map it—suggests that places emerge along paths (linear streets) or nodes (transportation transfer points), and they are bounded by imposing physical edges (waterfront, building facades that wall an open space) (Downs & Stea 1973, Peponis et al 1990). When asked to describe their apartment, New Yorkers presented either a map (giving the location of adjacent rooms) or a tour (moving the respondent through space) (Linde & Labov 1975).

But mental maps drawn by naive geographers also measure what people bring to the material forms they inhabit (Tuan 1974, 1977). Foremost, perhaps, is pragmatic utility: people identify as places those spots that they go to for some particular purpose or function. The sequence of places along one’s daily rounds (home, shopping, employment, entertainment) is often the core cartographic feature of subjective cityscapes—with identified districts and landmarks then grafted on as a means of orientation (Pred 1990). The egoistic particularity of mapped-out places (Jameson 1984:90) suggests that such representations will vary among individuals in terms of their biographical characteristics and experiences: research shows considerable racial and ethnic differences in how people choose places to put on their maps (Lewis 1996). Also, people recall more easily places that they associate with momentous events in their lives (literatures on cognitive mapping, and environmental psychology generally, are reviewed in Kitchin 1994, Sundstrom et al 1996).

A sense of place is not only the ability to locate things on a cognitive map, but also the attribution of meaning to a built-form or natural spot (Rotenberg & McDonogh 1993, Walter 1988). Places are made as people ascribe qualities to the material and social stuff gathered there: ours or theirs; safe or dangerous; public or private; unfamiliar or known; rich or poor; Black or White; beautiful or ugly; new or old; accessible or not. Rankings of city neighborhoods in terms of perceived desirability and quality of life are key variables in “place stratification” models used to explain patterns of residential dispersion of racial and ethnic groups in metropolitan areas (Alba & Logan 1993, Farley et al 1994, Harris 1999, Lindstrom 1997, South & Crowder 1998). Advantaged groups (and individuals) seek to put distance between themselves and the less advantaged. The very idea of “neighborhood” is not inherent in any arrangement of streets and houses, but is rather an ongoing practical and discursive production/imagining of a people. “Locality” is as much phenomenological as spatial, achieved against the ground

of globalization or nationalization (Appadurai 1996, Crain 1997, Koptiuch 1997, Lippard 1997).

Meanings that individuals and groups assign to places are more or less embedded in historically contingent and shared cultural understandings of the terrain—sustained by diverse imageries through which we see and remember cities (Boyer 1994). Cultural geography (or metageography) studies the (often implicit) spatial representations and images through which people arrange their behavior and interpretations of the social world (Anderson & Gale 1992, Basso 1996, Norton 1989, Sopher 1973). To shift ground: the familiar seven-continent spatialization of the earth's prominent land masses has been described as a "myth" (Lewis & Wigen 1997) that gets reproduced, transmitted, learned, and assumed as fact—but not among all peoples at all times, and with heavy ideological freight. Is North America a "place," or Africa? Conventional demarcations among continents are not based on any consistently applied decision-rule: Europe and Asia are not completely divided by water; not all islands are continents—Madagascar isn't. Moreover, the homogeneities implied by gathering up social practices, demographic distributions, cultural beliefs, built-environments, and physical topography onto *one* continent are belied by obvious internal differentiation (what else does sub-Saharan Africa share with Mediterranean Africa—or Mexico with Canada and the United States—apart from sitting on the same continental land mass?)

