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Toward an Anthropological Understanding of Space and Place

Pauline McKenzie Aucoin

Abstract Anthropological studies of space and place recognize that landscape, space and the body represent important sites for cultural meaning, social and political memory, and public discourse. Space can be used to carry social meanings that are culturally and historically constructed as well as contested. The hermeneutic study of space explores space as a symbolic medium and recognizes that space and space language convey a culture's meanings about the immediate world, while place carries with it sentiments of attachment and identity that emerge out of lived experience. At the macro or cosmic level, geo-symbolic systems can order the world cosmologically and serves as one element of political organization.

Several decades ago, Clifford Geertz remarked on the absence of place as a field of inquiry in socio-cultural anthropology, noting that it had been all but invisible: a taken-for-granted dimension, a given, a ubiquitous part of everyday existence for which there was little theory (1996, 259).[1] Since that time, however, culture, place, and space has emerged as a central field of research in anthropology, yielding rich ethnographic studies of the significance of landscape, architecture, spatial order, place, and displacement to people and cultural systems. The relationships between cultures and the spaces they are associated with vary in important ways, each requiring a different theory set and approach to research. Localized cultures whose interactions with particular spaces have remained constant over time have been studied in situ through long term fieldwork, leading to important understandings of knowledge in place and the politics of spatial order. More recently, anthropologists have come to account for societies where movement is the norm and culture is recognized in "traveling and intermingling repertoires" (Lambek 2011, 3), mediated by technologies of translocality – computers, cellphones, satellites; and in a spatially

[1] Geertz's claim neglected several important and insightful studies of place that had been carried out before this time; for example, Cunningham 1964; Kuper 1972; Bourdieu 1973; Ardener 1993; Johnson 1989; and Munn 1986.

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fluid, increasingly global world, analysed through multi-sited ethnography (Marcus 1998). Our current global scene finds anthropologists carrying out 'mobile fieldwork' (Khosravi 2010) as they grapple to understand the lived experiences and stigma of both indigenous confinement (Aurylaite 2015) and refugee displacement (Campkin 2013), surveillance, border fetishism, and the illegality of presence itself.

Drawing insights from ritual studies, geography, political theory, art history, and philosophy, the emergence of place and space studies in anthropology has brought with it a new vocabulary as well, with terms such as deep geometry (Geertz 1980), architectonics (Fernandez 2003), heterotopia (Relph 1992; Foucault 1984b), spatialized history (Gordillo 2004), taskscape (Ingold 1993), ethnoscapes and moving sovereignties (Appadurai 1991, 1995), movement as spatial transgression (Aucoin 2002), and dislocation and border regimes (Hall 2012; Khosravi 2010). These terms enable us to better understand the importance of what had previously been regarded simply as locale (Rodman 1992). Their use speaks to the increasing breadth of a field that now encompasses such topics as gated communities and the politics of public space (Low 2004), the imaginary of nature and wilderness (Hastrup 2013; Cronon 1995), landscape and power in Viennese gardens (Rotenberg 1995), the analytics of movement in post-combat zones (Wool 2013), symbolic design in Zen Buddhist Japanese landscapes (Johnson 2003), discourses on trans-border trade in electronic waste (Kirby and Lora-Wainwright 2015), Earth and extra-terrestrial scale (Battaglia et al. 2015), and the political economy of spatial illegality (Andersson 2014).[2] These terms point to the development of theory as well, with an extension of the study of place-making "beyond culture" (Feld and Basso 1996) as it strives to critically account for power and spatial transitions, shifting boundaries, cultural displacement, and spaces for new sociality and meaning in a globalized world (see Gupta 2003; Gupta and Ferguson 1997).

