Review

Reviewed Work(s): Place and Placelessness. by E. Relph

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highway built in the 1960s. It becomes difficult to maintain a focus on the presurvey landscape.

The series in which this monograph appears was designed to appeal to historians and to historical geographers. What will these readers find useful in this book? Professor Johnson provides some original insights into the evolution of a Middle Western landscape. She explains the importance of the "forty" (40 acres of land) as a modular unit, not only in the survey, but also in the development of farms in the upper Midwest. Under the terms of the Homestead Act in 1862 pioneer farmers could organize their 160 acre allotments in various combinations of 40-acre blocks, each block having to be contiguous. The ingenuity of the pioneers in organizing the layout of their farms in order to take advantage of upland and valley bottomland, of millsite and woodlot is fascinating, and Professor Johnson examines the process in detail.

On the other side of the coin were the serious disadvantages to the imposition of a rectangular survey system on a diverse, hilly terrain. Plowing and cultivating fields aligned against the grain of the slope produced excessive soil erosion and flooding. Extensive clearing of the woodland eliminated wildlife habitats. Professor Johnson turns her attention to these problems, tracing the efforts of twentieth-century farmers and local government officials to control soil erosion, to provide better land management practices within watersheds, and to reestablish and protect refuges for the wildlife that has survived. Roads that were built along parallels and meridians and township and county boundaries that seldom were in concordance with watershed boundaries have become the complex concerns of local jurisdictions dealing with soil conservation, watershed management, and planning. All of these problems are the product of the rectangular survey system, and Professor Johnson misses none of them. There is in this book bountiful insight from which historians, historical geographers and other social scientists will benefit.

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Place and Placelessness.

E. Relph.

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HISTORIANS of Anglo-American geographic thought will probably remember the 1970s as a time of critical protest against theory-building, objectivism, quantification and other goals set by the profession during the previous decade. A common thread discernible throughout much of this criticism is an effort to call attention to the lived experience of people in their everyday situations, and in this light to assess the appropriateness of conventional thought and practice. Support for such reevaluation has been sought in phenomenology, existentialism, and other schools of critical philosophy that provide a contrast to the familiar empiricist and analytical traditions of twentieth-century geography in this country.

Relph's work, *Place and Placelessness*, offers a good illustration of this trend. It stands as counterpoint to the many textbooks on spatial organization and systems which appeared during the 1960s. Relph chooses to focus on place, an old pivotal concern for the geographer. To substantiate the view that the nature and identity of places should be an important concern for geographers today, he rallies support from a variety of disciplines, particularly architecture, sociology, philosophy, and literature.

To assemble such a volume and variety of scholarly opinion on the importance of place is certainly a welcome enterprise. Through a series of carefully chosen illustrations, Relph points to relationships between place and space, and to varieties in the human experience of place. A section on images and the identity of place is especially laudable. It opens ways toward clarifying the often-cited tension between "insider" and "outsider" perspectives, and also underscores the neglected social dimensions of place experience. Instead of treating "insider" and "outsider" perspectives as polarized and irreconcilable, he suggests that there may be a continuum of stances on either side. An "insider" may have varying levels of

"insideness," ranging from complete "existential insideness" through "empathetic," "behavioral," or "vicarious" levels of insideness. An outsider," too, may vary in levels of involvement, from "incidental" through "behavioral," to "existential" types of outsideness. It could be argued that this typology, based at least partially on Peter L. Berger's description of anthropological stances on culture (*A Rumour of Angels*, 1971), is primarily helpful in elucidating the perspectives of external observers, and not necessarily helpful for appreciating those of residents. For the geographer, however, this proposed continuum of stances provides a useful potential link with other disciplinary approaches to the study of place identity and images. By underscoring the importance of social networks and collective concern in fostering and maintaining particular degrees of engagement in place, Relph suggests a more comprehensive approach to the study of images and perceptions.

Treating the genesis of a sense of place and its opposite, "placelessness," Relph leans heavily on the existentialist notion of authenticity. Despite periodic *caveat* and reservation, it is clear that he favors place over placelessness and authenticity over inauthenticity. Concluding sections of the volume comment discursively on the experience of present day landscapes, noting the parallelism between people's relationship to one another and their relationships to place. The humanized landscape, to cite Vidal de la Blache, again appears as a "medal struck in the image of a people." Thus, if ambivalence and contradictions abound among contemporary life-styles, attitudes, and behavior, little wonder that our landscapes bear such confusing and contradictory faces.

