PLACE

an introduction

SECOND EDITION

Tim Cresswell

WILEY Blackwell

Place

Place

An Introduction

Second Edition

Tim Cresswell

WILEY Blackwell

This edition first published 2015

Edition history: Blackwell Publishing Ltd (1e, 2004)

Registered Office
John Wiley & Sons Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

Editorial Offices
350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5020, USA
9600 Garsington Road, Oxford, OX4 2DQ, UK
The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

For details of our global editorial offices, for customer services, and for information about how to apply for permission to reuse the copyright material in this book please see our website at www.wiley.com/wiley-blackwell.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Cresswell, Tim.
Place: an introduction / Tim Cresswell. – Second edition.
pages cm
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-470-65562-7 (pbk.)
1. Human geography. 2. Geographical perception. I. Title.
GF50.C74 2015
304.2'3–dc23
2014018394

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Cover image: Untitled, South East Spain, 2006, Ben Murphy. From the series *The Riverbed*. Copyright Ben Murphy 2014.

Set in 10.5/13 pt Minion Pro by Toppan Best-set Premedia Limited

1 2015

For Yi-Fu Tuan

Contents

Figures

Acknowledgments

Thinking and writing about place has, for me, been an interactive activity for many years. I have been fortunate enough to have encountered some outstanding teachers as a student. These include Peter Jackson, Jacquie Burgess, Denis Cosgrove, Yi-Fu Tuan, and Robert Sack. They have all inspired me in different ways and I hope some of that inspiration is evident in this book. Now that I am a teacher myself I find myself increasingly indebted to students who have taken ideas and run with them in startling directions. They include Gareth Hoskins, Peter Adey, Bradley L. Garrett, Kimberley Peters, Craig Martin, Amy Cutler, Andre Novoa, terri moreau, Rupert Griffiths, Weiqiang Lin, and Laura Prazeres. In the years between the first edition and this edition I spent seven happy years at the Geography Department at Royal Holloway, University of London, which proved to be a remarkable site of intellectual endeavor for a cultural geographer such as myself. Landscape Surgery was a particularly wonderful arena to discuss ideas about place, landscape, mobility, material culture, and just about anything else a cultural geographer could wish for. I am more particularly indebted to Carol Jennings for her careful reading of this manuscript and many useful suggestions. Michael Brown is the true inventor of the word anachorism that appears in Chapter 6. Finally, many thanks to Gerry Pratt and Nick Blomley for the invitation to write the original version of this book and to the good people at Wiley-Blackwell for helping along the way. Justin Vaughan at Wiley-Blackwell has been consistently encouraging and has provided much needed prods in the years since I agreed to write the second edition.

Extracts from *Space, Place, and Gender* (1994) by Doreen Massey are used by permission of Polity Press, University of Minnesota Press, and the author.

Foreword

The first edition of *Place: A Short Introduction* was published in 2004 as part of a series of short introductions in geography. The idea was to focus on a concept rather than a traditional subfield. I had some doubt as to whether such a book would have a market as a teaching tool. While a concept such as place is clearly central to the discipline of geography – the discipline I was writing for and from – it is rarely the case that there is a course with place as its singular focus. I have been delighted, therefore, at the way the first edition has been used so widely both in geography and beyond. It was much more successful that I ever imagined. It certainly has been widely used as a text book in geography courses at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. What is more encouraging is the way it has been used across disciplines it was not explicitly aimed at. These include creative writing, English literature, American studies, religious studies, architecture, and interdisciplinary liberal arts. There are even courses with the title "place studies" that use it.

In addition to the obvious importance of place across a range of disciplines in the academy, there has been a resurgence of place issues in the wider world beyond. The events of the Arab Spring and Occupy were frequently framed around place issues. There have been lively discussions about the effects of multinationals and chain stores on the downtowns of cities. The idea of the local (a derivative of place) has been powerful in the rise of new-old forms of food culture and economic systems. Writing about place in the form of creative non-fiction has seen a renaissance in the United Kingdom (the place I know best) with place-based books appearing in national newspapers and in the bestseller lists. Art, too, has continued to ask questions of place and belonging.

Researching and writing about place, then, is clearly both an interdisciplinary endeavor and a practice that extends beyond the academy. For this

reason the second edition of *Place: A Short Introduction* is a more interdisciplinary and outward-looking book, less focused on the discipline of geography. Geography has a lot to offer, thanks to its history of focusing on place, but it is not the sole owner of the concept. This is an offering, from the place of geography, to the wider world. This edition is about 50 percent longer than the first edition and, therefore, not so "short." I hope, nevertheless, to have maintained the accessibility of the first edition. In addition to a more generally interdisciplinary sense to the book, there are added sections which reflect the engagement with place across disciplines. These include sections on philosophy, architecture, art and place, information technologies, assemblage theory, and animal geographies amongst others. Otherwise encouraging notes from a few readers noted a number of errors in the first edition and I am grateful to them. I have kept a list and have hopefully rectified these issues.

1

Introduction: Defining Place

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

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

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

Place: An Introduction, Second Edition. Tim Cresswell.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

> The modern daytime dilemma is geography, and everyone is looking to be the definitive source. Google spends $1bn annually maintaining their maps, and that does not include the $1.5bn Google spent buying the navigation company Waze. Google is far from the only company trying to own everywhere, as Nokia purchased Navteq and TomTom and Tele Atlas try to merge. All of these companies want to become the definitive source of what's on the ground.
>
> That's because what's on the ground has become big business. With GPSes in every car, and a smartphone in every pocket, the market for telling you where you are and where to go has become fierce.
>
> With all these companies, why do we need a project like OpenStreetMap? The answer is simply that as a society, no one company should have a monopoly on place, just as no one company had a monopoly on time in the 1800s. Place is a shared resource, and when you give all that power to a single entity, you are giving them the power not only to tell you about your location, but to shape it. (Wroclawski 2014, npn)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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