Space is considered by anthropologists to be a central element of social life, one of the three dimensions of space-time-culture within which human life is immersed, and that are at once universal and yet variously conceived and experienced by different cultures. Engaged with and experienced both as a physical and ambient dimension, as distance, location, or topography, space is recognized as an important cultural medium, an idiom through which individuals can think and that can be culturally organized to produce spatial practices that are social, aesthetic, political, religious or economic. Once embedded with significance, spatial constituents can be made to carry meaning as part of a geo-symbolic order. Place is a "framed space that is meaningful to a person or group over time" (Thornton 2008, 10); a presence that comes into being through human experience, dreaming, perception, imaginings, and sensation, and within which a sense of being in the world can develop. It involves culturally meaningful sites whose significance rests in lived experience: with naming, local events and conflicts, the attachment of stories, experiences of

[2] See Rodman [Critchlow] (1992), Hirsch (1997), Low and Zúñiga (2003), and Kokot (2006) for overviews of the main themes of space and place studies that have been addressed from an anthropological perspective.

affect, and the affixation of meanings and memory to locations, landscapes,[3] built environments, and places of the body. Those cultural activities in which people engage in order to render spaces meaningful, whether these spaces are built, worked over, lived in, or part of a space imaginary, are place-making practices. As sites take on cultural meaning, they come to be distinguished from generalized space as places.[4]

While philosophers seek to understand in what ways life can be meaningful for humans, anthropologists view humans as 'meaning making' beings, and so seek to understand how humans 'bestow' meaning (White 1940) on any or all facets of life and the external world, including space. Their quest then, is to understand what cultural worlds exist and how meanings are created and attached to these worlds, how they change, and to what purpose they may be put. Equally important is the existence of non-places, those areas which have no personal or cultural meaning, but that we frequent, pass through, or spend long periods of time in as part of modern existence – airports, line-ups, or refugee camps (Augé 1995).

Anthropological analysis aims to account for the dynamics of meaning construction, the lived experience of place and the practices of space within particular cultures. Analysis requires recognition that while space is situated in culture, its meaning is not fixed and may be contested and changed over time through a dialectical, sometimes political process that reveals the praxis of space. As Hugh Raffles so eloquently explains (2002, 185), places and space are always "in that flow of becoming … [t]here is no point of stasis: people are in motion, the tide turns, the banks crumble. Shifting historical sedimentations form the unreliable ground on which lives are made."

Place is multilocal and multivocal: multilocal in the sense that it "shapes and expresses polysemic meanings of place in different users" (Rodman 1992, 647), and multivocal in that many voices can be encompassed within a single place. An ability to hear these voices requires that one is aware of and attuned to the narratives that are expressed through various sensorial modes – sentiment, movement, sound, tactility, and sight (649). Place-making may bring with it sentiments of attachment, or what Raymond Williams (1977) calls structures of feeling. Accounting for those voices that have been silenced, in Edwin Ardener's terms (1981) muted, is equally important for these also form an integral though obscured part of any social landscape.

The task set out for anthropologists studying space in the context of sociocultural life is to observe, elicit through interview, and record by means of participatory research all features, symbols, meanings, beliefs, activities and experiences relating to space and place in a particular society, that is, "to look at things obsessively up-close" (Geertz 1996, 260); and following from this, to create an ethnographic account written from the perspective of those who live it as a culturally meaningful experience. A record of space examines how it is culturally organized

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[3] Tomforde (2006) documents the enduring significance of landscape and memory to identity for diaspora cultures.

[4] See also Clammer for a discussion of philosophy and anthropology's intersection (2013).

and experienced – similarly or differently – by social groups (cultures, sub-cultures, genders, classes, age, race or ethnic groups, castes), while a study of place records how spatialized culture is lived: learned, experienced, conceived, contested, resisted, transgressed, remembered, or longed for.

The goal of anthropology, however, is not merely to collect quantitative data or provide a description of one's observations, which Charles Taylor refers to critically as our "brute data" (1987, 38). It aims to make a society's experiences in and conceptualizations of the world intelligible to those who have not previously encountered it, enabling them to grasp – or in Weber's terms understand (*verstehen*) – this world as an insider does, and to appreciate "the self-understandings of actors engaged in particular actions" (Schwandt 2003, 299) as these relate to space and place. In anthropology, this process of analysis has been described by Clifford Geertz as a hermeneutic one; its goal is philosophical insofar as its aim is to understand what is involved in the process of understanding itself (Madison 1991).

In his classic work *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Geertz sets out a definition of culture and a method of analysis that, while sparking criticism in its day from positivists,[5] underpins most studies in socio-cultural anthropology today. So great has his influence been that what is known as the interpretive turn in the social sciences, has been described in anthropology as the "Geertzian revolution" (Ortner 1999, 2).[6] And though writing in the 1970s, Geertz's work continues to inform many areas of the sociology of culture, cultural studies, and cultural geography (see Alexander et al. 2012).[7] Influenced by Weber's view on interpretive social science, Geertz argued (like Weber) that "man is suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun" (1973, 5); culture is taken to be those webs and its analysis is, therefore, "not an experimental science in search of laws but an interpretive one in search of meaning" (1973, 5).