These culturally reproduced images of places are thus arbitrary but real in their consequences—for what people *do* to the land, as they make (or destroy) places. Nomadic hunting and gathering lifestyles of Native Americans in New England did much less to reduce the diversity of flora and fauna of this place than the agricultural lifestyles of the colonists who carved up the land into parcels of privately owned property (Cronon 1983). Navaho beliefs that Arizona's Black Mesa is a sacred place did not prevent the Peabody Coal Company from strip mining it for coal starting in 1970 (Kelley & Francis 1994). Whether Native American understandings of places are consistently in tune with ecologically sound noninvasive practices is a matter of dispute (Krech 1999, Stea & Turan 1993). So much is at stake in these diverse images and experiences of a place, and it becomes a sociological truism to say that such symbolic constructions will be forever precarious and contested (Griswold 1992, Hiss 1990, Laclau 1990). The Bastille, for example, started out as a profane place, and became by turn, a sacred place, a liminal place, and finally a mundane place (Smith 1999).

WHAT PLACE DOES

If place matters for social life and historical change—how? Scattered literatures suggest that place: stabilizes and gives durability to social structural categories, differences and hierarchies; arranges patterns of face-to-face interaction that constitute network-formation and collective action; embodies and secures otherwise intangible cultural norms, identities, memories—and values like the American

Dream (Whitaker 1996). These consequences result uniquely (but incompletely) from material forms assembled at a particular spot, in part via the meanings that people invest in a place.

Emplacing Difference and Hierarchy

Fundamental social classifications take on an imposing and constraining force as they are built in to everyday material places. The kinship structure of simple societies is secured as it is spatialized in the geographic arrangement of villages and dwellings (Durkheim & Mauss 1963), and the interior allocation of spaces in the Kabyle house corresponds to basic dichotomies in the Berber cosmogony: male/female, wet/dry, high/low, light/dark (Bourdieu 1990). This structuralist tradition says little about agency and choice in the planning of places (Pearson & Richards 1997). Instead, seeking theoretical escape from artificial oppositions of the objective and subjective, Bourdieu suggests that the architectural and geographic form of places is generated (self-reproduced) by not-fully-conscious-or-strategic practices and symbolic logics that are (at the same time) embodied in and structured by the resulting material arrangements of buildings.

Place sustains difference and hierarchy both by routinizing daily rounds in ways that exclude and segregate categories of people, and by embodying in visible and tangible ways the cultural meanings variously ascribed to them. The spatial division of labor between home and work has profound consequences for women's identities and opportunities (Ahrentzen 1992, Hayden 1981, Hayden 1984, Nippert-Eng 1995, Wright 1981). What it is to be female is constructed in part through idealized qualities (domestic security, family stability) ascribed to the home (Benjamin 1995, Cieraad 1999)—which has been traditionally (and for many is still) a woman's place (Massey 1994). Gendered segregations via the geography and architecture of built-places contribute to the subordination and spatialized social control of women, either by denying access to knowledge and activities crucial for the reproduction of power and privilege or by limiting mobility more generally within places defined as unsafe, physically threatening, or inappropriate (McDowell 1999, Spain 1992, Weisman 1992, Wilson 1992; in Africa: Moore 1986, Prussin 1995). Racial, ethnic, and class segregations are achieved via restrictive land-use zoning that requires homes to be of a certain size or value, especially in suburbs (DeSena 1990, Haar 1996, Kirp et al 1995, Wilson 1998). Class differences and hierarchies are reproduced through segregated class-specific localities of residence and consumption, geographic patterns of relocation that differentially affect labor and capital, and place-shaped capacities for working-class mobilization or expression (Thrift & Williams 1987). Still, at the same time that ethnic enclaves segregate, they also provide conditions of ethnic solidarity, community, and economic advance (Zhou 1992).

Places reflect and reinforce hierarchy by extending or denying life-chances to groups located in salutary or detrimental spots. Most of the literature on ethnic enclaves has focussed on segregated urban neighborhoods whose physical, social,

and cultural deterioration (whether due to the exodus of middle-class minorities or to racist real estate practices) has made it difficult for residents to better their conditions (Massey & Denton 1993, Oliver & Shapiro 1995, Wilson 1996). However, the point may be generalizable: being in the wrong place at the wrong time imposes costs on ethnic minority populations, as Clark (1998) has shown for several European minorities in the seventeenth century. The fate of these groups was a contingent matter of place: those located in regions strategically in between two international powers at war suffered greater persecution and violence. The situation is not all that different for long-time residents of supposedly declining urban neighborhoods, who are compelled by gentrification to relocate elsewhere when they are given offers that they cannot refuse (Zukin 1987).

