

PLACE

The term belonging to the vocabulary of space, meaning a location (physical, geographical, anthropological, imaginative, etc.) endowed with some particular meaning: cultural, historical, symbolic, emotional.

The notion of place is related to individual or communal being in a specific space; a place has the characteristics of that which is specific: location, point, as opposed to abstract, impersonal space. As an anthropological place (Augé) it is socially transformed, becoming an element of individual or collective identity. It is a kind of imagination that people living in a given place create about their relation to the territory, relatives, other inhabitants. Its opposite is non-place.

The term related to the category of place is location, which can be understood as the placement of something/someone in a specific point in space. Aristotle spoke about such a location by asking about the place in the context of space from the perspective of philosophical reflection: "Does the place exist and how does it exist?" As he claimed, the existing things must be somewhere, have their place, because the movement of things consists in a change of place. It is possible to speak of the primacy of the place over the thing: the place is a condition for the existence of the thing, precedes and enables its existence. Martin Heidegger sees it differently. In his opinion, the place is constituted by things, or more precisely by the handiness of things in the sense of the tools used by humans to create their environment. In the course of existence, humans create space, including sites and surroundings. A place constitutes itself in an experience. The relationship between humans and a place is not physical, but is a relationship of mutual co-existence, based on the idea of residence understood as a way of human existence in the world. As such, a place is connected with humans, it does not exist by itself, but thanks to humans who give it meaning. The essence of a place is its unique content.

From a cultural point of view, a place is a space meaningful for specific individuals and communities that refer to a specific system of knowledge, imagination and values and rules of conduct. In such a place, the identity process comes to the fore, concerning both the individual and the social group, which is reflected in the practices of identification, memory, but also exclusion. Identity is built up and established by residence (Heidegger). This leads to the establishment of a special relationship of the individual or community with the place, a kind of emotional relationship, which Edward Tuan calls *topophilia* (from gr. *topos* – "place, neighborhood", *philein* – "like"), love and attachment to the place. The archetypal expression of a place understood in this way is a family home, which over time can take on an imaginary form (Bachelard). It expresses the archetype of a home as a safe and mythical place and at the same time dwelling means a spiritual state. In this sense, a place is not only a physical location, because it acquires the attributes of a mental category, just as a house ceases to be a physical building and penetrates into us as a memory, aura, etc.

The opposite of topophilia is topophobia, especially when places are associated with violence, oppression, exclusion (Rose).

The place and its importance are mainly influenced by geographical and cultural conditions. Geographically, the place is linked to its location, topography, climate, which determine the range of activities, tools and materials used, etc. As a location, a place is a specific point in a space, the extent of which is determined by occupancy by us or by things. In this sense, a place is a separate (defined) and developed (described) part of the space, which consists of that which fills it in a material sense (e.g. room, house, city, etc.) and the created meanings and content in a symbolic sense. In a place, physical components (material, geographical) intertwine with cultural ones, creating a special relationship that renders a given place different from any other. The "locality" of a place may be related to its geographical location and other conditions arising therefrom, but above all to the community living there and the sum of the experiences gained at the place (Relph, Tilley).

In a cultural sense, a place is more than a location, and it expresses itself through a set of values, images and behaviours on the one hand, and on the other through *genius loci*, the unique atmosphere, the aura of the place, which can only be perceived in direct contact. From the point of view of a cultural researcher, a place is a reservoir of various spatial values and related attitudes and beliefs, professed by specific individuals and communities, according to the principle that there is no "nobody's" reality (Znaniecki).

Apart from space, time is an important factor influencing the specificity of a place. Places are created in time and owe their character to those who spend time there (Ingold). In time, we build relations with the place we experience in everyday life, but also relations with previous generations who left their material or symbolic trace in the place, e.g. in the form of a built settlement or a marked path or narratives being the sum of stories passed down from generation to generation in the form of legends or parables that make up a community (Benjamin). A place understood in this way may also be a place of remembrance (Nora). The term "place of remembrance" introduced by Pierre Nora has metaphorical connotations because, according to him, places of remembrance can be geographical, architectural places as well as people (real and mythical), events, slogans, songs, symbols, literary texts, feasts, rituals, etc. In this sense, they are the foundation of collective memory, shaping the identity of the group. Memorial sites sacralise the space and events commemorating the heroes, they become a contribution to the emergence of new cultural practices, rituals, reinterpretation of symbols (e.g. memorial places are centres of worship, celebrations and anniversaries are organised there).

Places appear in our memory and recollections. Especially places from childhood or once abandoned (e.g. by migrants) can function as idealised, archetypal images of the homeland or home. By worshipping the memory of the fate of the community in a specific place, the identity of the community is built (Nora).

The opposite of a place is a non-place (Relph, Augé), which is the effect of weakening

identity processes and breaking ties with the place. Nowadays, places as such are more and more often displaced by spaces of difference (heterotopes) and non-places which look identical everywhere: non-authentic, a-historic, uniformed and commercialised products of globalisation. Siegfried Kracauer was the first to write about such spaces, showing their lack of roots and alienation using the example of a hotel lobby. Non-places are at the opposite pole to historically defined places, embedded in a given space and time, which Marc Augé describes as anthropological.

According to Augé, a non-place is a feature of hyper-modernity, which favours the crossing of people and information from distant places and environments, while at the same time creating spaces functioning as points of separation, i.e. places that are impermanent and undefined, based on what is temporary, provisional and fluid. Non-places exist outside the traditionally understood time and space, they are "the same everywhere" and devoid of a specific, local flavour. In non-places, the difference between the close and the distant, as well as between the individual and the collective disappears. Being in a non-place one is everywhere and nowhere at the same time. Examples of such non-places are supermarkets, airports, large hotels, motorways, TV screens or computer monitors, and even smartphone displays.

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