In his introduction to interpretive methods, Geertz draws on Paul Ricoeur's theory of hermeneutics when he states that culture is "an ensemble of texts, themselves ensembles, which the anthropologist strains to read over the shoulders of those to whom they properly belong" (1973, 452). Consisting of all aspects of material culture, ideas, and human behaviour – in his words "arguments, melodies, formulas, maps, and pictures … rituals, palaces, technologies and social formations," cultural worlds do not in Geertz's view consist of "idealities to be stared at" (1980, 135), but rather texts to be interpreted that can best be approached through the study of

[5] Kämpf (2013) provides an overview of the positivist/interpretive debate with a discussion of the importance of meaning to both philosophy and anthropology.

[6] Sherry Ortner discusses critiques of interpretive anthropology in relation to feminist, post-colonial, reflexive, and post-modern theories that have called for recognition of the situatedness of hermeneutic understandings. Armin Geertz (2003) advocates ethnohermeneutics as an approach to studying non Western cultures and religions that will draw on interpretations and theories developed by Indigenous scholars as a response to post-colonial critiques of hegemonic Western discourse.

[7] See Lila Abu-Lughod (2005) for an anthropological exploration of space and culture in the context of popular television in Egypt, both in terms of new spaces created for consuming this media, and the depiction of national, memorialized, gendered and domestic spaces through its programs.

symbolic processes, language, and meaning. Although interpretation seems an ambiguous method, understandings are nonetheless held to be "open to correction, and comparable to other cases" (Rabinow and Williams 1987, 19).

Interpretation in any cross-cultural study of space and place is a dialogical process, requiring that the observation, recording and accumulation of information is acquired through a "continuous dialectical tacking between the most local of the local detail and the most global of global structure … back and forth between the whole conceived through the parts that actualize it and the parts conceived through the whole which motivated them" (Geertz 1983, 69), this whole/part method (modelled after Dilthey) comprising the hermeneutic circle. The acquiring of knowledge concerning space and place proceeds until the whole of a culture's experience and sense of the world is understood; so that both its topophilia or "affective bond between people and place" (Tuan 1974, 4), as well as its topophobia or "ties that are distasteful in some way, or induce anxiety and depression" (Seaman 1982, 132), can be appreciated. The dimensions of topophobic place are clearly portrayed by Gastón Gordillo for the Chaco region of Argentina where space for the indigenous Toba constitutes an historical landscape that retains memories of massacres, labour extraction and disease. This is a place where the memory of colonial horrors is embodied in terrifying devils that inhabit this region, and are believed to bring disease and hardship to its inhabitants (2004, 125).

This quest for understanding also takes into account ontological difference; as, for example, in Eduardo Kohn's (2013) exploration of the sentience of forests for the Runa who inhabit a region of Amazonian rainforest in Ecuador. Here exists a forest whose trees are sentient; they think and hear the world around them. For the Athapaskan and Tlingit cultures of northern Canada, understandings of geographic features also embrace sentient features of space, including glaciers that "listen, pay attention, and respond to human behaviour – especially to indiscretion" (Cruikshank 2005, 25). Tools that are used to acquire these understandings are drawn from hermeneutics, linguistics and semiotic analysis, making an anthropologist both decoder and translator, experiencer and interpreter (Feld 1990, 15). In Setha Low's words (2000, 49), these tools are applied toward "reading the landscape as a text, decoding the built environment through analogy and metaphor, and the phenomenological experience of place."