Power-Vessels and Strongholds

Places have power *sui generis*, all apart from powerful people or organizations who occupy them: the capacity to dominate and control people or things comes through the geographic location, built-form, and symbolic meanings of a place. The array of building-types is, on this score, also a catalog of how places differently become terrains of powers (Markus 1993). Spatializations of normal/pathological, often accompanied by architectures of enclosure, display, segregation, surveillance, and classification, give an impersonal and autonomous power over docile subjects to hospitals, prisons, asylums, schools—the Panopticon (Foucault 1979). Power-spots vary in form and function: the co-location of exclusive clubs and corporate headquarters create local and comfortable places where interlocking directorates can assemble informally and plot moves (Davis & Greve 1997, Kono et al 1998). The “command of heights” has strategic advantage in ground warfare: places of high ground afford a wider view of adversaries’ maneuvers, inhibit their uphill attack, and facilitate construction of powerful defensive strongholds (Clausewitz 1976). The aestheticization of politics means that Mussolini’s fascist power is inscribed even on the sewer plates of Rome (Falasca-Zamponi 1997:98). Still, the hold of a place on power is never permanent or absolute: as markets and capital go global, rusted steel mills and ghostly impoverished towns stay behind (Pappas 1989, Zukin 1991).

Domination over nature is housed in buildings that become—for this reason—places of social power too. Scientific laboratories are places where wild creatures are tamed, enculturated by insertion into artificial territorial regimes that create purified and workable objects of inquiry (Knorr Cetina 1999). From their domination over nature, laboratories dominate society as they become “obligatory passage points” standing between desperate people and their panacea. For example, the vaccine for anthrax was uniquely emplaced at Pasteur’s Parisian laboratory, which became a “center of calculation” with the power to move a healthier France toward enlarged and enthusiastic patronage of science (Latour 1988). The power of laboratories as “truth-spots” depends considerably upon sequesterations achieved architecturally, walls and doors that exclude or inhibit people, and pollutants that

might challenge or compromise the cognitive authority of experimental science (Galison & Thompson 1999, Gieryn 1998, Gutman 1989, Shapin 1998).

The exercise of political power is also intimately connected with place: geography and built environments organize political behavior such as voting or activism (Sellers 1998), spaces become the focus of government development policies, and control of territory is one measure of effective state sovereignty (Agnew 1987). Place enables power to travel, to extend its reach over people and territory. This can result from standardizations of the land itself—gridding the countryside, village, and city in a “high modernist” way, or even just mapping it (Kain & Baigent 1992)—that facilitate state control over its people (Holston 1989, Price 1995, Rabinow 1989, Scott 1998, Sennett 1970). Or such power can merely be displayed in a kind of architectural chest-thumping: Louis XIV’s straight-jacketed gardens at Versailles demonstrated for all to see the capacity of the French state for material domination over the land and, thus, its prowess to control people (Mukerji 1997). Imposing monuments or government buildings erected all over the colonies extended imperial power, in part by asserting with “superior” engineering or decor that indigenes simply lacked the civilization to do the same for themselves (Anderson 1983, Metcalf 1989, Vale 1992, Wright 1991, cf. Carter 1988, Robinson 1989). Such power can also be symbolized and reproduced through distinctive building-types or styles—the bungalow in India (King 1995)—that materialize colonization. In all these cases, the absolute (power) becomes local through its emplacement (Deleuze & Guattari 1986). These architectural and geographic power-moves sometimes meet resistance: recent construction of modern and globally typical factories for making silk in Hangzhou could not deter workers’ subversive practices grounded in long-standing traditions (e.g., commandeering open spots on the shop-floor for long breaks) (Rofel 1997; cf. Baldry 1999).