Place and Placelessness offers a useful benchmark summary of the state-of-the-arts within a growing literature on the question of place. The scholarly world as a whole has become more aware of the human and environmental significance of locality, uniqueness, and rootedness in an era where homogenization and *kitsch* appear to be the prevailing landscape motifs. One wonders, however, whether the author's definition of place and the polarization of place and placelessness is the most effective way to further the development of a geographic perspective on place. Relph's message will strike a chord primarily with human geographers and environmentalists: place is construed almost exclusively from a human—existentialist—point of view. The question arises whether this perspective may foreclose potential contributions from our colleagues in physical geography. The traditional chorological definition of place, which promised a framework within which human and physical geographers could hopefully integrate their studies, is not the definition implied in this book. Place does not connote areal boundedness in a "map" sense, nor is it defined by the visual, aesthetic, or functional criteria of external observers. Rather, it appears to connote centeredness, as experienced either by residents of a place or by the sensitive visitor who has become attuned intersubjectively to the lives of residents. Focus rests on a humanly defined sense of place or centeredness. This anthropocentric perspective serves well to unmask problems resulting from experience.

There is a strong case for letting places speak for themselves, and that is perhaps the most important message of a radically phenomenological approach. Beyond the culturally variable intentions projected onto present day landscapes, one is tempted to speculate on other types of "intention" rooted in natural, ecological processes. The present state of our knowledge and analytical skill prevents us from grasping all that may be involved in a more geocentric perspective on place, but it is important to appreciate the implications of choosing an exclusively anthropocentric stance.

The physical environment is not entirely neglected in *Place and Placelessness*. Examples chosen to epitomize "sense of place" are usually ones in which nature, people, technology and objects interact in shaping everyday life and landscapes. Yet the analytical focus appears to rest predominantly on architectural, or technologically-created landscapes and environments. This allows little scope for highlighting important differences in the temporal dimensions of "placemaking." One is not led to appreciate the varying rates and scales of evolution which might characterize the life histories of nonhuman actors on the geographic landscape.

There are certain terms used throughout the text which might appear confusing to the reader uninitiated in existentialist literature. There is an unavoidable impression of moral judgement in the use of terms such as "authenticity" and "inauthenticity" with respect to place, even if

their use in existentialist circles may be shrouded with ambiguity. These terms are commonly used in reference to modes of being-in-the-world, and they offer a set of criteria whereby a person could examine whether behavior flows genuinely from its author or not. To label and identify places as authentic or inauthentic, however, involves a metaphorical use of these terms, which raises problems of judgement, aesthetic preference, and culturally relative norms. Even if, for the sake of clarity, one were to consider humans as the only shapers and users of place, there still remains the problem of inferring authenticity from externally manifest behavior and landscape. Could it be that what characterizes place and placelessness is ambivalence rather than inauthenticity? As the author remarks, each of us longs for rootedness within some place, as well as freedom to transcend the confines of place.

In the elucidation of placelessness, emphasis rests upon the intentional design of institutions and processes which tend toward a dismemberment of areal boundedness, e.g., mass media, big business, multinational corporations, and central economic authorities. In this context again the use of certain terms poses difficulties: "The landscape of reflection and reason," for example, is defined as (p. 125) "the landscape either created directly by the application of rational, scientific techniques to particular settings, or experienced through the adopted attitudes of rationalism." Is "reason" to be understood as the equivalent of "rationality"? Is "reflection" to be identified with scientific calculation and blueprint? One has little difficulty appreciating the spirit of such sentences, but the choice of terms does appear somewhat confusing. In such a crucially important area, conceptual and semantic clarity are especially important.

The concluding section of the book leaves the reader with only a few hints about the author's personal stance on the question of place. Even here, Relph continues to speak through the words of others, and is cautious about identifying with some of their conclusions. He makes an attempt to demonstrate some positive features of contemporary placelessness and to connect symbolism to the landscape description of chain stores, "Howard Johnson's," and other standardized and ubiquitous "placeless" scenes. It is difficult to reconcile the positive tone explicit in his comments about the private automobile, however, with the negative tone implicit in his previous critique of freeways and automated arteries of placelessness.

Perhaps one of the greatest values of a book lies in its evocative and heuristic potential. *Place and Placelessness* can certainly heighten consciousness of how wide-ranging the interest in place is among our colleagues in various fields. It is a courageous and timely signpost in a direction many contemporary geographers wish to follow. It should reassure many that indeed our discipline has much insight to offer on a subject that transcends the more specialized endeavor of other disciplines. It can also provoke a sensitivity to everyday environments, and provide a focus for our diffuse and diverging research efforts on experience and landscape. For these, and for many other reasons, it is a welcome contribution to the geography of the 1970s.

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