The hermeneutic interpretation of space and place as a process involves anthropologists not only in a dialectical tacking between and within the whole and parts of an unknown culture, that is within the text itself. It also sees movement between the realm of an unfamiliar culture or social group and the anthropologist's own set of language and symbols through which meaning in his or her world is conceptualized and expressed. This process is dialogic and polyvocal in Bakhtin's sense (1981) insofar as it requires intercultural and interpersonal conversations that will elicit, describe, compare, explain, contrast, and allow for correction as ideas and meanings move back and forth across a cultural interstice, a liminal space where as-yet not understood aspects of culture are drawn together with the anthropologist's familiar linguistic and ideational world, that is, her or his own text, as she tries to make sense of an unfamiliar cultural world. This process engages us in discussion, analysis,

compilation and adjustment in order that meanings can be discerned as we strive for intelligibility: as we match sign with sense. This work of ethnography has been likened by Vincent Crapanzano to the work of Hermes, the ancient god of transitions, movement, translation and transformation who delivers messages across borders and mediates communication between worlds; it is Hermes who "clarifies the opaque, renders the foreign familiar…. decodes the message… interprets" (1986, 51; see also Palmer 1980). According to Lisette Josephides (2015, 14), the job required of anthropologists as they begin to explore meaning and explain symbols as part of any interpretation of space is that they search for equivalent terms to express the meaning of a culture's symbols, by asking "what idea in one culture is equivalent to (substitutable with) another idea in another culture. Thus the ethnographer must remain a 'two-way traveller,' thinking one society through another."

Something of this analytical process is captured by Peter Worsley in his account of the elicitation of space lexicon in the indigenous language of the Australians of Groote Eyland, as he identifies Groote Eylander terms for space, direction, positioning, and orientation, while scrabbling for equivalents in English and teasing out distinctions for space understandings in these languages. Orientation terms for right, left, front, and back are used in relation to the body but, Worsley explains, whereas in English we can have an impersonal, absolute right as when giving instructions to drive to the right on a road – "to 'turn right', on Groote 'right' always means 'to your right.' Direction is embedded." A Groote Eyland term for which there is no equivalent in English is the directional term used when climbing a palm tree, where a derivative of the word for 'groin' exists and refers to using the "front of the body (and hands and feet) to climb a tree" (1997, 104). He notes a commonly used term for space that can "describe a strait between two islands or the space between objects" where there is no obstruction. However, there is no term for 'line': "'horizontal', 'vertical' and 'oblique' are expressed through terms for 'lying', 'standing upright', and 'leaning'" while the word for corner is derived from the word 'crooked,' as in the bend in a river (104). The compilation and translation of spatial and orientation terms does not simply provide a dictionary or set of equivalents in the language of the anthropologist, however. They provide a key to the culturally constructed meanings and experiences of space that, as more of an unfamiliar culture's system of meaning is taken into account, allows for an articulation of spatial with other meaning systems – gender, political, identity, religious – until the whole of a culture's space-knowledge system has been mapped out, and we can see how spatial worlds are conceptualized.

As an interpretive process, Elizabeth Kinsella (2006) argues that hermeneutics constitutes a critical approach that carries transformative possibilities as the circling process brings together foreign and familiar, text and interpreter in such a way as to allow, in Gadamer's words (1996, 306), a fusion of horizons out of which deeper understandings can emerge. The question that arises then, is how to bring this fusion about so as to enable mutual understanding and cross-cultural appreciation, a particularly salient challenge for anthropology which, since its earliest days, has been tasked with 'making the strange familiar, and the familiar strange.' This is an especially important goal for reflexive anthropology; as Ricoeur explains (1974, 51), "it

is the function of hermeneutics to make the understanding of the other – and of his signs in various cultures – coincide with the understanding of self and of being." Mutual understanding is compounded, however, by anthropology's longstanding epistemological distinction between two competing logics of inquiry, emics and etics or understanding and explanation. Applying an emic approach, culture, space and place will be understood according to its participants' self-understandings; whereas etics privileges explanations of other cultures that are formulated by the anthropologist as outsider. As Robert Ulin (1992, 263) explains, as separate logics each of these denies cross-cultural dialogue as well as self-reflexivity, and by analysing culture as a closed system, denies historical process which, Ulin warns, may lead to its reification. To resolve this, he points to Ricoeur's method of depth hermeneutics which can draw emic and etic understandings into a dialectical relationship. This method, he explains, "offers the possibility of grasping meaningful action objectively" (Ulin 1992, 254). Setting emic and etic understandings within a dialectical relationship can address issues of human action and meaning.[8] Critical hermeneutics allows for mediation as part of an open discussion of causality through reflection and critical argument, taking into account not only the meaning that space carries, but also how the ambiguity of meaning can allow for the "distortion and domination" (Roberge 2011, 5) that are at play in the formation of ideologies.[9] In the context of an appreciation of historical process, Ulin notes (1992, 263), "whether written, oral or action, a text does not have a pure interiority or pure exteriority. Significations owe their generation to human practical activity, and, hence, belong fully to historical processes that must be considered if critical interpretation is to be applied."