Proximity, Interaction, Community

Places bring people together in bodily co-presence—but then what (Boden & Molotch 1994, Sennett 1994)? Put crudely, the possibilities are two—engagement or estrangement (Sennett 1990)—and debates over the conditions making for one or the other outcome constitute perhaps the most celebrated and enduring contribution of sociologists to the study of place (reviewed in Choldin 1978, Fischer 1975). Urban places have been described as the locus of diversity, tolerance, sophistication, sociation, public participation, cosmopolitanism, integration, specialization, personal network-formation (Fischer 1977, 1982), coping, frequent spontaneous interactions, freedom, creativity—i.e., community (as a coming together in local collective projects requiring civil negotiations of differences that are inevitable) (Young 1990). But urban places have also been described as the locus of anonymity, detachment, loneliness, calculating egoism, privatization, formalized social controls, segregations, individualism, withdrawal, detachment, parochialism, disconnections, isolation, fear, seclusion, mental illness (Halpern 1995)—i.e., the last place on earth one would expect to find community.

Whether or not community results from the gathering up of people into proximate face-to-face interactions depends—sociologists routinely say—on their number, their differentiations along lines of class, race, ethnicity, taste or lifestyle, and the cultural beliefs they share (Wellman 1979). But is there a “place effect” as well, in which the tight coupling of geography, built-form, and subjective topological understanding mediates the effects of size, demographic patterns, and values on the possibility or achievement of community? Enough studies suggest that the design and serial construction of places is at the same time the *execution* of community (in one or the other sense of that word) (Hummon 1990, Kunstler 1996, Suttles 1972).

Engagement can be built-in. At the scale of individual buildings, Allen (1977) found that the rate of innovation in high-tech R&D organizations could be enhanced by designing facilities to maximize chance interactions (e.g., by forcing everybody to use the same stairwell, open and inviting enough to encouraging lingering talk). In the same way, the built-form of cities may help to explain outbreaks of cultural effervescence and creativity (Hannerz 1992). Ordinary neighborhood residents may be brought together in unplanned interactions when individual dwellings are compactly—built rather than widely dispersed, or when front porches and stoops permit seamless moves from home to a pedestrian-friendly street (Festinger et al 1950, cf. Logan & Spitze 1994). Presence of perceived public places such as parks, plazas (Moore 1996), squares, libraries, agora—owned by no one (legally or informally), inviting and accessible to all—fosters mingling of diverse people who don’t already know each other and provides a setting for spectacles and communal celebrations (Carr et al 1992, Lofland 1998, Rowe 1997, Sarkis 1997). If those public places are designed effectively—providing comfortable places to sit, movable chairs, water, street food, maybe something erotic (Young 1990)—more people will be drawn to them (Whyte 1980). Or perhaps the places most conducive to community are not “designed” at all (Cline 1997), but are disordered—and lose much when they are purified (Jacobs 1961, Sennett 1970). Places like neighborhood bars, restaurants (Ferguson 1998), corner stores, churches, and clubs provides spots for informal engagements and organizational meetings, often among people who already know each other (Oldenburg 1989). Giving residents a stake in the process of place-making—“New Urbanist” planners involve residents in “charrettes,” where strategic design decisions are made collectively—leads to greater civic interest and participation in subsequent public policy deliberations (Brain 1997, Brain 1998, MacCannell 1999).