The goal of depth hermeneutics,[10] as realized with this fusion and the application of multiple perspectives towards understanding, is not merely to identify causality however, for it is through this fusion that cultures can understand and then come to appreciate one another; to reach mutual cross-cultural understandings (*verstandigtseins*). Where boundaries are fixed and borders cannot be breached, singular truths may emerge with rigid, ethnocentric social values that create spaces where prejudice and racism can take hold. Taylor speaks to the importance of an appreciation of cultural difference in our complex and conflict ridden world,[11] and for the acceptance of other cultures as having a worth that is equal to one's own. This acceptance, however, requires that our own self-understanding change: "There can be no understanding of "the other" without a changed understanding of the self…the path to acknowledging their existence and value can be painful. The crucial moment occurs

[8] Insights from hermeneutic interpretation and whole/part relations that can be applied toward research design are detailed by Michael Agar (1980).

[9] See Aucoin (2002) on the politics of meaning for both domination and resistance discourses.

[10] The critique of Habermas's fusion of horizons as (p. 183, n. 85) as holding to a false consensualism is discussed in Euben (1999).

[11] Werbner's (1996 S55) semiotic analysis of the novel *The Satanic Verses* explores hermeneutic and conflicting understandings of this work, where interpretations "have piled upon interpretations in an infinite hermeneutical spiral."

when the "other's" differences can be perceived not as error…but as the challenge posed by a viable human alternative" (2002). This appreciation, he argues, is founded on the presupposition that every society has "something important to say to all human beings" (1992, 66), a presupposition that lays a foundation for the recognition and acceptance of value for all cultures. On the importance and relevance of this approach to anthropology, Lambek goes further in arguing that conversations with and an understanding of others is a form of "ethical work," and that "encounters between traditions can be ethical only when they are approached hermeneutically" (2015); that is, where conversations are held and we "learn to listen and to speak to others."

1 Ethnographic Understandings

Accounting for space as a physical setting within which a society makes its living has been an essential though primarily descriptive rather than interpretive component of ethnography for well over a century.[12] Later studies of the ways in which the constituents of space, particularly spatial orientations, have been recognized culturally and given meaning, and then made use of in a society's formulation of cosmic order, emerged as interest in symbolic anthropology arose with the work of Victor Turner.[13] With this interest came an appreciation and greater awareness of the multifarious symbolic dimensions of space and place and its potential to carry meaning.[14] As a symbolic medium, space, landscape and place can be seen as communicative; "an expression of culturally shared mental structures and embodied processes" (Low 2000, 49). Hermeneutic studies of space as symbolic have been carried out at both the micro level, by examining how space and language convey meanings about the immediate world; as well as a macro or cosmic level by examining geo-symbolic systems. Geertz's (1996, 259) study *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth Century Bali*, did much to advance hermeneutic understandings of the significance of geo-symbolic order both as a cultural practice, and as a dimension within which and through which some people live, experience, and may even rule the world.

The publication of Steven Feld and Keith Basso's volume *Senses of Place* (1996) marks an important moment in the anthropology of space and place because it

[12] E.E. Evans-Pritchard's classic study *The Nuer* (1940), for example, records in detail the culture-environment relations among Nuer pastoralists in East Africa, providing a rich account of physical setting, resource base, and seasonal climatic changes. With this account, an appreciation can be gained of the acuity of Nuer decisions regarding resource availability and mobility as they manoeuvered herds of cattle across a vast territory of which they have an extensive and intimate knowledge; however, little was conveyed of the cultural meaning of this Nuer landscape.

[13] For an interpretive analysis of the symbolism of space and time and religious ritual, see Gossen 1979.

[14] Feuchtwang's (2014) analysis of cosmology, space, ritual and traditional medicine in China illustrates the articulation of various meaning systems, including space.

explicitly applied hermeneutics as epistemology toward its understanding of space in order to explore what the knowing, sensing, and experiencing of place might represent cross-culturally. Their ethnographies provide exceptionally rich studies of space and meaning that draw on years of research in their respective research communities. In his study of sound, sentiment and space among the Kaluli of Papua New Guinea, Steven Feld (1996) aims at understanding how space and the sensation of sound intersect in such a way that they create a place for the Kaluli that is at once sensorial, evocative, and mnemonic. The Kaluli rainforest is a culturally meaningful place, and the experience of sound within that place plays a significant role in the creation of that meaning. The Kaluli sense of place embodies both knowledge and acoustic or sound sensation, and these in turn contribute to emplacement, or the Kaluli sense of the meaningfulness of their place in the world. Awareness of the sounds that surround them, of water falling and flowing over the land, natural sounds such as bird songs, whistles, or cooing, as well as the performance of songs and use of place names by the Kaluli, recalls the belief that these sounds are connected to the flow of the voice through the body, thereby connecting people to a larger soundscape. Songs and the poetic recitation of place names are mnemonic in that they recall mythological sites, people and by-gone events, and their experience elicits for the Kaluli an emotional response as they weep with the recollection of events or people of the past. Feld goes so far as to describe this as a "sound world" because of the belief in the importance of connection through sound, place, sentiment and memory.

Keith Basso's ethnography, *Wisdom Sits in Places*, explores the tendency for places to "trigger acts of self-reflection," and asks what this self-reflection would entail among the Apache of the American southwest. Drawing on Martin Heidegger's concept of dwelling, which points to the importance of people's "lived relationships" with space, Basso (1996, 107) notes that place-making among the Apache does not require special skills: stories of events that occurred at a place are remembered and retold, defining physical features of a site are made note of, reference is made to ancestors who travelled this way in the past, and once a place takes on a name, the mention of that place-name will serve as a "vehicle" for recalling certain knowledge that triggers a memory of the associations that this site holds. The significance of these place-names is that when problems arise, if an individual experiences hardship or conflict emerges, the knowledge that has been invested in this place will be drawn on in subtle ways during their counsel by kin or elders. Of particular note are cautionary narratives that tell of a sequence of events that ended poorly for the individuals involved due to bad judgement or failure to prepare for a task or activity, and so provide examples of behaviour to avoid. The intent of these place references is not to tell someone what to do, but to cause them to think about a site and the meaning it holds through a metaphor or brief reference to one of its distinguishing features. This reference will be enough to prompt those involved to recall the knowledge that that place embraces, and to reflect on the circumstances of their own lives. Speaking these names evokes wisdom that may point to a solution to an individual's problems, may encourage them by referring to a conflict or an event that was resolved successfully, or simply reassure them so that they will have

the fortitude to keep going. As Basso explains (1996, 107), the use of place-names "animates thought;" by reflecting on the meaning of places, this thinking may "produce expanded awareness, feelings of relief, and fortitude," all of which may contribute to a focusing of mind that may also, eventually, contribute to problem solving.

2 Geo-symbolic Order

The organization of space into geo-symbolic schemes constitutes a society's systematic symbolic and metaphorical ordering of the world, an ordering that not only reflects but also encodes its worldly or cosmological structure. By instituting categorization, influencing perception, and placing persons and objects in the world, geo-cosmological structures carry both a "deep symbolic and pragmatic force" which, as Keesing (1982, 58) illustrates in his analysis of spatial separation, ideas of pollution and gender hierarchy among the Kwaio of the Solomon Islands, serves to preserve gender distinctions through spatial segregation, which in turn upholds principles of male dominance.[15] Spatial order is part of what Geertz (1980, 109) refers to as a society's "deep geometry." As an ordering process, it establishes and metaphorically expresses social, familial or political relationships between things or persons on the basis of designated place or relative placement, making use of any of those dimensions of space – left-right, high-low, interior-exterior, centre-periphery, or cardinal directions – that a particular society deems significant.[16] The encoding of social relations in spatial terms proceeds through the use of geometrics, that is by using space as a means of delineating and expressing the properties and relationships of objects or persons to each other. Thus, spatial distinctions are used to divide the unmarked natural world into marked, culturally significant areas by setting out visible or invisible boundaries that divide the spatial dimension into spaces that carry a social meaning. By creating an association between certain spatial dimensions and particular social categories (such as status groups, gender, or age categories), by differentiating and delineating boundaries between particular areas, space can then be made to take on symbolic meaning as well as political and cultural significance.