So, too, can estrangement be built-in. Residential development that sprawls further and further away from city centers creates the need for mobile pods of seclusion if they are connectable only by private car traveling at high speeds (de Boer 1986, Sorkin 1999). Conversion of once public places into private or semi-public ones—shopping malls replace Main Street and the town square (consider what Benjamin said of European urban arcades from a century ago: “At the exit . . . I breathe more easily; the street, freedom, the present!” Buck-Morss 1989:38), new neighborhoods are gated (Blakely & Snyder 1997), the grid of residential

streets is selectively closed off—restrict the range and diversity of people with whom one is likely to interact on daily rounds (Lofland 1998). The borders among ethnic (or class) enclaves in the urban mosaic often become impassable (Massey 1985, Young 1990; but see Sigelman et al 1996). The spatial specialization of function—magnet places like stores, workplaces, office parks, or civic centers are distanced from residential neighborhoods, which are then differentiated by the property values of their homes—further segregates denizens along lines of race, class, ethnicity, age, and gender (Lofland 1973). These patterns are inspired by narrations of place that in effect legitimate the resulting homogeneous enclaves—for example, when suburbs are envisaged through imageries of romantic pastoralism or unique historical heritages (Bridger 1996, Dorst 1989), and thus as escapes from the risks, pollutions, and undesirables simultaneously planted in The City. When “community” does arise inside such enclaves—wealthy ’burb or gentrifying neighborhood—it tends to be defensive, exclusionary, and protectionist (Frug 1999), and works against a more inclusive public sphere.

Places Spawn Collective Action

Gould’s rich studies of Parisian insurrections in 1848 and 1870–1871 epitomize a place-sensitive perspective on collective behavior (Gould 1995). Haussmann’s rebuilding of central Paris between these two uprisings changed the identity-contours along which protest was organized. In 1848, most workers were residentially clustered by trade or craft in neighborhoods replete with cabarets and cafes where they mobilized and schemed: networks forged in the workplace and reinforced in neighborhood centers of sociability organized insurgency along class lines. By 1870, Haussmann’s boulevards had fractured some of these neighborhoods and, more importantly, pushed many workers out to peripheral areas just annexed as part of Paris. In these outlying areas, workers from different trades along with others from different classes formed a new collective identity based on the neighborhood itself: they were drawn to local public meetings, where they organized their neighbors into active resistance against the French state. Neighborhood ties became the *via media* of recruitment and mobilization for the Paris Commune. In the twentieth century, the “red belt” of Paris moved even further out into suburbs such as Bobigny, where the combination of radical politics and neighborhood attachments is sustained (Stovall 1990).

Place was equally consequential in the 1989 Beijing student revolt. The fine structure of campus architecture and of surrounding streets shaped patterns of mobilization. Here, the built environment was not a source of collective identity but rather structured the spatial distribution and flow of activists (Zhao 1998). Community organization of racial groups in Los Angeles was affected by the spatial patterns of “tertiary” residential streets (Grannis 1998). In the case of Swedish trade unionists between 1890 and 1940, spatial proximity in itself inspired collective activism (Hedstrom 1994). On different occasions, place provided a site where numbers of participants could and would gather—Leipzig’s Karl Marx Platz for

East German protests in 1989 (Opp & Gern 1993), Groveland Church for political rallies in a Chicago African-American community (Pattillo-McCoy 1998).

Place can become the *object* of collective action, as in NIMBY [not in my backyard] movements (Norton & Hannon 1997) or protests grounded in charges of environmental racism (Bullard 1990). Saving Owens Valley from thirsty Los Angeles (Walton 1992; for Arizona: Espeland 1998), saving “Black Corona” (a neighborhood in Queens, New York) from an intrusive elevated train line (Gregory 1998), saving the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood in Minneapolis from urban renewal (Stoecker 1994), and saving Manhattan’s Lower East Side from gentrification (Abu-Lughod 1994) became rallying cries for protest movements.

Other studies call attention to the locations of places, in geographic space, as factors in collective action. In the seventeenth-century Ottoman Empire, villages that were neither too close to the center of political power nor too isolated were more prone to peasant uprisings (Barkey & Van Rossem 1997). In eighteenth century England, political autonomy and solidarity—leading eventually to emerging rights of citizenship—were more common in pastoral areas than in arable lands more tightly controlled by ruling elites (Somers 1993, cf. Brustein & Levi 1987). And, in a quite different way, place affects media coverage of collective action: public events are more likely to receive coverage if they occur on the customary beat of reporters (Oliver & Myers 1999).