In their discussion of metaphorical systems, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980, 14) define the organization of a whole set of concepts with respect to one another as an orientation metaphor when these attach a spatial orientation to such a set of concepts.[17] In some cases, spatial order and ascribed place may be organized

[15] Brettell (2015) and Spain (1992) provide ethnographic examples as well as reviews of theories of gender, space and power.

[16] Robert Hertz (1973 [1909]) provides us with one of the earliest and most insightful reflections on spatial distinction and meaning.

[17] In English, for example, moods are given the orientational expression up/down, and social classes are separated as lower/middle/upper.

in such a manner as to replicate cosmological space, the microcosmic arrangement of the human world then duplicating the macrocosmic model of the universe. This replication serves to both concretize and metonymically express this order: the structural order of cosmic space being actualized in the minute details of worldly spatial design. As a forum for the expression of social relationships, spatial organization represents a "signifying practice" (de Certeau 1984, 107). The use and attachment of meaning to space and geography transforms space and spatial dimensions (such as left-right, or high-low) into signifiers, and in so doing establishes space as a medium through which a society's understanding of the world may be conveyed. The use of space as a medium for the communication of a society's classification system and values is clearly shown by Clark Cunningham (1964) for the Atoni of Indonesia, where spatial divisions within the interior space of the house reflect culturally important social divisions, particularly with respect to gender and status, and important principles of unity and division.[18]

By creating a concrete world that is consonant with a proposed reality, spatial orders not only display and convey society's underlying social theory, but also help to legitimize this organization by implicitly arguing that "worldly status has a cosmic base" (Geertz 1980,102). In this, spatial order may be integral to a society's political theory for the enactment of spatial organization, carried out with the actual placing of people and things in their assigned positions, may be part of political practice. The production and reproduction of these schemes in a multiplicity of different forums contributes to the continual assertion and imposition of a society's classifying principles and hierarchies and serves to create, in Pierre Bourdieu's terms (1977, 89), "a world in which each speaks metaphorically of all the others."

In the ethnographic case of Western Fiji, the social organization of gendered space constitutes one of several symbolic practices of power (Foucault 1984a) that enact gender stratification, a practice that is met, significantly, by spatial inversion as a form of resistance (Aucoin 2000; 2002). The order of space in Fiji prescribes the appropriateness – according to hierarchical principles of social rank and gender – of village architectural arrangements, body positioning, movements and even gestures. Practices of gendering space reflect "a process of symbolic encoding and decoding that produces a series of homologies between the spatial, symbolic and social order" (Blunt and Rose 1994, 3); and where those homologies differentiate social value, they can be said to institute hierarchy.

For Western Fiji, hierarchical distinctions are drawn between those of chiefly rank and commoners, senior versus junior members of patrilineal clans, and between men and women. The spatial order that symbolizes and enacts social distinctions is founded upon a "spatial axis" (Toren 1987) of high or above versus low or below. This order aligns spatial, religious, gender and political distinctions such that above is symbolically associated with the sacred, supernatural, immortal, more powerful and masculine realm of supernatural beings or ancestor spirits, the chief, patrilineal elders, and men, while below is linked to the profane, junior ranked, mortal, less

[18] Cunningham analyses in great detail spatial divisions as they relate to status and kin relationships as well. See also Waterson (2009).

powerful and feminine domain of women, commoners and those of junior status. According to this geo-symbolic plan, the dominant status of men, and the chief as the most senior and sacred man among men, is writ large in the symbolic order of space within this society, where the hamlet of the chiefly clan is situated on the highest piece of land within the village, above all other clan sites; the chief's house is positioned highest, above all other houses of the village; in each hamlet, the clan's men's house is above all other buildings; and domestic houses are positioned around the men's house according to rank, with those of junior rank being furthest away and therefore symbolically "below." The internal space of domestic houses is symbolically ordered by this high/low axis as well, higher or more sacred areas being associated with men while symbolically "lower," profane areas are allocated to women and children.

This spatial-symbolic ordering of high/low is also imposed upon the body, with the head being considered above and sacred; it is taboo or forbidden to touch another person's head, especially that of a chief. The reverence in which this part of the chief's body is held is illustrated during his installation ceremony when, during this ritual, the chief's head is ceremoniously enwrapped with white bark cloth. This is a symbolic gesture that draws a spatial parallel between the chief as a sanctified leader under whose rule all members of the district live, and the surrounding mist-enshrouded mountain peaks (referred to as the 'head' of the mountain), from which each political district draws its name. This parallel is expressed in the proverb "When the peak of the mountain/head of the chief is enshrouded with cloud/wrapped with bark cloth, the rains will surely come," an allusion to the belief that it is the supernaturally empowered chief whose power or mana ensures the return of the rains every year, and with them abundant crops and prosperity. The parallel drawn between this symbolic order and geography serves to concretize and metonymically express this spatial organization. In Geertz's words (1980, 114), the confluence of spatial order and ritual enactment carry much "truth-imaging mimetic force."

The ordering principles of this system are reflected by and embedded in numerous prescriptions concerning bodily positioning, movements, gestures and everyday acts as well: those of senior rank sit above and are served before those of junior rank and women; men bathe upstream from those downstream areas allocated to women and children which are symbolically below; and one should never stand or walk above or reach over another adult without first asking permission.

The spatial order and constant enacting of spatial prescriptions regarding rank and gender is in sharp contrast to a type of dance performed by women as part of a wedding ceremony, which women attend separately from men. During this festive and sometimes rowdy gathering, women will drum, sing, joke, exchange news with female kin and friends, and mix and drink kava. Over the course of the evening, however, the women's drumming becomes louder and certain older women will begin to perform highly comical dances, to the great amusement of the others. Older women enter with faces whitened with talc, wearing sun glasses (as men do), but with their clothes put on backwards in a comical fashion and wearing pants, which women are forbidden from wearing. They walk stooped over while pretending to carry a heavy sack high on their shoulders in the manner that men do, and leaning

on a walking stick as if bowed under the weight of such a heavy load. As this woman proceeds around the room, she will move to the front, across or behind her audience, rising up and then stooping over. But then her demeanor will change as she begins to lurch about, gripping her cane as it wobbles wildly, pretending to stumble, her stick slipping out from under her, her sack slipping off her shoulders. On several occasions, I have seen women mimic in a ludicrous and highly comical way the formal and ritualized manner in which men mix and serve kava to the chief, a sanctified drink that establishes the ritual connection between men and the spiritual world – pretending to splash it across the room. Several of the elements of these performances contradict the stringent rules of body movement appropriate to this society's order of space. But it is these women's irreverent parodies of men's ritual practices, that makes of these events a critical commentary. In performance, the potentially subversive role of humour is well recognized: as Mary Douglas has explained, the joke "affords opportunity for realizing that an accepted pattern has no necessity. Its excitement lies in the suggestion that any particular ordering of experience may be arbitrary…[in this] it is potentially subversive" (1975, 297).… Essentially a joke is an anti-rite" (301–302).

And it is the humour of the clown's dance movements, her fumbling, backwards dressing, defiance of strict rules of movement across and above space, and irreverent parodies of men, which allows this subversion to proceed. Through such dissidance, women deny men their dominance, and contravene their rules of space and propriety assigned to women within this "male aesthetic economy" (Foster 1996, 23), thereby engaging through an embodied corporeal discourse in a politics of movement. By such contradictions, women resist an hegemony of space that attempts to inflict upon them and their bodies a subordinate social meaning and correspondingly confines them to symbolically less valued spaces. Given the prevalence and consistency of this design, spatial inversion represents a potentially potent means of political commentary.

3 Conclusion

The anthropological study of space and place recognizes that landscape, space and place represent important sites for cultural meaning, social and political memory, and public discourse. Space can be used to carry social meanings that are culturally and historically constructed as well as contested, while a sense of place develops out of human relationships, feeling, and imagination. As Walter (1988, 9) explains, places grow out of "the drama of dwelling together. They [are] intimately connected with the local, imagination, with the spirit of the place." A hermeneutic approach is well suited to the study of culture, space and place as it explores space as a symbolic medium whose meanings can be read as a text. As well, hermeneutics recognizes that space and space language convey a culture's meanings about the immediate world, while place carries with it sentiments of attachment and identity that emerge out of lived experience.

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