If places spawn collective action, so too can they become its contraceptive. As public spaces in cities are privatized, stigmatized, avoided or destroyed, the effect is chilling on the possibility of mobilization and public protest. Streets and sidewalks, squares and markets, increasingly give way to pedways and skyways, malls and arenas that are constructed with material (locks), legal (armed guards and surveillance cameras), and semiotic (informal codes that announce appropriate users and uses) devices that discourage public displays of political activism (Boddy 1992, Davis 1990, Winner 1992). In a very different way, identities grounded in attachment to local communities or neighborhoods can *inhibit* an individual’s commitment to collective action—as Bearman (1991) found for deserters from the Confederate Army who stopped thinking about themselves as generic Southerners.

Normative Landscapes (Resistance, Transgression, Control)

Place is imbricated in moral judgments and deviant practices as well. Conduct appropriate backstage is often not permissible out front (Goffman 1959). Tags of graffiti artists violate legal norms when sprayed on the sides of subway cars or public walls, but they become legitimate art when moved inside a gallery or museum (Lachmann 1988). Openly gay behavior may be expected and approved in Castro Valley, San Francisco (Castells 1983; for Stockholm, M Graham 1998; for lesbians in Northampton, Massachusetts, Forsyth 1997), but not (it seems) in rural Wyoming. Whether a workers’ strike is legal or not, and how police respond to it, depends much on its geography (Blomley 1994). Constructions of behavior, appearances, or even people as deviant depend upon where they happen—but as

these three examples illustrate, to engage in “out of place” practices is also a form of resistance (de Certeau 1984, Pile & Keith 1997) against forces imposing a territorialized normative order (Cresswell 1996). Still, just as place is caught up in definitions of deviance, so deviance on occasion defines place: sites of mass murders, terrorist violence, atrocities, or natural tragedies are variously memorialized, erased, sanctified, stigmatized, or merely rectified (Foote 1997, Gregory & Lewis 1988).

Place also plays a role in shaping rates of behavior generally considered deviant or criminal no matter where they occur. Environmental criminologists suggest that the geographic location of various social activities and the architectural arrangements of spaces and building can promote or retard crime rates—mainly crime against property (Brantingham & Brantingham 1990). City blocks with bars or public schools have higher rates of burglaries than elsewhere, and a study in Vancouver found that the number of streets leading in to a block was directly proportional to the rate of property crime—convenient access and egress seems to enable some forms of street crime (Felson 1994). Likewise, property crime rates may be lowered if places are designed to avoid large unassigned public spaces (with nobody interested enough to watch over them), to separate schools from shopping malls, to remove walls and shrubbery that make good hiding places (Jeffery 1971; on “defended neighborhoods:” De Sena 1990, Green et al 1998). On some occasions, places are designed and constructed explicitly to clean up vice and other disorderly practices—as was the case with George Pullman’s model village in Chicago, which nevertheless failed to avert the destructive strike of 1894 (Buder 1967, Smith 1995, cf. Littmann 1998; on company towns: Crawford 1995; on model villages and planned communities: Buder 1990). Debate rages on over whether environmental factors affect crime rates net of other social, demographic, or economic variables (Birkbeck & LaFree 1993, Ekblom 1995, McCarthy & Hagan 1992). Interestingly, however, places perceived by people as dangerous often do not match up with the geographic distribution of crime: in an ethnically mixed urban neighborhood, residents typically defined narrow and closed-off streets as more dangerous than open and busy spaces, even though only one quarter of the neighborhood’s robberies happened there (Merry 1981). But even *perception* of one’s neighborhood as dangerous increases the frequency of symptoms of depression, anxiety, oppositional defiant disorder among adolescents (Aneshensel & Sucoff 1996).

Social control is also territorialized, in both its formal and informal guises. Police squad cars in Los Angeles maintain order in part by patrolling boundaries and restricting access—they use place as a means to decide who and what properly belongs where (Herbert 1997). The same tactics are used by gang members seeking to establish and control their turf (Venkatesh 1997, White 1990). Public places provide the circumstances for the most degrading forms of informal social control: on-the-street harassment of women or racial minorities is surely one way to keep disadvantaged groups in their place (Duneier & Molotch 1999, Feagin 1991, Gardner 1995). Offices have become open, facilitating surveillance

and bureaucratic control (Hatch 1990). What Venkatesh writes of gangs and their territories holds as well for formal policing, public harassment, and crime generally: "On the one hand, the formal qualities of a built environment exert a powerful effect on individuals by shaping the possibilities for their behaviors. On the other hand, individuals produce their space by investing their surroundings with qualitative attributes and specified meanings" (1997:90).

Place Attachment: Identity, Memory, Loss

The formation of emotional, sentimental bonds between people and a place brings together (in yet another way) the material formations on a geographic site and the meanings we invest in them (Altman & Low 1992, Gupta & Ferguson 1997). Place attachments result from accumulated biographical experiences: we associate places with the fulfilling, terrifying, traumatic, triumphant, secret events that happened to us personally there. The longer people have lived in a place, the more rooted they feel, and the greater their attachment to it (Elder et al 1996, Herting et al 1997). Other research shows that place attachment results from interactive and culturally shared processes of endowing rooms or buildings or neighborhoods with an emotional meaning. The good times shared by friends at a university coffee shop (Milligan 1998) or a Chicago cafeteria (Duneier 1992) formed the basis for tight bonds of group affiliation—then disrupted when the special place was shut down. Generally, involvement in local public activities (shopping, politics) increases attachment to one's neighborhood—i.e., community sentiment (Cuba & Hummon 1993, Hummon 1992). But the attachment to places also depends some on the geography and architecture of the places themselves. Residents of neighborhoods near prominent landmarks, or with easily defined edges, or with better quality housing stock, are more likely to have stronger emotional bonds to where they live. Because of these kinds of attachments, sociologists should perhaps add place to race, class, and gender as a wellspring of identity, drawn upon to decide just who we are in an always unsettled way (Keith & Pile 1993).

Place attachment facilitates a sense of security and well-being, defines group boundaries, and stabilizes memories (Halbwachs 1980) against the passage of time (generally: Logan & Molotch 1987; among children: Chawla 1992, Marcus 1992; among the elderly: Reed et al 1997, Rubinstein & Parmelee 1992). Perhaps for this reason, mnemonic places (Zerubavel 1997) are specifically designed and constructed to evoke memories, trigger identities, and embody histories. National monuments commemorating wars or centennials or atrocities (Barber 1972, Sarfatti Larson 1997, Spillman 1997, Wagner-Pacifici & Schwartz 1991) inspire patriotism, at least in theory (on place and contested national identities: Borneman 1997, Gupta 1997, Zelinsky 1988), just as sacred places become the destination of pilgrimages because of their mythic or symbolic connection to the transcendent (Barrie 1996, Friedlander & Seligman 1994, Hecht 1994). In these cases, built places give material form to the ineffable or invisible, providing a durable legible architectural aide-memoire (on national identities: Cerulo 1995, Radcliffe

& Westwood 1996). They might also be home to ghosts (Bell 1997) and—as with cemeteries (Sloane 1991)—we go to such places to visit those who are no longer.

The loss of place, it follows, must have devastating implications for individual and collective identity, memory, and history—and for psychological well-being (Fullilove 1996). To be without a place of one's own—*persona non locata*—is to be almost non-existent, as studies of the homeless imply (Dordick 1997, Rossi 1989, Snow & Anderson 1993, Wolch & Dear 1993, Wright 1997). Among the problems of those discharged from total institutions (mental hospitals, prisons) is the difficulty of reattaching to a place—finding a home, a neighborhood, a community, often amid local opposition to the deinstitutionalized (Dear & Wolch 1987, Taylor 1989). Effects of displacement vary (Brown & Perkins 1992) depending upon whether the dislocation is forced, as in natural disasters (Erikson 1967), urban renewal (Gans 1962) and political exile (Bisharat 1997, Malkki 1995, Portes & Stepick 1993); or voluntary, as in job relocations and tourism (MacCannell 1976)—and on whether the displacement is temporary or permanent (on migrant workers: Mitchell 1996; on immigrant ethnic communities: Kasinitz 1992). The immense literature on diasporas calls attention to idealizations of homelands that (sometimes) never were, as part of the affirmation of ethnic or tribal solidarity and continuity (Appadurai 1996, Cohen 1997, Naficy 1999, Safran 1991, Sorenson 1992). One can be displaced even without going anywhere: victims of residential burglaries report (for some time thereafter) a violation of their personal space and a loss of security (Brown & Perkins 1992), and the same loss of meaning is reported by those whose sacred places are desecrated (de Certeau 1984), by Native Americans whose homelands have been made invisible (Blu 1996) and by people in regions of the United States chronically marginalized, exploited, forgotten, and unforgettable like West Virginia coal country (Stewart 1996).

CONCLUSION

Review articles typically end by looking ahead to questions and problems most in need of research tomorrow. This is impossible, mainly because the books and articles reviewed here as exemplifying a place-sensitive sociology do not add up to a neat propositional inventory of empirical findings about the social causes and effects of place. It is difficult to spot the most vitally overlooked gaps when the domain of study is as unbounded as the one discussed here—place matters for politics and identity, history and futures, inequality and community. Is there anything sociological not touched by place? Probably not.

An alternative conclusion came to mind while spending a week in Maastricht, Holland, where I had been invited to give a series of lectures. It is a place not exactly like the place where I had earlier gathered up and studied the books and articles needed for what I have written so far. The difficulties in imagining just what a place-sensitive sociology might become next were obvious as I struggled

to see how Maastricht differed from Bloomington, Indiana, or how they might be alike—and why those differences or similarities might matter for the thinking I was doing. As a sociologist, it was easy for me to start demographically: how many people lived in each place, and how are the two populations differentiated by age, race, gender, occupation, SES, religion, ethnicity? I could just as easily put into words historical tidbits about them: the treaty to create a European Union was signed at Maastricht in 1992, Hoagy Carmichael composed “Stardust” at the Book Nook on Bloomington’s Indiana Avenue in 1929. And it was no sweat to theorize Maastricht and Bloomington as instances of global capitalism or urban sprawl or liberal democratic regimes or town-gown relations. Still, neither numbers nor words nor abstract concepts seemed sufficient to capture the sociologically significant characteristics of Maastricht and Bloomington as places.

Maybe a place-sensitive sociology is not a set of empirical findings at all or even a distinctive kind of explanatory model, but rather a way to do sociology in a different key—a visual key.



Figure 1 Street in Maastricht.

I walked down this street in Maastricht a dozen times and forced myself to wonder how I knew that I was not back in Bloomington. Surely I could measure the width of the lane between buildings (noting that no street in Indiana is that narrow), or tell a story about the absence of front lawns, or theorize medieval vs. twentieth-century architectural styles. But so much is lost in this translation of street scene to measurement or narration or abstraction. What I lacked were tools to analyze place in its given two and three dimensions. I am a victim, perhaps, of trained incompetence in a discipline that cultivates statistics and words as means to grasp the social. Sociologists could become more adept with maps, floor

plans, photographic images, bricks and mortar, landscapes and cityscapes, so that interpreting a street or forest becomes as routine and as informative as computing a chi-square. That visualizing (I think) is the next step.

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